

Ripon & Lower Dales Methodist Circuit

Worship at Home

3rd July 2022

This year, our Circuit has agreed to hold Bible Month in July. Bible Month aims to encourage us all to focus on one book of the Bible during that month. Its aim is to develop biblical literacy as we all read and study the book at the same time. Many churches will have study groups alongside the normal Sunday Worship to help deepen our understanding.

The chosen book this year is Isaiah, which might have you thinking – oh no! it is 66 chapters long. But if you read 6 chapters a day, it will only take 11 days – so less than half the month (or try 3 chapters over 22 days). Give it a go – many passages will be so familiar, as we also read them in the New Testament, but it is interesting to read them in their original context.

Call to Worship

Lord, you are the source of all life, hope and truth.

You are the source of all that is good and right and of value.

You are the source of peace, new life and love,

And we have come to worship you. Amen.

Hymn

- 1 Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here ;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear :
in him no sin is found —
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.
- 2 Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around ;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned :
how awesome is the sight —

our radiant King of light !
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

- 3 Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place ;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace :
no work too hard for him —
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (*b.* 1957)

Prayers of praise and confession

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,

As we imagine you, seated on your heavenly throne in splendour, we know we are not worthy to kneel at your feet.

And yet, you invite us to come.

You sent your son, Jesus our Saviour, to lead us into your presence, a place where we can come to praise you, because you are worthy of our adoration.

We can come to give you thanks and praise, because you renew our hope.

We can come to give you thanks and praise, because through your Spirit, you walk with us everywhere we go, each and every moment of our lives.

But, at times, Lord, we do not seek your presence in our lives, we believe we can trust in our own ways, that we don't need you to guide us.

Forgive us, Lord, for our foolish ways, help us to heed the words of prophets like Isaiah; help us to consider how their words spoken so long ago, are still so relevant in our world today.

We thank you for the greatest prophet of all, your Son Jesus Christ, who teaches us that through your amazing grace, we are always assured of your forgiveness, love and mercy. Amen.

I'm sure you could all tell of an interesting book, or TV documentary, that you've read or seen. Something that proves interesting by its changing content can be enjoyable, entertaining, educational. However, when we say "We live in interesting times" we usually mean, they are not very interesting to live through! We can certainly describe our current lives as interesting, but not enjoyable. Did you ever think you'd live through a pandemic, then see global financial strife through one man's decision to invade his neighbour's country?

The book of Isaiah was written during interesting times. There were huge political changes, international instability and much social division taking place over the 200 year span of history covered in the book. Isaiah clearly covers more than one person's lifespan. It is generally thought the book (or rather the scroll) was begun by Isaiah of Jerusalem, but added to by his followers – although we certainly have a God who could have let one person see far into the future! It doesn't matter which you believe, it is the words that matter, the message within, and what they can tell us, in our interesting lives today. Something we hope to help you with during Bible Month.

First, though, let us have a short history to help put the book of Isaiah in context.

At this time, 750 BC, the twelve tribes of Israel form two nations, Judah in the south with Jerusalem and the temple at its heart, and the bigger Israel to the north. They are at the crossroads of major trade routes, Egypt to the south, Rome and Greece to the west, Asia and Arabia eastwards, and most worrying of all Assyria to the north. During the timeline of Isaiah, Assyria will be replaced by Babylon and then the Persian empire – each giving their own challenges to the people of God.

The book is generally split into 3 parts. The first 39 chapters are attributed to Isaiah, with some added in later, possibly by others, and contain rebuke and judgement on the people. They need to

repent and turn back to God. It covers the Assyrian invasion of Israel.

Chapters 40 – 55 come from the time of Exile in Babylon and are filled with forgiveness and hope. Chapters 56-66 come from the time of the return to Jerusalem and restoration of God's people where we hear God's promise of future blessings through his Messiah.

The book of Isaiah begins by God calling out to his rebellious people.

Isaiah 1:2-4 A Rebellious Nation

² Hear me, you heavens! Listen, O earth!
For the LORD has spoken:

"I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.

³ The ox knows its master,
the donkey its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand."

⁴ Woe to the sinful nation,
a people whose guilt is great,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of
Israel and turned their backs on him.

God calls on them to (v17) "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the case of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

Isaiah is called to be a prophet to these rebellious people - read Chapter 6 for the full vision of Isaiah's Commission.

Isaiah 6:8-10

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people:

"Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving."

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull and close their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

Hymn

- 1 I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?
*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*
- 2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?
- 3 I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

Isaiah had a harsh message to take to the people of God, at a time when their world was already scary. The Assyrian empire was expanding at such a rate, that it captured Syria, then ten years later Israel too. Jerusalem didn't fall to them, but 100 years later the Babylonians ransacked the city and destroyed their beloved temple.

“Where was God?” The people asked. Something we've probably asked too, at times during the past 3 years.

Isaiah seems to have had no hesitation, “Here I am, send me” he declares. But it was not an easy task. He is thought to be a wealthy man living in Jerusalem, and his

obedience to answer God's call will prove costly in many ways. He wasn't going to be popular – prophets seldom are, and he would pay for his message of judgement with his life – tradition has it that he was sawn in half under the reign of Manasseh.

Isaiah has some ‘Tough love’ to offer the people, as God's judgement is upon them, but offers a ‘Light to the world’ through a promised ‘Faithful Servant’ and ‘A New World’ to come, one of justice and equality for all. These are the themes we shall explore over the coming weeks.

I pray that God will help us to hear his word and speak to us in our own ‘interesting times’. We certainly live in a world where justice and equality is severely lacking.

We see that every day when so many of our country are struggling to pay their way. We see it when so many refugees are seeking refuge and sanctuary. We see it when one nation invades another, and causes global instability.

Sadly, we live in a world of twisted values, just as those of Isaiah's time did too. They didn't heed his words. Is it possible that we could? With God's help, all things are possible. We have Jesus to guide us, and the Spirit to empower us. Are we prepared to be like Isaiah and declare “Here I am Lord, send me!”?

Hymn

- 1 Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We want to serve you, to answer your call.
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?
What should we do in our service to all?
- 2 ‘Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
out of my plenty, think what you can share.
- 3 ‘Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comforts but what others gave me;
offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.

4 'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one ;
go where my sheep are rejected and lost.
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers ;
go and do likewise, and don't count the cost.'

5 Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master ?
We are your servants who answer your call.
You go before us, and there we will follow,
taking our cross in the service of all.
Allan Charles Dickinson (b. 1954)

Prayers for others

Almighty, Creator God,

We pray for the world, your world. You made it and it belongs to you. You made it to be a beautiful and interesting place to live, full of flowers, birds, animals and people.

You made it to be a place where people would live in community and in fellowship, with care and support for one another, and a strong faith in you, with a desire to trust and be obedient to your law.

But we have changed the world you created into one of less interesting times.

We see how we have spoilt the world, and made it difficult for animals to survive, by destroying habitats through our greed.

We hear from the news how nations are fighting with nation, or even within their own borders.

Lord, open our eyes that, like the prophets of old, we may become more aware of your glory.

Open our ears to their words of hope, love and joy, that together, as a global family, we may bring an end to guilt and fear and suffering.

We pray for those areas in the world of such great need, thinking especially of Afghanistan and Ukraine.

We pray for those refugees being offered sanctuary and safety, and ask that

governments work together so that all seeking help may find that same security.

We pray for all those fearful for the future, those struggling with debt and poverty, those facing medical appointments, not knowing what the diagnosis may be, and we pray for all those supporting loved ones in a caring capacity.

We ask these prayers in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, whom you promised to send so long ago, and whom we are privileged to know and love today. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn

1 Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love ;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord ;
and where there's doubt, true faith in you :
*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console ;
to be understood as to understand ;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

2 Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope ;
where there is darkness, only light ;
and where there's sadness, ever joy :
Refrain

3 Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving unto all that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Sebastian Temple (1928–1997)
from the *Prayer of St Francis*

Blessing

Go into the world with your eyes open to the needs of others and your ears alert to hear their cry.

Go with your lips ready to speak the name of Jesus and your heart longing to share his love. Amen.

May the blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Kathy Lowrie