

Isaiah 61:1-11  
What Good News Looks Like  
WRCoB 6.25.23

Question for the day: Was Jesus about social justice?

Well, the answer to that question depends on who you ask?

Some Christians say focusing on social justice issues  
Is a perversion of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

That rather than addressing social justice issues  
We should be preaching and living the Gospel.

That no amount of work in social justice  
Will amount to anything  
Because we live in a fallen world.

It will always be this way  
Until Jesus comes again and takes the throne.

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Others might answer the question  
By saying social justice is at the heart of the Gospel.

That Jesus emphasized social justice issues  
Everywhere he went.

He fed the hungry  
He defended the marginalized.

He stood up for women  
He embraced the outcast and foreigner.

He stood in solidarity with the despised and rejected  
And ate among the sinners.

They would ask, is that not seeking to address  
The injustices in his society?

So, which is it?

Was Jesus about social justice  
Or was he only concerned with saving souls?

In the beginning passages of Isaiah, we read  
That neglect of the alien, widow and orphan  
Was one of the ways the people of Israel  
Lost God's favor

In my understanding of Scripture  
Jesus was concerned about both!

Personal transformation of heart and soul  
AND justice and peace in the world..

It's not one or the other, but both!!

Jesus was concerned about saving the whole world!

For God so loved the . . . what? WORLD

For God so loved the world  
That he sent his only begotten Son.

**John 3:17 CEB God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.**

Now having said that, the term social justice  
Brings with it a lot of baggage.

To many, it sounds like a bunch of hand outs  
By the government to undeserving people.

To others, it is the government's responsibility.

Politically, it is a hot button subject

I want to be clear, there is no place in the Bible  
Where the words, social and justice, are side-by-side.

But that doesn't mean Scripture isn't concerned about it.

Might there be a better biblical term for social justice?

I think there is!

## **Social Justice**

Is God about justice?

Most assuredly, YES!

God is a just God and God expects justice!  
Perhaps best summarized here in Micah.

## **Micah 6:8 NRSV**

**<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good,  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God?**

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Today is the last sermon in our series from Isaiah.

We selected four passages

As a quick walk through of the Book of Isaiah.

We could have, and maybe should have

Spent more time and included many more passages.

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We are here now in 61.

Is there anything you recognize in the reading?

Yes, Isaiah 61:1-2 are familiar verses.

Jesus read these verses

When he read from the scroll in the temple

Right at the beginning of his ministry

## **Luke 4:18-19 CEB**

**<sup>18</sup> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**

Ok, so the temple attendant gave Jesus the scroll to read.

And whether the passage was already chosen for him  
Or Jesus was free to choose, we don't know.

But what we do know is that after he read the passage  
He rolled up the scroll  
Gave it back to the attendant and said.

**Luke 4:21 NRSVUE "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."**

Now why would Jesus say that  
Unless he was clearly stating  
That he was the one Isaiah spoke of?

Either Jesus was crazy as a loon  
Or he spoke with the authority God gave him!

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Ok, do you think it is significant  
That Jesus emphasized these verses  
As fulfilled in him?

Do you think the message found in this passage  
Was significant to Jesus  
As he began his ministry?

Absolutely!

If in Luke, this was the signature statement  
To address to the church his ultimate concerns

Then justice was very much at the forefront of the Gospel.

Jesus' main mission was to preach the Good News

The Good News is all about justice.

Justice is what God's kingdom is about.

**Luke 4:43 NRSV I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.**

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Now, back in the Book of Isaiah,  
We began in the early chapters of Isaiah  
The prophecy of Israel's destruction by the  
nation of Assyria.

First by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians.

Later, we heard Isaiah speak words of comfort  
Encouraging the people  
That their days of suffering would soon be over

To now, today, God's promise of justice and redemption.

God will restore Israel.

**Isaiah 61:8 NIV**

**<sup>8</sup>“For I, the Lord, love justice;  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.  
In my faithfulness I will reward my people  
and make an everlasting covenant with them.**

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And so, as I understand this passage  
Declaring the year of the Lord's favor  
It will be a year when God's love and compassion  
Will be poured specifically onto

The weak, vulnerable  
The marginalized and the disenfranchised.

I mean think about this.

When you preach the Good News to the poor  
What are you preaching  
To the ones who keep the poor, poor?

Seriously

When you preach release of the captives  
What are you preaching to those  
Who keep the captive, captive?

Honestly, when you preach letting the oppress go free  
What are you preaching to those  
Who keep the oppressed, oppressed?

The way I figure  
If it's Good News to the poor  
It's probably bad news to the rich.

If it is Good News to the oppressed  
It's not good news to the oppressor.

And if it is Good News to the captive  
It can't be good news to the captor.

God's justice, then, is both punitive and restorative.

Am I right?

This is biblical justice.

It is not the politically charged social justice.

Jesus preached Good News to the poor  
As an act of restoration.

The last shall be first  
And the first shall be last

And he preached the Good News to the rich  
As a punitive warning

**Luke 6:24-26 NIV**

**<sup>24</sup> “But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.**

**<sup>25</sup> Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.**

**Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep.**

Biblical Justice is about creating a just kingdom.

It is a foretaste of God’s kingdom yet to come.

And as followers of Jesus  
Whenever we use our voice or action  
To fight the injustices in this world

Whether it is human trafficking, economic exploitation  
Or the fight for basic human rights for all people

We are workers working for justice in God’s kingdom.



You see, when you comfort the afflicted  
You end up afflicting the comfortable.

And that certainly is what Jesus did throughout his ministry.

He peeved the status quo  
By raising up the downtrodden, the marginalized  
And the oppressed.

Jesus provoke his neighbors  
By saying the Good News  
For those they have mistreated

And his neighbors didn't like it.  
And the scribes and Pharisees didn't like it.  
And King Herod didn't like it.  
And Pontius Pilate didn't like it.

And Jesus ends up dying on the cross  
Fueled by all this hostility from those in power.

Because the Good News threatens positions of power!

Because as Martin Luther King Jr.

*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to **justice** everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*

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And so, what does this Good News look like?

If we had read on in Isaiah, we would read

### **Isaiah 65 (Selected Verses) CEB**

**<sup>17</sup> Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth: past events won't be remembered; they won't come to mind.**

**<sup>19b</sup> No one will ever hear the sound of weeping or crying in it again. <sup>20</sup> No more will babies live only a few days, or the old fail to live out their days.**

**<sup>21</sup> They will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> They won't build for others to live in, nor plant for others to eat.**

**<sup>23</sup> They won't labor in vain, nor bear children to a world of horrors, because they will be people blessed by the Lord, they along with their descendants.**

That's what the Good News looks like

### **Zechariah 8:4-6 The Message**

**“Old men and old women will come back to Jerusalem, sit on benches on the streets and spin tales, move around safely with their canes—a good city to grow old in. And boys and girls will fill the public parks, laughing and playing—a good city to grow up in.”**

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.

May it be so. Amen.