

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020
"HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

By Kim Sheard

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God. ~ Isaiah 61:1-2a (NRSV)*

2020 has been a rougher year than usual, with COVID-19, a record number of hurricanes, contentious elections, and racial injustices added to the normal ups and downs of life. I'm sure many of us are ready for the arrival of 2021 and, at least psychologically, a fresh start.

In Leviticus 25, God gave Moses instructions for the people of Israel to celebrate a "Year of Jubilee" every fifty years, during which prisoners would be freed, debts forgiven, and no one would farm; they would eat only what the fields produced naturally. Leviticus 25:10 (KJV) is even inscribed on the Liberty Bell. It says, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Where Isaiah 61 (today's scripture) refers to proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, it is most likely referring to this Year of Jubilee, which would then be followed by "the day of vengeance of our God." That part doesn't sound good...

Much later in Biblical history, when Jesus went to the synagogue in his hometown, He stood up and read these verses from Isaiah, ending with "'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" Jesus was the "me" anointed by the Lord to bring good news to the oppressed and all the other wonderful things in the passage. However! Jesus **stopped** reading before the part about proclaiming the day of vengeance of our God! He stuck with the good news!

Jesus's sacrifice on the cross made many of the Old Testament laws obsolete. Instead, we are to be saved by grace through faith. The Year of Jubilee is no longer needed, as we are already in the year—or time—of God's favor, even if worldly concerns sometimes makes it seem like the opposite. And someday, Christ will return again on the "day of vengeance of our God," and our Earthly concerns will all be behind us. A Happy New Year like none other!

Thought for Today: We are living in the time of the Lord's favor!

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice that ushered us into this time when we need not jump through hoops to earn God's favor. We need only believe and accept. Help us remember and prepare for your return. Amen.