**The Quartet of the Vulnerable, Sermon 3**

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# Opening (4 minutes)

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor… ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’.”**

* [Pause]
* ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ - What an audacious thing to say
  + Do you know who said it?
    - Yes. Jesus. If anyone else says that to you, leave. They’re lying
  + Do you know when Jesus said it?

**Luke 4:14-21**

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

* This was the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry, according to Luke. Coming back from being tested by the Devil in the wilderness for 40 days, Jesus enters the Synagogue in the town he was raised in as a child, after returning from his life as a refugee in Egypt, and reads these words from Isaiah 61 and 58: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
* Let me remind you of the larger passage in Isaiah 58. We read it two weeks ago:
* Isaiah 58:6-10

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? **Then** your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; **then** your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. **Then** you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, **then** your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

* Jesus came for those in the most vulnerable situations.

# Recap: (1 minute)

* **Good morning**
* **Goals of Series:**
  + **To orient our eyes and hearts towards God’s heart for the hurt and suffering**
  + **To show how God works in and through the most vulnerable**
  + **To challenge and encourage us to emulate Christ in our lives**
* Guiding Passage:
  + **Zechariah 7:9-10 – “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’**

# Transition:

* We just read how Jesus began his ministry.
* How did he end it?

# The Sheep and The Goats: (5 minutes)

* **Matthew 25: 31-46**. Jesus’ last parable says:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, **‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’**

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

* Pause
* “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”
  + **From the beginning of his ministry on earth to the end, Jesus was for the least of these, the vulnerable.**
    - Here’s a question this passage brings to my mind: “If the gospel we believe in is not good news for those in vulnerable positions, for the sick, the prisoner, the hungry, is it actually good at all?”
    - These passages clarify in my mind that it is not only good. It is very good.
* **J. N. K. Mugambi, Kenyan theologian – “’The Good News which Jesus proclaims to the world is not theoretical. It is practical. It is news which in real life rehabilitates individuals and groups that are marginalized by various natural and social circumstances. In contemporary Africa, the Good News understood in this way ought to rehabilitate the afflicted individuals in every region, country and locality. The Gospel ought to help Africans regain their confidence and hope.’ As a result, the kingdom of God is not only a destination, but also a *direction*” (*Inalienable*, 35).** 
  + God’s heart is for the hurt and suffering
  + He is working in and through those in the most vulnerable situations

##### And you and I. The Church. We are to emulate Christ. And our acts of obedience, or inaction, have eternal ramifications.

* + There are only two groups. The sheep and the goats.
  + “Truly I tell you, whatever you did [or did not do] for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did [or did not do] for me.”
  + Pause

# Transition: (at ~ 10 minutes)

* I thought about ending the sermon there, but I have been in enough churches and listened to enough pastors to know that the “pastoral” thing to do is to preach the full time you are given. ;)
* In all honestly, I am bringing up so many scriptures to equip our tool belts with passages, stories, and examples that we can go to when confronted by situations we don't know how to respond to. I understand that it can be a bit overwhelming
  + Each of these stories are sermon series unto themselves, so I highly recommend that you go back to them and spend time with God, learn about his character and draw close to his heart.
* God’s Word is teaming with so much life and depth.
  + “Scripture is rife with narratives of those whom the world discards and devalues but whom God sees and remembers” (*The God Who Sees*, González, 59).
* It’s amazing to me how so many of the stories we read of men and women who lived thousands of years ago are completely relevant to our modern situations and challenges
* For example, let’s enter the story of Joseph, son of Jacob. You might know him from his “Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat” musical fame. He was the favorite son of his father Jacob. I am sure life was relatively easy for him… until it wasn’t. **Genesis 37:23-28, 36**

# God is Present when a Foreign Child is Trafficked by His Family and later Falsely Imprisoned (14 minutes)

* **Genesis 37:23-28, 36**

“So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt….Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.”

* Joseph was loved by his father more than any of his brothers and his brothers became jealous. How jealous you ask?
  + So jealous that they grab him, throw him in a hole, sell him as a slave, and fake his death
  + By no choice of his own, Joseph’s power is swapped for vulnerability
  + In the course of only a few hours, Joseph goes from a beloved child in a position of wealth and security to an orphaned, trafficked slave in a foreign land
  + **Joseph, “the beloved son” becomes Joseph, “the orphaned, trafficked, foreign slave”**

Do you know that people are trafficked and enslaved today?

* Today. Right now, **50 million people across our planet are slaves**
* That is **1:150 people on earth**
* Modern “slavery generates as much as $150bn (£116bn) in profits every year, more than one third of which ($46.9bn) is generated in developed countries…”
* **According to abolitionist group Anti-Slavery International, “a person today is considered enslaved if they are forced to work against their will; are owned or controlled by an exploiter or “employer”; have limited freedom of movement; or are dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as property.”**
* We see this in Child Labor, Forced Labor, Forced Marriages, and Commercial Sex Work
  + <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/feb/25/modern-slavery-trafficking-persons-one-in-200>
* “Modern slavery affects people of every colour, age and gender – but is more prevalent among vulnerable people. That might be a Cambodian villager looking for a better paid job in a neighbouring country, only to find himself trafficked on to a fishing boat. Or a young girl forced to marry at 13 because climate change has flooded her family’s crops and they can no longer afford to keep her at home. Or a homeless person kidnapped from a London soup kitchen and forced to work on a caravan site. Or a migrant whose visa has expired and can be threatened with deportation if she doesn’t do what the trafficker demands.”
* People like Joseph
* Do you know what each of these 50 million people today, let alone the millions of people who have been enslaved throughout history, have in common though? God is with them
* Do you know how I know this?
  + Because God said in Isaiah to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke.
  + Because Christ came to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and set the oppressed free.
  + Because Christ himself was oppressed, imprisoned, and marginalized.
  + Because God was with Joseph
* **Genesis 39:2**

“The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.”

* Everything Joseph touched, God blessed.
  + Potiphar prospered when Joseph was in his house. In fact, God granted Joseph so much success that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire household and everything he owned (39:1-6). The only thing Potiphar remained in control of was what he ate.
* For those Bible scholars out there, do you remember what happens next? Let’s pick up the story again in **Genesis 39:6-20**

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

* By no choice of his own, Joseph’s power is swapped for vulnerability
* In the course of a few hours, Joseph goes from a beloved servant in a position of wealth and security in his master’s house to a “Hebrew slave” falsely imprisoned without a trial
  + Did you notice the change in Joseph’s description throughout the passage?
    - Vs 6: Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph
    - Vs 14: this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us!
    - Vs 16: “That Hebrew slave you brought us
    - Vs 19: This is how your slave treated me,
* Karen González describes it this way:**“Even though the attempted sexual assault that Joseph is accused of has nothing do with his nationality or his status as a foreigner, those facts quickly become politicized for the sake of anti-foreigner sentiments” (*The God Who Sees,* González, 99).**
  + This is what it looks like to be in a vulnerable situation
  + Joseph did nothing wrong; in fact, he did everything right. **It didn’t make a difference.** One person with power over him, exploited his vulnerability and took away his entire life in a single afternoon.
  + Do you know this part of the story is relevant today too?
    - It reminds me of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* the story of a black man imprisoned without a trial for a crime he not only didn’t commit, but couldn’t have committed. Joseph’s story put the the capital “C” in a Classic
  + **“The lives of those on the margins are greatly affected by the decisions made by people who are a long way from the margins and very often don’t know much about them. Those of us who are closer to the center of a culture or society, who have access and means that those on the margins live without, bear a responsibility to those on the margins” (*Inalienable*, 133).**
  + **Joseph, “the steward of his master’s house” became Joseph, “that forgotten and imprisoned Hebrew Slave you brought us”**
  + But, God was with Joseph.
* **Genesis 39:20-23**

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

* **“as an enslaved person in a foreign land, Joseph does not receive due process. Instead, he is thrown into jail for a crime he didn’t commit”, but God still sees him and blesses his work…even while he spends years unjustly imprisoned and forgotten (González, 100).**
* And Joseph’s story of vulnerability and blessing continues through the years in prison to his time interpreting dreams, until ultimately, because God is with him, he becomes the steward of all of Egypt, and his family comes to him for food in the midst of a severe famine throughout the land.
* **Joseph, “the prisoner” becomes “Joseph, the instrument of salvation for Egypt and the surrounding lands,” and then, once again, Joseph, “the beloved son”**

# Transition: (~24 minutes)

* Our God is with the vulnerable. He invites them to his table
* We have just enough time to mine one more story. A story about an open table.
* Who here knows the story of Mephibosheth?
* Some quick context about Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth was King David’s best friend’s son.
* King David’s best friend growing up was Jonathan, the son of King Saul. Now, and this is an oversimplification, when David was becoming King, some of his men got it in their heads that David wanted Saul and Jonathan, along with their families killed, so they killed them all. For those musical lovers out there, think *Anastasia.*
* David wasn’t happy about this and had the men who killed Saul and his family killed. The only person who escaped was Jonathan’s five year old son, Mephibosheth. “when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled” (2 Sam. 4:4)
* Let’s step into the story in **2 Samuel 9**

David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, *“Are you Ziba?” “At your service,” he replied*. The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?” Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.” “Where is he?” the king asked. Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.” So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, *“Mephibosheth!” “At your service,” he replied.* “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table; he was lame in both feet.

* **Mephibosheth was a disabled and disgraced asylum seeker. The last remnant of a previous king’s family who had been forcibly removed from power in what many likely saw as a military coup.**
* He was physically, socially, and economically powerless. He was likely looked on by all around him with pity and shame because of the vast disparity between who he was born to be and who he was.
* His name translated, meant “dispeller of shame.” I’m sure many people heard that and laughed at the irony. This foreign man who is unable to work and without money causes shame to disappear? What a joke!
* But David saw Mephibosheth differently.
* His first words to Mephibosheth were: “Don’t be afraid… for I will surely show you kindness **for the sake of your father Jonathan**. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”
* “You will always eat at my table.” Why? “for the sake of your father Jonathan.”
* **Mephibosheth was invited to the table and adopted into David’s family as a son not because of anything he had done, but because of who his father was.**

# Transition

* Let me remind us church that we were Mephibosheth in this story before we were invited to Christ’s table and adopted as co-heirs with Christ into God’s family

**Romans 8:17 says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”**

* How does this change how we approach others?
* We have intentionally talked about the vulnerable for three weeks now.
* Over this time, I’ve realized a theme throughout the stories we’ve read. **Only one** of the individuals we have talked about **chose** to be in a place of vulnerability. Everyone else had the decision made for, or rather to, them. They became widows, orphans, foreigners, poor, slaves, prisoners, lame, sick, downtrodden. But, God was with them. The same holds true today. God is with the hurt and suffering. God is with the vulnerable not because of what they have done, but because of who he is.
* Our savior is the only one who chose to become vulnerable. He was born into this world by a teenage mother, had an adoptive father, barely missed being killed in an infanticide, became a refugee in Egypt, then a lowly non-citizen in Rome, wandered from place to place with only the clothes on his back, identified with prostitute, the sick, the lowly, the tax collectors, and the sinners, was sold out by his friend for 30 pieces of silver, was forcibly arrested, falsely imprisoned, and publicly executed for crimes he didn’t commit, alongside two common criminals.
* An earthly ministry that began by proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor ended abruptly, without hope.
* **“Were it not for Jesus’ resurrection, the entire story would have been profoundly ironic, with massive delusion at its core”** (*Justice*, 129).
* But God was with Jesus. In fact Jesus was with God at the beginning, and the grave could not hold him. Sin could not keep him down.
* Let’s dwell for a moment in the profound pain and beauty of our Savior’s love for us
* Pause

# Communion Transition:

* Jesus didn’t just preach to, or for, the vulnerable. **He identified himself with the poor, the prisoner, the oppressed, the suffering, and the vulnerable.**
* We often hear about Joseph’s and Mephibosheth’s suffering as Americans and think about theological arguments around suffering. Joseph, Mephibosheth, and millions of other vulnerable people around the world think differently**.** 
  + **“For them, God’s presence in suffering is what enables them to live. Indeed, for many who suffer, Christ on the cross offers the comfort** **of knowing that they serve a God who himself has known great sorrow and suffering”** (WHH, 100-101).
* Let’s Pray

# Communion

* In the final hours before he was sold out by a friend, falsely imprisoned, and unjustifiably, executed in public next to two common criminals on our behalf, Jesus **“took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” - Matthew 26:26-29**

# End

* Do you know that after the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn?
* When I envision that song, I hear “After the Last Tear Falls’” the song we just sang together
* This song has been my anthem as I have prepared for and preached this series. It reminds me that we are to have eyes and hearts like Christ, and that all of the suffering, the positions of compounding vulnerability that we have talked about the last three weeks. None of this will remain.
* After the last tear falls, there is love. Love, love, love.
* Next week, we are going to wrap up our series by talking about the poor and how each of us can respond in faith to God’s word.
* Our conversation will be full of practical ideas and examples for how we can emulate Christ.
* It’s gonna be fun.

# Benediction

* Please rise and receive this benediction:

**May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you: wherever he may send you;**

**May he guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm;**

**May he bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders he has shown you;**

**May he bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.**

**Amen. Go in peace.**