

Good evening everyone welcome to Tuesday Evening Sermon our once a month time where we dig deeper into God's word and really try and tease out a little bit of maybe some of the recent teaching that we've had on our Sunday services uh just chew on the word of God just that little bit more and so tonight is likely to be a little bit longer and because of the subject matter because of where I want to go with things it is much more kind of teaching session and maybe more so than just a sermon or a preach so hopefully you can bear with that this might be something that you want to keep coming back to or you might want to even pause and come back to things because there's bits of it that you might just want to mull over and refresh yourself with just as we go through it so get your bibles ready uh you might want a pen and paper even just to jot some notes down as we go through things because tonight we're going to look at the topic of justice and mission and we're kind of trying to tease out is justice part of the church's mission because it could be argued that the focus in the new testament is very much on evangelism and that evangelism is what mission is for the church today and so I want to try and tease into that a little bit in our time together so before we do that let's take a moment to pray; let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

So is justice part of the mission of the church now we have to understand clearly that the church only has a mission because God has a mission so and we're not going into that so much today explicitly and tied in with this would be maybe sometimes questions like well should the church be concerned about care of creation could that be part of mission because there's a an ecumenical document that talks about the five marks of mission and the first couple are about uh sharing the faith with people seeing people come to faith discipling people so the normal kind of things that we tag on with evangelism and discipleship is probably quite comfortable with that as being part of mission but then it does talk about justice I think is mark number four and mark number five is care of creation is are these part of mission how could we argue for that and I think the creation care one is part of the kind of justice picture because as we've been seeing part of the old testament argument about justice is care of those who are powerless and who are vulnerable and it could be argued that that creation is very vulnerable particularly as mankind has developed capacity and in numbers that we have great power over creation apart from obviously the great natural disasters that happen we do have great power and even some of them that we are influencing because of our behavior so maybe those kind of things are not mentioned in in the scriptures explicitly because well humanity was never an efficient position to do both beforehand they cared much better for creation but even still could it be argued from the scriptures that creation care should be part of the mission of the church just like justice could be

And the people that would argue for that probably look back into the old testament as we have been doing with our series in Isaiah we've been going to the old testament and that raises one of the issues that I want to touch on just as we get into things tonight because there's a couple of issues we need to touch on initially before we kind of dig into this

Because these issues I think are sometimes at the heart of why we might not see justice or creation care as part of new testament mission and the first is I thought that I came across in my reading over the summer in the book we need to talk about justice by Ben Lindsay I've mentioned him before and in the evening on a race in Scotland and later in the book he talks about race and theology and he talks about this tension between evangelism and a broader understanding of mission an understanding of mission that would be more community orientated than just an individual orientated and he quotes another pastor an academic who says generally in the black church you learn about Jesus through Moses white Christians through Paul that's why they struggle with social issues Lindsay says this author's overarching point is that many black churches promote a theology that leads to Jesus through the old testament story of Moses which tells of a God of justice who hears the cry of his people and saves and redeems them as a result black people are presented with the redemption of all things creation people and places however the majority of white churches come to Jesus through the apostle Paul in the new testament here there is a heavy focus on the grace of God for the sinner and the importance of the family of Christ representing the church the result is that there is an emphasis on personal salvation and community renewal is in the shadows if your theology and teaching are more appalling than mosaic then it becomes really hard to see how the word of God applies to social justice issues whereas the mosaic starting point allows freedom to articulate why God cares about personal salvation economics business education etc I found that a really startling and helpful perspective on it possibly pushed a little bit far after all Paul does say in Colossians that that God is redeeming all things and reconciling all things to himself through Christ and so it's probably pushed a little bit far there he's obviously trying to make a point but I wonder if that's part of it that in quite majority churches we can be very individual focused and we maybe do form a large part of our theology exclusively through the new testament and I struggle with the old testament whereas because black majority churches and black Christians and Christians of other ethnic groups have faced slavery have faced conditions that would more naturally help them feel a sense of a unity with the Israelites and Egypt and et cetera it's natural that they would maybe then go to the old testament scriptures and so through that journey to our theology that is more about community and about the renewal of much more than just the individual not that they would deny the individual it's just that they maybe try and hold it in greater tension than we do at times and I think part of the influence of our upbringing then is that with regard to the old testament we have maybe a tendency to over spiritualize it and we gloss over things that are about the physical and about the community and about creation and we make a much more spiritual focus on it or we just disregard the old testament and so much of it as irrelevant we don't maybe preach on it as much when we don't talk about it or study about it as much when was the last time that you really looked at Leviticus in depth for example so tonight we're going to dig into a couple of old testament passages and see a little bit of this at work and I'm also going to quote a couple of sections from the mission of God by Christopher wright which I find a really helpful book in helping us to get this other kind of perspective on mission and maybe challenges a little bit to equate where we're at but first I want us to turn to 2 Timothy Chapter 3 verse 16 and 17 which verses many of you will be familiar with Paul says to Timothy all scripture is God

breathed and is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training and righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work all scripture is God breathed and is useful all scripture and of course at the time he Paul was talking about the old testament so there's stuff in the old testament that is useful and we know it's of God but we often don't really think it's very useful we often just as I say I think over spiritualize it or disregard it now clearly how we relate to the old testament is different from Jews particularly because as we see in the book of Hebrews we have Jesus who is presented as the perfect sacrifice and the perfect high priest so we no longer no longer need the sacrificial system we no longer need a high priest to offer our sacrifices on our behalf that is provided for by Jesus so that deals away with a great swathe of the old testament then there's laws in the old testament that are about the distinction between who is in the people of God and who's not in the people of God and about purity in that sense and again because of Jesus because there is neither Greek a gentile nor Jew that distinction is not kept for us in the same manner that it was in the old testament about food laws and some of the other laws and kind of ceremony on purity laws and such things so there's something quite different there for us now but I think from what I've been reading and thinking about this issue of mission and justice I think somehow we need to hold better the old and new testament together so as to reveal a fuller understanding of the mission of God so that we don't just treat the old testament as some nice old stories that laid simply a foundation for Jesus or are nicely sentimental words of encouragement that we actually see that that God began his mission in the old testament carried it through the old testament and yes there is a new covenant but it builds upon what was there previously and I've tried to touch on some of this in my time here already with talking about the kingdom of God uh of the blessing that that was promised uh to and through Abraham but there is more which is something that's wonderful about scripture and so we're going to turn now to some of those old testament passages one in particular that I have no idea if you've ever looked at it really and we're going to turn to Leviticus chapter 25 Leviticus chapter 25 and read a number of verses from here so Leviticus chapter 25 and at verse 1 the lord said to Moses at mount Sinai speak to the Israelites and say to them when you enter the land I am going to give you the land itself must observe a sabbath to the lord for six years sow your fields and for six years prune your vineyards and gather your crops but in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest the sabbath to the lord do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines the land is to have a year of rest whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you for yourself your male and female servants and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land whatever the land produces may be eaten count seven sabbath years seven times seven years so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of 49 years then sound the trumpet everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month on the day of atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants it shall be a jubilee for you each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan the fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the intended vines for it is at jubilee and is to be holy for you it's only

what is taken directly from the fields in this year of jubilee everyone is to return to their own property jumping on a little bit to verse 25

If one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold if however there is no one to redeem it for them but later on they're on they prosper and acquire sufficient means to redeem it for themselves they are to determine the value for the years since they sold it and refund the balance to the one to whom they sold it they can go back to their own property but if they do not acquire the means to repay what was sold this well what was sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the year of jubilee it will be returned in the jubilee and they can then go back to their property and then at verse 39

If any of your fellow Israelites became become poor and sell themselves to you do not make them work as slaves to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you they are to work for you until the year of jubilee then they are they and their children are to be released and they will go back to their own clans into the property of their ancestors because the Israelites are my servants whom I brought out of Egypt they must not be sold as slaves do not rule over them ruthlessly but fear your God amen so the year of jubilee is where I want to start this section the original as we see was meant to be the 49th year seven sets of seven years and then there would be this year of jubilee and we're unsure actually if it ever did happen in the life of Israel sadly but in that 50th year they were meant to free people from their debts free people from slavery that if they had sold land to others because of financial hardship that they were to get that land back and it would rebalance how things were set up when they first came in to the promised land and we see both that in the later portions that I read there but you can go on and read the full chapter and Leviticus 25. Jubilee had two main thrusts it had release and liberty and return or restoration so you were released from your debts you were released from slavery and you were able then to be returned to your wider clan or your family unit and you were able to you were free from slavery and also if you had sold land that would be released that would be returned to you and your property your financial position your your honor would be restored so release return liberty and restoration

And when we read of failures to keep the sabbath it's potentially also including this idea of jubilee not just the Sunday the Saturday that they didn't keep or the sabbath years but also potentially the jubilee years

And in the course of Israel's history this developed into a much wider hope a longing within the people and it was picked up and articulated by the prophets so let's jump on to Isaiah chapter 61. Okay Isaiah 61 at verse 1.

Isaiah 61 at verse 1

The spirit of the sovereign lord is on me because the lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor he sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners to proclaim the year of the

lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion does this bestow in them a crown of beauty instead of ashes of all the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead a spirit of despair they were called oaks of righteousness a planting of the lord for the display of his splendor they will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations strangers will shepherd your flocks foreigners will work your fields and vineyards and you will be called priests of the lord you will name ministers of our God you will feed on the wealth of nations and in their riches you will boast instead of your shame you will receive a double portion and instead of grace you will rejoice in your inheritance and so you will inherit a double portion in the land and everlasting joy will be yours 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 their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples all who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the lord has blessed amen

So as I say I think we often approach the old testament solely in a very spiritual sense but reading Isaiah 61 after reading Leviticus 25 I think makes a difference because when you start to read those verses I don't think you just think in spiritual terms I think there are spiritual nuances there but I think it's more as well to proclaim freedom for the captives those who have sold themselves because of debts and now because jubilee should have happened because sabbath should have been recognized and honored and followed there should have been freedom for the captives to proclaim the year the year of the lord's favor the jubilee year to comfort those who mourn to provide for those who grieve to bestow them a crown of beauty instead of ashes oil of joy instead of mourning because they're in slavery and because they don't have the land that they once had and they've had to sell it

To rebuild what has been lost that instead of disgrace verse seven you will see you will rejoice in your inheritance their inheritance was the land it was what God had given each family medium-sized clan unit to have so that they had provision for them and they've had to sell that and so they're in slavery and they so they're in disgrace and they're lacking honor and because of jubilee that was meant to be restored to them

Because the lord loves justice he loves justice

I think it's leading with jubilee language that freedom of the captives good news for the poor the year of the lord's favor inheritance instead of disgrace but we're trying to understand well what about new testament mission

And so let's jump on into Luke chapter 4 in the new testament where we read about Jesus okay Luke chapter 4 at verse 14.

Jesus returned to galilee in the power of the spirit news about him spread through the whole countryside he was teaching in in their synagogues and everyone praised him he went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and on the sabbath day he went into

the synagogue as was his custom he stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet as I was handed to him and rolling it he found the place where it is written the spirit of the lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor he sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the lord's favor then he rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down as of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him he began by saying to them today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing amen

So Jesus picks up the words of Isaiah and again we have that tendency to spiritualize every part of it don't we but you know there how many are the commentators that would say well this person was healed the leper was healed or the blind man was made to see and that uh the paralyzed man was able to walk and these were not only healings and not only a generated faith but they would give that person back life because then they could work that that is picked up in so many commentators

So when the kingdom comes and in the ministry of Jesus it's not just about faith it's not excluding faith it's not excluding spiritual dynamics but it's not just and the gospel the good news is not just that you can be forgiven your sins when Jesus came and he started preaching he says the good news is what the gospel is what can you remember

Repent and believe the good news for the kingdom of God is near the gospel is actually about the kingdom of God not just about forgiveness of sins and so in all of this I guess the question arises how big is our your understanding of the gospel and of the cross and of the mission of God so I'd like to quote a little bit from Christopher Wright because when I was going over this uh once more I was just struck by it he writes uh so powerfully so a couple of couple of sections that we'll just listen to just now it is a distorted and surely false reading of scripture to argue that whatever the new testament tells us about the mission of the followers of Christ cancels out what we already know about the mission of God's people from the old testament of course the new testament focuses on the new thing that we now have to proclaim to the nations only from the new testament can we proclaim the good news that God has sent his son into the world God has kept his promise to Israel Jesus has died and has risen and is even now reigning as lord and king in the name of Jesus Christ we can know forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith and his blood shed on the cross Christ well returning glory the kingdom of God will be fully established in the new creation all of these great affirmations and much more are the content of the good news that could only be made known in the new testament through the historical events of the gospels and the witness of the apostles and of course it is our mandate duty and joy to proclaim these things to the world and the evangelistic task entrusted to us but where do we find any justification for imagining that by rightly understanding what the new testament commands us to do we are absolved from doing what the old testament commands why should we imagine that doing evangelism and obedience to the new testament excludes doing justice and obedience to the old why have we allowed what we call the great commission to obscure the twin challenge endorsed by Jesus himself of the great commandment

I just find that so powerful and hard time and really just hits me and it just makes me want to approach the old testament and new and in different ways and see that it has relevance and that God has been doing and building things for millennia and that it culminated in Christ and Jesus coming and what he's doing and what we have to share yes there's that evangelistic task there is calling people into that but then when we are discipling people what we are discipling them to is maybe much greater than we've ever imagined Christopher wright goes on to say God's mission was that sin should be punished and sinners forgiven evil should be defeated and humanity liberated death should be destroyed and life and immortality brought to light enemies should be reconciled to one another and to God and creation itself should be restored and reconciled to its creator a huge vision of what God is doing has revealed through the scriptures he goes on to say a full biblical understanding of the work of Christ on the cross goes far beyond though of course it includes the matter of personal guilt and individual forgiveness that Jesus died in my place bearing the guilt of my sin as a voluntary substitute is the most gloriously liberating truth to which we cling in glad and grateful worship with tears of wonder that I should long for others to know this truth and be saved and forgiven by casting their sins on the crucified savior in repentance and faith is the most energizing motive for evangelism all of this must be maintained with total commitment and personal conviction so we hold on to evangelism we hold on to calling people to repentance to saying that every one of us is a messed up sinner and we need the forgiveness of God that is not in debate that is not up for dropping any time but he says but there is more in the biblical theology of the cross than individual salvation and there is more to biblical mission than evangelism the gospel is good news for the whole creation to point out these wider dimensions of God's redemptive mission is not watering down the gospel of personal salvation rather we set that most precious personal good news for the individual firmly and affirmatively within its full biblical context of all that God has achieved and will finally complete through the cross of Christ only in the cross only in the cross is there forgiveness justification and cleansing for guilty sinners hallelujah only in the cross stands at the feet of evil powers only in the cross is the release from the fear of death and its ultimate destruction altogether only in the cross are even the most intractable and tractable of enemies reconciled only in the cross where we finally witness the healing of all creation the fact is that sin and evil constitute bad news in every area of life on this planet the redemptive work of God through the cross of Christ is good news for every area of life on earth that has been touched by sin which means every area of life bluntly we need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess and by God's incredible grace we have a gospel big enough to redeem all that sin and evil has touched and every dimension of that good news is good news utterly and only because of the blood of Christ on the cross there is no other power no other resource no other name through which we can offer the whole gospel to the whole person and the whole world than Jesus Christ crucified and risen

I'll probably put up uh scans of just a few of those pages so that you can go back and look at them more easily and if you want a copy of the book then or alone of my copy then just let me know

I just did not know how to summarize some of that and so forgive me for quoting so lengthy sections but sometimes we need some meaty stuff to chew on and to hear and so that's what I've chosen to do tonight I hope you can see where I am coming from I hope you can see what is nurtured in my thinking and in my heart - this understanding that the mission of God the Gospel of Jesus Christ is huge and relevant for every area of life.

And thus why justice is part of the mission of God and so the mission of the church and why I've felt called to preach about this these past number of weeks

Friends I hope tonight has provided some food for thought maybe a wider biblical foundation than just what we saw in Isaiah and begins to not just convict us maybe even if that's needed affirm that that call that some of us have because I was talking to someone I just through the this series and the church has never affirmed her occupation I won't go into what it is but the church is never from not Brightons parish church not any church because I think we probably downplay issues of justice and we elevate evangelism and maybe we do that because we think one is eternal and so we do the eternal over the temporal and in Brightons we do that with the kirk session in the deacons court where they cover the eternal matters and the temporal matters but that's another story in another conversation

But this individual had never been affirmed by the church never once in decades of work but by talking about justice by seeing that justice is crucial and important because it is at the heart of God and it's at the heart of God because it's part of the mission of God or vice versa that it's part of the mission of God because of the heart of God that brought a measure of affirmation for her she could see that in her work she is bringing the light of Jesus she is bringing good news for the poor

And hopefully freedom for the captives and that is more than just spiritual that it includes a spiritual but it is more than just a spiritual so friends uh I will be interested to hear what you have to say give me some feedback give me a call arrange to go for a walk if that's permitted in due course but let's wrestle with this because I really do think it's there in the scriptures it's there in the heart of God

And some way somehow needs to become much more there are echoes of it certainly there are clear signs of it in parts of us as Brightons

But maybe we just need to have that wider biblical understanding of things to give us that nudge to bring that degree of challenge as we were looking at on Sunday I hope tonight has been helpful and that God speaks through this to equip us and call us so let us take a moment to pray let us pray:

Our God and Heavenly Father what was of you would you take it deep into our hearts and minds would you transform and renew our minds that we would follow in your ways that we would take on the character and the heart of Jesus more fully and lord what was of me what was just dross would you just blow it away that it wouldn't take root that it

wouldn't unsettle us. May there not be any attack of the enemy that would bring a guilt that is heavy and ill-fitting but would we if we are challenged simply have the discipline receive it as a discipline of our father and no forgiveness and know his you're enabling to lead us into life that all might have life lord lead us in your ways help us to see the injustices around us help us not to be complacent as we've heard not to be 'thinking well I'm just one little person what do my choices matter' because they do Lord each of our choices matter and when we collectively pull together then then incredible things happen and even on that individual things level credible things happen so Lord, leaders in this lead us to know how to engage with our community, our wider area, even the wider issues of the world as we seek justice and defend the oppressed .

We ask you in Jesus name, Amen

Friends, thanks for joining us tonight for our Tuesday Evening Sermon and in the description there'll be some links so you can get a scan of the pages I read from tonight; and do join us Thursday evening for live prayer at 8:15 and in the morning there's also the open time of prayer at 10 am if you're able to join us - you do need to book in advance for that one. We'll be back on Sunday. This Sunday it's Remembrance Sunday so we'll be starting at the earlier time of 10:45 with music and notices from 10:30 so that at 11 o'clock we can show and have our mark of Remembrance at 11 o'clock. Join us then if you're able .....

and as you go from here the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you this night and forevermore.

Amen