

Isaiah, his name is his message. Isaiah means "God is salvation." Thank you for your prayers as to which book was to be our next study. The Lord did make it clear and as usual it is fitting in ways I didn't see before I began studying for the first sermon in Isaiah. For one thing, Isaiah refers to God as the Holy One of Israel 25 times in his book. There are only six other times in the Old Testament when the name is used. Since we finished the series on the attributes of God with the holiness of God, we can see the connection.

The setting is also clearly something we can relate to in our day. **The people Isaiah prophesied to sensed the insecurity of their wealth and could see that things were about to change.** The kingdom was in a time of transition. It was being tested to see if it would rely on things of this world to assist them against the foreign threats or if they would rely upon God. I think we can all see that this is the challenge that we face.

Isaiah's father was Amoz. Jewish tradition tells us that Amoz was the brother of Amaziah, king of Judah. This would make Isaiah of royal lineage and give him access to the kings. We know he lived in Jerusalem and was married and had children (7:3; 8:3, 18). He wrote one other book, a historical account of the reign of Uzziah, which has never been found (2 Chronicles 26:22). He prophesied between the years 740 to at least 681 B.C., sixty or more years of ministry.

Textual critics have decided that the book of Isaiah was written by three different prophets in three distinct time periods. They note that the middle portion appears to be written to the exiles and that there seem to be three writing styles. This is in part due to their denial of anything supernatural. Isaiah couldn't write to the exiles because he was before the exiles. That is unless he was a seer, which is exactly what he claimed to be.

As for different styles, he was addressing different subjects and writing over decades. I challenge anyone to find a writer whose style remains the same over 60 years writing on different topics. My writing has changed dramatically in 20 years. There is also the fact that there is a theme that runs through the book. The theme is that God is purifying his people for the coming of the Messiah. The people of Judah were a mess, but through captivity and testing they would become the ones ready for the days of the Messiah. That is why the three sections focus on their current sinful condition which would result in exile, encouragement during exile, and finally the days of the Messiah.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, and one of the intertestamental books¹ tell us Isaiah was the sole author. The Qumran caves held an entire scroll of Isaiah which showed no sign of segmentation and dated to around 200 B.C. But perhaps most convincing of all to us who believe in the inspiration of Scripture is that fact that

all three sections of Isaiah are quoted in the New Testament and ascribed to Isaiah.

To whet your appetite for what is to come, listen to what Jesus said about Isaiah. ⁴¹ *Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.* John 12:41 Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus and spoke of Him! Isaiah is mentioned by name 20 times in the New Testament. Quotations from Isaiah run throughout because his message is the message of the New Testament. The Messiah is coming to save the world!

The ESV study Bible introduction to Isaiah tells us, *Isaiah's message makes an impact on every reader in one of two ways. Either this book will harden the reader's pride against God (6:9-10; 28:13; 29:11-12) or it will become to the contrite reader a feast of refreshment in God (55:1-3; 57:15; 66:2).* I can say that I have seen that to be the case. Isaiah challenges us to see things not as the world sees, but as God sees them. This will not be an easy study. Isaiah is a seer and a poet. His lines are filled with metaphor and simile. The book does not flow like a narrative. It is a collection of different prophecies. It jumps from judgment to hope and comfort and then back again to judgment. Nevertheless, many have found Isaiah to be the richest of the Old Testament books.

Ray Ortlund Jr. began his commentary on Isaiah with a quotation from William Henry Green that I'd like you to consider. *Who can tell us whether this awful and mysterious silence, in which the Infinite One has wrapped himself, portends mercy or wrath? Who can say to the troubled*

conscience whether He, whose laws in nature are inflexible and remorseless, will pardon sin? Who can answer the anxious inquiry whether the dying live on or whether they cease to be? Is there a future state? And if so, what is the nature of that untried condition of being? If there be immortal happiness, how can I attain it? If there be an everlasting woe, how can it be escaped? Let the reader close his Bible and ask himself seriously what he knows upon these momentous questions apart from its teachings. What solid foundation has he to rest upon in regard to matters which so absolutely transcend all earthly experience and are so entirely out of the reach of our unassisted faculties? A man of facile faith may perhaps delude himself into the belief of what he wishes to believe. He may thus take upon trust God's unlimited mercy, his ready forgiveness of transgressors, and eternal happiness after death. But this is all a dream. He knows nothing, he can know nothing about it, except by direct revelation from heaven.²

What do we know? How can we know anything about the spiritual realm unless God reveals it? And God has revealed it to His prophets and sovereignly seen that it was written down for us to know spiritual truth in the midst of this fallen world.

Without any more introduction, let us begin. ¹ *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.* Isaiah 1:1 Isaiah prophesied during the reign of four kings. Early in his ministry the threat

was from Syria in league with the northern tribes of Israel. Later it was Assyria that was conquering the known world. Isaiah had visions that he often expressed in poetic form. He was seeing the Word of the Lord (2:1). The world sees and interprets with its limited abilities and is usually nowhere near understanding what is really taking place. The prophet is not influenced by worldly perception. He sees what God reveals of reality. This is why we so need our minds renewed by the Word of God today (Romans 12:2). How often we simply take a pundit's limited perceptions as factual. **We need to move beyond the limited resources of man and walk in the light of the Lord (2:5).**

Are you dumfounded as to why the world can't see things that are black and white to you? Without spiritual eyes they are unable to see (1 Corinthians 2:14). They take their opinion from someone else that is as blind as they (Luke 6:39). The Christian is often astonished at the lack of discernment expressed by the world. We can't understand why bad behavior is rewarded and destructive things are encouraged. We should know that those who walk in darkness cannot see. But when Isaiah's words confront *us*, we should also be aware that areas of our understanding may still be in darkness. Let us revere the Lord enough to be open to what He is trying to show us and willing to have a change in our thinking.

² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. Isaiah 1:2 Isaiah makes it clear that this is the Word of the

Lord. The heavens and the earth as inanimate objects without feeling are to bear witness to the rebellious condition of God's children. It was the language Moses used when he warned them of the cost of disobedience (Deuteronomy 30:19). God called Abraham and chose his descendants to be His children, to represent Him to the world (Deuteronomy 7:6). He reared them and brought them up for that purpose.

God delivered them from captivity and gave them a revelation on Sinai of how to live. He led them to the Promised Land. He gave them Judges to help guide them and delivered them from their enemies. When they cried out for a king, he gave them their request, knowing it was their rejection of God as their king (1 Samuel 8:7).

When they failed to represent God to the world, but became in every way as vile as the world and more so (2 Kings 21:9), He declared, "They have rebelled against me." There is pain in that decree. Some of you parents have felt that pain and are feeling it even now. Children have a choice. We tell them what is right for their own good, but the allurements of this world deceive them into thinking there is a better way. God knows that pain, as He watched Judah return to idolatry. Appearances deceived them. The apparent prosperity of their neighbors was not due to their false gods. Salvation does not come from leaning upon the powerful. The Lord is salvation. If they could only see. God help us see.

Do you really think electing a different set of leaders will save the nation? That is idolatry. **Our answer is not politics! It is**

turning to the Lord with all our heart (Deuteronomy 10:12). If our nation won't, you still can. But don't take up their idols. God sets up leaders, but He often gives us leaders we deserve. It's not enough to know that God reigns. We need to know that God is reigning.

Vote for the person that has the godliest stand, but don't put your hope in them. They can't save us. Only God can save! The way we speak reflects our hearts (Matthew 12:34). Are you looking to the Lord as the only hope for this nation? Or do you talk as if man has the answer? God has reared and brought us up as well. Hasn't He? God help us to stop rebelling against Him in our words and actions.

³ The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Isaiah 1:3 The Lord is telling them they are stupider than a cow or donkey. And so is everyone that doesn't know where to turn in times of need. It shows a lack of basic understanding that our hope is *only* found in the Lord (Psalm 62:2). Nothing in this world is dependable. Things aren't going to go like you hope. But God is there through it all and will strengthen you if you will let Him. He may rescue you or give you the perseverance to endure, but He won't fail you. This world will certainly fail you!

Believing the lie of self-dependence shows we have a lack of understanding an essential truth. God is the only One that is reliable, not reliable to do what you want, but to do what is right (Psalm 73:26). In the end, that is all that matters. Isaiah is declaring a convicting message. We lean

on our own understanding and no different than the world (Proverbs 3:5).

In our modern world, "conviction" is a bad word. Nothing is wrong with anything. But in reality, lack of conviction is psychopathic. Let me share one more Orland quote. *Conviction of sin is the lance of the divine Surgeon piercing the infected soul, releasing the pressure, letting the infection pour out. Conviction of sin is a health-giving injury. Conviction of sin is the Holy Spirit being kind to us by confronting us with the light we don't want to see and the truth we're afraid to admit and the guilt we prefer to ignore. Conviction of sin is the severe love of God overruling our compulsive dishonesty, our willful blindness, our favorite excuses. Conviction of sin is the violent sweetness of God opposing the sins lying comfortably undisturbed in our lives. Conviction of sin is the merciful God declaring war on the false peace we settle for. Conviction of sin is our escape from malaise to joy, from attending church to worship, from faking it to authenticity. Conviction of sin, with the forgiveness of Jesus pouring over our wounds, is life.*³

Do we understand where to turn in times of difficulty? Or are we rebellious children that are dumber than a donkey? That is pretty tough poetry. Is that too harsh? Is God being too tough on us? That very thought proves our rebellious nature. We don't want to hear the truth about ourselves. We'd rather not be disturbed in our mediocrity (Revelation 3:15-16).

These last two verses are really an expression of God's broken heart toward His children. Next God points out our broken strength. *⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.* Isaiah 1:4 The "Ah" tells us this is God's lament for our condition. Has any idol ever told you, "My yoke is easy!" It probably has, but then you find out it's a lie (Matthew 11:30). The idol's burden is crushing, constantly demanding more. It results in estrangement from God. That is a burden that is more than we can bear (Psalm 32:3). Our strength is cut off. Our comfort and hope are gone.

This is God's lament for what had become of those for whom He had such a glorious intent (Deuteronomy 28:1). How did they go from such promise to such bondage? They forsook the Lord and despised the Holy One of Israel. Is this what we are observing in our nation, or in our lives? Or is the Lord all our hope and strength, the One upon Whom we are depending?

Do we recognize our true condition? The Lord goes on to describe Judah as a man who is horribly wounded and sick but doesn't even realize it. *⁵ Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. ⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.* Isaiah 1:5,6 Do we realize how desperately needy we are? Don't we want to begin to return to

real health? Will we lie to ourselves and pretend we are not at death's door?

God's next illustration of Judah's need for God was a picture of an overpowered nation. *⁷ Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. ⁸ And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.* Isaiah 1:7-8 Some people think that this is literal, but it didn't come to that at this point in Judah's history. Spiritually they were like a shack left in field that had been picked over by their enemies. Little was left standing and nothing of substance remained. The enemy of their soul had plundered their spiritual wealth. God had such plans for them, but they had fallen to such a pathetic condition. Is the church today a tottering shack, our land overthrown by the enemy or are we charging the gates of hell (Matthew 16:18)?

Our last verse tells us of God's unfailing grace. *⁹ If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.* Isaiah 1:9 Left to ourselves we would become as vile as Sodom and Gomorrah and come under the wrath of God. But God is gracious. He would not let Judah be utterly destroyed for the promised Messiah was to come from the house of David (Isaiah 9:7). He keeps a remnant then and now that His witness might remain in the earth. It is the grace of God that reaches out and saves us, keeps us, strengthens us, leads us on to sanctification, and finally to glory in His presence. A few were still

following the Lord then and now, only because God is faithful.

Isaiah's prophecies challenge us to examine our spiritual condition from God's perspective. Are we being honest with Him and with ourselves? Do we turn to Him first in our time of need? Are we burdened with our sin? Have we rebelled and become estranged? His grace reaches out with healing in His hand and invites us to return. Will you take His hand?

Questions

- 1 What is the meaning of "Isaiah?"
- 2 How are Isaiah's and our times similar?
- 3 Why should we believe Isaiah wrote the whole book?
- 4 How can we know about any spiritual reality for certain?
- 5 How did God describe the people in vs 2-3?
- 6 What is modern day idolatry?
- 7 Why is conviction good?
- 8 What is God's heart in these verses?
- 9 How did God describe their condition?
- 10 Where do we see God's grace in these verses?