



It's great to go home! I bet some of the university students here feel that! Great to go to a house that you have known for many years, to mums cooking, or dads cooking. To sit back and have a coke or a beer with the family. It can be comforting to be in your room, your bed, your place. Of course for many of us home changes! I was a pastor's kid so I moved every 8 years, but I

used to be able to go home to my parent's retirement home at Kinloch. I've got a sleeping bag that I bought when I was 15 – it's a macpac and it feels like to home to me! Don't worry I wash it so it doesn't smell like the 80s! Maori have this phrase for a place to go home, turangawaewae, a place to stand a place where you belong. I love to go to Kinloch because I've been going there since I was 2 months old, first a caravan, then a tent, then a beach house then a retirement house, now I just visit for the day.

One of the great themes of Isaiah is the people of Israel going home. Do you know what I mean by home? I hope you have good memories of home. Perhaps your marriage feels like home, or your siblings, or a special place, or a holy place like Ohope beach campsite where I gave my heart to the Lord. Ultimately God wants you to find home in him, in his people and in this place. While Isaiah talks about Jerusalem as home, our final home will be the new Jerusalem.



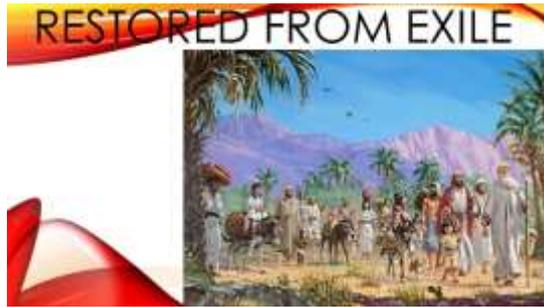
I love this verse of hope. Say to the captives – come, and to those in darkness – be free. These are words inviting us home, traveller come home! Have you ever been trapped, and do you know what it's like to be free! God wants to set you free. We were in Paris in January and we hopped on this super overcrowded train and there were people all around shouting at us in French, and

someone started to pick my pocket. I know the family just suddenly wanted to be home. If you have ever felt that sense of captivity, and yearning to be free. Isaiah is speaking to that. To the captives, he was talking about literal captive, captives in Babylon, maybe not in dungeons, but to a people unable to be free. He was announcing God's word! Come, be free. Are you trapped, trapped in a compulsion, trapped in an addiction? God wants to set you free. It may not be a quick fix – but let me reassure you, God is on your side, he wants you to be free. To be free from those painkillers, from that negative cycle in your relationship.

Are you trapped in a sickness? God wants you to be free, you may not always be healed, but you can be free. God sees you if you are struggling behind a neurological condition, and you can be free. Victor Frankl the concentration camp survivor spoke about when all other freedoms are removed we can still be free in how we respond to our circumstances; God wants us to know that freedom.

Are you a captive to body image? Are you in the darkness of a dead end job?

Has family life become like a dungeon, and your responsibilities become like chains. God offers you a freedom beyond abandonment, a freedom in how to love and respond.



Isaiah's words were fulfilled in the return of the people of Israel from captivity in Babylon, From about the year 538BC the Jews began to return to Judah from Babylon, now these are the middle class and above Jews because the very poor never left. The first major return was a group with Zerubbabel. In Ezra two we have a list of a large group that went back with Zerubbabel. In

Ezra 3 we then hear about their joy in rebuilding the altar. Ps 126 When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion... our mouths were filled with laughter. By Ezra 6 the temple is rebuilt and dedicated and Passover is celebrated. You can imagine the joy, it would be like one of us having been in a communist country for 30 years during the cold war and finally coming home and celebrating Christmas. There is second major wave of people who come back with Ezra himself Ezra 7 – and this is where the original returning community is starting to be refashioned into a new Israel. Ezra moves the focus from rebuilding, to rededicating, fasting and prayer. He's the establishment coming home after the forerunners. So you can hear their words from Isaiah about a highway and being led alongside streams. This is a large ongoing migration. And then thirdly we get Nehemiah coming back about 12 years later with yet another wave of returners, going back to rebuild the city wall and restore Jerusalem. He encourages people to move back into the city, to reoccupy it. Isaiah's prophesy was fulfilled when God's people returned from captivity in Babylon. And ever after that phrase has been rich in meaning in faith communities – the Babylonian captivity and the return.



Ok let me pick up another beautiful quote from Isaiah. A mother might forget but God does not. I guess in our time we see mothers and fathers who do not treat their children with love, we see some parents treat their children in a terrible way. But God does not forget. Persistence is God's part in faith. I will write you on the palm of my hand. Wow. I love that idea that God says he does not

forget his people. No matter what. He does not forget. I often write on the outside of my hand, but the inside rubs off, it's also more tender. You would need to write with something very permanent. As a Christian I think of the nails that wrote on Jesus' hands. I guess we've all seen people who get a tattoo of their kids names as a permanent reminder. This is what God is saying, I have tattooed you on my palm, I will never forget you.

I know it is one of the blessings of a lifelong relationship as that those are the last people we remember. In fact, the last time I remember my uncle being able to speak properly, I had been chatting away with him in the den, talking about the kids and so on. And he was smiling and laughed a little but not really talking. And I wondered do you even know who I am? But as I left and said goodbye Den turned to me and said "goodbye Simon". God never forgets us. Never forgets you. Never forgets me. Never

There are lots of challenges in comparing Isaiah's prophesy's with the return of Jewish people to the Land in the last century, but it is just plain disingenuous to ignore these events. So let



me trace the connections and then look at the difficulties. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD many of the Jewish leaders and elite were exiled from Israel, and then after the Bar-kochba rebellion and defeat in 135 Hadrian exiled more Jews and forbade Jews from living in Jerusalem, this was a key part of the growth of the diaspora into Europe. In fact, for centuries few

imagined the Jews going back to Israel, and there was horrible mistreatment of the Jews by Catholic and Protestant. In the 18th century following even further pogroms of violence Jews began heading to Israel and Modern Zionism – the politics of returning to Israel was born. It started small, between 1904 and 1914 about 40,000 Jews returned, even from as early as 1920 there was violence between Jewish immigrants and Palestinian Arabs. Up to 1929 another 100,000 Jews migrated. However, it was the rise of Nazism that accelerated the migration of another 1 Million Jews, sadly during the Holocaust many countries turned away fleeing Jews and they had to migrate secretly, by 1945 the Jewish population of Palestine had reached 33%. For the next few years there was conflict and then in 1948 the state of Israel was declared and more Jews poured into Israel. Almost immediately there was war as surrounded Arab states tried to limit or destroy the state of Israel. In 1949 came a ceasefire. Over the next few years at least another million Jews, many fleeing violence came to Israel. In 1967 there was a six-day war in response to Arab aggression all around Israel and Israel captured the Golan heights, the west bank and the Sinai Peninsula. In 1973 Israel was attacked during the celebrations of the day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, and despite significant loss of life repelled the attackers. The reality is that there is now a significant state of Israel existing in the Holy Land that has some major similarities to Isaiah’s prophecies of return. – Praise God.

Firstly, we should note that many people saw these prophecies and perhaps helped make them happen. Secondly we should also note that Israel is a secular state and is not at all a perfect match with Biblical prophecy. Let’s talk about the conflict.



Ok, I want to celebrate the Fulfilment of Biblical Prophecy. But there are lots of Problems. There is a deeply entrenched antagonism between Israel and her neighbours, there are a huge community of Palestinians caught in the conflict between Jewish and Arab neighbours. There are Jewish settlers taking over what were other people’s homes. There were people living in

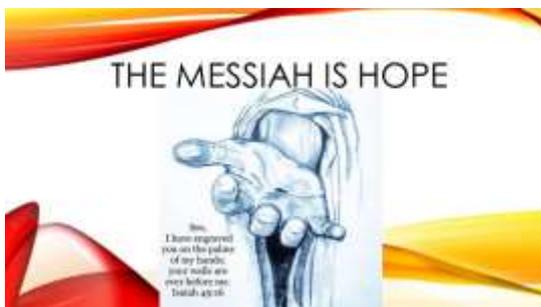
Palestine when the Jewish return started. The Biblical hope talks about the nations flowing to Jerusalem not trying to kill people. There is aggression from Hamas intending to Destroy Israel, there is the wall, there are appalling conditions in Gaza. Then there is the ambition of some in Israel to extend their borders from the Nile to the Euphrates, Big stuff. The modern state of Israel is a secular state and for all the verses in the Bible about land conquest there are other verses also about treatment of refugees and justice and equity. As you can see I am not pretending to solve the problems of the Middle east in a 25-minute sermon. I do want to say I see a political reality with similarities to a biblical prophecy. But I also want to say there are humanitarian issues here that are extreme. I remember having Jewish friends who said,

it's easy in safety to condemn Israel, but when you live in the land Eretz Israel you come to understand better. I think those living in London and Paris are coming to understand better. There are communities of young people being radicalised, by the behaviour of religious and supposedly Godly states. The behaviour of Israel doesn't always help, and I understand that Hamas do fire rockets from hospitals sometimes, it's not a battle for the naive. There is much prayer needed. I remember Jan and Neil saying both sides need Jesus, not a religious Jesus of right wing or left wing propaganda – But the Jesus of Isaiah. The Jesus who suffered. The Jesus who inspired the Parahaka community in NZ, where Maori Christians peacefully opposed the European land grab during the NZ civil wars. 100 year later their legacy is not yet finished, in God's timing an apparent defeat can become a victory.



I wrote on the church blog last week about Dr Lucy Hone and her research into Resilient grieving. Lucy had studied resilience and then had been instrumental in helping people recover from the Christchurch earthquake, only to have her beautiful 12-year daughter killed in a road accident. She determined that she would see if her learnings about resilience could help her

through her personal grieving. She wrote about many strategies that really did help. But the one I want to pick up today is the role of positive emotions in grief. Rejoice. Lucy says much has been written about negative emotions in grief, but actually allowing yourself to feel positive emotions at times is a vital antidote to being overwhelmed by grief. Laughter, joy, hopefulness and curiosity are just a few that allow the body to have a short respite from grief, to be able to laugh about a dead person's funny traits, to in time hope again, to just go out for a laugh, to rejoice in what remains. Lucy is not a Christian but she remembers distinctly a voice telling her after the loss of her daughter, chose life not death, don't lose what you still have to what you have lost. She ascribes that to herself, and acknowledges that some might suggest it was the voice of God. You see I think God talks to us all Christian or not Christian – I just hope I'm listening. When Isaiah talks of joy, the people could be remembering all they had lost, but instead they look forward. If you have been bereaved or feel a long way from home. Chose life and not death - don't lose what you still have to what you have lost.



We are engraved on the saviour hand. Do you know that. Do you know that he loves you, that he wants to bring you to a place of home? It might not be a physical home, with sounds and smells like Kinloch has for me. I went there recently in my little boat and the sound of the birdsong was extraordinary. Perhaps the home he wants to bring you to is a more like my sleeping bag, a

portable home, or a community. My sisters and I are walking the Milford track in January to remember mum and dad. Our family are not perfect but part of that walk will be community, and will be home. When we celebrate communion is a little while, we will be home.