



Walk | Read | Pray | Join | Commit

The Jesus Manifesto | Week 6 | Isaiah 61:8 | Mark 14:12-26

Collect

Depending on which of the following three ideas you think your group would most benefit focussing on, here are some possible opening discussions:

- **Justice:** One of the most popular definition of justice today is “justice as fairness”. How complete or incomplete a definition of justice do you think that is?
- **Reward:** Where have you seen examples of people being,
 - Under-rewarded
 - Appropriately rewarded
 - Over-rewarded for their work or achievements?
- **Covenant:** How many events in the Old Testament can you recall which demonstrate Israel’s inability to sustain their promise-based relationship with God?
 - *Tip: For those who know the Bible less well, do show them where some of those events are, to help them build familiarity.*

Context

This week’s verse from Isaiah 61 focuses on three big ideas that have already been prominent in the earlier chapters of Isaiah: God loves justice; God wants to reward His people; God wants to make an everlasting covenant with His people.

These are magnificent and inspiring thoughts, but also raise a huge question: How can God be just and yet reward a sinful people? In fact, if you read the wider context of Isaiah 40-66, this paradox is reflected in the continuous shift between proclamations of judgment against God’s unfaithful people and promises of the blessing he longs to send.

This paradox is resolved by the sufferings of Jesus – “the Servant of the Lord” in Isaiah 53. The accompanying passage from Mark 14 on the Lord’s Supper connects deeply with this, as well as revealing the means by which Jesus creates the new, eternal covenant.

Many commentators consider chapters 56-66 to be a third volume of Isaiah’s prophecies: this section opens with the Lord’s command, “Maintain **justice** and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand.” But the paradox mentioned above continues through these chapters.

Discuss: 59:9-21 is a helpful passage for summarising the good news that undergirds the Jesus Manifesto. It is also a key moment when Isaiah turns from speaking God’s words (“you”) to responding on behalf of the people (“we”). You could discuss it in three parts:

- Read 59:9-15a
 - Why has justice been “driven back”?
 - Name some examples of (a) obvious ways (b) more subtle ways in which this is true of society and true of us.



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- Read 59:15b-17
 - What is God's solution to the lack of justice among His people? (You could also read Romans 3:23-26 here, which explains how Christ's sacrifice enables God to forgive sinners without forsaking justice.)
- Read 59:18-21
 - What are the differences between those who experience just redemption and those who experience just punishment?

Content

JUSTICE: One of the great surprises in Isaiah 61 is that the great vision of restoration is not simply described as God's grace or favour, but as a great act of justice in verse 8.

Discuss: Pick out some of the details in 61:1-7 and discuss how, in the light of Christ's restoring work, these can truly be called acts of justice as well as grace.

*Note: You may find this general definition of justice helpful here: **Justice = treating everything according to its true nature and worth.***

REWARDS: When thinking about God's rewards, it can be helpful to think in terms of the ultimate rewards that come by grace in Christ (e.g. Ephesians 1:3-7, 2:6-7) and the secondary rewards of our labours in Christ (e.g. 1 Cor 3:11-15, Heb 6:9-10, Mat 10:42).

Discuss: When Christians think about the "secondary" rewards, we can probably slip into one of two errors: laziness or anxiety. Which are you most prone to? What encouragements and challenges can help correct our thinking?

COVENANT: God promises that his new covenant, new promise, has the ability to be everlasting.

Discuss: What is different about the new covenant that enables this? (Recall 59:20-21)

Challenge

In Isaiah 61, the result of the Lord's blessing – including our understanding of His justice, rewards and eternal covenant – is verse 9: that "all who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed."

Discuss: How clear do you think it is to the not-yet-Christians in your life that the Lord's blessing is upon you? What in Isaiah 61:8 might you need to take to heart more deeply to increase your joy (61:7) and so make that blessing more evident?

Connect

Isaiah responds to all this with an outburst of praise in 61:10. Spend some time simply praising God for the blessings you've been thinking about. Also, pray for anyone who has been (a) struggling to focus on God's blessings in a tough season; (b) struggling with laziness or anxiety about seeking God's kingdom and pursuing His great rewards.