

Jesus, the Lord's Anointed.

Sometimes translation of a passage in the Bible can be very inadequate. One of the worst is arguably the translation of Isaiah 61:1 in some versions. These words are included in the words that Jesus read to the synagogue at Nazareth early in His ministry. He claimed that the words were being fulfilled as the people heard them. Isaiah 61:1 ought to be translated, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor." However, the *Good News Bible* has translated, "The Sovereign LORD has filled me with his spirit. He has chosen and sent me to bring good news to the poor." *The Bible for Today (CEV)* has translated, "The Spirit of the LORD God has taken control of me! The LORD has chosen and sent me to tell the oppressed the good news."

What is wrong with "chosen and sent"? Isaiah is a remarkable book in that it names Cyrus, the king who ordered the return of Judah from captivity and appoints him for this task long before his birth. That is one of the reasons why so-called "scholars" assume that the part of "Isaiah" had to have been written after the event. Prophecy does not happen today, and so, they assume, it could not have happened then, either. In chapter 45 Isaiah wrote, "This is what the LORD says to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of..." So Cyrus was the LORD's anointed, though he was a foreign emperor. In chapter 44 the Lord also says about Cyrus, "He is My shepherd."

In Isaiah the expression "My servant" sometimes refers to the nation of Israel, and in other Old Testament books "My servant" has been used for individuals such as Moses, David, and "the prophets." However, in Isaiah 41-53 the expression "My servant" is used for the promised Servant of the Lord who would take the place of Israel and redeem Israel. He would suffer and die to bear the sin of "the many." The LORD would make His life a guilt offering.

In the case of Cyrus a translation like "chosen and sent" is probably adequate for "anointed." However, from the vantage-point of the New Testament, the title is more in Jesus' case. The Hebrew word "Meshiah" means, "anointed one." The New Testament Greek verb *chrío* means "anoint", and "the Christ" is the Greek equivalent for "the Messiah."

The Messiah would be a man anointed with the Holy Spirit for His Messianic task. When John the Baptist baptised Jesus, the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, although for other people the baptism of John the Baptist did not confer the Holy Spirit. In Luke chapter four there is particular point to what happened immediately after Jesus' baptism. "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil." (Lk 4:1-2). Then "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit" (Lk 4:14). Then, at Nazareth when He stood up to read, He chose Isaiah 61 and began to read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor..." When John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to ask whether He was "the Coming One", Jesus answered by referring to Isaiah 35:5-6 and 29:18-19. He had a special task to benefit the blind, the deaf, and lame, and meek, and the poor. In what followed at Nazareth He also made an explicit claim to be a prophet. At the very least He claimed that the Spirit, who, the Jews said, who had been active in prophets like Moses, Elijah and Elisha, had been quenched in Israel after Zechariah and Malachi, was once again active in Israel. In the Old Testament kings, prophets, and priests were anointed with olive oil as part of their induction into service. Jesus' began His public ministry when He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to an exceptional degree. Rabbis had compared lame, blind, lepers, and childless people to dead men. Jesus added to His answer to John, "The dead are raised." The Spirit, who empowered Him for ministry, was the "Giver of life."

Beyond the technical term "anointed", however, is Jesus' self-understanding. What kind of Messiah had He come to be? Many Jews believed their Messiah would be a victorious national deliverer. However, Jesus claimed to be a number of things foretold in the Old Testament, including the prophet who would be like Moses, to whom the people were commanded to listen (Deut 18), the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the Anointed One ("Messiah") in passages like Psalm 2, Isaiah 61, and Daniel 9:25-26, the Son of David, who would reign on the throne of David for ever, and the suffering Servant of the Lord of Isaiah chapter 41-53. Indeed, Isaiah 61 is addressed to the Servant of the Lord. His message meant that He would be a surprisingly different kind of Messiah.

The passage in Isaiah makes special reference to the message and task of the promised Messiah. He had a special role of proclaiming good news to the poor, the broken-hearted and the oppressed. His preaching and healing was to be the accompaniment of something much greater. Jesus claimed that He performed His miracles "by the finger of God", through the Spirit, direct intervention. Israel's release from Babylon in Isaiah would

become a picture of the much greater release from sin and from death as its consequence.

His essential work would also be surprisingly different from what people generally expected. Daniel 9 said that the Anointed One would “be cut off and have nothing.” Just before Jesus’ ascension into heaven He claimed that He had fulfilled everything written about Him in the Old Testament. He opened the minds of His disciples so they could understand the Scriptures, and told them, “This is what Scripture has said, ‘The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations.’” It was much more than that God the Father had chosen and sent Him. He had “anointed Him.” To create a word, The LORD had “Christed Him”; He had “Messiahed Him”

We don’t know whether the reading from Isaiah 61 at Nazareth was the prescribed passage for the day or whether Jesus deliberately chose it. What was important was Jesus’ claim that it was fulfilled in Him. He was the Lord’s Anointed.

More is involved. Jesus promised to impart the Spirit to His disciples. He gave them power over unclean spirits. He promised that His Spirit would support them when they were dragged before judges. John the Baptist predicted that He would baptise others not only with water (because “baptise” is done literally with water) but also with the Holy Spirit. Streams of living water (a picture of the Holy Spirit) would flow from those who believed in Him.

In short, Jesus was claiming that, with His advent, the Messianic age had dawned and that the consummation of the world was at hand.

What Peter and the rest of the disciples saw in Jesus led them to confess, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” When Caiaphas forsook his role as impartial judge at Jesus’ trial and became the prosecutor, he demanded, “I put you under oath by the living God: Tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Jesus answered him, “It is as you have said, but I tell you all, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Then He was on trial. The day was coming when the situation would be reversed. But first He had to complete His messianic work, on the cross.

The people of Nazareth thought that Jesus was too ordinary to be making such claims about Himself. When Jesus sent the messengers back to John, He added, “And blessed is he who takes no offence at Me.” Right at the centre of the Gospel is the scandalous message that the Christ was rejected by the religious leaders of Israel, and publicly executed, in shame and great suffering. God grant that we, who see ourselves as the poor, and those oppressed by sin and death, continue to find in Him our Redeemer. May God grant that we do not take offence in His cross!