PRE-JOURNEY STUDY #1 – WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

***1) The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,***

***2) to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,***

***3) 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.  They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.***

Great words from a great God that loves us so very much and has entrusted to us some very serious tasks! These verses talk about being called by God to be agents of change, people who have first been changed by Jehovah. We are then sent by Him to others listed in these same verses to “bestow” on them the change needed in their lives.

**So WHO are these agents of change? WE are, the people of God, the joint-heirs with Jesus!** Notice the word “anointed” in verse 1. In the Old Testament when a new king or prophet for Israel was chosen by God there was a ceremony where he was anointed with oil. This was a sign of God’s calling on his life and sanctification (being set apart) for God’s service. It is very clear in verse 1 that we have been anointed – chosen and set apart – for a specific purpose: to proclaim good news to others.

But God doesn’t stop there; He goes on to say through Isaiah that, once anointed, we were sent by Him with even more specific missions. Look at what He sends us to do: to bind up, to proclaim, to comfort, to provide, to bestow (there’s that word again). Sounds like a great way to live, doesn’t it?

Over the many years of doing short-term missionary journeys we have had the absolute blessing of meeting some of the most amazing people of God ever. Too often, however, during their journey or even after their return, I would hear from them about feeling the hand of God on their lives for missions. After tasting being the hands and feet of Jesus for just a week or so they were feeling His leading. Some of these conversations lasted a few minutes, others a few weeks, but, sadly, the great majority never got beyond this point of feeling something from God to doing something with God.

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, **I am sending you’**” (John 20:21). He was talking to His disciples who had seen Jesus recently crucified, in fact, who were in hiding in a locked room when Jesus spoke these words to them. In a great sense, US, me and you, and verse 22 says he then breathed the Holy Spirit, His presence and power, on each of them, anointing them to go out and change the world. We know from scripture what those eleven trembling men did with that mandate but let’s ask ourselves: **What have WE done with that command of Christ?**

You are getting ready for your missionary journey now and part of that preparation is to understand **who you are in Christ.** You are the **beloved** of God, **paid for** with the blood of Jesus, **set apart** by God Himself, **accompanied** by God, the Holy Spirit, **sent** to be used by God in what He is doing in a land not your own. Ready for this? Let’s get-r-done!

PRE-JOURNEY STUDY #2 – YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?

***The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people, and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. 2) I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3) I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’*** Genesis 12:1-3

Now that we have the WHO answered about God’s agents of change, let’s look at the TO WHOM in this equation. Our God makes very clear both **who we are and to whom He has sent us.** As we see in the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12 He sometimes sends us before He shows us the answers to all the questions. Sometimes we have to move forward to see clearly the plan traced by God for us.

Remember the Indiana Jones movie, The Last Crusade (I think it was)? He was once again being chased and came to a bottomless chasm that seemed to have no way across. Remembering the words of his father, he stepped out into seeming space only to see there was an invisible bridge across the void and to safety. Had he not taken that first step he would have not seen the way. That’s living the life of a disciple – without faith it is impossible.

Thus, led by God with personal faith in His promises and knowing we are blessed, we go as agents of change to different kinds of people in society. **Isaiah 61 lists them: the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners, those who mourn, and those who grieve.** I have been on that list more than once myself, haven’t you? Remember the person or persons God sent to you in your time of need? That person was God’s agent of change. Going to desperate people is not pleasant as it reminds us of when we were in that position. For that reason many of us avoid being agents of change – it’s painful.

The truth is we are all broken people with broken lives but **the Truth doesn’t leave us there.** Jesus, when he comes into our lives, makes something beautiful and useful of our brokenness as only He can. He IS the truth! We don’t have to continue to live in our broken state or be imprisoned by our sin. Those times of despair and their being made complete become a part of who we are, enabling us to be agents of change for people going through brokenness now.

In fact, Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 tells us that, when we go to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, the prisoner, the mourning, and the grieving we are doing more than helping them - we are actually doing that **to HIM**. “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’” (verse 40).

So here we go, broken beautiful people on a journey to a land not our own to people who are also broken but without Jesus. It’s a great adventure, yes, God’s adventure that He has called us to journey with Him, to see what He is doing and what He wants to do, to use us as agents of change. Remember that you are going in both His presence and power to do something that He created you to do and restored you from brokenness to complete. Our God is a great God of amazing mercy and grace…

PRE-JOURNEY STUDY #3 – BROTHER, GOT ANY CHANGE?

***He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.***Micah 6:8

The gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, is that God, through His Son has reconciled our relationship with Him by redeeming us from our sins. **Redemption from sin is instantaneous** at the moment we believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one of God, crucified that we might live, resurrected that we might have life abundant now and forever. Redemption from the control of sin is **a lifelong process** for followers of Christ, still imprisoned in a corrupt and sinful state.

Too often the people of God have reduced the gospel to an escape from hell, the penalty for sin. This has resulted in a society that sees and embraces the redemption from sin at salvation but fails to grasp a life of redemption. For this reason we have the people named in our last study: the poor, brokenhearted, captive, prisoner, the mourning, the grieving, and the desperate. **Man’s sin against man**, what we do to others, still cries out for redemption. What cries out even louder are the people victimized by that sin.

We are to be people of reconciliation and redemption. As Micah 6:8 shows that such a life means Father God sends us to live lives that bring change to “the least of these”. Our lives are to be characterized by justice, mercy, and humility. To preach salvation from sin without preaching the good news of redemption from the effects of sin is **only half the message** of the gospel. **How much justice, mercy, and humility do you show in your life?**

How does a life like that flesh out? How does that life look? Isaiah 61 also presents the other side of the picture. We are chosen and set aside to:

* preach good news to the poor
* bind up the brokenhearted
* proclaim freedom for the captives
* proclaim release from darkness for the prisoners
* comfort all who mourn
* provide for those who grieve
* bring them a crown of beauty instead of ashes
* bring them the oil of gladness instead of mourning
* bring them a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair

That’s some pretty heavy stuff! Truth is all of that is impossible for anyone who is not already redeemed – **we can only give others what we have been given ourselves.**

On your missionary journey you are going to be “armed” with these redemptive powers given to you by God. He says when we do any of these things to the least of these we do it to Him. All of us have a story of redemption from sin and its imprisonment. The people you will be touching in the name of Jesus while on your missionary journey desperately need to hear that story and see someone redeemed by the good news of Jesus!

***Bring my sons and daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.*** Isaiah 40:6-7

PRE-JOURNEY STUDY #4 – WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

***He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*** Psalm 1:3

Isaiah 61:3 also compares the people of God to a tree, just like Psalm 1:3. Isaiah writes that the people of God called “agents of change” will also be called “oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor.” I like that! Oaks are beautiful, strong trees that can stand up to mighty storms yet give shady rest to the worn-out. If I had to pick out what kind of tree I would like to be the oak would run neck-and-neck with the palm tree…but that’s another story.

What God is showing us in Isaiah 61:3 is that there is **another huge blessing** to being anointed, set apart for His purposes. In bringing needed change to the outcast and downtrodden we both become better people, stronger in the Lord, **a living, breathing display of God’s glory.** It’s one of those win-win situations where both sides benefit from the actions taken. We take hope and help to the least of these and they are changed forever. In taking hope and help to them we are changed forever. Our strength and beauty become greater and God’s glory shines brighter from our lives. **How is God’s glory shown in your life right now?**

One thing everybody who participates on a missionary journey finds out is that, while we go to be a blessing to the people we serve overseas, **WE come home even more blessed** for following Jesus. It doesn’t matter how hard you work, how much you build or paint, or how many kids you touch as the hands of Jesus. The greater blessing is ours for going, for being obedient and faithful, for seeing how God can use us for His glory. **How do you see faithfulness and obedience going hand-in-hand here?**

The truth is that what God is going **to do to you** on this trip is as important as what He is going to **do through you**. Your life will be forever changed, impacted by God’s touch, stronger than ever before, and connected in a new way to your source of strength, the Spirit of God. You may go like an acorn but you will return home much more like an oak. You may go questioning why God made you the way He did but you will come home knowing how a surrendered YOU can make a huge difference in the lives of OTHERS. **How open are you to what God wants to do through you and to you on this journey? What part of ministry, serving God by serving others, do you most enjoy?**

Ephesians 2:10 says “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” **What good works has God shown you that He has created for YOU to do?**

“But thank God that although you used to be slaves of sin, you gave wholehearted obedience to the teaching that was handed down to you, which provides a pattern. Now that you have been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness.” ~ Romans 6:16-18

Pray now asking God to prepare both you and those you are going to serve for your time together, showing you during this missionary journey how He was wired you for serving Him.