

## Isaiah 1:21 - 2:5

Is 1:21 - 'She was once full of justice.' Society is becoming increasingly sensitive to the problem of injustice.

There is the unjust abuse of women and girls - we have recently had the #MeToo campaign, followed by the expose of several Hollywood actors and filmmakers in the Harvey Weinstein scandal; there was the expose of Larry Nassar team doctor to US Olympians; more recently the sex scandals at Oxfam; the football coach Barry Bennell. We are living through a time of awakening as society is waking up to the moral outrage of abuse, or abusing the young, the powerless, abusing women.

For some of us, these stories may have touched a nerve, perhaps raising memories of our own experiences of injustice. And these stories have touched us because we long for justice. It is an innate desire, and injustice makes us ache. I remember the day before my birthday this year looking at my credit card statement to find someone had stolen about £500. I was really shaken! 'How dare they!'. Thankfully it was sorted quickly; but if you've ever had your house broken into, or your wallet stolen, or worse, been wrongfully accused, or shunned, abused, mistreated, betrayed - you will know the ache that injustice causes.

The problem of injustice can be felt from the other side as well - is it not true that we all have a capacity for treating others unjustly. You may never have betrayed your spouse, but it's true that when our own interests are at stake, we will treat people badly.

In our own experiences of injustice, whether as victim or perpetrator, the truth is that we long for someone who will come and right all of our wrongs, come and restore everything that others have stolen; and even sort out our own hearts that so easily mistreat others.

Well Isaiah chapter 1 shows us where to go with all these problems of injustice, who to turn to.

For Justice is the melodic line that runs through these verses in Isaiah The message of these verses seems to be this: when we come across injustice, in society, in the church, in our lives, in our hearts - **we must turn to the Lord: who alone can restore justice.**

What would that look like, to turn to God to restore justice? These verses outline three aspects of the injustice: The Crime; The Sentence; and The Promise. And each of these three aspects give us in turn three responses that are appropriate - three ways the we must turn to God in relation to this issue.

**So, first,**

### **1 The Crime - 'Examine Yourself': see the horror of injustice among God's people (1:21-23)**

The 'city' in v.21 is Jerusalem; this also stands as a symbol for God's people. Isaiah here denounces them: once they were faithful, full of justice and righteousness (21), but now have become a prostitute (21) - an image of unfaithfulness.

How have God's people become unfaithful? Through pursuing injustice (21); three things are mentioned: murder (21); thieving and bribery; and not defending the weak - the 'fatherless and widow' (23); this is directed at the rulers (23), the very ones who should have been using their power to shield and protect the weak and powerless; but they were instead ignoring their case (23).

But what these three have in common is *injustice*:

- murder: the killing of the innocent
- being swayed by bribes and money - letting money dictate how you act, rather than principles of fairness
- ultimately: ignoring the pleas and the case of the voiceless; denying them justice

See the Crime - Israel guilty of injustice. This tarnishes them - see the images in v. 22 - they were once pure 'silver'; pure 'wine'; but now their lives have been tarnished and diluted by sin.

So: injustice, described in the language of faithfulness, and purity of devotion: this language points to a deeper issue beneath the injustice: their relationship with God. They were once pure in their allegiance to Him; but now, remember Chapter 1 - their relationship with God was marked by hypocrisy.

They had become unfaithful to Him. And this unfaithfulness was reflected in their injustice.

### **So, first, see The Crime**

And the application is for us to **examine ourselves**.

We, like Jerusalem, are a visible community of God's people...so we must allow Isaiah's words to search us. We need to examine our actions:

Let's consider the issues

murder - you may not have pulled the trigger; but: how is your thought life? Your words? To those in the church you take issue with, or don't get on with, or find hard? Are there relationships that you need to put right?

money - you might not accept bribes, but does money control you? Do you 'chase after' it? Does the thought of losing money make you really anxious?

the voiceless - you might not set out to victimize the poor, but within this church family, are we caring for those who can't care for themselves? The bereaved; the children with no father; the infirm; the divorced; and it's not just those inside the church - do we just walk past the poor in Stevenage? PCC - can we examine more carefully how we as a church support the weak, the poor?

These verses encourage us to examine yourselves on these issues.

But also go deeper: examine your relationship with God. For a lesson of these verses is that our use of money and our treatment of the vulnerable are an index of our attitude to God: it's possible to be a part of God's people but your heart is far from God.

Maybe you go through the motions - come to Life Explored, or part of a home group - where is your heart in relation to God? **Christian, examine yourself.**

*There is the Crime; But what is God's response to it? Can He let injustice go? No...*

### **2 The Sentence; 'Christian, Be penitent': see the certainty of God's punishment of injustice (1:24-31)**

In these verses God pronounces sentence on the crime of injustice. This sentence has three clear elements to it:

i) *Destruction*:

'I will vent wrath on my foes' (24)

'I will turn my hand against you' (25)

'rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish' (28)

there will be shame and disgrace (29), an eternal punishment (31)

But that's not the only part of the sentence: there is also

ii) *Restoration*:

'I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities' (25)

The Lord will restore their relationship to Him; And the leadership will be sorted:

'I will restore your leaders...' (26)

This promise of restoration is accompanied by another: the promise of

iii) - *Deliverance*: 'Zion will be delivered with justice (27)

Delivered - it is to be saved.

See, the sentence - and the three elements: destruction, restoration, deliverance.

Note in passing that it is the Lord Himself who promises to act to solve the problem of injustice: 'I will' comes 4 times in 24-26. And note too how seriously God takes injustice. 'thoroughly' deal with it. This should be frightening - for if you persist in committing injustice against God's people, you will come up against the full force of His wrath; but it should also be comforting - for here is God's settled intention to deal with injustice. And only He can - are you troubled by having been badly treated by someone? Struggling with anger? Or struggling because of the memory of your own sin of injustice? Well, come to the Lord - come to Him; only He can solve your problem. God is the God of the fatherless and the widow. Have you been bereaved - God is interested in your case. You fatherless? God wants to be your father. Are you powerless, voiceless? God will fight for you.

once again, 'justice' is a thread that binds these together. How?

i) *Destruction* - God destroys the unjust

ii) *Restoration* - He restores justice

iii) *Deliverance* - v. 27 - *He delivers those affected* - The sense is twofold: the fatherless and widow - the victims - delivered; but also - Israelites who turn back to God will be saved from His wrath. The hint here is of individual Israelites turning away from their own individual sin and God accepting them back; and he will do that *with justice* (27)

This begs a question: how can God have 'penitent' Israelites back, and still be just? What about their sin? Their injustice? If He is so just, he can't just overlook their sins; crucial that we answer that - because it affects us; we are all guilty of injustices; by nature we are all far from God. He God says that He can forgive us - with justice. How does that work?

The New Testament answer to that question is found in the Cross.

on the Cross: God stepped in the way of his own destruction; vented the full force of his wrath on himself - So that we can be restored; And because Jesus the God-man take our place, we can be forgiven and delivered with perfect justice.

Which means that this sentence is relevant for us:

- The Destruction you and I deserve for our injustice has taken place at the Cross: Jesus is destroyed instead of us

- So, we can be restored/redeemed *with justice*

But: if we won't let Jesus take our destruction, there is no restoration or redemption possible: the threat of that destruction still hangs over us.

That's the sentence. And it is given so we can act on it. The choice is that we either let Jesus be destroyed, so that we can be restored; or we have to face God's punishment ourselves. If I had known that the snow

was coming, I wouldn't have parked my car on a side road on a hill! Meant I couldn't move it...If you know the judgement is coming, you take action.

How are we to act on this announcement? How are we to avoid the destruction? How are we to be restored and delivered? The hint is there is v. 27 - penitence. **Christian, be penitent**

Begs the question - how aware are you of your own sin? You can't be penitent if you don't know your sin.

That's the importance of our first point - we were told to examine ourselves. Well if we do that honestly, we will find sin. As we do, we must secondly be penitent - that is, we are sorry for our sin, and turn away from it.

By the way - it's the way you become a Christian - are you aware as I'm speaking that you're not right with God; the way to solve it is by being penitent; because Jesus died for you, coming God in repentance, saying sorry, giving your life to Him.

Not just how you become a Christian - it is also you go on as a Christian. Christians are those with repentant hearts - soft hearts towards sin, sensitive toward sin. As you go on as a Christian you should be growing in knowing *more* of our sin, not less; growing to hate it more; to be troubled by it more.

Yet we can know more of our sin, without being crushed by it. How? Because - who was destroyed? Christ; so we can face what we are really like - and not be crushed; see - Christian, maybe you are guilty of a great injustice; betrayed someone...anger...lost it with someone; victimised someone - are you repentant about it; have you confessed it to God? If you have you don't need to be destroyed by it - because Jesus was destroyed for you. So bring your grief to Him in repentance; turn away from what you've done; there can be forgiveness, there can be restoration

Christian, Maybe you are troubled by the memory of something you've done a long time ago; you've confessed it a long time ago but it still haunts you, still troubles your relationship with God; well remember v 27 - God has delivered you *with justice* - we know that because Christ paid; and God is satisfied; which means that He won't ask you to pay again - that would be unjust. Whatever it is - rest in Jesus.

**So see, secondly, the sentence**

*In the long run; what about the problem of injustice?* Well, look on, and see thirdly

**3 The Promise - 'Christian, live Godwardly: for God is on the move to eradicate injustice (2:1 - 4)**

The previous verses hint at a new City - 'City of Righteousness, the Faithful City' (26). We see more in this final section - a promise of total restoration:

- in the 'Last Days' (2) we see God deal completely with the problem of injustice. That means that we should live with Him as our focus and centre - living Godwardly - these verses are all about God - His attraction; His plans and purposes to eradicate justice. See how it He does it: through

**- Global Influence (2)**

People see that God is better than anything; they love God: so they stream to Him. from all over the world - 'all nations' (2) stream to Him.

**- Personal Transformation (3)**

v.3 gives a glimpse of people whose hearts are very different from Israel in chapter 1: hearts that *want* to go to the Lord (3), who want to be taught by him (3), who want to live his way (3). Here are people who love God and want to live justly

**- Finally: Removal of injustice**

v4 - God's law, His word, judges between nations; his rule is finally upheld; it 'settles disputes', and removes the need for war (4). People love God - so are satisfied with his rule, and don't look to fight their own corners.

Notice God does all of this - 'He...' - He is on the move to eradicate justice once and for all;

What about us? Well, we're to get on board with this promise - how? By 'living Godwardly' - making Him the focus. We can, because the NT tells us that the 'last days' are *now* - the time before Jesus returns. So we can see some of this promise being fulfilled now:

### **Global influence**

This is happening now. I was at seminary on Thursday, just visiting; in a lecture room with Brits; Dutch; Madagascan; South African; that was 12 people.

All the nations are streaming to God. The travesty of injustice among God's people - of hypocrisy among God's people - it's being undone: as people who genuinely love God are streaming to Him from all nations. So Christian, get on board: be Godward By furthering the global influence of the gospel. Support Compassion; pray for our mission partners

### **Personal Transformation**

The gospel is transforming people's lives now. Change is possible: it is possible to live a life of justice. How? Verse 3 suggests that it is looking at God himself; by going up to God Himself; He teaches us; He changes us. Coming to Him, Knowing Him, Seeing Him, transforms us. Where do we see God's beautiful character, revealed most clearly? In the Lord Jesus. Christian, you want to grow to care about justice more? To grow in concern for the poor, the vulnerable? Study Christ's love of justice: how he cursed the Pharisees; how He turned over the money changers in the temple; who counselled us not to judge others, lest we be judged. And Who so loved you and me - that He died to bring us - Fatherless before God, cut off from him by our own sin - back to our Father who we were estranged from.

Live Godwardly - focus on Christ - and you will change to love justice.

Then there is the third component - the Removal of injustice (4) - more a promise for the future, the new creation. We start to see that now, but won't see it perfectly until Jesus returns.

So until then: there will be other #me too campaigns, there will be other Harvey Weinsteins; but for us, we have someone to go to with our injustices, and with our unjust hearts.

Christian - - examine yourself; - be penitent; - live Godwardly

Let's pray