

A Community of Hope - Isaiah

The political philosopher, Edmund Burke said

“Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it”

My message this morning is in part a Christian version of that. Those Christians who don’t know their bibles are destined to be weak and miserable Christians.

So week by week in this church we try to teach the bible. Most of the time working through individual books of the bible, but just occasionally trying to see how the whole message of the bible fits together. In previous weeks we have been trying to follow the story line of the bible. In particular we have been seeing how the whole story of the bible focuses on the church – indeed on local churches like this one.

☞ *Church – new creation*

We saw that a church is a community of people on the brink of eternity. Awaiting the new heaven and the new earth. For all our imperfections we are an outpost of heaven.

☞ *Garden of Eden*

We saw that the whole story began in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were created good, but sinned and ruined the human race, so that we are all now damaged goods.

☞ *arrow*

But we saw how the church is place where people are being restored.

But that did not happen immediately. First God chose one man – Abraham

☞ *Abraham*

Abraham was given a rich set of promises, which again we saw are inherited by the church.

☞ *Arrow*

Abraham was promised that his descendants would be a great nation who would bless the whole world. And the church is described as a holy nation, chosen to declare God's praises to a watching world.

Two weeks ago we saw the role of the law in the Old Testament.

☞ *Law*

The law sounds a warning alarm.

☞ *Hand*

It says "Hang on. All this can't happen without obedience, and without the death of Christ on the cross to pay for our disobedience."

☞ *Fade hand*

So the local church is a place where we live in obedience to Christ, and constantly remind ourselves of his forgiveness won for us on the cross.

The rest of the Old Testament story is long and convoluted, but it basically gives us one message. What the Old Testament law warned us about came true. For a while Israel thrived, but over time she declined lapsed into sin and faithlessness, and finally the whole nation was exiled, dispersed, and ruined.

It is into that situation that the prophets speak.

☞ *Prophets*

Their message is as simple as it is glorious. God had not given up on his promises. He is going to restore what was lost at the Garden of Eden. He is going to fulfil his promises to Abraham. He is going to overcome the obstacle of the law.

They promise that he will do something NEW through Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit.

☞ *Two Arrows*

They look forward both to the church now, and also to the new creation at the end of time.

So this morning we are going to look at one of those prophets - Isaiah - and then look at a very interesting passage in the New Testament, which makes it plain that it is worth grasping this whole message of the bible – because it will make you strong and unstoppably joyful as a Christian.

Firstly then the message of Isaiah

☞ *The message of Isaiah.*

Isaiah is 66 chapters of pure riches. It is the chocolate fudge cake of the Old Testament – you dare not bite off too much of it for fear it will give you indigestion. So I will just give you a little taster – like those samples you get at food fairs.

We have been considering in this series what we have called “the communal message of the bible” and one of Isaiah’s big messages is “God is going to create a wonderful new community of his people from all nations.”

In chapters 1-39 Isaiah says – God is going to send a king to lead his new community – king Jesus.

☞ *1-39*

For instance look at Isaiah 11;10

☞ *Isa 11:10*

Isaiah 11:10 (NIV - Anglicised)

¹⁰In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

He is called “the Root of Jesse” because Jesse was king David’s father – so he means that Jesus will be of royal blood. Notice that he draws people from all nations together to “his glorious place of rest”. This is the church! Where Jesus draws us together to rest in him.

☞ *40-55*

In chapters 40-55 Isaiah promises that a suffering servant will do for the sins of God’s new community

☞ *Isa 52:14-15*

Isaiah 52:14–15 (NIV - Anglicised)

¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ so will he sprinkle many nations...

The idea of “sprinkling” many nations is to indicate that his blood, shed on the cross will pay for the sins of all his people from all nations.

☞ **56-66**

In chapters 56-66 Isaiah promises that a Proclaimer will proclaim good news – the gospel – to God’s new community

☞ **Isa 61:1, 11**

Isaiah 61:1, 11

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor....
the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise
spring up before all nations.

Here it is, then. Isaiah is saying that God is going to bring together “the nations”, “many nations”, “all nations” – through a king who will lead them – this is Jesus. Through a suffering servant who will die for their sins – this is Jesus. Through a prophetic proclaimer who will proclaim the good news to them – this is Jesus.

So, we have had our food hall taster. Now I want us to turn to Romans 15 to see in one instance how all this yields food for your soul.

☞ **Romans 15:1-13**

Paul has been arguing in Romans 14 that the church in Rome should be a church for all kinds of people. Specifically for Jews and Gentiles – that is non-Jews. That doesn’t mean that they must all become exactly the same, or that they will all immediately agree on everything. There will be some with “weak consciences” on some issues, and others whom he describes as “strong.”

But he says, we must bear with one another.



V1

We must accept one another



V7

He justifies this because Jesus was like this.



V3



Vv8-9

Jesus was a Jew and lived his life amongst the Jews, but it was “so that the Gentiles may glorify God.”

But he is going back beyond Jesus here. Jesus came “to confirm the promises made to the Patriarchs” – that is to Abraham and his descendants.

What I want you to see this morning is Paul is saying that this message of acceptance and forbearance towards other believers is rooted in the whole message of the bible.

☞ *His message is rooted in the whole bible*

In verses 9-11 Paul gathers together a selection of verses which talk about God’s concern to see the Gentiles – that is the whole world – praising him, rejoicing in him, hoping in him. You can see from the NIV footnotes where those quotes come from.

The first one is from 2 Samuel 22 – a history book of the Old Testament.

The second from Deuteronomy 32 – the law

The third one is from a Psalm

The fourth one is from Isaiah – a prophet – indeed the great prophet of the Old Testament. It is the verse we quoted from Isaiah 11.

Paul has chosen from every major section of the Old Testament writings. He is telling us “understand the message of the bible AS A WHOLE.”

The local church is to be a gathering of every kind of person in that area. Gathered together, tolerating one another’s quirks and weaknesses. It is a major focus of the whole bible – from beginning to end – history, law, psalm, prophecy all say it.

This is why we have in our church vision statements a commitment to reach out to all the peoples of East Oxford, and to care for and disciple people of all backgrounds.

For the last thirty or so years it has been popular to encourage churches to focus on one particular segment of their community, and build a church which is relatively

homogenous. Whether that is a black church, or a church for young singles, or a church for families or whatever. And in one sense it works, let me tell you! Such churches grow.

But I have always felt instinctively uncomfortable about that. I noticed how actually the New Testament writers would not tolerate separate Jewish churches and gentile churches, or churches for the rich and educated and churches for the poor. A major part of the Apostle Paul's life was spent holding diverse groups of Christians together.

And then in 1994 the Rwandan genocide happened. 800,000 people were massacred in just 100 days. One of the most shocking elements of this, for a Christian like me, was that professing Christians were amongst the perpetrators. What went wrong with the discipling of those Christians that they could kill others just because they belonged to a different tribe?

Part of the answer was this. Decades before church leaders had begun to accept that there should be Hutu churches and Tutsi churches – the two tribal groups. It was considered too difficult to integrate them into one church.

When the crisis came they were Hutu or Tutsi before they were Christian. One of the Christian groups which was different was the evangelical student movement. They had integrated Hutus and Tutsis and by and large they stood against the violence – many of them died protecting people from the other tribal group.

Homogenous churches grow, but it is really difficult for the Christians in them to grow. Because so much of Christian growth is about learning to love, and live alongside the deeply different brother or sister from whom Christ died.

We must be a church which tolerates all kinds of people – it is the heartbeart of the whole bible. We don't need to stop being who we are. I am a white, Devon farmer's son, educated at Cambridge University – but first of all I am child of the living God for whom Christ died! And so is every other believer here, even if they think that farms are dirty stinking miserable places when I know they are the closest thing to Paradise you can find on the earth. Some of you will know that a city slicker friend of mine described me in a book he wrote as a Hobbit! I still love him.

The second thing that I want you to notice is that absorbing the whole message of the bible gives us the power to live like this.

☞ *Absorbing the whole...*



V4

Everything that was written. Not just our favourite little selection my duty is to teach “the whole counsel of God” and our duty together is to learn it. Of course we will all have different capacities, but every one of us is called to read and learn and understand scripture. In illiterate societies new converts learn to read. A few years ago we had someone converted who could hardly read. Within a couple of years he was fluent. He just knew this book was food for his soul. One of the most biblically literate people Magdalen Road has had in the last fifty years was a college servant with no formal education. But he knew his bible and his life to the core of his being reflected that.

Most of us can read without effort but do we?

Reading the scriptures says Paul, gives us endurance – v4

- *Endurance*

According to the bible it is not particularly significant how you start out as a Christian. It’s how you finish that matters. Particularly here he is talking about enduring in a lifestyle of not pleasing ourselves – but serving others, like Christ.

Reading the scriptures gives us encouragement.

- *Encouragement*

I have been a Christian now for nearly thirty years. There have been so many times when I have been despondent and feeling deeply low. Particularly, you know seeking to build a true biblical community as Paul is describing here, is hard work. I need God’s encouragement.

Reading the scriptures says Paul gives us hope

- *Hope*

V4 – ends with “so that we might have hope”

V12 quotes Isaiah saying that “the nations will hope in him”. And then Paul goes on like this.



V13

The bible displays to us our sure and certain hope, and then God applies that to our hearts by his Spirit so that we trust him, and find fullness of joy and peace.