

Restoration

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning all. It's really good to be here this morning. I'm going to speak about restoration this morning, but before I do, I just want to, I'm going to read from Isaiah 61, but Isaiah 61 is part of what some people refer to as Third Isaiah. They separate the book of Isaiah, the 66th chapter of Isaiah into three bits. And the third Isaiah starts with Isaiah 55 verse 1 and 2 and 3. I want to read this because I've just had a sense this morning that we have some weary people. This is what God says, Come all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters, you who have no money. Come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and on your labours and what does not satisfy. Listen. Listen to me and eat what is good, and you will delight in the riches of fair. Give ear and come to me. Listen that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. My faithful love promised to David.

I just wanted to read that because it feels like weariness is something which I'm sensing. I might be quite wrong, but I'm equally willing to take the risk that if you're feeling weary this morning, physically weary, emotionally weary, spiritually weary, or just as my mother would say, a bit of a doodah.

God says, come to me. Come to me, and I will give you rest, and I'll feed you, and I'll comfort you, and I'll build you up. So, I like watching the repair shop. I don't know if you've watched the repair shop.

It's a really nice program, and it speaks to all my skills, because as you know, I'm very well skilled in DIY, and I watch them, and I think, oh, I would have done that. Slightly better, slightly better, but, you know, I'm willing to let them off, because they're just trying, aren't they? But I like the repair shop, because people bring in all sorts of stuff that's battered and broken and isn't working, and then you get these extraordinarily enthusiastic and skilled people. So, oh, yes, I can do something with that, and whether it's a teddy bear, or whether it's a record player, or whether it's goodness knows what, they just make it look really nice, and at the end, they show them, they give them back to the owner, and the owner normally cries. So, that's all good, isn't it? It's nice telly, nice telly. If you haven't watched the repair shop, if you feel you want to, have a look at it. If not, please don't. But I want to talk about restoration this morning, and the idea of restoration, of God restoring us, and God restoring us as individuals, and God restoring relationships. And it's one of those wonderful opportunities. We very rarely have this in our preaching series. We normally have a series, and every now and then you get what's called Preacher's Choice. And it's fantastic, except that as one comes to prepare, you think, goodness me, there's a lot to pick from. And you have to get on your knees and work out what it is that God wants to say. So, let's read from Isaiah 61. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God.

To comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion. To bestow on them a crown of beauty, instead of ashes. The oil of joy, instead of mourning, and a garment of praise, instead of a spirit of despair.

[5 : 0 0] They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks. Foreigners will work in your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord. You will be named ministers of our God.

You will feed on the wealth of nations. And in their riches, you will boast. Christ. It's a wonderful passage that I could spend the whole of the next period of time talking on.

But I want to use that really as a springboard into what I want to say. I'm going to go all over scripture today, so they'll all be on the screen. But this idea that we are sent, by default, we are sent to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, bind up the brokenhearted, and release from darkness for the prisoners. God comes to restore us. God doesn't want us to be the same because we know him. He wants to change us.

There's the lovely phrase in the hymn, isn't there? Change from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place. Jesus. My job is to allow God to change me from glory to glory.

And sometimes I find that easy because I relax into it, and sometimes I just have a little tantrum and wrestle a bit, and that doesn't always go well. But God wants to restore us. It's like we are presented at the repair shop. And God says, oh yes, I can make something beautiful of that.

[7 : 21] And I look at me, and I think, oh you can't. But he says he can. He says he can. He says he can restore us, and repair us.

He says he can. He says he can. He says he can. So let's move on to the next slide please, Josh. God's desire is for relationship. He is a relational God. He wants us to be his friends. He wants us to be his family.

Romans 11, verse 17. You, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted among the others, and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root. Now I'm about as good at gardening as I am at DIY.

But fortunately Fiona is extraordinarily good at gardening, and she does all sort of clever things with flowers, and it looks nice. But I understand that verse, and this idea of being grafted.

And each of us, each of us are grafted, as we have given our lives to Jesus, each of us are grafted into God. And the illustration there is of an olive tree.

[8 : 43] And you might have been a wild olive shoot. I've been called all sorts of things in my life. I've never been called a wild olive shoot, but it probably fits. But the wild olive shoot has been grafted in, and so have you been grafted in to the olive tree, which is our heavenly Father.

And what do we get? Nourishing sap. We are fed. We are nourished by the Holy Spirit as we allow ourselves to be grafted in. And there's something there really important about relationship. God doesn't say, I'll bring you a bucket of sap and leave it for you.

He says, you're actually part of who I am. I am the vine, you are the branches, says Jesus.

So do you see that the first thing that God's after is relationship with us? John 15, 14. You are my friends. I love that little verse, that little statement in that verse.

It's not even the whole verse. But Jesus saying to his disciples, you're my friends. You're my friends. And he says to each of us, you're my friend. We haven't got a sort of professional, distant relationship. It isn't a transactional relationship. It's a relational relationship.

[10 : 29] There you are. That's a good sentence for you. And he wants to know us, and for us to know him. And there's something there about how do we get into that relationship by prayer, by reading scripture, by spending time together on a Sunday and through the week, by being with God, by allowing him to speak to us and change us and restore us and repair us and challenge us and help us understand that what we are doing might not be everything that we should be doing.

He also desires relationship with each other. We are not born to be isolated.

We're not born to be on our own. We're born to be together. We're born to be part of a family. One of the wonderful things is today is that today, all 80 odd of us here, and believe me from where I'm stood, you're all odd. All 80 of us here are here because God wants you to be here. He brought you here.

And the real important thing there is, without you being here, we as a fellowship are diminished.

Because God believes in relationship. God believes in you being part of this family.

He called you here. He asked you to be here. And you're here because you have a purpose and a place within this church, this family, this fellowship.

[12 : 20] How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity, says Psalm 133. How good it is when we live together in unity.

So the first thing in terms of our journey of restoration is that we take relationships seriously. And there's lots I could say about that, but I'm not going to say much more, except to say, if we don't start with relationship with God, if we don't take seriously our relationship with each other, then we're somehow going to create difficulties in terms of that overall restoration.

Let's move on, Josh, please. So God's desire is to restore. He wants to restore us to himself.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, Psalm 51. Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of spirit who gives you life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8, very well-known verses there at the beginning of Romans 8. God wants to restore us. And the cry of the psalmist, is one which I can understand.

[13:59] Because some weeks, life feels hard. And I really do genuinely feel this morning that for some of us here, life is just feeling hard.

It's a grind. It's a challenge. It's tiring. There are things happening which just take and sap our energy.

And we lose the joy. We lose the thrill. We lose the Easter Sunday morning delight of the risen Lord Jesus.

Not because we're being particularly naughty. Just because life gets in the way. And we have the opportunity to sit on our chair, to walk around, to lie on our bed, and say, Oh God, restore to me the joy of your salvation.

Because there is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. So he really wants to restore us.

[15:21] He really wants us to be people who are part of this joy. And then we get to something really interesting about our restoring us to each other.

And Galatians 6 is one of the verses that the scripture talks about there. Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore them gently.

Now there's some work to do on that verse, isn't there? Because you who are spiritual, well, none of us are perfect. This isn't a hierarchy of, I'm good, you're bad.

So I'm going to come and tell you, because I'm a really good person, and you're a really bad person, and I'm going to tell you how bad you are. But there is a gentle restoring and a responsibility for each other.

And this is where relationships get really complicated. And I spend a lot of my working life talking about this sort of thing. But as Christians, as a fellowship, as a family, if I'm doing something I shouldn't be doing, it's your job to come and tell me.

[16:42] And actually, it's really unkind if you don't. Because I carry on behaving in ways which aren't helpful, which aren't good, which aren't right.

But don't lose sight of the gently bit. Okay? Feel free to form a small queue, or even a big queue afterwards, to speak to me, telling me the things that I'm doing.

But be kind to me. Be gentle to me. I can see you writing down this. All right. Well, we'll just pick the top three to start with, shall we, Andy? And then we'll work from there.

But part of our growth as Christians, part of my change from glory into glory, is for you to help me. It's for you to help me. And for me to help you.

And for us to help each other together. A gentle arm round the shoulder. A gentle whisper in the ear. A gentle, I'm not sure that should be quite how it's working.

[17:51] because none of us have this perfect and cracked this side of heaven. So God wants to restore us to himself.

God wants to restore us with each other. Our relationship with each other. Okay, next slide please. And this restoration is spiritual.

If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, I will forgive them their sins and will heal their land.

And that's from 2 Chronicles 7. Just look at what God wants us to do. He asks us to humble ourselves.

In a world, in a society, in a system where humility is seen as weakness. Where humility is seen as something which diminishes me.

[19:05] God says be humble. God says humble yourself before me. Don't try and make excuses.

Don't try and explain away. Humble yourself before me. Pray and seek my face.

We have no option but to pray and to seek God's face. It's part of our life as Christians.

Prayer is complicated and prayer can be hard. And again, there's a whole pile of sermons that can be preached on that and I'm not going to. prayer is part of our walk with God.

It's the conversation, that ongoing daily conversation with God that we need. And this isn't about, or rather, it isn't necessarily about getting on your knees and doing a sort of praying, a series of set prayers, although some of us do do that.

[20 : 21] It's about the praying, the relationship with God of saying, oh look God, God, there's a flower. Thank you for the flower. God, I need to do something here.

Please help me. God, I have to have a conversation with somebody. Please help me. God, I need to go and talk to Andy about something. Please help me. Praying and seeking God's face of accepting that God is big and we are small, of accepting that God is God and I am not God. I am not always right. Humble yourself. Pray, seek face, seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways. And that's language we don't often use, isn't it?

The language of wicked ways is not something that we often sort of use as a concept. Wicked is a film now about some, a witch or something anyway, it's a film.

But it's not a concept that we use in our daily lives except that wicked means sin, means not what God wants us to do.

[21 : 31] Turn away from the stuff that God doesn't want us to do. And then this lovely verse in Jeremiah 30.

God is saying here, I'm going to destroy the land by the way. But then he says, I'm with you and I will save you to his people, to you.

I will save you, declared the Lord. I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure. Expect to be disciplined by God.

And that's a hard one. But God's love. God's gentle. God's kind. God's nice. Yes. He's so love, gentle, kind that he will discipline us when we do it wrong.

As parents discipline children and as we discipline each other, God disciplines us. not harsh, not nasty, not to destroy.

[22 : 39] For those of you who have been disciplined unkindly and abusively, it's not who God is. God doesn't abuse. God doesn't discipline violently.

But God will say, uh-uh, that's not okay. I will discipline you but only in due measure. I will not completely destroy you.

But the spiritual nature of restoration is something that we need to work on and work through and make sure that we're doing our bit in that.

But don't forget, all the time, God starts with, I'm with you and I love you. Next slide, please.

Restoration is emotional.

It's about feelings. And some of us are better with feelings than others. And let's just be clear about that to start with. Psalm 23 is the most wonderful psalm.

[23 : 52] It's very popular for a purpose. It's on fridge magnets because it's great. But don't lose sight of what it says. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. He guides me along right paths for his name's sake. Could you remember when it was warm?

It was about 1976, I think it was. Have you ever just lain on your back in a field and just felt the warmth of the sun?

And probably, if you're me, drifted off to sleep. But just allowing yourself to rest with God.

that peace that you feel, the peace that you feel as you maybe lie in a field or next to a river or wherever and you just, just feel that peace.

[25 : 04] That's what God will do. That's what God is leading you into. In fact, he's making you do it. Now, it might not be that there's an actual field and an actual river.

There might not be actual sun. There will be one day. But part of our relationship with God is a deeply emotional one.

It's allowing yourself to be restored emotionally. To know that peace. The peace that passes understanding. And the peace that passes understanding, by the way, is really interesting because what it means is I feel peaceful when I really shouldn't.

It makes no sense for me to be peaceful. I remember talking to a lovely man who is now in heaven and he was facing a quadruple bypass operation.

And I said, how are you feeling, Fred? And he said, oh, fine, I feel really peaceful. I can feel God's peace. And he knew that he might not wake up from that operation.

[26 : 17] And for 50 days, he was in a coma. And on the 51st day, he woke up. And he used to sit with him in hospital when he was in a coma and just pray with him.

And he woke up and he was fine. And he lived for a number of years more. Didn't make sense for him to be peaceful.

He could have been all sorts of things. Why did he feel peaceful? Because he surrendered it all to his heavenly father. And then from the Isaiah passage I read earlier.

To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They'll be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

How do you feel about yourself? Do you feel that you are beautiful, joyful, and you wear a garment of praise?

[27 : 27] Or do you feel different from that? Is that a challenge to hear that God has given you a crown of beauty?

Do you feel like it's more like ashes? Do you feel joyful or is it more like mourning?

Do you have a garment of praise? Or does it feel a bit more like a spirit of despair? These are very important things and they're very practical things.

And this morning I believe that God just wants to gently touch you and allow you to know that change, that restoration from ashes to beauty, from mourning to joy, from despair to praise.

God will He won't bully you into this, but He will allow you to know it if you want to.

[28 : 37] Next slide, please. This isn't a quick fix, by the way. One of the things that worries me about modern Christianity in the Western world is that it's too quickly turned into some sort of spiritual slot machine or vending machine.

I put a pound in, a pound of prayer in, I press a few buttons and out comes the miracle I want. or I pull the lever and I get a win.

That's not how it works. Very often God does do miraculous things and things change very quickly, but my personal experience is that there are times where He will take His time because to change me so radically so quickly would actually discombobulate me.

So God expects us to be patient. The God of grace who calls you to His eternal glory in Christ after you've suffered a little while will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast after you've suffered a little while.

Sorry folks, it ain't all the bed of roses. Really Andy, I'm living the best life. love. We are not immune from suffering.

[30 : 08] We're not immune from things going wrong. We're not immune from the challenges of the world because we live in a fallen and broken world.

world. So it ain't some sort of magic trick but it is a promise. It's a promise that God will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Isn't that nice? Strong, firm and steadfast in the midst of the storm. I was watching, we are very privileged, our house looks out onto a field and there are some trees and there was a crow sitting on the top of a tree yesterday and it was a little gusty yesterday, wasn't it?

It blew a bit and this tree was doing this and this crow was sitting at the top of the tree doing that as well and I thought you daft apeth, go down a bit, it'll be more stable but he just wanted to sit at the top and I don't know whether it was enjoying it or not but it looked quite good fun, it was like a roller coaster, a free roller coaster for crows but somewhere in the wind and the gusts and the storm it just held on, held on, strong, firm and steadfast.

Please don't take that illustration too far, alright? Strong, firm, and steadfast. The storms will blow, the world will throw challenges at us, things will go goof but God will keep us strong, firm and steadfast.

[32 : 05] And then one of my many favourite verses in scripture, Joel 2 verse 25. And if you read Joel, it's a really interesting book, it's mostly about locusts and armies and destruction.

And then God says this, I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten. The great locusts and the young locusts and the other locusts, there are lots of locusts, big ones, little ones, middle sized ones.

I watched a video once of locusts coming and attacking a number of trees. And the work that they get through, they just strip it bare.

I've never seen anything like it. And God says, you've had times in your life, you might be in a time in your life where the locusts are stripping it bare.

eating every leaf there is. It's a real time of challenge. Or there has been in the past a time of challenge, which feels like an ache from an old wound.

[33 : 16] Feels like an ache from a broken bone that's healed, but just every now and then if it's cold it just aches a bit. God wants to restore those years.

those times, that period of time where you have felt like it's just a locust eating time. It's just a being stripped bare of everything I've got and everything that I am.

And God is the God who promises to restore that if that's what he wishes. So, next slide please, sorry.

We need faith very briefly. I do believe, please help my unbelief, a wonderful verse. The soldier saying to Jesus, Jesus saying I'll heal your child and he said, oh, I believe you but please help my unbelief.

is a wonderful phrase. It's a wonderful phrase and very often I find myself echoing it. And Jesus says this, if your brother and sister sins against you, rebuke them and if they repent, forgive them, even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back saying I repent, you must forgive them.

[34 : 34] Okay, the seven times, seven bit, we know all that. And then the disciples said this, increase our faith. Not give us a calculator to work out precisely how many times I have to forgive each other.

Not, goodness me, that's a challenge. Increase our faith. Sometimes with restoration we just have to cry out to God, give me more faith.

Help my unbelief. I'm not sure I believe that this can change. but God, I believe that you can do it. So help my unbelief and increase my faith.

A cry of the heart, increase my faith please. And then, because time has run, last slide please.

I've asked Sandy and the group just to help us with this and maybe the group would like to start coming up at this point. I'll give you the thingy in a minute. No, go on. Get up there, get up there.

[35 : 37] I'll give you the headphones in a minute. Just as the group play and sing, feel free to sing and join in or feel free to sit quietly or kneel quietly or stand up quietly.

As I've been talking, what's God put in your head? What are the locusts eating? Where's there a deficit that has been stolen from you?

That period of time in your life which is still that ache? Are there relationships we need to restore? Where do I need to humble myself?

and who amongst us today just needs more than anything else to go and lie down in green pastures to be restored?

Where are you? Because wherever you are, God is waiting for you as those nice folk in the repair shop wait.

[36 : 51] and as you come in, they say, God says to you, yep, I can make something beautiful of that to each of you.

So now let's just spend a few moments allowing God to minister to us. If you need to, you'd like to have prayer, just indicate or come and have a chat with Alan or John or myself or anybody else that you'd like to talk to.

But don't let this moment pass as we come before God for restoration. Amen. Thank you.