

Text: Isaiah 11:1-10 and John 8:1-11

Sunday 1st November 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be true and pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Friends, can I ask you, when was the last time you were challenged about something? When was the last time you were open to a challenge from God or someone around you? After last week's service, I was talking with Gill, my wife, about something I needed to get from the shops – an item of clothing – and I was just going to go to a local shop, where I knew I could get it quite easily, quickly and probably quite cheaply. It was at that point I became challenged, because at that point Gill spoke out and

queried if we should be buying clothes from this particular shop, because the price of the clothes might indicate that the labourers are not paid a fair wage, unlikely to be paid a living wage, and so maybe it would be better to find out more and buy from places we are more confident about their approach to justice.

At the time it was hard to hear and it up-ended all my plans and my schedules, I got a bit flustered, I got a bit stressed, but you know – Gill was right, and she was right to speak out and challenge me. Because in that moment she was speaking God's heart, His heart for justice, and God's people, God's leaders, must be open to His challenge, to His discipline, so that life may come for them and for all the nations.

In our passage today, the Lord through Isaiah speaks in verse 1 of the ‘stump of Jesse’ and from this ‘a shoot’, ‘a branch’ will come. This is reference to the royal line of King David, to whom God promised that his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel for ever. But because of the waywardness of these leaders, God had disciplined them, God had chopped the tree down to a stump. **These leaders had led the nation astray**, but as we’ve seen the nation was not innocent either, for there was selfishness and oppression – the nation had become corrupt as well, and so God brought challenge and discipline to His people to turn them to His ways and into the life He wished them to have and to share with all.

He would accomplish this, as we saw last week, by raising up a new King, a shoot, a branch, who would bear fruit,

the fruit of shalom, peace, which we read in verses 6 to 9. There we read that the natures of creation will be transformed such that there is harmony where today there is only division and strife and enmity. But a glorious hope, once more, is held out – and it will be brought to fruition by this great King, a king upon whom the Spirit of the Lord will rest, such that with wisdom He will be able to judge all things rightly, with understanding He will see to the heart of the issue, with counsel He can devise a right course of action and His might will see it through.

I suspect , I hope, that we might like the sound of this, we might like the sound of this new King, and as we saw last week, the New Testament teaches that these promises have been begun to be fulfilled in Jesus, that He is this

promised King, upon whom the Spirit rested such that His Kingdom began to break into this world.

But our passage today has a middle section that I think we could be a little uncomfortable with, **for it reads:**

‘He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,

or decide by what he hears with his ears;

but with righteousness he will judge **the needy,**

with justice he will give decisions

for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;

with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.’

(Isaiah 11:3b-4)

I wonder, does that stack up with your mental picture of

Jesus? **More often than not, I think we have a picture of**

Jesus as simply meek and mild, that we dumb down gentleness, compassion and love to something that never ruffles feathers or brings a word of challenge.

But the peace, the shalom, described in verses 6 to 9, is hard-won, it follows judgment, it follows challenge and discipline. **The Lord doesn't do it to grind them down, but that they might be led into life, true life and life for all, and so He champions justice for the poor and calls His people to show a righteousness that went beyond simple, external religion.**

Again and again in the New Testament we see Jesus doing the same. **In our second passage today, a woman has been caught doing wrong, but where is the man? Where**

is justice against him? The Pharisees are ready to fulfil the Law, but of these same Pharisees **Jesus will say:**

‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices...But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.’

(Matthew 23:23)

In Jesus and in Isaiah, we see that living rightly, righteousness, is more than refraining from sin or ticking religious boxes, it is also actively turning towards others to help them know life. As a result, Jesus challenges the Pharisees, He calls them out, and yet, to the woman, He is still challenging, but with gentleness – He is not ready

to condemn her, but nonetheless He does not ignore Her choices, **and says to her**, ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’ (John 8:11) In Jesus there is this perfect balance of love and gentleness, with righteousness, justice and even discipline.

I wonder friends, where is Jesus challenging us and calling us to a way of life that seeks life for others? Where is He calling us to stand alongside the poor and the oppressed? Where do we need to change our practices, our way of living, so that we don’t just buy the cheap clothes? In our series so far, what issues of justice have you responded to? What next step have you taken?

Within these same verses, it’s interesting that **Isaiah says this King will** ‘...with justice...give decisions for the poor

of the earth.’ (v4) It makes me wonder, why does God seem to side with the poor? Isn’t He the God who shows no favouritism? Well, I think it’s always been the case, across human history, and even today, that it is the poor who have been disproportionately vulnerable to injustice and victims of injustice, and so God gives particular attention to them and calls His people to seek justice for such as these that they might know life.

In the New Testament, Jesus said, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation **of the world**. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you **invited me in**, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I

was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came **to visit me.**”

‘Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you **something to drink?** When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and **go to visit you?**”

‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”” (Matthew 25:34-40)

Are you rich? Could your decisions be deliberately, or inadvertently, affecting the poor such that they are victims of injustice? It is said that **if you have sufficient**

food, decent clothes, live in a house or flat, and have a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top 15% of the world's wealthy people. If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies, a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars (in any condition), and live in your own home, you are in the top 5% of the world's wealthy people.

So, most of us are in the top 15% and many might be in the top 5% or higher, and **so our choices matter. The clothes I choose to buy, matter. But if my heart is not right, if my heart is hard, I won't care about such things and I won't receive the challenge, even the discipline, of Jesus, no matter that He delivers it with gentleness, or so that I and others can know life.**

So, finally, how can we have hearts that are receptive to His call, to His challenge? Well, in our passage from Isaiah today, this future King would be marked by something that was missing from the leaders, and that future Kingdom would be marked by something missing amongst creation. **We read today:**

‘The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...

the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord –

and he will delight in the fear **of the Lord...**

They will neither harm nor destroy

on all my holy mountain,

for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord

as the waters cover the sea.’

(Isaiah 11:2-3, 9)

In our day, we think of 'knowledge' as information, 'knowledge' for us is knowing about something. But in the Scriptures, to know someone, is not knowledge about them but having a personal, intimate relationship with them, such that it could be said of the prophet Samuel, **before his call by the Lord, that he 'did not yet know the Lord' (1 Samuel 3:7). To know, is to have relationship, and when that relationship is with the Lord, there is a fear of the Lord that is good and healthy, a fear that even Jesus showed to the Father because He rested **in the Father's** love. And so, this fear, as seen perfectly in the life of Jesus, as seen in that future kingdom, is a fear that shows itself in obedience, in choices aligned to the Word of God, and in hearts open to His challenge, His discipline even, because we know He does it for love of us and for this world.**

Friends, as people who claim to follow Jesus, do we also delight in the fear of the Lord as He did? Are we a people, who have that personal relationship with God, and so will receive our heavenly Father's challenge? Will our living, be more than ticking various religious boxes, such that we actively make choices to seek justice, defend the oppressed, and so by the challenge and discipline of God, we and the nations come into the life and the peace of God? I pray it may be so. Amen.

We close our time together, by turning our eyes, our hearts, to our King and proclaiming His Kingdom with our final hymn,

HYMN MP-549 Our eyes have seen the glory