

- ¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.
- ¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
- ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise
spring up before all nations. (NIV⁸⁴)

ADVENT IS A SEASON FOR GIVE AND TAKE

In order for a relationship to work, there has to be give and take. Guys if you want your wives to watch that war movie with you, you probably have to watch a few romantic comedy movies with her. If you want her to go to the game with you, you probably will have a ballet in your future. That's the way it works. It's give and take. Friendships are often based on give and take as well. If you show up everyday at your friend's house and help yourself to their food and then just sit silently on the couch, before you know it, the locks are going to be changed and you are going to be minus one friend. It can't be all take, you have to contribute something to the relationship. Your job is a give and take relationship. If you only show up at work for 10 minutes every other week, so that you can take your paycheck, pretty soon your boss is going to stop giving it. If you want to stay employed, you have to give your time and effort to the good of the company.

Today we are going to look at how Advent, and really a Christian's whole life, is a Season of Give and Take. As we continue to look towards and celebrate the arrivals of our King, we'll see today

how our relationship with our King is a give and take relationship. The only difference, Jesus is the one who does both. Today we'll rejoice as we see Jesus take the bad away and give us the good in our lives.

The prophet Isaiah wrote these words 800 years before they came to be. We'll talk about how they are fulfilled in a moment, but let's first explore them some more.

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² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor

News has meaning to you in proportion to how much it impacts your life. If I told you that the NBA lock-out was over and they were going to be playing professional basketball again by Christmas, you wouldn't care unless you were a fan of NBA basketball and missed watching the games. If I told you that a Russian airline is going to offering nonstop flights from Russia to Anchorage next summer, you probably wouldn't be all that interested unless you are planning a pleasure trip to Siberia. But, the news that Herman Cain has dropped out of the running for the GOP nomination might interest you a little more, because you have an interest in who will be the next president. Every October when they set the PFD number, they break into regular programming because every Alaska who is getting a PFD wants to know how much the dividend will be.

Knowing that the Lord has anointed one to *to preach good news to the poor... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners*, only makes a difference to you if you think that you are any of those descriptions. If you have convinced yourself that those words don't apply to you, then those verses are probably inconsequential to you. And that is what much of the world has done. "Poor, brokenhearted, captive!! That's not me!! I know some people who are, but not me!!" John the Baptist encountered people like that, and he had a one word message for them! "Repent!" And his message still speaks into our ears and into our hearts. John the Baptist continues to bid us to be ready for our King, and he tells us how with his one word command! "Repent!" It's easy to read words like *poor, brokenhearted, captive* and look in other places, but God wants us to look to ourselves. God wants us to acknowledge that we are all three by nature.

By nature we are *poor*. Spiritually bankrupt, unable to buy or bribe our way into God's favor. We bring nothing to the table, nothing except our hollow and empty way of life. We are *brokenhearted*. We are sick with a terminal disease. We are growing everyday closer to spiritual death, and in desperate need of intervention. We are *captives and prisoners*. We are bound by the sinful natures that we inherit and the sins that we continue to commit each day. We are powerless to break free from sin's bondage. We are in rough spiritual shape, and are powerless to bring any improvement into our sorry states of existence.

Even though we are powerless to give anything, our God gives us everything! The headline of his grace speaks this meaningful breaking news into our lives. *The LORD has anointed (one) to preach good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners*. That's you and me. That was you and me, until our God

extended to us his grace. And the Scriptures tell us exactly how. Jesus read these exact words to the people at a Nazareth synagogue, and after he was done, he looked up and said, ***Today this scripture words are fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:21)***. Jesus is the one who was anointed by God. Jesus is the one who makes poor folks like us to be rich in his grace. Jesus is the one who heals our sin sick hearts. Jesus is the one who shook free the chains of sin and grants us freedom and forgiveness. He did it for us, by faithfully proclaiming his love, like he did in that synagogue. He did it by always being patient, even with those who were trying to trap him. He did it by laying down his perfect life on the altar of God's wrath. He became the sacrifice that our sins required. His blood was the price that was paid for forgiveness. His life - broken by our sin - made our broken lives whole. His free body was bound to the cross, so that our captive souls could be set free, and could live free with him forever. Jesus was the one who came to preach and to deliver the good news of our salvation.

Jesus gave us so much! We would certainly expect him to take from us as well. It would be only natural that he would take some good from us, in exchange for the good that he provided. But that is not the way it works. Jesus gives us only good things and takes only bad things away from us. He demands nothing in return for his love. The list of things that Jesus has been anointed for continues. ***to bestow on (us) a crown of beauty, instead of ashes, the oil of gladness, instead of mourning, and a garment of praise, instead of a spirit of despair.*** Jesus sees the bad in our lives and he takes it away. He replaces it with nothing but good. He sees the ashes of sorrow and suffering and he gives us something better for our head – a crown of beauty. He sees the tears of mourning, and blesses us instead with oil of gladness to run down our cheeks in blessing. Instead of the sackcloth of despair that we would otherwise be wearing, our Savior gives us a garment of praise!! Our loving Lord takes the bad from our lives and gives us his good.

Our gifts to God play no part in our salvation. And they aren't really even our gifts – they really are God's gifts. He's the one who gives them to us. He's the one that sanctifies us through and through. He's the one that cleanses our gifts, which on our own are filthy rags. He's the one that enables us with the desire to give him thanks and praise. ***I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God... For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.*** Even the things and the praise that we give to God are another example of God giving to us. He gives us the opportunity to give. He works in our hearts the desire to praise his name. He causes the seeds of our faith to grow and to spout forth a garden of faith fruits.

So let's take advantage of this opportunity that God gives us. Let's serve the Lord right where we are. As we have opportunity to return to him firstfruit offerings of time, talent, and treasure, let's give – acknowledging that it is really the Lord who enables us to give. As God grants us contentment and satisfaction in faithfully carrying out our calling to him, let's serve those who are around us – family, neighbors, friends – with the keen realization that these opportunities are the continued giving of a gracious God. As God opens doors to gospel proclamation, let's rejoice in the opportunity that we have been given to share with others the joys of a relationship with Jesus.

Our relationship with Jesus is unlike any relationship that we have here on earth. It's a give and take, but he does both because he loves us. This Advent Season, let's prepare for his coming with humble repentance and let's await his return with an eager expectation. He gives us a sure promise of forgiveness and everlasting life with him in heaven. In heaven we will celebrate and eternal give and take. There all sorrow and sin will be taken away, and an eternity of praising and thanking God will be

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10,11

given to you and to me and to every believer who has ever lived. We'll praise then, and let's praise now the one who both gives and takes - Jesus Christ our Lord!! Amen.