

## HOPE GIVERS: PT 1. LOVED BY GOD

We are living in complex times. Times of great uncertainty. Imagine predicting 12 months ago that within the year, 2.3 million people would be killed and international travel and tourism would halt.

Alongside this we are seeing the decline of British and American power, and the rise of military dictatorships. Putin's power in Russia is unchecked as he poisons opponents at will. China has put over 1 million Uyghur people into indoctrination camps and is projecting military power into the Pacific without consequence. Saudi Arabia is waging war in Yemen with devastating humanitarian consequences. Meantime our planet is rapidly degrading, with alarming consequences. We see the gap between the rich and the poor rapidly increasing. We see the rise in anxiety amongst our young people, and depression and suicide at record levels. We see the decline in the value of truth, with fake news and conspiracy theories. This is the context in which we now live. This is our world

Isaiah 61 speaks into our context in a particularly relevant way. It is a message of hope. Into the context in which we find ourselves living, we are called to be hope givers. Hope givers to those who are fearful, and anxious, and scared as they think of the future.

Isaiah is a hard book to preach from. It is not logically laid out with clear structure. It is not clear at times, who is speaking. It is not clear which time period is being referred to. It is not written in a style that we are used to. It is prophetic and poetic. Isaiah was a prophet in the period of the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah who reigned approx. 767-687BC. The book's themes are of Judgement and Hope.

It has two major sections. Ch 1-39 and 40 to 66. The first section speaks of the Old Jerusalem, idolatry, rebellion and injustice and God's warning of impending judgment. It also talks of a new Jerusalem. First 39 chapters see this judgement being outworked. Israel continued to defy God, and God used the empires of Babylon and Assyrians to bring judgement. Eventually the Israelites were exiled and the temple was destroyed.

Ch 40-66 are written about the period after the exile. Debate about who wrote them because Isaiah was by now dead. The Israelites have returned to a ruined Jerusalem. But people have lost confidence in God and accuse God of abandoning them. God is on trial and he answers these accusations Ch 49-55. We are then introduced to a Coming servant who would fulfil God's plans and bring a New Jerusalem. However, he is a suffering servant. Not what was expected?

Ch 60, 61 and 62 we have 3 poems. Poems about the kingdom of God. We figure out the new Jerusalem is actually God's new and restored creation. Kingdom

Check out the Bible project website. Go to Watch – Overviews – Isaiah for more detail on the context. Read Isaiah 61. The passage is familiar because Jesus quoted part of it in Luke 4, and caused an uproar.

C 61 is a chapter of pictures. Allusions, imagery, 3 images that I want to explore this morning from this passage that add up to a powerful conclusion. This conclusion is the basis for us to be hope givers.

### Language of grace vs 1-3

This language made sense to a people who had been made destitute by war and who had had their lives ripped out from them. They were broken as they were taken from the land and put in a foreign country. They had been captives. And here was the announcement of Good news.

Who is "me". Spirit of the Lord is upon me? Was it Isaiah or his disciples. Many think the listeners would have seen in it the Messiah, the servant king of previous chapters. And Jesus certainly later says this is referring to him. This is kingdom stuff here, the pictures of 60, 61, 62 were never fulfilled. There were glimpses of them but never really the New Jerusalem that they Israelites expected. There was focus on reaching the Gentiles among some Jews. But by Jesus time they were back under Roman rule and still despised the Gentiles. They were not a blessing to the nations and were in bondage to the Law. The poor were pushed out of temple worship, for the rich spiritual elite.

Jesus promises grace. We are freed from our failures and from our striving to be good enough. We are freed from our shame and spiritual poverty. Blessing is coming that is underserved and unearned. The old system is going to be destroyed. New covenant.

**Language of sonship v7** (picked up in the NT by Paul in Romans 8:15-17 etc)

Double portion is what the first born in ancient times received. 6 times we read of this concept in the OT. The first born son received a special place in the family, they would get a double inheritance, and take over as patriarch of the family. When the senior father was dying they would pray a special blessing over the first born son. Ie Jacob and Esau

Firstborn sons were to be dedicated to the Lord. When the Levi tribe were set aside as priests, they became the substitute first born for all the other tribes. The Levites had a special relationship of intimacy and service with God.

The word first born is also used of Jesus. Jesus was literally the first born of Mary, and twice it is used in this regard. But the other times when Jesus is called the first born, it is a theological term meaning the most prominent.



I reading the story of Christina Noble this week. Bridge across my sorrows. (great movie as well) She was bought up in Ireland and suffered unimaginable abuse as a child. Her mother died, and her father abandoned her. She was gang raped and abused by a relative. She married an abusive husband. She lived on the streets. She was abused in an orphanage. The story goes on to tell of her work with orphans in Vietnam. It is incredible how God took her pain and abuse and turned it into blessing and redemption.

God wants to take our past, our sorrow our shame, our dishonour and he wants to give us a double inheritance. He wants to give us the place of most favoured. He wants us to know that we are special. Beloved by him.

### Language of intimacy v10

This Imagery picked up by Paul Ephe 5:7 and John in Rev 21:2,9. In ancient times the week leading up to the wedding was a time of celebration. Men in one place. Women in another. Then the bride was taken to the grooms house in a gown that the groom had provided. Then more celebrations before the marriage was consummated. We are in that week of celebration. God has sent us a garment of praise - A dress that onlookers admire as we walk through the streets to the house.

There is a lot going on here. At one level, God sees us as pure and spotless, without any fault. But there is more than that. God has placed in us his Spirit so that we might be Christ like. That we might reflect the character of God to those around us. God wants us to surrender totally to him, so that his power can flow into our lives and we are changed. Purified. Those around us will see the difference. Faith worked out in action, good deeds, justice.

The picture is one of God's love for us as like that of a husband and wife. The very closest and most intimate relationship we can know as humans is that of a marriage relationship. Movies and songs celebrate the joy of intimate love. The picture is of the bride coming down the aisle in radiance. Interesting uni-sex illustration. Man dressed awaiting. Bride coming in her splendour.

The love of God is such that he wants to come into a deep place of intimacy with us, and this is only possible as he changes our hearts. As we remove our dirty clothes. As he changes us.

It is a powerful picture of the love of God. Anyone who has been in a relationship knows that love only sees the best, that love overlooks the faults, that love in a sense is blind. When we are first in love we are often blind. Once we get married we soon discover the person we married is not perfect. Then we have to choose to be blind, to forgive and to let go. God is not blind but his love lead to the cross so that we would become the perfect bride or groom.

What do these images tell us. How do they speak into our context

We are loved by God. It sounds Trite, cliché. But we can be hope givers because we are loved by God.

Because we have experienced his grace. Because we know his favour, his blessing. Because we are in a place of security and intimacy with God. We can give hope because of what we have experienced already.

Our significance is not in how many likes on our facebook, or how successful we are in our career, how well our kids turn out, or in how much we accumulate.

Our significance is that we have experienced God's grace and favour and love.

That we have experienced a God of grace who believes in us, and who is changing us to be more like himself. Who is taking our brokenness and despair and giving us joy, and peace.

We can be hope givers because we know we are called into the family of God as his children. We are the beloved, the favoured child.

We can be hope givers because we have been bought into a place of intimacy with God that is a mystery. Unexplainable. But where at the core of our being, God has placed his Spirit within us, and given us a new heart.

We can be hope givers because God is changing our character such that others notice and are drawn to us.

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### REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How have you experienced God's grace? What is the most powerful grace experience you have known?
2. How did you experience parental love? Did it feel conditional? Was there a favourite in the family? What wounds from childhood did you carry into adulthood?
3. Why do you think God's love for his people is described in terms of marriage? What are the implications of this? How do those who are single relate to this imagery?
4. What does intimacy with God look like? Is it hard for guys to relate to this idea?
5. What would it look like if you truly knew every moment of the day that you were deeply loved by God?
6. If we don't know we are deeply loved by God, we cannot give hope to those around us. Discuss
7. What lies, wounds and actions are hindering you from experiencing the depth of God's love?



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS