

SERVICE TRANSCRIPT

Sunday 19th July 2020

Leader: Janet Rhea

Preacher: Mark Reid

Open our ears

to hear your word.

Open our eyes

to see your presence.

Open our arms

to the embrace of community.

Open our minds

to the beauty of truth.

Open our hearts

to the joy of new life.

Lord, you give us choices each and every day. This week we have seen your path, and turned away from it. We have seen our brother or sister in need and we did not turn to help.

Lord, have mercy.

We have said cruel or unkind words, or refrained from saying helpful words when they were needed.

Lord, have mercy.

We have been critical of those who failed to offer us a helping hand, while ignoring our own apathy towards others.

Lord, have mercy.

We have used our resources, gifts from you, to help only ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.

We give you thanks that in spite of ourselves you show your love to us every day.

Lord, your love sustains us.

We give you thanks for life and breath today, for health and food to eat, and a beautiful world to live in.

Lord, your love sustains us.

We give you thanks for the many people in our lives who love us, who care for us, whose presence brings us joy.

Lord, your love sustains us.

We give you thanks for this community of faith, encouraging us to give our utmost to our Saviour.

Lord, your love sustains us.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ through whose death we receive pardon, through whose resurrection we have hope. Everything we have is yours, challenge us Lord, on how we spend our time, our resources and our prayer.

Lord, your love sustains us. Thank you. Amen

Father we live in strange and challenging times. We have so many things to worry about, and yet actually we have no control over events. Help us to be open and honest with you about our pain, fears, grief, worries and anguish. Remind us that you are always there. In the silence we raise before you those things that are on our hearts.

Silence - Personal Prayer

Thank you Father that you hear us and that answers will come. Please walk with us through each experience comforting, strengthening and empowering us through your spirit.

Amen

Sermon – Reboot

Reboot. I know that many of those of you who use computers will be familiar with the term boot. KICK IN THE BIN If you're not, then you'll be thinking that boot is an item of footwear that you may feel like using to give your computer a good kicking on days it is playing up!

Booting is actually what computer folk call starting up a computer and reboot is restarting it. As phones and tablets are also computers, they also boot and can be rebooted, although most people use more obvious words start, restart or reset.

Why would you want to reboot or restart your computer or tablet or phone? Usually because it has gone wrong and it has started to play up like running slowly, freezing up or just becoming unresponsive or not doing what you expect it to. Editing videos, like this one, causes lots of computer errors. The simple solution is to restart – reboot - reset. Everything is shut down, the memory wiped clean, the system resets and it starts afresh.

We have been looking through the prophecy of Isaiah 61. Here's the opening couple of verses again.

VERSES

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God...etc.

Here we see the coming of the Messiah, who would address the injustices of the world. He would deal with those in poverty, those in slavery, those imprisoned, those broken-hearted: all placed there by human sin and injustice. In a broken world He would press reboot.

Although at the time, the prophecy would have resonated with Exiles returning to the ruined land of Judah from captivity in Babylon; over time, the Jews started to understand that the prophecy had global scope and spiritual significance. The prophecy was still literal in terms of poverty, slavery or imprisonment, but could be applied spiritually too. It dealt with those poor in spirit, those bound in some way by circumstances or the oppression and abuse of others; and there were those blinded to God and the spiritual world, and were living in darkness as it were.

They saw in Isaiah 61 an important principle from the Old Testament in the book of Leviticus. The clue comes in the phrase *"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* It was a reference to the principle of Jubilee which is found in Leviticus 25, and Shaun is going to read that for us now.

Leviticus 27:8-17

8 “Count seven sabbath years – seven times seven years – so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. 9 Then sound the trumpet everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. 10 Consecrate the fiftieth 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. 11 The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. 12 For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.

13 “In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to their own property.

14 “If you sell land to any of your own people or buy land from them, do not take advantage of each other. 15 You are to buy from your own people on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And they are to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. 16 When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what is really being sold to you is the number of crops. 17 Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the Lord your God.

JUBILEE was part of a series of cycles of Sabbath years where land had to be left fallow. It protected the soil and meant that the people rested from the heavy agricultural programme. A Sabbath year had to be taken every seven years. After every seven cycles there was a year of Jubilee, that is, every 50th year. As with Sabbath years, the land was to be fallow, and the Israelites were only permitted to gather the spontaneous produce of the fields. But there was much more to Jubilee. All landed property during that year reverted to its original owner (land was often leased for income, or taken by others to pay a debt or sold) and all who were slaves were set free, and all debts were cancelled. To bring in our computer illustration, Israelite society would be rebooted every 50 years.

As a social institution, it was intended to break cycles of poverty, prevent accumulation of land by unscrupulous individuals, return land taken by unjust means, and address exploitation of the most vulnerable. It was about righteousness, justice, equity, liberty, and a recognition of a God who stood for all these things.

Jubilee was a good idea (it was a God idea). But how often did it happen? There’s no recorded incidence of Jubilee ever occurring. Why? We find the reason in a phrase used to describe the state of the nation after the occupation of Canaan: *everyone did as they saw fit* VERSE (Judges 19:25b). People were just too greedy, too selfish to want to comply with Jubilee and they ignored it, or forgot it.

It was the nation’s drift away from God to idolatry and rampant injustice that caused the rot that resulted in God leaving the nation to the tender(!) mercies of the likes of Assyria and Babylon.

God never forgot Jubilee. If the Jews weren’t going to reboot the country, He was. We see that promise in Isaiah 61:1-3; and that wasn’t going to be for a 50 year cycle either. The Messiah was coming as a liberator, cancelling debt, freeing slaves, releasing prisoners, bringing freedom and that was going to be for good. The verses have all the ingredients of Jubilee in them.

As we saw last week Jesus was that Messiah, that liberator – one who would free others from spiritual prisons and literal prisons. He was ushering in a new order – the Kingdom of God. He was

pressing the reboot button on the human race and on creation. Here is Jesus' rendition of Isaiah 61:1 and 2 again from Luke 4.

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

REBOOT What did Jesus understand by proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour? It wasn't a calendar year but an age Jesus was ushering in. The Kingdom of God is at hand. That's the message of Luke and of the NT. Jesus was opening up an age where God was bringing in His Kingdom.

I like the illustration of rebooting when we think of Jesus bringing in the Kingdom of God. When I reboot my computer, it takes a while for my system to load but after that it will still take a while for me to get everything back to where it was before things went wrong. That's why we are still in the age of God's favour.

God's intention is to reboot the human race, reboot the world and reboot creation generally. It started with Jesus, His ministry, His death, His resurrection, His ascension to glory. It all paved the way for men and women to find forgiveness, life and hope. And since then the Kingdom of God is growing, but it's not yet complete.

As Jesus pressed reboot and claimed Messiahship in Nazareth, He did something unexpected. After proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour, he stopped mid passage, rolled up the scroll and handed it back. He didn't read the rest of the passage like I did earlier. Just because Jesus stopped the reading short didn't mean the rest of the sentence wasn't important: *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God,*

Quite the contrary, Jesus spoke much about the coming judgement of God on all who will not follow Him. We are in an age – the day of God's favour – when all men and women have the opportunity to follow the invitation of God to follow Jesus and to become citizens of His kingdom. That is still the message He brings.

Paul reflects this when he says these words in 2 Corinthians: *We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 5:20 to 6:3*

Paul uses similar words to Isaiah 61:2 and Luke 4:19: *now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.* The age of Jubilee is now, but Jesus and the NT point forward to the time when this age will close and God will judge the human race for its injustices, its greed, its selfishness and sin. Those who do not follow Jesus will face God's judgement; as the writer to the Hebrews puts it *how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?* Heb 2:3

The question remains the same today. RECONCILED *Are we reconciled to God?* This is the year of God's favour. He offers us forgiveness freely and completely. He offers to make us part of His

Kingdom. Now is the time of God's favour. If you aren't following Jesus, what's stopping you? He loves you.

For those of us who know Jesus and follow Him, the year of God's favour challenges us still. I'd suggest it does that in three ways right now.

The first is Spiritual. In Christ we are the children of God. The Holy Spirit is on us and Jesus' anointing and mission is ours too. As I said last week, the significance of the change Jesus made to the passage in Nazareth, is how we read the phrase about the year of the Lord's favour. He re-arranged the passage to read like this: *To send the wounded away in freedom to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*. Whatever our background, whatever our present circumstances, however wounded and broken we are, the Spirit gives us freedom to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Our task like Jesus, is to tell everyone that *now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation*, because everyone in our generation needs to know that God loves them

How do we do that in a world so sceptical of Christians? We just tell our story of how He's freed us, how He made us see, how he has brought healing into our lives. The story of God's grace in our lives stands as evidence that Jesus is alive and others can know Him too. He rebooted us, He can reboot them too.

Practical The prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18-19 doesn't just have a spiritual meaning, it has a literal application. It's always had this duality. Jesus *is* good news to the poor, he really *is* into freeing captives, releasing prisoners and the rest of it. He *is* against all forms of injustice and sickness. He didn't just say nice sermons and parables whilst on Earth, he healed the sick, cast out demons, was a friend of the poor and the marginalised. He brought hope to the hopeless. He transformed lives. Through His people and by His Holy Spirit, He still does!

I believe that the Spirit is challenging us to not just to be the voice of Jesus, but His hands and feet. Through us He can show others what Kingdom values, what Jubilee values are as we help the poor, release those captive to all sorts of things, as we free others to be the people God created them to be. We bring hope as the Spirit leads and enables us. Let's be both spiritually transformational and materially transformational – allow the Spirit to make us to be Jesus' hands and His feet.

Relevant Finally, the anointed work we are called to is more relevant now than it has ever been in our generation. The last few months have changed our society from optimistic to pessimistic. We have been hit by a pandemic, our economy is collapsing, unemployment and poverty are rising, injustices in our society have come to the fore, climate is changing rapidly. All reasons to be reminded that God's favour can and will come to an end. Before then, we are also reminded that we still have the responsibility to bring God's reboot to our society, to project Kingdom values. I liked the short film we saw earlier which was a story of redemption: about a family who went to great lengths to get through to a father who for whatever reason, had become estranged from his daughter. In Jesus, we see a God who went to great lengths to redeem us. Now we are called to do whatever it takes to achieve the redemption of others.

In the hopelessness, uncertainty and pressures of the present situation, we as God's people are still here to be salt and light, to be the hands and feet of Jesus and we are having to seek God for new ways of doing that. A challenge? Yes, but we also need to remember that the Spirit of God is on us. He is the God who reboots lives, reboots the world and uses us to do it.

Let's not struggle with what has been lost, or what we may or whether we will get back to where we were. Let's just ask God what we should do now. Let's allow the Spirit to pour us into a society that so needs hope, so needs direction, and so needs purpose.

Let's pray

Father, thank you that against the backdrop of a world that seems to be in freefall at the moment, the Messiah has already come, He's already set the reboot of this world in motion. In Your Kingdom there is hope, freedom, healing and forgiveness. Thank you that You have called us and anointed us as Your people to do the work of Jesus in our generation. We see so many challenges right now and we have been disconnected as church from much of what we have relied on for so long. May we rely on the only really solid Rock there is, and that's Jesus. May you release Your power in and through us by Your Spirit. Use us to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus. May we show by our words, and actions and by the Spirit's works of power, that Jesus is alive and can transform the brokenness and hopelessness of the present situation into transformed lives and extend Your Kingdom.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen

For Reflection and Discussion

Read Leviticus 25:8-17, Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18-19

1. What was it about Jubilee, do you think, that caused it to apparently be never observed? What advantages did it have for society if it had been observed?
2. In Isaiah we see all the essential elements of Jubilee. How does what is promised differ from the laws of Leviticus 25?
3. Jesus showed how the prophecy of Isaiah can be looked at in a spiritual as well as a literal way. How do you think that helps is in how we reflect Jesus in the post Coronavirus world? To help you reflect on this you may want to look again at Mark's closing points in his talk.

