

## Profile of a Peacemaker

Isaiah 58:1-12

By [Jason Williams](#)

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I am Jason Williams the Urban Missions Pastor here at Briarwood and it is my privilege to come before you and open up the Word of God. Isaiah 58:6–12 says

[6] “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? [7] Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? [8] Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. [9] Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, [10] if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. [11] And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. [12] And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

May God richly add a blessing to the preaching of His Word.

2013 marks the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights movement here in Birmingham, Alabama. Just over half a century ago in our state, Governor George Wallace stood and gave a speech which include the following words; “In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” When the reporter asked why he started using racist messages, Wallace simply replied “I tried to talk about good schools and good roads, these things that have been a part of my career but nobody listened and then I began talking about blacks and they stomped the floor.” The thing that grips me about Wallace’s speech is not so much the

disturbance of it but how many people rallied behind him for that cry for injustice, those people who frequently worshipped God, attended churches and professed to the love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. I have known personally this bigotry and hatred. I had the chance to meet my grandfather one time and when he found out I married a black woman he never talked to me or my father again. He is faithful in a church and a professing believer of Christ. This kind of outward worship and adherence to the formalities of Christianity yet holding hypocrisy and hatred in one's heart is nothing new for Isaiah was experiencing this in his day.

Why do we do urban ministry at Briarwood. It is because God calls us to be peacemakers and reconcilers especially in a city where historically injustice and hatred was so strong, heavy and such an affront to the Gospel of grace. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? What are the necessary ingredients of a peacemaker? In this study I want to share with you three things– the heart, the hands and the hope of the peacemaker.

Let's look at our text for this study in Isaiah.

We'll start by looking at the heart of the peacemaker. Isaiah 58:1 says [1] "Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins." In other words, don't water down this message Isaiah. This is a strong rebuke given to God's covenant people in their rebellion. God goes on to describe this group of people who seem to have a real desire for worship. Isaiah 58:2 says [2] Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. They are diligent day after day and I can just imagine they were offering prayers. They were offering their tithes and animal sacrifices. The blood was flowing. They were passionate about doctrine. It says that they delighted to know His laws. They studied the law and adhered to it outwardly. It even says that they delighted to draw near to God yet we see He is very distant from them.

Isaiah 58:3 says [3] 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Here we see God is not answering. Why aren't You listening? Why haven't You observed my piety and outward fasting God? Don't You know God we're Your covenant people? Don't You see our humility? Then God begins detailing some sin in their lives. He tells them they're covetous. They are seeking after their own pleasure, their own business. In other words, they were spending their time on things that were important to them. They sought to worship God and themselves at the same time. They were covetous not only of their resources but of their time. They were not really giving God His due. They were breaking Sabbath and went as far even to oppress their workers to inflict injustice. They were contentious, fighting

and quarrelling with one another. God says “you may appear to be seeking Me diligently but let Me show you the kind of heart I desire.” It’s the heart that seeks the welfare of the poor and the oppressed and those who have experience injustice.

Why would that be? God says through Solomon in Proverbs 14:31, [31] Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. Proverbs 19:17 says [17] Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed. In other words, God says it brings Him glory and honor when we care for the poor. Jesus reiterates the same thing in Matthew 25 when He gives final judgment. Why? It is because a genuine faith in Christ, a true understanding of the Gospel will ultimately lead to a love for the poor and the most marginalized. It’s not simply for the Christian who has the gift of mercy any more than you sharing your faith and for those who have the gift of evangelism. It’s part of the love of God.

In essence Jesus is saying through the prophet Isaiah that if you don’t love the poor then you don’t love Me. You may know the law but you don’t know and love the Lawgiver. Let me illustrate this for you. Let’s say you told your child that you loved them but you never showed up to a single sporting event they were involved in. Let’s say you told your wife you really loved her but you never showed her affection or served her around the house. It’s just sentiment and words. When you truly love someone whatever they value in life you will respond to like a law that you now want to keep. Even though you may not have valued it, it now governs and directs you.

My wife loves me and some of you may think why in the world would she want to do that but God is gracious. Because she loves me the things that used to be very insignificant in her life began to take on value. I love to play golf and when I met her she thought that golf was expensive, a waste of time and boring. She still thinks it’s expensive but not boring or a waste of time. Over time she gets her own golf clubs and she starts to come and play with me. On her first round she actually got within three inches of a hole in one. I guess that is beginner’s providence but what changed in her where she did not like golf to the fact that she began to enjoy it? It is the fact that she loves me and I love golf. She learned to value it over time.

See it governed her time and the same thing happens when we follow Christ. The things that He loves begin to be of value to us. We begin to take on those things and love that does not emit, produce and energize choices that are adjusted to the values of the one loved, is nothing but mere sentiment and laws that never take you to the deep love of the Lawgiver are simply moralistic and superficial. Here me carefully because I want you to understand this. A love for the poor does not develop overnight any more than my wife developed a love for golf overnight. A love for the poor takes time and God is patient with us. I believe

if you read your Bible from cover to cover a love for the poor better develop at some point.

It looks different for every single person and how we engage in ministry to the poor looks different. There are different callings and different gifts that we have but if there is no genuine concern for the poor and for those who have experienced oppression and injustice we cannot say we love God. So the peacemaker's heart is transformed from the inside out as God gives him/her a growing desire for the poor.

The second thing we see is the hands of the peacemaker in next section. The peacemaker also puts their hands to do deeds of love, mercy and justice. We all know there is so much wrong with our society, specifically in America. There is oppression and injustice of all kinds. There are oppressed people in communities and perhaps none are more oppressed than the child in the womb. There are countless babies murdered every year. There are over seven million people incarcerated in America and that's more than any other country. I'm not saying that everyone in there should not be in there but in America it is better to be guilty and rich than poor and innocent. It's injustice. What about the fact that payday and title loan companies gross profits of over 3.2 trillion dollars last year in interest exacted, taking advantage of the poor. Human trafficking from the 20-59 corridor from Atlanta to Birmingham is the highest human trafficking route of prostituted young women in our country. Fatherlessness has risen to over 75 percent. The root causes of these things are very complex and I don't claim to know the answers.

Working for justice I typically encounter two very polarizing perspectives. So when we talk about these social issues that are plaguing our country the liberal will say it is the unjust systems, it's the social structures that are the problem. My conservative friends will say, no, it's not the systems injustice, it's the individual morality, it's the breakdown of the family but no one is blaming the fatherless child. We know it's not their fault. The fatherless young man at eight years old doesn't sit around his house today thinking "mom, I think I need to go to another school district where they don't fight as much and pick on me for being smart." We all agree that it's not his fault. My wife and I just moved to Hoover and my daughter is 4 years old and she has a 300 percent better chance in making in life than kids in the city of Birmingham. My child has over a hundred books in her house. I mentor a young man who is 10 years old and he had two books.

God's Word is telling us if we don't share our advantages and my resources with those who are fatherless and oppressed then it's not just unloving but it's actually unjust. I often ask why are we not more concerned for the poor, with all of the resources that we have. I really believe it's because we don't see ourselves as the rich. I will confess to you that I'm a recovering materialist. You can ask my mom. I probably owned fifteen cars from the time I was 15 years old up until I was saved at the age of 24. For years I never thought you could remotely place

Jason Williams in the category of the rich. Bill Gates, he's rich. Warren Buffet – rich, Tiger Woods– rich, Oprah Winfrey– rich. Jason Williams? The Williams family is working middle class. We are not rich. If you make more than \$50,000 a year, then you are richer than 99 percent of the world. That's incomprehensible. There are 6.7 billion people in the world and half of them live off less than \$2 a day. I would say that you and I are infinitely rich.

We tend to go around and compare ourselves with other people. We compare our riches and our wealth with things we don't have, instead of looking at how God has graciously and abundantly gifted us. *[48b] Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more (Luke 12:48b)*. Last year alone, church goers had a combined income of over 5.2 trillion dollars. I John 3:17 says *[17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* We also know there is another side to this. We know there is another side to giving and trying to alleviate poverty. We know that many times we have been burned by the poor or working with the poor and working for justice our methods haven't always been the best. Some of our help actually creates dependency instead of helping people. So the urban ministry team has developed a philosophy which I don't have time to work through but I'll just name them – relationships. We believe in the dignity of every human being that God created. They are fearfully and wonderfully made. When I go minister to the poor I am looking at someone made in the image of God. I am affirming that person's dignity. It's about empowerment and not enablement. Bob Luptin is one of my favorite urban workers. He says "When you do something for someone that they can take the initiative on their own to do that may well be the kindest way to destroy a people." That's why we believe in empowerment. We also believe in cultivating leaders. We believe in advocacy. The poor need advocates. The young fatherless boy needs models otherwise he'll go down the road of what he sees in his neighborhood and community.

The last thing is we have a holistic ministry for we do things in word and deed. We tend to be hung up with just sharing the Gospel or we just need to meet people's physical needs. No, we need to do all of it. Comprehensive poverty calls for comprehensive Gospel that is robust and tells people of the lordship of Jesus Christ and how He impacts every area of life. We have a myriad of ways to get involved in this church of you using your time, talents and treasures, whether it's mentoring, tutoring, cleaning, gardening, you name it. I'm starting to see develop out of Briarwood which brings so much joy to my heart is watching people work in their vocation, where God has gifted them with abilities and talents and using that for ministry, to minister to those who are oppressed and experience injustice.

Number three is the hope of the peacemaker. You have to have the heart of a peacemaker first. Then we see the hands of the peacemaker and now we see hope. What is the peacemaker's hope? What is my hope in life? My hope is that I know ultimately Jesus Christ will come back as reigning King and He will create

this society that we are now trying to get a foretaste of and there will be justice. There will be right relationships and everything will be restored. There will be reconciliation. People won't fight over race anymore. People won't look down on others. We will all be too busy worshipping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Because of who He is I have hope and so I never get too cynical or depressed when things aren't going well. I also never look at urban ministry and ministry to the poor as if we're going to create some utopia where all the problems in the world are going to go away, but I have hope.

One of the reasons I have hope is because you, the people of God. In 2002 in this very church the PCA held its General Assembly and an overwhelming vote took place for our denomination to repent of past views on slavery and segregation. We are not the same people. The church is not the same church that it was 50 years ago and praise God for that. In my three years on staff here I've seen countless individuals get involved in giving their lives away to the poor, involving themselves, plunging themselves into the issues of our day and for that I commend you. It is such a pleasure and a privilege to serve a people that when you show them from the Word of God they seek God and seek to be obedient to what He calls us to do. I commend you. I am thankful for you.

God lists a number of promises in the text. We read one at the beginning in Isaiah 58:8a which says *[8] Then shall your light break forth like the dawn...* In other words, you will be a city on the hill whose light cannot be hidden and they will see your good works and will glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). It brings us pleasure when our God is exalted and while despair and darkness are all around us I am experiencing and seeing God's light break forth. In some of the most desperate situations, light is breaking forth. Light is breaking through our prisons as men go into these prisons and love on these inmates. I'm seeing the light break forth as we tutor and mentor children. I'm seeing God's light break forth in these four communities where we have begun to jobs. God's light is breaking forth.

He also says in Isaiah 58:8, *and your healing shall spring up speedily...* In other words, God will comfort your souls and bring real spiritual healing. He also says in Isaiah 58:8, *your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.* He gives us the security needed. We have a sovereign God and it's amazing to me the fear of the believer who says "I don't want to go into a poor community. I don't want to go where I may be in danger." Is God not sovereign? Do you truly believe that He has counted every day of your life and He knows exactly when He'll take you to be with Him? Then why don't we trust Him with our lives, finances and everything? If we really believe that God is sovereign we will not be afraid. It says in the text the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard and your righteousness will go before you. In other words, that God who is bringing that Kingdom and will reflect justice and mercy, we begin to mirror that God and that's what people see. When I was growing up I used to love going to Baskin Robbins 31 flavors. I don't think they have Baskin Robbins in the

south and it's a bummer. At Baskin Robbins they have all these flavors of ice cream and it's so hard to decide which flavors you want.

So they give you this little pink spoon and they let you sample different flavors. When we go and do ministry in the city to love people and they see the righteousness, mercy and grace of God's people it is simply a foretaste of the Kingdom that is coming down. It is a foretaste of what our God will do.

Isaiah 58:9a says [9] *Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer...* Does anybody like answered prayer? I love answered prayer. Time fails me to talk about the myriad of ways God has answered prayer. You can join the urban ministry prayer team. Our prayer team has really just turned into praises all the time. It's not that we're not praying for things because we're continually prayerful but we're continually seeing God answer in so many ways, whether it's sending a church planting pastor down to Fairfield or raising up an early childhood development center or raising up a mentoring program where over 35 at risk youth are being loved on and shown what it means to model the Gospel of Jesus Christ, foretastes are happening and prayers are being answered. It says we'll be peacemakers, restorers and builders. God says that when we participate in this kind of ministry foundations are rebuilt. Urban ministry and raising up the poor is not just about what we're doing here and now, it will impact coming generations of peacemakers.

What is the conclusion of the matter and how do we develop the heart, the hands, and the hope of a peacemaker? The grand takeaway is the humility of the peacemaker. If what we heard in this study was moralism let me dispel that notion rather quickly. If we think that urban ministry, justice and mercy to the poor, is another to-do item on the list of objectives in the Christian life, then you and I have missed it. If we do it simply to appease God and check off the box then our motivation is one of self-centeredness and self-promoting. Guilt will not sustain us in this ministry. I've seen where people are turned a little bit by guilt and they want to get involved and then within a few months they are out because guilt couldn't sustain them.

What will sustain us in this ministry? The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing to sustain us because Christianity and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only religion that tells us how far an infinite, wealthy God came to the poorest of the poor to rescue them. Only the Gospel can do it. He was born in a borrowed manger, His family offering two pigeons at His birth which was the lowest rung of the social class. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Luke 9 said the Son of Man had no where to lay His head. He rode into town on a borrowed donkey. He had His last meal in a borrowed room and He was buried in a borrowed tomb. Our God took on our poverty to give us His wealth. Until you know the grace of our God that though He was rich He became poor that by His poverty you and I will be made rich.

The only way you can develop a heart for the poor and the most marginalized is to realize that you were the poorest of the poor and God came down and rescued you with no obligation. We deserved wrath. Do you know what justice is? We deserved wrath, condemnation and that we pay for the penalty of our sin. That is justice and yet in the greatest act of grace we see the injustice that happened to Jesus on the cross and He took that penalty for you and me. There is no way to appease a holy God other than to fall on your face, repent and believe that He indeed purchased you that He bought you with a price.

So where do we go from here? I believe that we need to repent, pray and engage. Working in issues of justice and poverty may mean that you'll go to Kenya or support and pray for a missionary in Uganda or China. It may mean that you mentor a child. In order to do that you have to actually repent of your self-centeredness and seek God for where He would direct you. I'm here to tell you that God's will is not sitting around and wondering "Lord, where will you send me?" if you're not willing to step out and begin to explore avenues that He would use you in. Then engage. You and I can't do everything but we can do something. We can offer what God has gifted us with to someone. Come to Him and say "Look God, I've missed it in my own heart." It's pretty bad when I can look at my own bill and I have spent more on DirecTV for the year than I have on a church plant. That's a problem for me. God is standing there ready to forgive me and say "It's not you anyway, it's My Son." Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, You are high and lifted up. You God, are rich in mercy. We are poor and in desperate need of the Gospel of grace. Thank You for pouring out Your love on us by putting Your Son on the cross and paying for our sins. We are overwhelmed by Your sacrifice and love. Thank You for these people and this great church who You have called unto Yourself. I commend You for them. I thank You for their hearts of love, mercy and justice and ask God that You would continue to propel us with Gospel motivation to love deeper, to give more because after all You gave everything so that we would know You, so that Your glory would go forth and Your Name would be praised. It's in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

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