

17 January 2010

Good to be with you, it's the first time I've been back since Christmas. I've been away in the USA last week with a bunch of people who are leaders in an organisation called the Order of Mission, which really is in some ways in the heart of what's going on here in our church and at Crookes in particular. It was a response of the Church of England to what's going on at St Thomas' and they were struggling at times with some of the things we were doing and the Diocese at the time suggest we form a religious order. That's always been the established Church's response to bunches of people doing slightly different things, so we did that a number of years ago now and most of the senior staff team, churches all over the place in every continent had 350 members, but we formed that to help connect people who felt they were called to lead in mission, some were church leaders and some leading small groups or just 1 or 2 people but those people called to lead a mission, get a network together and meet with some of the leaders had a real good time and waiting on God and so on, so that's why I've not been here since Christmas. It's good to be back and just enough time has gone by that I've recovered from jet lag and hopefully might make a bit of sense!

We are coming to an end of a series that we've been doing before Christmas on the prophetic call that God has given us as a church here at Philadelphia, and the Kings Centre, and we've been basing that on a number of passages and scripture. What we are not going to do is to look at the Bible passages like they really suit us and so that we like them – that's not what's going on. What's going on is as we go through this series is we've picked out all the things we feel God has said to us over the last few years, we've picked out some of the key words we feel The Lord has given that came to us through clear revelation and on top of that upon hearing it once and learning it again and again. There are some scriptures, for example coming as a visiting speaker who doesn't know what's going on but just come for the prophetic gift and made it really clear that there's a number of key prophetic words to us. I felt it important to have a season of this where we are clear of the wider picture and where we've operated from. We're now on the penultimate one of those main scriptures that we are talking about and next week we are going to be talking about Joel 2 which is a very powerful scripture and one that God hit us with harder than any other and there's lots of stories around that and I'll tell you about them next week.

This week we're looking at Isaiah 62 to remind us what we've looked at so far. If you consider yourself to be a member of St Thomas' or Kings Centre then I suggest you get the tapes from the website and there's a button on there that says 'get teaching', if you look at this you will find a whole load of back sermons.

We've talked about Revelations 3 where Jesus says we are to become like the church at Philadelphia and that one was talking about the name and why we called ourselves St Thomas' at Philadelphia, this is not just because we are in the area of Sheffield called Philadelphia, but it's because of a prophetic word we received about 10 years before we moved here and God is saying to us he's put before us an open door and challenging us to go through that.

We then moved to Ezekiel 47 and the river of life that flows out of the temple and there's that call to stay in the river and not get pushed to the edges and stay with it as it flows from the high plateau land of the temple down over the aribar, over the waterfalls and rocky places down to the Dead Sea to the lowest point on Earth. Where the river of life goes that life itself goes with it, so we've looked at that.

Then we moved on to Isaiah 61 just before Christmas and we looked at how Isaiah 61 is all about the ministry of Jesus and what it looked when Jesus started to minister and how we as Christians who have the spirit of Jesus in us and that is what the Bible teaches us, and the word Christian and when it was first used in Antioch it means 'Little Christ' and how us as Christians are called to enter into the ministry of Jesus and allow him to enter the body of Christ to minister through us. So we've talked about Isaiah 61 and how Jesus comes and ministers in a time of seeming decline and helplessness.

Last week when I wasn't here, we were talking about Isaiah 35 and the streams and the desert and how God wants to meet with you in this church, in times when it's difficult and we struggle to keep going and now we're sharing that word. The Lord was using it to minister to individuals as though it would be really good if you've not heard that and allow God to speak you through it.

Today we're going to talk about is Isaiah 62 and it could be summed up as 'get ready, make ready, your King is coming'. It's a messianic passage and it's one that many people would probably recognise as something that's pertaining to the second coming of Christ to the time when Jesus will come back and talk about the end of the world, time when his new kingdom is established. In many prophecies in the Bible there's an ultimate fulfilment of it and you will see it come back through the ages to the present time, lots of smaller fulfilments of the same promise in which prophecy is fulfilled in scripture and I believe that's an example of what's going on here for us.

Jesus the King is coming. I don't know if you've experienced Jesus personally coming into your life, we learn about Jesus, talk about him, prayed or sung to him and you've been part of groups that's gathered to discover things he's said and those things are all fantastic, but have you had Jesus come and visit you? Have you experienced his presence coming into your life and the massive and radical transformation that occurs when he does that?

For me, I grew up in a Christian home, I knew about Jesus as far as I could as a child and I believed in Jesus. I had a period of time where I wanted to reassert my own independence and my own right to do what I want to do with my life. When I was about 14 or 15 I saw an incredible thing – I saw my Mother, a lovely Christian woman, a great Mum. Mum and Dad were really good, raised me well, but my Mum was someone who was quite broken through life events that had happened; both her parents had committed suicide and though she was really good to us, there was a deep sadness and brokenness in her life and an underlying depression. One day she went to church and there was a guy called John Wimber who came and he was talking about the fact that supernatural things in the Bible could still happen today. In the mid 80's when I was a teenager, at the service he went to at our church he invited the Holy Spirit to come and Mum was hungry for more of God and 'yes I want more of that'. It's like in the passage of revelation and Jesus is talking to Christians and says "I will stand at the door and knock, those who open the door; I'll come in and eat with you and they with me. She was saying come in Jesus

I want more, I want to know the Holy Spirit lives in me and that you love me and that you are with me, but I want to meet you. It's not enough just to know about you, or just have my life affected by you. I want to meet you. That night she prayed and held her hands out and absolutely nothing happened and she saw people around her fall over with the power of God that she'd never seen before and wondered why nothing happened to her. But then over the next two weeks, she felt this increasing sense of joy and peace. It grew inside her like the river of life, like streams of living water like it says in the Bible and she became more and more full of joy. For me and my sisters as we watched her we couldn't work out what was happening. My Mum who was usually calm, but flat emotionally started laughing, smiling. We always had the radio on, but it was talk radio and all of a sudden she played Christian music and praise music, she was so full of joy. I was trying to get away from God at that point, but it really began to convict me and it really made me think 'Wow'.

I've never actually met someone who Jesus actually visited before, when he comes in and meets. There's a huge and radical change. Life starts to flow. Life has flowed through my family since he met with my grandparents under Billy Graham in the 50's. He challenged them to meet with Jesus and let him into their lives and a radical transformation started to happen, that was about 50 years ago now and over time since then everything has changed in my family. My sisters, parents, my daughters Grace and Hannah, all their families are Christians. Instead of having a life like my father grew up in, when he was young his family was torn apart with arguments, with a father who had been an alcoholic, whereas my mum whose parents at different times had committed suicide. My children now grow up in a place where there is joy, peace, where people know what it is to have Jesus in their lives. They have people coming in and out of the house all the time. They see people being ministered to.

My eldest daughter Grace said to me a few months ago when her legs had been hurting, she said to me "Dad, there's one thing with this healing stuff, you just take it for granted don't you? If you are not well, God will heal you". I thought how far things have come in just that short space of time.

If Jesus is wanting to visit you, it's worth opening the door. In Isaiah 62, he's not just talking about meeting an individual, he's talking about a whole city. This passage is saying Jesus is coming to the city. Will his people make ready for him? The way that this passage first came to us is that this is a prophesy talk and not just a sermon. I'd never thought of Isaiah 62. I could tell you what it said in Isaiah 61, but not 62 at all. About 18 months ago, we were in staff prayers in the morning, just worshipping God. I wasn't thinking about God in particular, I wasn't thinking about wanting words. I'd just been singing the songs, you know when you're a bit sleepy and not focused and suddenly into my mind came an image and in my mind I wasn't seeing it with my physical eyes but it was clear enough to know that it was from the Lord. I have learnt through time to distinguish my own thoughts than from when prophetic words come. One of the things that give me a clue is if a picture comes into my mind and it's nothing what I'm thinking about, nothing to do with what I've just been talking about and when I'm not expecting it. Suddenly I see this scene from outer space with stars, planets, galaxies, an out of space scene and then zooming towards me from outer space, I know this sounds bizarre but I hadn't been eating anything strange and I wasn't on any medication, but out of the depths of space and coming towards me came this black Bible and it was my Bible. I looked and it was hanging there glowing. I was thinking I don't know what this is. I'm assuming this is from you and then the Bible opened. I'm afraid I can't animate

this for you on Power Point, but it opened and the pages turned and kept turning until it got to Isaiah 62 which I didn't know. I could see it was my Bible; when you've got your own Bible you know where everything is on the pages and as the pages open on Isaiah 62, the whole Bible started to shine really brightly and I was watching this thinking what is this God? In my mind it wasn't audible but in my mind I heard God saying to me "now it is the time".

So we are looking at Isaiah 62 and God says "Now it is the time", so we went into a response time. In scripture it says that if you get a prophetic word, to weigh up what it means in light of the scripture. You talk to other people about it and together you pray and you ask God. If Isaiah 62 is happening and now it is the time, what does that mean? I went to Starbucks somewhere and said ok God you need to tell me what you want. I'm going to read it and I want you to give me some interpretation of what it means.

I want to give you a few headlines and what God is saying to us through this. I'm going to read a section of this:

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

As I was reading it struck me that you could interpret this in two ways; the Lord won't remain silent or it could be the prophet speaking and won't remain silent. But for me it was a mixture of the two, it was Jesus speaking through his body – so it was Jesus not remaining silent nor us either. I don't know whether you would recognize this, but it seems that for the majority of people living in the UK there has been an element of God and Christians remaining silent for the last few years.

If you go back 50 years in this country, and there were times in WWII where the PM would call a full day of prayer and fasting and now we've moved so far that the idea of that is now deemed ridiculous.

I've heard some disturbing statistics; I've read that 40% of Year 9 students when asked did not know what the names of the four Gospels were, in Sheffield the word of the Lord is not being clearly heard by every day people. At the same time the Lord has been speaking more and more clearly and I believe that what God is talking about here is two of those things finally colliding and coming together and so there's no longer silence about the Lord in our city. What God is beginning to do is to encourage us to have the boldness to break out.

One of the people living in our house with us is Sheron went to town about two months ago on a Saturday and said she was encouraged by the youth guys out there treasure hunting. This is where we ask God for prophetic clues to lead us to the treasure and the treasure is a person. What you do is to give one person a location, the other person some clothing and a person a name and then you write them down and if you find that person, you show them the list and you tell them that God loves them. It's just a great fun thing and worth having a go at. As she continued shopping she also realised that the prophetic team were out there. She also saw some other people praying for healing. She said that it's bizarre – you can't take more than two steps without running into someone from Philadelphia or Kings Centre.

If we believe that this prophesy is right and as Jesus said the time is now and that was over a year ago, that we are already in a period of time where this prophesy is coming to pass for us in Sheffield, then it's time to stop being silent about the Lord. How vocal are you about what Jesus has done in your life, that the right approach to introduce people to Jesus is to give them a download about Christian theology about sin and hell and heaven and the cross and all those things and atonement, they are all really important, but to me going in with that front loaded way isn't the way Jesus operated, he started with relationship. What I see more and more is what Jesus is prepared to do in my life, this is some of the stories that have affected me, this is what happens when he comes and visits me and comes to live with me. He loves you too and would you like him to do some stuff in your life and that's been increasing and so the time for silence about the Lord is over. As that vocal proclamation about what God's doing and that boldness and sharing God increases, we move on to the next part of the passage, it says:

No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

There's been a time when not only has it been silent about the Lord in terms of what every day people hear, but the church has been deserted and disgraced. There was a time that if you were considered to be someone respectable in business then you would be expected to be someone who went to church. It was seen as a sign of integrity, faithfulness and Godliness. Now if you go to church, people think you are a bit weird. I've just come back from Carolina, in the Southern US and there's things I struggle with out there such as gun culture, racism, but one thing I really love is that when you go there as a Pastor and a Christian you are completely normal. It's great to be in that environment. There was a time when it was like that in the UK, and God is beginning to change how the church is seen – it is no longer seen to be deserted and disgraced. We are not there yet, God is beginning to do work in his church that means that people realise that there are life changing communities that are supernaturally connected to him and joining those people, this can transform lives massively for the better. Since Jesus gave me that prophesy we entered into it last year and counting groups across the city, we have grown by about 600 people. There's something special going on.

The passage here talks about God's people in the context of a city and our city has matched what has happened with the church. It was a thriving city and some of that has faded but there has been some regeneration in the last 10 years which has been good but there's still council estates with poverty and unemployment; we've seen the rise of gangs with gun crime and drugs. I believe that the Lord says the church is no longer to be deserted and disgraced. I believe God wants prosperity, growth and to become a centre of excellence. He's able to work through his people to bring a transformation. I believe he wants to visit and stay here.

Let's carry on reading:

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Another thing the Lord has been saying is that he is in the business now of prophetic prayer and that he was saying to me when I first got this scripture there have been a number of people talking about the watchmen on the walls and I believe this is a prophesy. We've seen a huge increase in prophesy since

Isaiah 62 came to light about 18 months ago. Cath Livesey has done many prophesy courses and there's a number of us now know how to use the prophetic tools.

If you don't know what it means to hear God, if you said yes and follow him but don't know what it means to hear God yet, if you said yes to Jesus, then I say he has a gift for you. It's possible to hear the Lord day to day. There are a number of us that know what it means when the Bible says the sheep hear the good shepherd's voice.

We've spent some time with pastors of other churches who came and spent the day with us and it was fantastic to be with these guys who are from Evangelical churches and know what the Bible says about supernatural stuff but not experienced it. We were able to pray and just say the things we thought God was saying.

He's raising up intercession; about 8 months ago I felt a burden to pray. I was saying "what is that God?" I felt he was saying to me "you are the watchman and I am putting you on the wall. I'm putting others there too and I want you to look for them." As I've been looking I've noticed we all loved the Lord, but had a sudden burden to pray. If that's you, look for opportunities, maybe see me at the end. We've got a half night of prayer coming up, so come to that.

The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary."

I think this is just a word from when Jesus turns up, but it's about reaping as well as sowing. Do you feel like you've sown and sown and hope that someone will become a Christian, you've prayed for that person, but they've not felt anything and you are hoping for a breakthrough. This is called sowing. Maybe God has given you a promise and you haven't yet seen it being fulfilled. If you don't experience the promise, the Bible says that when a promise is unfulfilled the heart grows sick.

He says that when he comes those who sow will reap, if you have been persevering and you have been trying to get a breakthrough and you will see that breakthrough with your own eyes. I will say to you if you have been in that situation don't give up because Jesus is coming. The reason I'm sure about all this is that he keeps saying it to me again and again in so many different ways. If you have been sowing with tears, there will be a time when you will reap with joy, don't give up. Isaiah 62 continues:

Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him.

There's a picture of the people of God entering into the ministry of John the Baptist which is to get ready for Jesus to come. As I prayed about that, I was lead to Luke 10 and it says "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves".

As he is getting ready to come, I think there is a 'two by two' thing going on. I felt the Lord had said this to me and just within two weeks someone came and said that they were called to go to Sheffield and look for people of peace, but I've got no-one to do it with, will you come with me? So now every Friday dinner time I go out and we go and look for people who don't know Jesus yet, they haven't rejected him but there is an openness inside their heart.

It's a season for asking, seeking, looking and knocking. Not by winning them over with clever arguments or bashing them over the head with a Bible, it's not that. It's looking for people who have not met Jesus yet. Jesus says that when you find these people, your peace will rest with them. When you start talking and sharing things that Jesus has done in your life, you realise that they are open to God and Jesus. At this time he is calling us to look for these people, it might be at work, or going out, or with friends or neighbours. Support each other as you look for people of peace.

Finally, there is a picture of Jesus coming to the city, coming to the people of God in Sheffield. There have been a number of prophecies about this, one in particular that Liz Lovell had, a really clear vision of Jesus standing on a hill overlooking Sheffield and he was holding up his hands and as he held out his hands with the nail marks, it was a sign of his conditional and committed love for the people of Sheffield, she saw all this darkness and then realized it was these demonic hosts that no-one knew were there and no-one could see, but they were there and they went in fear and she saw this picture of Jesus walking through the streets.

"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes!

See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him."

They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.

I believe God wants to bring real change in our city, in our generation. When Jesus comes there are things that are hidden that suddenly come to light. He wants people to be free to receive the real things he has for them and he's calling you and me as people of God to help prepare.

I believe that this specific prophesy is for now – "now it is the time". There are windows of opportunity and there are times when you can respond, or not. If you don't respond God will do what he wants anyway, but there are opportunities for you to respond and for you to share in the joy of God working through you and there is an invitation for us in this city and I say "let's not miss it". Let's not get so taken up with our jobs, TV, etc that we miss the opportunity to take part in the movement of the Kingdom of God as he comes into our city in a new way.

What is God calling you to do? Are you to be a watchman, to learn, prophesise and pray or are you called to stand on the walls and begin to tell the people of God what he is doing and saying, to begin to perceive that, to intercede, to usher in this thing that God is doing. Now is the opportunity. What about being sent two by two, is he coming to the place where you work, is he about to come to your university or school in a new way? Are you able to respond to him by looking for the people of peace? Or are you called to sow knowing that you are going to reap a harvest, or are you just sitting back and assume it's going to happen anyway. Who is he sending you with, if there's one thing we've learnt at St Thomas' is that if people try to do something alone, then they very rarely get very far. Jesus sent two disciples even when he just wanted them to get a donkey, so if he's calling you to enter into a ministry, then he would not ask you to do that alone. Who's he calling you to meet with, talk to and pray with? These are amazing days that we live in.

We've got one more prophesy that we are going to talk about next week, that's got some scary aspects to it and also some encouraging ones but I just want you to be aware that this is something that the Lord has been speaking to us for over a year now.

Let us pray "Lord we thank you that you do speak today, we thank you Lord that you love this city, that you love us and people at different churches in this city. Thank you Lord that you love all the people who don't know you yet in the city as well. We thank you that you say you will come and do something new and that we have already seen the beginning of that Lord and that we've seen more than 600 people in the last year coming and joining in with missional communities coming to know you, but Lord we want more. I thank you Lord that you have called each of us to have a destiny of joining with you and to see that there is more of the Kingdom against sickness, sin and brokenness and to see this war won and that you've called each of us to be part of that with you Lord. You could do it without us Lord, but you invite us. Lord, as you knock on the door of our hearts we pray that we will open the door and that we invite you in with us. We pray that we enter into this ministry that you've called us to. Give us the boldness and the faith Lord to do what you are asking us to do. Amen.