

Sunday 19th July 2020

God's kindness to us in Christ – Isaiah 42:1-4, Ephesians 2:1-10

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Kemi Ogundipe

Hello and welcome to our talk today the 19th July. My name's Ian Baldwin and I will read from Isaiah 42 V1-4 and Ephesians 2 V1-10 before speaking about God's kindness to us in Jesus Christ. Afterwards Kemi will lead us in prayer before I close our time together.

Isaiah 42 V1-4

¹ "Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
² He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
³ A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his law the islands will put their hope."

Ephesians 2 V1-10

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest of us, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace that you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Jesus Christ. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Our reading from Isaiah is the first part in a passage known as the "Song of the Servant". Although the servant is not specifically named it points to Jesus and this can be evidenced in Matt 12v17 where it is applied to Jesus when out of compassion he heals on the Sabbath.

The servant is present with God as he speaks but the mission and its fulfilment are in the future.

In verse 1 "My chosen one in whom I delight: I will put my spirit on him".

This is exactly what happened in Mark 1v11 at Jesus baptism in the River Jordan God spoke these words and the Holy Spirit came on Jesus in the form of a dove.

Jesus did not shout or cry out but was calm and collected with no whipping up the crowd or showmanship. Rather as Jeremiah Ch15v19 puts it, "if you speak what is precious, unmixed with what is cheap and worthless, you shall be my mouth". Jesus spoke nothing but the truth of God and the way Jesus treated people. He was gentleness and kindness personified.

Those who are damaged by life, like a bruised reed, maybe oppressed by doubts and fears, he treats with kindness. Those whose faith is vulnerable and about to die, just like a smouldering wick, are treated with gentleness and patience until they can be reignited.

Jesus teaching, his life, death, and resurrection complete the gospel. The gospel that has reached the islands, that is the ends of the earth.

This is the gospel that Paul preached to the people of Ephesus.

Now in our passage from Ephesians 2 Paul seeks to demonstrate how much God has done for us in his kindness through Jesus Christ.

The problems are the same from the O.T. times to our own age. There have always been the have and have-nots the bruised reeds and smouldering wicks. We seem unable to create a free, just and humane society.

So, Paul starts where we are, the sorry state of humanity, and then contrasts it with Gods wonderful kindness. Our nature compared to God's grace.

In chapter 1 Paul has been praying about all the amazing things God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

He begins our passage by stating that we are spiritually dead – that is alienated from God. This is because of our transgressions; this is the wrong things we do knowing they are wrong and our sins which are when we fall short of God's standards. These cover all wrongdoing, either deliberate or unintentional, which separate us from God.

To be dead spiritually means we are not listening to God, deaf to the Holy Spirit, no desire to love God. Therefore, we are as unresponsive to God as a corpse. That is grim.

Sin means that people who are created by God and for God actually live without God. Without Christ we don't know freedom rather we live in slavery to the world, the devil and our sinful nature.

Now we all have to live in the world and earn a living but when the world (meaning secular society) is organised without regard to God we must be alert and careful. God does not want a world where there is oppression, tyranny, amoral behaviour, materialism, poverty, hunger, slavery, discrimination and so much injustice. To follow this world is to be a slave to sin.

The devil or ruler of the kingdom of the air has a kingdom of darkness not light. His spirit is at work in non-believers and blinds them, for he is called a liar and deceiver.

Only the power of God, that raised Jesus from the dead, could break the devil's power and rescue us.

The sinful nature Paul mentions is sometimes referred to as the flesh, meaning not skin and bone but our self-centred nature – we love to please ourselves. The cravings and desires Paul means are not simply the natural desires but when they become perverted and do harm i.e. God gave us a desire to eat, sleep and have sex but when they become greed/gluttony, lazy/slothful or lust and pornography then they do us and others harm.

So that self-centredness becomes our bondage. Humanity has rebelled against God and fallen under the devil's dominion. That makes us objects of God's wrath – sin has condemned us to God's wrath.

However, lest we think this is all a bit harsh, we must remember that God is not prone to random, spiteful, or uncontrolled rage, rather it is the action of a Holy God to evil. Unlike us, God will never compromise with evil. God's wrath and mercy are equally part of his nature.

So, I think Paul has made clear our position without Jesus Christ and now in v4 onwards he expounds what God has done for us in and through Jesus.

I mentioned earlier that God is wrath and mercy, but he is also compassion and kindness. Isaiah 63 v7

"I will tell of the kindness of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us – yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel according to his compassion and many kindnesses".

Because of God's love and mercy, we who were dead in sin have been made alive in Jesus Christ. Our fallen nature is taken by God's compassion and our sin and guilt taken by God's mercy and grace.

God saved us forever by this grace (v5 & 8)
v5 made us alive in or together with Christ
v6a we are raised up with him
v6b we will sit in heavenly places with him.

This resurrection, ascension and heavenly place reminds us of the Apostles Creed which we will say together later.

This is amazing stuff, and all expressed in God's kindness to us in Jesus. As Christians we are distinct because we are in "Christ Jesus" and we share those benefits with him and because we have a relational faith with a living God.

Just to remind ourselves what God did. We were dead and helpless and only God's mercy could reach us. We were under God's wrath and only God's love could triumph. We were under God's judgement and only God's grace could rescue us. He did all this out of his sheer kindness for us because God's power was shown in raising Jesus, but his immeasurable grace is shown in raising us?

By living our new life in Christ, we are evidence of his kindness and we shall not point to ourselves but to God.

V8-10 show why in the coming ages God will show his grace and kindness towards us. Remember we are saved by grace. Grace is God's free and undeserved mercy towards us. Our faith is our humble trust in him which allows us to receive from him.

Paul adds more to make sure we understand – v8 we do not negotiate our salvation (new life in Christ) - even our faith is a gift of God. We do not achieve it by our merit, nor do we receive it for any acts of our own. We have no part to play except to receive God's gifts. It is all God's kindness to us.

So we have nothing to boast about. There is no room for pride - only praise of God.

Jeremiah 9 v23 & 24

This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts, boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight" declares the Lord

V10 Salvation means we are new creation. Created by the creator of the world in his image. We are God's workmanship (work of art – a masterpiece). Is that what you see in the mirror!? Thankfully, God sees inside.

However, God has work for us to do. These works are the consequence of our new life in Christ. James 2 v 17 "Faith, if not accompanied by actions, is dead". These works are evidence of our living faith reflecting his love to us into the world.

So, our passage takes us on a journey. We begin dead walking in trespasses and sin doing our own thing. We end alive walking by faith in God's grace doing his works.

We love rags to riches stories. Ephesians 2 is one like no other.

This is an exciting picture of what happens when people respond to the gospel. The gospel allows us to experience a spiritual 'rags to riches' for free! We contribute nothing and it is not our efforts that achieve it. It is the free gift of God out of his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

So let us accept in full the gift of life and serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Now Kemi will lead us in our prayers.

Prayers

Can you reply to all prayer, after “Lord in your mercy”, your reply “hear our prayer.”
Let us pray.

Creator of heaven and Earth, we come before your throne of grace asking you to forgive us our sins in thought, word, and deed, renew a right spirit within us and grant us your peace.

Everlasting God, we bring our prayers to you, Lord of all nations, asking that your blessing of love and peace may be known to all people everywhere. Help us to bear abundant fruit from the seed of potential that you have planted within us.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Holy God we pray for our church, especially for the people you have called to be leaders and preachers in our generation. We pray that they will be strengthened and protected by the Holy Spirit and through them your church will reveal the good news of salvation and draw people together under your rule of justice and mercy.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Almighty Father, as we are looking forward to whenever to meet physically to start worship again in our church building, we pray for coronavirus situation and procedure that needs to be put in place to halt it's spread before the church is finally unlock. Help us all to be responsible in the things that we do in our lives to prevent the spread of the virus by taking heed of recommended precautions and avoiding situations which may make things worse. We pray that we may do it safely and sensibly and in ways that those who are still unsure about attending, that this is not a problem and that we and God will understand their reserve.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Father God, we pray that in our communities and surrounding areas, all will be welcome and accepted regardless of nationality, colour, gender, or status and that will seek always to serve you and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ in one another.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord we pray for Alex Griffiths due to have a baby next month and other women in her situation, we ask that you send angels to keep, guard, comfort, protect and surround them with hope and goodness before and after delivery. For those nursing their babies, we pray for your goodness to teach and help them grow both in their arms and in all years, you grant them together.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Gracious God, we lift before you all those who seek healing of body, mind, or Spirit, remembering Anthony Wedderburn and anyone you know as we name them in our hearts, asking that they will sense the touch of your loving hands, and feel your peace and presence along them each and every step of their journey towards healing and wholeness.

Lord in your mercy

Hear of prayer

Merciful God, we pray for the many people who have contracted coronavirus around the world, we remember before you all those who have died life fulfilled or life cut short through coronavirus and natural causes, as we name them in our hearts, especially those who were formative part of our lives, and community who made us who we are, and who we still miss. Bring comfort and peace to those worried, fearful, and uncertain as the virus spreads. We also pray for governments and authorities, who are developing strategies to contain and deal with the virus and those in health services, who may be risking their own lives to care for sick patients.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Faithful father, we offer these prayers for ourselves and others, we ask you to accept them and use them and us, so that your will may be done on Earth and more of your kingdom reveal to those who seek you.

Merciful father,

accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us say together the prayer the Lord Jesus Christ taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil
For the kingdom the power and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Thank you, Kemi, and thank you all for listening today and may God bless you in this coming week.
Amen.