

The Jesus Manifesto | Week 1 | Isaiah 61 | Mark 1:9-15

Collect

Some icebreaker questions:

- If you could be known for one thing, a quality or achievement, what would that be?
- What significant events in your life have prepared you for what you now do?

As we begin to look at the prophet Isaiah's words, have a think about this:

- A common definition of a prophet is 'one who speaks truth to power'. Where have you seen this prophet-like behaviour in history or in modern day?

Context

Chapter 61 of Isaiah bursts in to a long flowing book with what seems to be a new speaker with a new voice. The question this leaves the reader is this: Who's voice is that? Jewish scholars and many modern critics would suggest it must be Isaiah speaking about himself. However, because of various other passages in this book, especially moments where Isaiah counts himself amongst wrongdoers, another identity may be offered: that Isaiah is not speaking of himself, but rather the ideal or perfect servant of God.

There is only one person throughout all history who has served God perfectly: Jesus Christ. When we read this passage through the lens of the life of Jesus, it leaps off the page and we can see a model that is somewhat imitable.

The book of Isaiah was written between 739 and 681 BC. At the time, the Kingdom of Judah was going through times of revival and times of rebellion. Assyria was nearby and threatening destruction as well as Egypt. Isaiah's call on God's people was to repent (turn back to God) and wait with expectant anticipation for God's deliverance in the future. The book shows us a picture of God's holiness, but more than any other book, focusses on the salvation that will come through the Messiah (the anointed one). This Messiah, Isaiah suggests, will bring peace and safety and will lead Israel to bring a light to the nations and bring about salvation in the world. Strikingly, Isaiah also suggests that this Messiah will have to suffer; it is in his wounds we find our healing.

Discuss: Read Isaiah 61. What incidents of Jesus' life mirror the prophecy of Isaiah 61?

Fast forward around 700 years and a baby is born. This baby, born into obscurity and hardship, is named Jesus. 30 years on, at the age a Jewish male enters independent manhood, that same Jesus is baptised by John - a figure behaving like a prophet, living a radical life and preaching a radical message. One thing to note: in the beginning of Mark's gospel, we don't hear Jesus speak until we have heard the voice of scripture, the voice of a prophet, and the voice of the Father.

Discuss: Read Mark 1:9-15 – How do you think Jesus was prepared for all that happened in his life?

Content

‘The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me...’ – The first thing to note from Isaiah’s prophecy is the identity behind the gifting he has. It is important for Isaiah’s readers to know that the Messiah who will come is not a rogue agent but called, blessed, and sent by the ‘sovereign Lord’. See how this is mirrored also in the baptism of Jesus.

Reflect: The calling or anointing we have as members of the body of Christ is not a rogue anointing or an internal power but an authority gifted to us from our heavenly Father.

‘...because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.’ - The anointing of God is not to be contained in a vacuum or even for the benefit of the Church. The anointing of God is for a specific purpose; the proclamation of the Good News of God to the poor. This ‘Good News’ is not just a warm-hearted news feature written to make us happy, but is truly defined in the person of God. The same word ‘Good’ that describes the creation of the world in Genesis is now being used to invoke a New Creation, a ‘Good’ state of affairs. This proclamation of Good News says ‘no matter how poor in spirit, finance, health or poor in social standing you are, there is hope in a new creation both personally and in the world in which you live.’ Good News.

Discuss: How does this definition of Good News reflect Jesus’ life? Does it challenge your understanding of the phrase ‘good news’?

Mark wanted the readers to know that Jesus did not operate in his own strength, own wisdom, or own intellect, but that he was anointed by God. It was important for the readers to understand that Jesus’ ministry is kick-started by the Father’s declaration of love and affirmation of his Son.

Discuss: What ways can you remind yourself of your own sense of calling and your identity as a daughter/son of God?

Challenge

Bryan Stevenson writes in *Just Mercy* ‘The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavoured, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.’ Assess your regular week. **How much of your time is spent with people who are in need?** Stevenson goes on to write, ‘We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness even if our brokenness is not equivalent.’ **How can sharing our brokenness be good news to those around us?**

What other ways does this passage challenge us? Share with another couple of people and discuss: what practices can we put in place to address these challenges?

Connect

Spend time praying for God’s good news to be proclaimed in:

- An area of the world desperate for it;
- An area of London in need of it;
- A person we know who is hungering for it.