

**Text: Isaiah 61:1-9**

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> 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.**

**Today is our last week** in our series focusing on justice through the book of Isaiah. Over the previous weeks, we've seen time and again that justice is a priority for the Lord because it is central to worship and core to His plan for bringing hope and light to the world, so that the norm changes and there might life for all. Each week, we've also had input from members of our church family, sharing with us ideas for seeking justice.

**Of the passages we explored, several may be less well known to us, but today's passage could be familiar, or the beginning at least, because these words were quoted by Jesus. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus is in the synagogue at Nazareth and He reads this very passage, then says: 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:21) This passage of Scripture foretold of someone who would come, anointed in the Spirit of the Lord, to set the world right, to bring life and healing of soul and of society. In that synagogue, Jesus was claiming to be the person referred to in Isaiah, the promised Messiah who would come to suffer and to serve, that God's promises and plan would be fulfilled. Many of the promises in this passage should be familiar to us by now because they echo many earlier passages that we read and more besides.**

**Yet, there is something else in this passage, which I think helpfully rounds off our series on justice. **Isaiah said:****

**‘They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendour.**

**They will rebuild the ancient ruins**

**and restore the places **long devastated;****

**they will renew the ruined cities**

**that have been devastated for generations...**

**And you will be called priests of the Lord,**

**you will be named ministers of our God.’**

**(Isaiah 61:3-4, 6)**

**In these verses, we see that, whilst the principle agent of change and restoration is the promised Messiah, the people who benefit from Him, the people who receive...**

**His deliverance and salvation and help and grace, these same people are then called to be His ongoing agents, His ambassadors, His priests and ministers, such that they stand in the gap on His behalf and share what they have received from Him with the wider world. **These people are called to change**, they are called to change the world – to rebuild a world that has been devastated by sin, a world marked by a lack of love and too much cruelty and a way of life that says to take care of yourself first and at all costs. To all who have met with the Messiah, who have met with Jesus, there is a calling – we have a calling – to play a part in rebuilding lives and even rebuilding societies. It addresses the spiritual dynamics of life but also the material, for the earlier verses in the chapter speak of the Messiah transforming the full range of human reality and experience.**

**So, I wonder friends,** as we heed last week's message, that simply returning to normal is not viable and so we must look forward and look out, where are our resources being invested? What are we rebuilding or restoring? Are we simply maintaining the old structures and institution? **Or can we learn the way of Jesus,** to look outward and see the brokenness all around, and in love and compassion – where 'compassion' literally means 'with suffering' – can we love and suffer with this broken world for their benefit, and so play our part in what Jesus, the Messiah, is doing in our world? Friends, we are called to change, to change the world, so how is that seen in your life? How is that seen in our congregation's life?

But this calling to change is not only external, it's also internal. **Isaiah did say:**

**'They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendour...**

**For I, the Lord, love justice;**

**I hate robbery and wrongdoing.**

**In my faithfulness I will reward my people**

**and make an everlasting covenant with them.'**

**(Isaiah 61:3, 8)**

**We are called to change, but not only to change the world, we are called to change within ourselves. The Lord through Isaiah says that those who experience the ministry of the Messiah will be called 'oaks of righteousness', they will change in character, in their nature, such that they 'display...his splendour', His glory, His likeness – they will pursue justice, because He...**

is the Lord who loves justice. So firm is His commitment to our change, that it is in fact part of the everlasting covenant He makes with us, His people. **And this is key friends,** because we shouldn't fall into a false understanding about these matters – we don't grow in righteousness by trying harder, that would be man-made religion. Instead, we are 'a planting of the Lord' – it is He who will nurture and grow this righteousness in us.

It's a theme picked up in many places across the New Testament. **Paul will say to Titus:** '...our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,...gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.' (Titus 2:14) God through Isaiah, God through Paul, God across the Scriptures invites us into relationship and through



that relationship into a calling to change, to change on the inside. **It's something we see** in the life and ministry of Jesus: He transformed a tax collector into a disciple, a prostitute into a missionary, a sceptic into an apostle, a madman into a family man, and a thief into a friend.

Of course, it takes time – the Scriptures don't speak of us becoming perfect instantaneously – because an oak matures slowly, it doesn't become great overnight. But nevertheless, this is part of God's plan, part of His calling upon our lives – and He will help make it possible. He promises to give us His Spirit to dwell in us and enable us to change. **Paul says:** '...by the Spirit...put to death the misdeeds of the body...' (Romans 8:13) and the fruit of the Spirit – not the fruit **of our hard labour** – is '...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

**gentleness and self-control.’ (Gal. 5:22-23) God will do what we cannot do for ourselves – change our nature, change us on the inside.**

**Does this mean we have no part to play? Do we simply lie back and allow God to work some magic on us? Well no, in that same quote from Romans, **Paul says:** ‘...by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body...’ (Romans 8:13) You, with the Spirit, but without the Spirit you haven’t got a chance; for our brokenness, our darkness, the captivity within us because of sin is too powerful for us to overcome alone. But by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and because He has ascended into heaven and sent the Spirit, we can now know the healing and transformation promised in Isaiah and so increasingly grow as oaks of righteousness.**

**In our culture today,** there's that practice of taking a picture or selfie and adding a filter to make you look better or jazz things up a bit. Sometimes it's just for fun, but other times I wonder if it points to a wishful desire in us, or a discontentment with who we are – so we end up putting on the filter, we fake it, and whilst the outside changes, it does nothing about the inside. We're still broken, we're still insecure or easily angered, because we need outside help to change on the inside.

**Friends, we've been exploring** God's call to seek justice. That call requires us to change, it requires us to put others first, and like every call and command of God, if we see it as optional, we will never change. When I first became a Christian, I knew I had to stop getting drunk, I knew I had to stop swearing, I knew I had to treat girls better,...

**because the Scriptures teach us these things and I knew it wasn't an option. And so I wholeheartedly said "yes" to God's way, and change came, much quicker than I ever expected – but I had to choose, I had to choose to submit to God and not see it as optional. By taking that step, that step of faith to trust God's way over mine, He then gave power by His Spirit and I did change on the inside.**

**Brothers and sisters,** we are called to change, to change this world and see it rebuilt and restored. But for that to be – for our future to be different from the past – we must also heeds God's call to change on the inside and allow His Spirit to grow and mature us in His character and in His ways, which includes the seeking of justice.

**I pray it may be so. Amen.**

**We close our time** together with our final hymn,

**HYMN MP-857** *I, the Lord of sea and sky*