

## All Saints Talk for 07 April 2024

Tom Yacomeni

### The Power of Godly Vision

*Isaiah 2:1-5*

Isaiah 2:1-5

<sup>1</sup> *This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:*

<sup>2</sup> *In the last days*

*the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.*

<sup>3</sup> *Many peoples will come and say,*

*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.*

*He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths."*

*The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

<sup>4</sup> *He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.*

*They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.*

*Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.*

<sup>5</sup> *Come, O house of Jacob,*

*let us walk in the light of the LORD .*

70 years ago, in 1954, A physicist called Charles Townes was sat on a park bench when he was struck by an idea that ultimately led to the invention of the laser and got him a Nobel prize. He said that he could see that lasers would have lots of applications but at the time some people just dismissed them as ‘a solution looking for a problem’. Today of course, lasers are used everywhere, from homes, to shops, defence and healthcare, particularly for corrective eye surgery. There is a beautiful irony to the fact that every year hundreds of thousands of people have their eyes treated using lasers to improve their vision, when initially there was so much scepticism about their use.

Charles Townes was a committed Christian who believed that Science and Religion are essential partners for understanding the universe, and he likened his scientific inspiration for the laser to receiving a spiritual revelation. But in an interview for Esquire magazine in 2007 he also said ‘Much public thinking follows a rut. The same thing is true in science. People get stuck and don't like looking in other directions.’

There is more to life than we can see, taste and touch and we all need vision, not just in a physical sense. Helen Keller said ‘The only thing worse than being blind is having sight, but no vision.’

The King James version of Proverbs 29v18 says ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’



We are beginning a new sermon series today called *The Power of Godly Vision*. It is based on the Old Testament book of Isaiah because Isaiah is regarded as one of the greatest visionary prophets of all time. He is revered in every Abrahamic faith and he had a lot to say about God’s compassion, judgment, salvation and the future of humanity. Isaiah helps us to envision what is possible when we realise that God has always had a plan and a purpose for each one of us.

Isaiah lived in Judah and Jerusalem in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC, during turbulent times for the Jewish people. They were coming under attack from all sorts of invading armies before they were eventually conquered by the Babylonians around 600BC. Isaiah spends plenty of time warning the people about the potential dire consequences of their spiritual negligence and idolatry, but instead of just being a doom monger, he also presents a wonderful vision of how things could and should be under God's just and gentle reign. In fact the name Isaiah means 'God Saves' and because much of it so clearly presents a picture of God's plan of redemption through Jesus' death on the cross 700 years later, the book has sometimes been called 'the fifth Gospel'. In the New Testament, John says that Isaiah "saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." And Luke tells us that Jesus himself presented his own manifesto for ministry when he stood up and read from Isaiah in his home town.

Chapter 2 is where Isaiah presents his first vision of hope. It pictures Jerusalem renewed and raised up – a city centred around God's peaceful reign, where the Kingdom of heaven reaches out across the earth. And that is where I want to start our series today because here at All Saints we share this vision for our community to be transformed; where justice and mercy shall be seen and people look to the Lord Jesus for healing and hope.

The vision starts like this: 'In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established... and all nations will stream to it.'

We have been living in the last days ever since the resurrection of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In Acts 2v16 Peter quoted Joel to explain what was happening: 'In the last days, God says I will pour out my Spirit on all people.' Isaiah described the last days when the temple would be established, but Jesus inaugurated this new era saying he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days. Paul describes the church in Eph 2v20 as *a living temple* with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

So Isaiah wrote in terms of Judah and Jerusalem, but his vision was actually much bigger and wider than he could have possibly imagined. He describes a glorious time with all the nations uniting together in their pursuit of God's ways. With the world situation as dire as it is right now, that feels like such a distant dream, but sometimes there have been glimpses of what that could look like, like sunshine breaking through the clouds.



There is a remarkable bronze statue situated outside the United Nations building in New York which is titled "Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares." It was sculpted by Evgeniy Vuchetich and donated to the UN In 1959 by the Soviet Union and it is a direct reference to verse 4 of Isaiah's vision.

For a while it seemed the world was pulling together towards peace because on February 18, 1993, a historic deal was struck between Russia and the US. It involved dismantling nuclear weapons and using the nuclear material in the warheads for domestic energy rather than destruction.

It was called the Megatons to Megawatts Program - the largest and most successful nuclear non-proliferation program to date and until as recently as 2013, it's amazing to think that for 20 years the electricity for up to 1 in 10 American homes, businesses, schools and hospitals was generated from uranium extracted from dismantled Russian Nuclear weapons that were previously pointed at them!

The idea for turning bombs into fuel came when the cold war ended came from a physicist at MIT called Thomas Neff who simply asked a question: 'What's going to happen to all these weapons?' When he realised Russia needed cash just as much as America needed a cheap source of nuclear fuel, a vision formed in his mind and for twenty years, swords were turned into plowshares.

The great sadness is that the evil of nuclear stockpiling may be returning as the world destabilises. But Isaiah's vision of Swords into ploughshares endures. A Godly vision of the way things could be can still change the world.

Martin Luther-King had a dream that pushed forward America's civil rights act.

A Jewish Refugee called Ludwig Guttmann had a dream to introduce sport into the rehabilitation of disabled people, and in London in 1948 he organised the first of what has become today's Paralympic games, now watched by over 3 billion people.

Isaiah's vision was for the transformation of the nations.

He pictured the mountain of the Lord's temple, with the nations streaming up to it to seek his ways as God himself bringing justice, truth and peace to all sorts of different people.

This is not a vision of world domination, it is a vision of people from every tribe, tongue and nation choosing to come and experience the goodness and grace of God for themselves. 'Come on, let's go up to God's mountain' They say.

What is it that draws them? What is it that draws people to come back to this church or any church in Bath where the good news of Jesus is preached?

It is the presence of God. Don't get me wrong - it's great to be welcomed into a loving community with excellent hospitality, care and compassion. But it's not enough. It is the presence of God that makes the difference.

God's kingdom is saturated with his presence. Notice what the people want. 'He will teach us his ways, so we may walk in his paths.' They want direction, they want purpose. This isn't a third hand learning exercise, this is about people experiencing the presence of God for themselves and being changed for good and directed to a new and life-giving way.

People only thrive when they feel a sense of purpose, but we are raising a generation taught to believe that we merely exist by accident. Our community needs to know that there is a heavenly Father who loves them, cares for them and would give everything to be in relationship with them. John 3v16 says God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'

It's when people are focussed only on satisfying themselves that anger builds and wars start. In South Sudan thousands have been killed and over a million people have been displaced because of a bitter civil war started because of a personal dispute between two of their political leaders. (Do pray for Naomi Pendle as she works in Sudan trying to educate people there to work towards peace.)

Care for the family have often found that the greatest demand for parenting courses in the UK are for courses on dealing with anger. It's a growing problem and it doesn't take much for it to spill out into the streets.

But Isaiah points to a different way: Where God's Kingdom reigns, anger subsides and settles, because his ways are just and full of grace.

<sup>4</sup> He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Wouldn't it be great to see our society transformed so that each would help their neighbour, so that the poor are not left to fend for themselves, so that road rage would turn to street serenity and our young people are positive about the future?

Well I believe it is possible where the name of the Lord Jesus is proclaimed and honoured and it's our job as the church to show people that the kingdom of God is near and God's offer of peace extends to all people everywhere.

We have a wonderful opportunity to make a lasting difference in Weston over the next few years. If we continue to build a genuinely caring community, with powerful prayer and wonder-filled worship, people will be drawn to discover the presence of God for themselves. If we resist idolatry in our own lives and hold on to distinctive Godly values such as selfless simplicity, sexual fidelity, and humble obedience, this church will shine ever more brightly as the days get darker.

Although the book of Isaiah contains these wonderful descriptions of the future Kingdom of God with all nations joining together in a united pursuit of his glorious ways, notice that in the last line of our passage he no longer uses future tense. It is instead an exhortation to start living it now:

<sup>5</sup> Come, O house of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the LORD.

In other words, the time is *now*. Isaiah wanted the people of Judah to make a choice, to step out of the darkness and into the light. To see God's kingdom vision fulfilled in Weston we need to step out even further in faith. Walking in the light means living such transparent lives that others will see the life and message of Jesus shining through us and that means asking every day for the Holy Spirit to show us the way.

One of the things I am most looking forward to in the newly refurbished Church is the new lighting system. Super bright warm white LEDs making the church really light and welcoming, both inside and out. I look forward to the day the power is turned on and all that glorious light invades the gloom. It might just be an electrical upgrade but I pray it signifies a spiritual reality too.

Paul says in Philippians 2: <sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Come, All Saints, let's live in the light of the Lord.