

“The Lord is the Holy One of Israel”

Isaiah Chapter 1

Sunday, June 26th, 2022

A pastor went to a yard sale and found a lawnmower. It seemed in decent shape and the owner said it worked, so the pastor decided to buy it.

After a quick review of the machine, the pastor filled it with gas. Unfortunately, after a few pumps on the fuel line and a pull of the cord, nothing happened. The pastor pulled several more times and finally gave up.

Thankfully, the yard sale was still happening and the pastor, now quite exasperated, asked for his money back. “This mower doesn’t work!”

“Well,” the man said, “I did forget to tell you one thing about this lawnmower—it only works if you curse at it.”

“Curse at it,” the pastor said, “I can’t do that!” I’m a man of the cloth. I don’t even know if I can curse anymore. It’s been so long.”

The man smiled and said, “Just keep pulling that rope, Pastor. It’ll come back to you.”

Just as the lawnmower owner had forgotten to tell the pastor the mower started hard, so Judah had forgotten God in the 8th century.

Today, we begin a new sermon series. Two Sundays ago, we explored the final two verses in the New Testament book of James. Then, last Sunday, Elder Norm Brown, filling the pulpit in my absence, delivered a sermon from **Isaiah Chapter 55**, which sets the stage for our next series.

It has been awhile since we spent time mining an Old Testament (OT) book. The early spring of 2021, we undertook a brief survey of texts from OT books I’d not preached from. Before that, we worked through the New Testament book of Romans, and since then, we’ve worked through Jude and James. It is time to revisit a book from the Bible’s older testament. And, God has brought us to consider perhaps the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah is one of the Bible’s longest books at 66 chapters in length, exceeded only by the Psalms in terms of chapters (150). It is widely known as ‘the most theologically significant book in the Old Testament.’

Barry Webb, a research fellow in the Old Testament notes, “In terms of theological significance, the book of Isaiah is the ‘Romans’ of the Old Testament. Something of its importance can be gauged from the fact that it is quoted 66 times in the New Testament.” (Webb, 37-38) The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than all the other prophets combined!

But, I will not be preaching every jot and tittle as we work through Isaiah. I’ll cover one sermon per chapter; which would take us well over a year to cover. But, we’ll be taking periodic breaks to study short New Testament books, such as Colossians and 2 Peter.

Perhaps you're wondering, why even spend that amount of time in the Old Testament? Isn't it outdated? Ah, dear one, consider just three reasons to study the Old Testament:

1 - **The OT was the Bible Jesus used.** The New Testament gospel accounts were happening as Jesus walked the earth, was crucified, rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven.

2 - **The Old Testament takes up 75% of the Bible's content;** to neglect it is to seriously undermine one's understanding of the *New Testament*.

3 - **2 Timothy 3:16-17** teaches both testaments are "God breathed (inspired by God) and suitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that the man (or woman) of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Isaiah's name means "the Lord saves." The themes of the book that bears his name include judgment, exile, rebellion, pride, salvation, holiness, justice, mercy, hope, the Messiah, and God's sovereignty and kingdom.

Despite His people's failures, God did not forget them, but sent prophets to call them to repentance. He sent Amos and Hosea to the northern kingdom of Israel, but they were not heard, and Assyria carried the Israelites into exile in 722 BC. The kings and people of the southern kingdom of Judah were more apt to remember the Lord, but they, too, fell into apostasy.

According to the opening verse of the book, Isaiah the son of Amoz (not the prophet of similar name, *Amos*) ministered from the death of Uzziah in 739 BC through the reign of Hezekiah. **2 Chronicles Chapters 26-32** cover that time period. Judah had to decide whether it would submit to Assyria or resist the empire. Moreover, once it decided to resist Assyria, Judah had to choose whether it would do so in its own strength, relying on alliances with other earthly powers, or whether it would trust wholly in the Lord. Isaiah, of course, called Judah to the latter option, rebuking the people for their sin and calling for their repentance. In so doing, he also prophesied what would happen to Judah hundreds of years later, after the people had been exiled to Babylon (586 BC).

I'll read verses 1-9 and 21 to 23 where we see the ***Spiritual State of God's People***:

Isaiah 1:1-9; 21-23:

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah. **2** Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; **3** The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; *but* Israel does not know, My people do not consider."

4 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. **5** Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. **6** From the sole of the foot even to the head, *there is* no soundness in it, *but* wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

7 Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; And *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers. **8** So the daughter of Zion is left as a

booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. **9** Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.”

“**21** How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. **22** Your silver has become dross, your wine (beer; distilled from grain) mixed with water. **23** Your princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them.”

Verse 2 opens with God charging Judah with covenant-breaking. Like a child who rebels against a parent, the people—in particular the leaders—had forsaken the Lord. Though they followed the outward forms of worship, their prayers and sacrifices were empty and meaningless. God, through Isaiah, declares His people are no better than dense animals like oxen and donkeys; no, worse than that, they are *worse* than animals. At least the animals mentioned here in verse 3, knew their owner. God’s people don’t show any capacity to do that!

Animals sometimes seem to have more sense than people. Because of their alertness to natural phenomena, they have at times helped us to avoid disaster.

Some time ago, in northeastern China, officials were able to warn and evacuate people from high-risk areas hours before a killer earthquake struck. They were alerted to the disaster by cattle that mooed more than usual and chickens that refused to roost. And in Japan, 20 small quakes within a few months were accurately forecast because observers noted that catfish swam frantically, as if chased by sharks.

Note some of the indicators of Judah’s sins against God in the passage we just read:

- Vs 2, Judah “rebelled” against the Lord. Vs 3 says Israel “didn’t know Him.”
- In vs 4, God describes His people as “sinful” and “laden with iniquity (sin), offspring of evildoers, and children who deal corruptly who have forsaken the Lord and provoked Him to anger.”
- In verses 5 & 6, God says His people are “sick” - from head to heart to the sole of their feet.
- Verse 7 & 8 say the country was “desolate, besieged; cities burned with fire by strangers.”
- Verse 9 compares them with “Sodom and Gomorrah” which God totally destroyed after some of the Sodomites and the men of Gomorrah rioted because they wanted to have illicit sex with two angels of God.
- Verses 21-23 describe God’s people as “harlots, murderers and companions of thieves.”

Let’s bring this home. To “forsake the Lord” is to treat Him as the last resort; to despise Him. This is extremely offensive to God because it results from a cold, unredeemed heart. Ray Ortlund, Jr. notes, “...theft, murder, terrorism, and other outward sins are mere fleabites compared with the mega-sin of forsaking and despising God.

But, the latter is common, even in the church. For many, Christianity has become the grinding out of general doctrinal laws from collections of biblical facts. But childlike wonder and awe have died. The scenery and poetry and music of the majesty of God have dried up like a forgotten peach in the back of the refrigerator.” (Ortlund, 29)

Even so, the “Holy One of Israel”—a signature phrase of Isaiah used 25 times in his prophecy, and only 5 times in the rest of the OT —offered another chance for God’s people to repent, be forgiven, and avoid judgment and discipline.

Having seen the spiritual state of God’s people, we move in verses 10 through 17 to the empty religion they practiced. 10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: 11 “To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. 12 “When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*.

15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”

The people of Judah think they’re fulfilling true worship of God; but in verses 13 & 14, He charges them with hypocritical worship. Their worship attendance, their sacrifices, their prayers, and their rituals are meaningless to God because their behavior does not match up to what they say. Their “evil doings” are identified in verses 16 & 17 as injustice, exploitation of the oppressed, and denying support to those without social safety nets. That last category would include those who are orphaned and widowed, and alive in the womb. God does not mince words. The unconfessed sins of His people reveal what they really think of Him. This behavior disgusts God, reflects a sinful heart, and results in hollow worship.

So far, we’ve seen **the spiritual state of the people and the empty religion they practiced**. Finally, with verses 18-20 and 24-31, we see **God’s restoration promise** - He will **reason** with His people, and they will be **restored** and **redeemed**.

18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

“This is one of the most famous expressions of grace in all the Bible.” (Webb, 43) The people’s rebellion has been developed - they’re guilty as charged! Their sins are scarlet & red as crimson, the color of blood. Judgment is expected here, but grace intervenes! God reasons with the accused, and He offers total pardon! Restoration before God didn’t require suffering of the exile to make it possible. It was always possible if only the

people would repent! Webb notes, “Grace is always hard for rebels to understand; their view of God is too small.” (Webb, 43-44)

The last 8 verses of the chapter are concerned with **restoration and redemption**:

24 Therefore the Lord says, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, “Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. **25** I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. **26** I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.” **27** Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her penitents with righteousness. **28** The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed. **29** For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees which you have desired; and you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens which you have chosen. **30** For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades, and as a garden that has no water.

31 The strong shall be as tinder, and the work of it as a spark; both will burn together, and no one shall quench *them*.”

These were not good days for the relationship between God and His people. Neither Israel nor Judah were spiritually attuned; they practiced an empty religion of great offense to a holy God. But even so, things could get so much better for them if they only sought to please God by living according to His Word. It all is right here.

In verse 26, God said He would restore the judges as at first; and then Judah would again be known as the city of righteousness; the faithful city. In verse 27, God promised to redeem Zion (a term for the people of God) as God overcame His enemies.

As we close this first installment of our study on the OT book of Isaiah, we would do well to be reminded that God is identified in this chapter as the “Holy One of Israel” (vs. 4) “The Mighty One of Israel (vs. 24), and the “Lord of Hosts” (vs. 9 & 24). He is the commander over all troops whether in heaven or on the earth. He is more than able to accomplish what concerns you today.

Our concluding hymn is the great gospel song, “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus”, hymn # 307 in the *Trinity Hymnal*.

Listen to some of these lyrics, which we’ll soon sing:

For my pardon, this I see, nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This is all my hope and peace, nothing but the blood of Jesus;
This is all my righteousness, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Refrain - Oh! precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.