

The Kingdom of God part 6

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 19th Aug 2012

Intro-

- In part 1 spoke about the kingdom of God becoming the greatest of all Kingdoms.
- In part 2 spoke on the meaning of 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'.
- In part 3 spoke on deliverance being part of God's kingdom coming.
- In part 4 we looked at the Kingdom of God coming through the ministry of healing.
- In part 5 we spoke about signs and wonders being pointers to Jesus as king.
- Today we will look at another aspect of God's Kingdom coming- Good News being preached to the Poor.

Read Lk 4:16-21 (our passage today); **Lk 6:20**; **Lk 7:19-23** (see also Is 61:1-2a Matt 5:1 Matt 11:2-6)

Jesus was anointed for a purpose- v18 'To preach the gospel...'

- Jesus quotes here from Isaiah 61:1-2 which was known to be a Messianic prophecy and He also adds a bit from Is 42:7 as it is related (it speaks about opening blind eyes and also leasing prisoners). Rabbis would sometimes string related texts together from the Old Testament- this was called a 'String of Pearls' and it is a technique Paul uses in Romans 3 verses 10-18 where he strings together similar themed texts from Scripture to show that we are all sinners.
- What Jesus is doing here is giving His mission statement from scripture and stating that He is fulfilling it and that He is the King that Isaiah predicted- the Messiah.
- If we look at the passage in Isaiah we see it predicts one who is anointed- this is the Messiah- it means 'Anointed One'. Anointing speaks of a king- they used to anoint a king with oil- hence in 1Sam both Saul and David were anointed by Samuel. Sometimes the king was not referred to as king, but simply 'the anointed one'- David called Saul 'The Lord's anointed'. The word 'anointed one' in Hebrew is 'Mashiach' ('Messiah') and in Greek is 'Khristos' ('Christ'). When we say 'Jesus Christ' we are really saying that we believe Jesus is the King that God promised to send through the hundreds of prophecies in scripture.
- Jesus could have just come to the Earth and enjoyed the anointing of God, basking in the glory of the Holy Spirit, but it says here that He was anointed for a purpose. It is right to enjoy God's presence and to love being filled with the Holy Spirit, but if that is all that happens then we are not allowing the Kingdom of God to come in the fullest sense. We are filled for a purpose- we are filled to spill- to reach others for Christ.
- The purpose of Jesus' anointing is stated here- His mission is to preach the gospel to the poor. The word 'gospel' means 'good news'.
Barnes notes- To preach the gospel to the poor - The English word "gospel" is derived from two words - "God" or "good," and "spell," an old Saxon word meaning "history, relation, narration, word, or speech," and the word therefore means "a good communication" or "message." This corresponds exactly with the meaning of the Greek word - "a good or joyful message - glad tidings.
- The Septuagint (Ancient Greek version of the Old Testament) translated the word used in Isaiah 61 for 'preach the gospel' (בשר בִּשְׂרָא bās'ar) as Εὐαγγελίσασθαι (Euangelisasthai) – this literally is 'to evangelize'. Put simply Jesus' mission statement was to evangelise. Jesus is the master evangelist and He left the splendour of heaven to evangelise the earth- to spread the Good News. God's Kingdom comes when the gospel is preached. - Jesus came to herald this good news, bringing God's rule and reign to earth through the gospel and we continue

today by preaching the gospel. The message is that to those waiting in captivity a stronger King has come and beaten the oppressing Kingdom holding them- they are free to go home. It is like listening to Churchill announcing the end of the war on the wireless. In ancient times a herald would bring this good news and how welcome it would be. We are the heralds and we bring the message that King Jesus has overthrown the enemy on our behalf. As a herald, have a look at your feet and tell yourself that they are beautiful!

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom 10:13-15)

and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. (Ephesians 6:15)

He said to them, "Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation (Mark 16:15)

- If this is the mission of the King, then when His Kingdom comes we should expect that people hear the gospel is preached. Although Jesus did many signs and wonders, cast out demons and healed many He always taught people God's truth as He did so. At times Christians go out and pray for the sick and see them healed but don't fully give a gospel message or show people what they must do to be saved. We are not to be shy or weary of preaching the gospel.
- **Application-** when was the last time that you preached the gospel to someone? Have you practised what are the main points to cover when preaching the gospel?

Jesus came for the poor- v18 'To preach the gospel to the poor'

- Surely this is a bit of a shocking thing to say, that Jesus came for the poor, but here it is plainly stated that He had Good News for the poor, so the key question becomes what does this verse mean by poor? Does God not also love the rich?
- To find out we need to go back to Isaiah where Jesus was quoting from. In Isaiah 61:1 the Hebrew word for poor is עָנִי anav. This word can be translated poor, afflicted, humble, meek, depressed (figuratively), in mind (gentle) or circumstances (needy, especially saintly) - lowly. Most of the time however it is translated as '**humble**'. It is the word used to describe Moses in Numbers 12:3- Moses was very humble,(anav) more than any.

Is 66:2 gives us the meaning:

Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble (anav) and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. (Is 66:2)

- A Jewish person would have this understanding of the word 'poor' in this context- it means one who is humble before God- one who recognises that they are spiritually bankrupt without God's help. One who is desperate to hear God's good news. It is to these hungry people that Jesus is drawn- that is why in the beatitudes Jesus starts by saying 'blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'. Matthew provides the context by explaining what type of poor person is in mind- the 'poor in Spirit' i.e. the humble that Isaiah referred to.
- What Jesus is saying is that we are blessed when we choose to surrender to God. This can happen to someone who is really proud, or anti-God- suddenly they get a revelation of their need of Him- as the Apostle Paul did. He described himself

formerly as an arrogant man (1Tim 1:13) but He encountered God and realised his need of God's grace. It can be an encounter with God, or being made aware of His Word (which James 1:23-24 says is a mirror showing us what we are really like). God's holiness is seen in His Law (e.g. the 10 commandments) and making people aware of God's law can lead to an awareness of sin:

...I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." (Rom 7:7)

...through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:20)

So then, the law was our guardian (schoolmaster/tutor) until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. (Gal 3:24)

- Paul begins his letter to the Romans by making both Jews and Gentiles aware that God is angry with sin and will bring all sins into judgement on the day of judgement. Only after he has made all aware that they are sinners does he bring out the cure- Christ's sacrifice for us. Sometimes we are too quick to tell people about God's love without any mention of God's justice and it can leave people indifferent to God as they don't see any need for Christ's sacrifice of love on their behalf.
- Through our prayers and through the preaching of the Word God will, by His Spirit, bring conviction of sin and reveal the need for God's mercy. Conviction can only come through the Spirit (John 16:8-11), but the Spirit will use our words to bring conviction to people as we share what the Bible says. I find that making people aware that God is all-knowing, all-seeing and that there is no sin He will overlook, and there is a day of judgement coming where we will all have to give account is very useful for helping people see their need for a saviour. Also the reality of eternity in Heaven or Hell makes people wake up to the importance of the message and the wonderful gift of life and forgiveness through the cross.
- Often though it is the materially poor who already realise their desperate need of the grace of God and the materially rich who are apathetic about God. Hence Jesus said 'how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God'. It is hard Jesus said but all things are possible with God. The rich are at a disadvantage as they can have a tendency to being comfortable and putting their trust in their wealth rather than God. Hence Jesus teaching that you cannot serve both God and money- you will love one and hate the other. In fact a huge percentage of the teaching of Jesus was dedicated to warning people about the dangers of living for money. We live in one of the richest countries on the planet, even though we are going through a financial crisis. We too need to show people the foolishness of living for money rather than living for God.
- **Application-** Dr Michael Brown (who was greatly used at the Pensacola revival where many came under the conviction of sin when Steve Hill preached) wrote a book 'It's time to Rock the Boat' where he accused the Church today in the West of preaching an 'easy-believism' Gospel which has no teeth. Does the gospel you preach have teeth? Have you ever had a discussion with someone about Hell/the day of Judgement?
- The Hebrew word for 'poor/humble' also means 'afflicted'. In times of revival there are reports of people coming under extreme conviction of sin, like they are being dangled over the fumes of Hell. When I was in Pensacola people were wailing over their sin and running to the front to get saved. Are we complacent about our own sin? Have we become comfortable ourselves? Has money or have the creature comforts of the West (TV, computer, clothes, house, holidays, car, garden etc.) made us apathetic towards a true zeal for God or towards preaching the gospel?

Jesus came to proclaim Jubilee- v19 'To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD'

- 'The acceptable year of the Lord' in verse 19 reminds us of the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8-55). This was at the end of 7 cycles of 7 years=49 years. Therefore in the 50th year there was to be a special celebration. Its climax was the great Day of Atonement. This was marked by the blowing of trumpets (a ram's horn, shofar).
- In fact our word 'jubilee' comes from this occasion. The Jewish word is 'yobel' which in turn derives from yobhel, meaning 'ram'.
- Debts were cancelled and all Hebrew slaves were set free and all land returned to its original owner or owner's family. This was a divine protection over the people of Israel so that poverty would be eradicated. After being slaves for so long in Egypt and then under Joshua moving into the promised land each family was allotted a portion of land. Every adult male among them became a land owner. This land was a permanent possession that could never depart from his family. If a man became poor he could sell part or all of his land, but only temporarily. It would always revert to him or his descendants at the year of jubilee. Also if he had to sell himself to another as a slave in order to pay off his debts he had to be released in the year of jubilee. God announced through Isaiah that when the Messiah comes it is like the year of Jubilee.
- God's social security system for Israel was aimed at eradicating poverty. It says in Deut 15:4 'There should be no poor among you'. However, Israel didn't keep to what God had said and this was one of the reasons for the captivity. As Isaiah says:

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! "The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. (Is 1:10-17)

"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. (Is 58:1-10)

- God doesn't prefer the poor (He shows no favouritism)- but He stands up for them and fights their cause and He hates injustice and lack of fair-play in the world. He loves us all equally, and that is why when any of us suffers in any way- be it material poverty, exploitation, abuse of any kind, discrimination, stigma, denial of education, homelessness, addiction God takes notice. If He even cares about sparrows, how much more is He going to take up the cause of the poor and the oppressed? Although the gospel is for all, those that are suffering in this world are particularly on God's heart and they should also be on ours.
- When God's Kingdom comes justice happens- the King sorts out injustice.

- Jesus could have come and demanded that we serve Him, however He deliberately chose to come to this earth differently, as our servant. He came relating to the poor and oppressed, He was intentionally incarnational in His approach in order to get through to those who were poor and oppressed.
- Jesus left the riches and glory of Heaven to come to earth. He could have chosen the perfect body but Isaiah says 'He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him'. He could have been born in a palace, but He was born in an animal's feeding trough. Jesus chose to be born into a poor family- His parents could only afford the poor people's sacrifice of a turtle-dove at Mary's purification. He was described by Isaiah (Is 53) as being a tender plant growing out of dry ground (i.e. His background was poor and impoverished). He grew up in Nazareth- a despised place. He left His work to preach the gospel and had no place to lay his head (Luke 9:57-58). He ate only due to the hospitality of others and what people gave to Him. He had no possessions except His clothes. Despite living in poverty He had a purse kept by Judas to raise funds for the poor. He challenged the rich young ruler to sell all He had and follow Him because Jesus lived on nothing. His disciples had also left everything they had to follow Him. He advocated people selling their possessions and giving to the poor to develop purses in Heaven. How is our purse in Heaven doing? This scripture sums up how Christ lived:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

- Jesus hung out with the dregs of society and got a name for it- 'friend of sinners'. He hung out with tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes, beggars, Samaritans, uneducated fishermen.
- How 'incarnational' are we willing to be to reach the lost? Are we willing to identify with the poor?
- Our understanding of God's grace to us will reflect in how gracious we are to others. The early Church really grasped just how much Christ had given up to make them rich and so naturally they became gracious to one another. The result was that they fulfilled God's Kingdom intentions for Israel in Deut 15:4 that 'There should be no poor among you'. Luke it is thought deliberately uses this terminology when he says in Acts 4:34 that when they shared their possessions 'nor was there anyone among them who lacked'. The grace and kindness of Christ had achieved what Law could not.
- Our view of the Kingdom will reflect our actions- if we believe that Christ has just come to bring justice to the oppressed but believe all will be saved anyway because God is love then we will never preach the gospel. If we believe that Christ has come to save the lost but is not that concerned about their physical welfare or needs then we will preach the gospel but be uncaring about people's needs. Liberal theology and Evangelical theology have dominated these two extremes at times. At times Evangelical Christians have shyed away from the 'Social' Gospel as they see such a compromise in message that the Liberals have brought. However we need to be like Jesus and the early Church- firing on all cylinders- preaching the Gospel AND caring for the poor and afflicted- this the Kingdom coming to earth. In Heaven there is no poverty and we need to bring that aspect of God's reign and Justice here to Earth.
- As we look to have our first building let's make sure that we use it along with our other possessions to God's glory, and we can do no better than using it to reach out to the poor. We need wisdom as we do this as we live in a culture dependant on benefits and so many people are not able to manage the little money they have wisely, hence debt builds up. Handouts are not always the answer (they sometimes

are though) but helping people find work and restoring dignity are important. Teaching lifeskills etc. can be very helpful. For that reason CAP money handling and CAP centre would be a great use of the building as well as a place people can come for all sorts of counsel and referral for help with life-issues.

George Müller (1805-1898) had heard that Bristol had very poor sanitation, and soon after Müller arrived, the city was devastated by an epidemic of cholera, and many hundreds of people died. He visited the sick people, trusting God to keep him from catching the disease. So many people had died that there were hundreds of orphans with no-one to care for them; many were reduced to begging in the streets. George Müller wanted to do something to help, and it was this that started his life's work for God. Through the power of prayer, together with action George made a difference. He never once asked anyone for money, but brought his prayer requests to God, and saw answers. In his life he cared for 10,024 orphans. He was well-known for providing an education to the children under his care, to the point where he was accused of raising the poor above their natural station in life. He also established 117 schools which offered Christian education to over 120,000 children, many of them being orphans.

John Wesley. (1703 – 1791 used in the Methodist revival). During his years at Oxford, Wesley was known to give the bulk of the stipend he received from home to the poor. As the leader of the Holy Club, he devoted much of his time and resources visiting and providing for the needs of the imprisoned and poor people of Oxford. He gave away so much of his small income that Wesley's mother, Susanna, was known to have expressed concern for his health and well-being. She was concerned that John was not eating enough because he was giving his money away.

Wesley lived all of his life on the annual sum of £29. Even when his earnings increased substantially in later years, he always gave the balance to the poor.He knew the gospel of grace could not be received in the midst of such hopelessness. Therefore, Wesley resolved, in the interest of grace, to remove the barriers erected by the world to the hearing and receiving of God's saving Word. Along with collecting food, clothing, fuel, and medicine for the poor, Wesley was among the first to provide them with the means for lifting themselves out of poverty.

First, he established access to free health care. Wesley offered free medicines, modern treatments for various ailments, and information on home remedies to people who otherwise would have no access to medical care or were easy prey for quacks.

Secondly, Wesley developed a system for assisting people in finding jobs. If he could not find employment for someone, Wesley would create work for them.

Third, Wesley created a sort of credit union designed to help the poor out of debt. People could obtain money interest free for three months to pay off creditors who were known to charge exorbitant interest rates. The interest free loan could then be repaid as the borrower was able; thus keeping many breadwinners out of debtor's prison. The loan fund helped people out from under the burden of debt and the threat of prison while the employment service helped the same person secure the means for repaying the loan while providing for their family's needs.

In addition to these self-help services, Wesley also provided educational assistance by teaching people to read and write; thus increasing their likelihood of achieving self-sufficiency.

However, Wesley's most important contribution to improving the life of the poor in England is the effect he had in helping to change attitudes toward poverty and the poor. Wesley's greatest contribution was his demystification of wealth. He helped debunk the notion that the poor were poor because they were lazy and dishonest. The common belief among the middle and upper classes and the poor themselves was that the poor deserved to be poor. Wealth was a sign of divine favor and poverty was a sign of divine disfavor. Through preaching and advocacy, Wesley helped to soften the hard-hearted and dispel the prejudice of the day:

Is it not worse for one after an hard day's labour to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength? You that live at ease in the earth, that want nothing but eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand how well God has dealt with you—is it not worse to seek bread day by day, and find none? Perhaps to find the comfort also of five or six children, crying for what he has not to give. Were it not that he is restrained by an unseen hand, would he not soon 'curse God and die'? O want of bread! Want of bread! Who can tell what this means unless he hath felt it himself? I am astonished it occasions no more than heaviness even in them that believe!

Therefore, John Wesley's ministry was entirely with and for the poor. He saw solidarity with the poor as solidarity with God in Jesus Christ..... Wesley's ministry with the poor was also aimed at the comfortable middle and upper classes who were, he hoped, made to feel uncomfortable by his preaching and witness.

At Wesley's death in 1791, the Methodist movement in England had become predominantly a middle-class endeavor. The movement that started among the poor and oppressed helped to lift many out of poverty. However, once free from the slums, the former poor adapted many of the same middle class attitudes that contributed their former suffering. Many turned their backs on their poor sisters and brothers. Wesley

lamented this fact in a later sermon written after he had traveled the circuit of Methodist societies across England....In it he offers a stinging critique of the Methodist's growing neglect of their heritage:

O ye that have riches in possessions, once more hear the word of the Lord! Ye that are rich in this world, that have food to eat and raiment to put on, and something over, are you clear of the curse of loving the world? Are you clear from the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life? Do you "put a knife to your throat" when you sit down to meat, lest your "table should be a snare to you"? Is not your belly your god? Do not you seek happiness in dress, furniture, pictures, gardens, or anything else that pleases the eye? Do not you grow soft and delicate, unable to bear cold, heat, the wind or the rain as you did when you were poor? Are you not increasing in goods, laying up treasures on earth, instead of restoring to God in the poor, not so much or so much, but all that you can spare? Surely, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven."!

- One billion children—one out of every two in the world—live in poverty. One hundred and twenty-five million infants who die each week, most from easily-preventable causes. 640 million live without adequate shelter. 400 million have no safe water. 25,000 die every day of hunger and hunger-related causes—one person every 3 ½ seconds, most are children.
- Band Aid, when 1 film shown of children starving to death everyone suddenly realised what it was all about and shut their mouths and wept. The gospel is good news to the poor (Is 61:1) and that includes the materially poor, not just the comfortable middle-classes. Jesus said when we do something for the least of His children we do it for Him, and that in the great judgement the mercy we have shown in this life will determine our eternal destiny (Matt 25:31-46).

Tony Campolo has once said 'It would be good for you to have a child you sponsored standing up for you on the day of judgement'. We know we are not saved by works, but as James points out- faith is accompanied by works (James 2:14-26).

I have a dream of a people who minister God's love, help and healing to the lost, poor, sick, forgotten, unloved, bound, abused, and lonely. I dream of a people who speak God's prophetic voice in our community, seeing God's justice established. I dream of a people who feed the hungry and comfort the grieving. A people whose faith is demonstrated by action. A people known as generous, and giving. I dream of a people who have Jesus' compassion for those who are captives and set them free to serve the Lord.

Half of the least-developed countries are also the least evangelized, leading one observer to note: "The most dominant impression one gains from looking at the world in this way is that the poor are the lost (lost from God's saving work in Christ) and the lost are poor."

- Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5).
- Micah 6:8 says 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'.

Summary

If we want to see God's Kingdom coming we need to continue the work the King came to do:

- **Jesus came to evangelise**
- **Jesus came for the poor in spirit**
- **Jesus came to bring Jubilee**

Song: *O Lord the clouds are Gathering/ The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord*