

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 19th November 2023 am

TITLE: "Gospel driven justice" TEXT: Isaiah 61 verses 1-11

Series: More on Mission Part 3

Scripture references from the ESV

Isaiah 61 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;

he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,

the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;

that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

⁵ Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers;

⁶ but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God;

you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast.

⁷ Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their lot;

therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.

⁸ For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong;

I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹ Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;

all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;

he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to

sprout up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

Over the centuries, Christians have traditionally opted either to emphasise preaching the gospel and neglect social justice issues or to do the reverse. In both scenarios, the Gospel is weakened.

- When conservative Christians rightly preach a God of love but do not show love to those around them, whether within or outside the church, they fail to show that God is a God of love.
- When liberal Christians put all the emphasis on social justice but never preach the Gospel, then people will see them as really nice people, but never hear of Christ who died to save them from sin.

We need to do Gospel preaching and we need to do mercy ministry. The early church did both (please read Acts 6) because they did not see a tension between the two. Instead, they saw what Isaiah 61 shows us.

The servants of Messiah are set free to rebuild what is ruined.

The principle behind this lies in **vv1-2** (above). The year of the Lord's favour was the year of Jubilee, ordained by God to take place every 50 years. In that year, all debts should be written off, those who had sold themselves into slavery were to be set free and landed given as security for loans was to be handed back to the original owner. It gave everyone a fresh start, balanced the economy and kept the rich from exploiting the poor. In **Isaiah 61**, the servant of the Lord comes to announce this year of Jubilee. The time has come to set people free, and give back what has been taken, with three results:

- Joy (**v3**)
- Those set free are able to rebuild what has been ruined (**v4**)
- All of this is to bring glory to God (**v3**)

It is God who sets his people free, through his anointed servant, and therefore it is right that the glory goes to him.

This message was spoken to Israel before they were taken into exile in Babylon because of their failure to put God first. They were held in Babylon for 70 years, but all through that time, they had this promise that God would set them free

and return them to their own land where they would rebuild the cities that the Babylonians had destroyed. The return happened in 516BC when God miraculously intervened and many Jews went back to the land of Israel, where they rebuilt their houses and the walls of Jerusalem, and rebuilt the temple which had been destroyed.

- There was a literal fulfilment of this prophecy, showing that there continues to be a here and now fulfilment today.

In **Luke 4: 16-21**, Jesus tells us that he is the fulfilment of this prophecy. After reading **v1-2a** (above) in the synagogue, and with all eyes fixed on him, **he began to say to them "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"**. (4:21)

Isaiah 61, as Jesus interprets it for us, teaches us that:

In Christ we are set free from sin, death and Satan to rebuild what is ruined.

We will see that this passage, together with the life of Jesus, points us to what we are to do as believers in Christ.

1. **We are to proclaim the Gospel (v1)**. The theme here is release from captivity. For Israel, it was literal captivity, but that points to a greater reality – the reality of captivity to sin, Satan and death.

Israel were in captivity because of their sin and that of the Babylonians, who ruthlessly attacked them, but behind all that evil is Satan. The result of evil is death for all.

We need to be set free by one who is stronger than sin, Satan and death.

Jesus is that one.

He has secured freedom from those three enemies by

- Purchasing forgiveness for us
- Defeating Satan for us
- Conquering death for us

In living a perfect life of obedience, dying a sacrificial death, rising to life after his burial and ascending back to heaven, Jesus set us free from the condemnation of sin, the power that Satan had over our lives and the vice like grip of death that would have held us forever.

Sin, Satan and death no longer have the final word over our lives.

When Jesus came to earth, he proclaimed this freedom, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. If we are going to minister as he did, then we need to put priority on proclaiming this freedom in Christ. Gospel preaching should be the foundation of everything we do, because, without it, we will become little more than a secular aid agency.

Without Christ, those who are wealthy, healthy and living freely in our UK democracy are still captive to sin Satan and death.

Mercy ministry begins with concern for the eternal souls of the people around us.

2. We are to rebuild the brokenness. All around us, we see lives that have been broken by sin, Satan and death.

- Sickness, resulting in long term disability, and bereavement as loved ones are taken from us by death
- Families fragmented by rivalry and marriages torn apart by an unfaithful or selfish spouse
- Confusion, hurt and anger around views on sexual orientation and gender
- Exploitation and slavery so that the western world can enjoy luxury goods
- The murder of unborn children by a society that cries out for justice, but denies justice and the right to life for those hidden in the womb
- Poverty due to the rising cost of living, exacerbating the divide between rich and poor
- Homelessness and people displaced because of war and persecution

The list is endless.

The good news is that the servants of Messiah are set free to rebuild (v4). The walls, houses and temple in Jerusalem were literally rebuilt. These were physical places, and the physical world matters.

When Jesus was on earth, he didn't only proclaim the good news of the kingdom. He also met the physical needs of those whose lives had been broken by sin, Satan and death.

He fed the hungry, healed the sick and stood up for those marginalised by society. If we are going to minister like Jesus, then we, the church, need to pick up this ministry.

Rebuilding broken lives will mean:

- Using our wealth to meet the needs of the poor
- Using our strength to stand up for those who can't defend themselves
- Using our voices to speak up for the elderly and unborn, when society wants just to get rid of them
- Using our wisdom to provide healthcare, and counselling for mental health issues

Conservative Christians might feel that their call is just to proclaim the Gospel, and to wait for the New Heavens and the New Earth to make right the brokenness. However, we know that we are not to wait for the return of Christ before we start working on our sanctification, and the same principle can be applied to rebuilding what is physically broken.

Since we have the assurance that Christ is going to redeem not just our souls, but also our bodies and

this earth, we can be certain that the physical matters to God. If it matters to God, then it should matter to us. The early church saw this:

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

(Acts 4:34-37). They believed that Jesus would come back and restore all things, and that set them free to let go of what they had in order to meet the physical needs of others. The grace to give and rebuild broken lives came as these believers heard about and believed in the resurrection (**Acts 4:33**): **And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.**

The tension between sacred (e.g. Gospel preaching) and secular (e.g. social action) is a false tension. When God created the world, he created physical and spiritual matter, and Christ came to redeem both the spiritual **and** the physical.

- Take time to read and consider **Romans chapter 8**

**We should be deeply concerned to rebuild what is broken,
whether it be the brokenness of souls bound by sin, minds damaged by mental health
issues,
or the brokenness of the physical world
that has been ravaged by war, disease, death and greed.**

3. We are to intercede for the nations (vv5-6a). Peter speaks of those who are followers of Christ in this way:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The role of the priest was to intercede before God for the people. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you have access to the throne of God. What an amazing privilege!

**We have access to the only God who stands ready to hear us, speak through us
and do those things we ask according to his will.**

When we pray, God hears and acts, so what should we do with this great privilege?

We must speak to God on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves because they don't know God. We must pray that God will, amongst many other things:

- Save people
- Give wisdom to world leaders
- Bring about justice for those who are oppressed
- Move people to give generously to relieve needs
- Heal people of disease

It is through prayer that we fight against sin, Satan and death, as we call on God to turn around the impossible situations that we see.

In Christ we are set free from sin, death and Satan, to rebuild what is ruined.

We are to proclaim the gospel, rebuild the brokenness and intercede for the nations.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus died to save us from our sin, but that is only the start.

- The Gospel is about God redeeming soul and body and the whole of creation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Resurrection life is coming, and when it does, everything that we long for, and work towards now, will be ours.
- When Jesus returns, we will be fully like him with no sin to fight or be ashamed of. Creation will be renewed with no sickness, death, poverty or injustice.

That is how the story ends and it is surely the motivation to use what God has given us to

- Proclaim the Gospel
- Rebuild the brokenness
- Intercede for the nations

**We have not been set free from sin, Satan and death just to selfishly praise God in
comfort and ease**

In Christ we are set free from sin, Satan and death to rebuild what is ruined