

God's Message to Us in Isaiah (Part 1)

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Introduction:

As most of you know, I have been preaching through the books of the Bible, usually with one sermon on each book.

- Today we are ready to begin the section that is called the Prophets.
- Isaiah is the first of these, so we will look at his book today.

My endeavour in this series has been to help you see how these books speak to us today.

- I want you to realise the relevancy of them.
 - The Bible is unique because it was given to us by the Holy Spirit in such a way that it applies not only to the people who first received it, but to all those who come after.
- The prophets are very helpful for us in that they, in accord with this principle, take the law (the five books of Moses) and expound it to their own generation.
 - In other words, they show the people of their day how the writings of Moses apply to them—they basically expound Moses.
 - So you have them addressing those who have spurned the grace of God, explaining why things have gone wrong, renewing God's promises of mercy, and telling the people what will happen if they repent and what will happen if they don't, and always telling them that in the end, God will accomplish his purpose in Christ to save the elect.
 - We learn from them how to apply the law and the gospel to ourselves today.
 - And these prophets also look into the future and speak more fully than Moses did of what God is going to do through His Son—of His coming and of His work and of the consequences of His work.
 - Without them, our understanding of Christ and His work would not be complete.
 - So you see that in the prophets, we have some very helpful and essential revelation from the LORD to help us in our walk with God.

Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophets (the Major Prophets include Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and sometimes Daniel is considered among them... and the Minor Prophets are the twelve prophets at the end of the Old Testament—Hosea through Malachi).

- Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophets because he is earliest of them.
 - Of course there was Moses the prophet who wrote the Law...
 - And there was Elijah and there was Elisha who lived prior to Isaiah, but they were not writing prophets—so Isaiah is the first of the writing prophets after Moses.
- He ministered from 740 BC until at least 681 BC (79 years)...
 - Jeremiah, the next major prophet, did not minister until 55 years later... in 626 BC, and Ezekiel did not come on the scene until 593 BC.

And talking about dates, I should probably mention that those Bible scholars who don't believe in supernatural prophecy do not believe that chapters 40-66 were written by Isaiah.

- Their unbelief will not permit them to accept that he could have written about future events and even named the name of Cyrus the Persian before Cyrus was even born.

- Of course there are some pretty specific prophecies about Babylon in the first 39 chapters, but they explain those away, or chalk them up to inserts by an editor.
- In fact, there is a lot of explaining away they have to do with Isaiah no matter how late they date it because it was definitely written before Christ came...
 - There is no way around that—The Christians did not revise the book that had already been in the hands of the Jews for several centuries...
- Yet, Isaiah says things about Christ that are absolutely amazing... two examples that stand out most of all are:
 - First, Isaiah chapter 53 where you have Christ bearing the transgressions of His people, being sacrificed as a lamb to atone for their sins, and God accepting His sacrifice.
 - Second, you have the many prophecies that speak about Jesus coming from Israel's line, even though they will be hardened so that only some accept Him—and that nevertheless when He comes the nations (that had little interest in God's kingdom) will come into it.
 - There is no way to predict such a thing without supernatural revelation.
- So to put it bluntly, anyone who reads Isaiah and does not accept it as revelation from God (which is what it claims to be all the way through) has to bury their head in the sand—they are denying the obvious because of a wicked heart of unbelief.
 - We all have the same sinful heart, even according to Isaiah himself, unless the Lord gives us His Holy Spirit to bring us to repentance and belief of the obvious.
 - Really, that is what faith is—it is simply believing what is obvious—obvious if sin were not blinding our minds.

So let's come to Isaiah as it is—a book of supernatural prophecy given to us by our gracious God for our instruction—to see what the Lord has for us.

- There is so much here that we will take two weeks to get through it all.

In Isaiah, there is this constant emphasis that in the end the LORD will save His elect by grace through Jesus Christ.

- Yes, it was written some 700 years before Christ came, but He had been promised since the fall.
- Often the dismal condition of Israel, through whom Christ was to come, made such salvation look impossible.
 - That was certainly the case in Isaiah's day as the people rebelled against God, but all through the long years of his ministry, Isaiah continued to emphasise that in the end, the LORD would bring His people to the salvation He had promised.

I. Isaiah chapter 1 & 2 set the pattern for the whole book.

A. It opens with the LORD bringing charges against His people.

- In Moses' day, the Lord had called heaven and earth to bear witness to His warnings against His people. .
- 1. Isaiah 1:2-4 has the charges brought against Israel before these witnesses:
 - **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.

- The LORD God of heaven had graciously adopted Israel as His children and over the past 7 or 8 centuries, He had faithfully and patiently cared for them.
 - But they had rebelled against Him and turned to serve other gods.
- 2. This charge could be brought against the church in almost every age.
 - The heavens and the earth have been here all along and they have seen it all.
 - They have seen how rebellious the church has been and how faithful God has been.

B. But what a gracious judge the LORD God is!

1. He has been chastening them as a loving Father.
 - And here we see Him pleading with His people to repent so that He will not have to keep on punishing them.
 - In verse 5, He says, **“Why should you be stricken anymore?”**
 - As a loving parent, He has no pleasure in punishing them—but He must keep doing it because they will not yield.
 - They are black and blue from His beatings, and He keeps having to strike them again because they are so stubborn.
 - In verse 7, He says, **“Your country is left to you desolate.”**
 - He goes on to describe the deplorable condition they have been brought to—all because of their sin.
 - In fact, if He had not spared them, they would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah—completely wiped out.
 - But also if He had not chastened them, they would have been wiped out as well.
- Our gracious LORD seems to be more pained by their wounds than they are—they just accepted it as the way things were,
 - but the LORD knew how different it would be if He were not having to keep on punishing them.
 - We see Jesus with this mind when He looks at Jerusalem and thinks of the destruction that is soon to fall on it for rejecting Him...
 - “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets—how often I would have gathered you, but you would not.”
2. In verses 10-15, He explains that even their worship is highly offensive to Him.
 - He calls it: **“trampling my courts with the multitude of your sacrifices.”**
 - Even when the outward form of their worship was right, the problem was that they were not repenting of their sins.
 - This is a weird thing about us Christians—we will keep on going through the motions even though we are living in defiance of God every day—
 - as if He will accept us because we went to church or said our prayers.

3. In verses 16-20, we see how this gracious Judge pleads with those He is charging to repent and calls them to come to Him for complete cleansing.
 - This is the gospel!
 - Look at the famous words in vs 18-19: **“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.**
 - It makes no sense for us to go on in our rebellion when we have a God who tenderly calls us to return to Him and be fully pardoned.
 - We know what He has done to secure our pardon.
 - How can we go on in our rebellion—there is no need for us to go on in it when we have a Saviour like Jesus—it is unreasonable to go on in it..
- C. In verses 24-31, He tells them what the consequences will be if they do not repent.
- It is rather surprising.
1. He says that He will rid Himself of His adversaries (v. 24)—of the people in the church who are against Him... there are always people like that in the church...
 - And the LORD will get rid of them, He will cast them into the outer darkness...
 - That is not the surprising part—the surprising part is the end result.
 - The end result is seen in the last part of verse 26—that they (the church) will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.
 - In other words, God is going to use the exile to purge out the rebellious among them and leave behind a faithful remnant.
 - He will use the exile to purify the church so that it won’t be ruined.
 - The exile will not destroy them... it will refine them so that they can fulfill what God has promised.
 2. When you think about it, persecution always refines the church. Consider how it worked in the case of Judah.
 - The LORD hardened the people through Isaiah’s ministry until it became necessary for Him to destroy even Jerusalem and drive them all out of the land.
 - He sent Babylon as His destroyer and they leveled Jerusalem and carried the people away.
 - But then 70 years later, God called them to come back and rebuild the temple.
 - The ones who did that were the ones who were earnest about serving the Lord.
 - It was kind of a restart for the church.
 - God has done that all through history. For example, when Jesus came.
 - He purged the church of His adversaries because they rejected Christ and there was a restart with those who were faithful.
 - The faithful were baptised and began to worship God in Jesus’ name.
 3. Of course those who repent have to be redeemed because they are sinners too.
 - It is just that they want to come to God and to serve Him on His terms.

- That is what makes them faithful—not that they have no sin—but that they come to God to be pardoned of their sin that they might serve Him.
- You see how the LORD shows that the outcome of His purging of His people is redemption in verse 27.
 - At the end of the day, vs. 27 says: **Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness.**
 - Isn't that marvellous?
 - The rest are destroyed (v. 28:)
 - **The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together, And those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.**

TRANS> All the way through Isaiah's prophecy, he shows how they are rebellious, how God will judge them, but how the outcome will be the salvation of the church.

- Not of the reprobate who are cast out, but of the true sons and daughters of God.
 - But there will also be a great blessing for the nations when the redeemer comes.

D. In chapter 2, Isaiah shows us what will happen to the nations when Jesus comes!

1. Look at 2:2-4:

- **Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.**

2. Do you see?

- These same people, His church that had become so corrupt that He was beating them black and blue,
 - would be the vehicle through which God's redemption would come into the world and by which the nations would be saved!
 - They bring forth Jesus Christ and then you have the nations of the world streaming to Christ—coming to His salvation that they might be His disciples.
 - This is still happening today.
 - You who are here worshipping God are part of this great movement of the nations to the LORD.

3. The salvation of the remnant and of the nations is the end result of God bringing the hammer of judgement down on His people to purge them.

- After all is said and done, the elect among them will be saved and the elect from all the nations of the world will be saved.
 - They will not even learn about war or prepare for war anymore.
 - They will deal with their problems in before the tribunal of God and stand under His word.
- This is something that is difficult for us to believe.

- But it appears from the way Isaiah describes it all that this is something we can expect to happen—as it says—in the last days, before and up unto the coming of Jesus Christ.
- It could mean that the people from the nations who are reconciled to God will not war with each other... but it seems to be rather that the nations will actually come to the LORD such that they will no longer fight.

TRANS> What a gracious Judge—a gracious Father—the LORD our God is!

- How He pleads with His people—
 - And still, even when they refuse to hear, He still refines them and pardons them and brings them at last to redemption and through them redeems the world!

E. But what of those who do not repent—both from Israel and the nations?

- The rest of chapter 2 describes it—they will meet with God’s judgment at the last day... what a terrifying thing!
 - They will want the mountains to fall on them... but it will be too late to hide.

TRANS> Isaiah makes it clear that this is how it will be.

- But alas, the church in Isaiah’s day was still in her rebellion...
 - Isaiah charges them with foolish wickedness and unbelief in chapters 3-5.
- And then in chapter 6, we see his extraordinary call to be God’s prophet.
 - God shows His holiness to Isaiah leaving this holy prophet overwhelmed by his own sin and that of his people—“**Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips!**”
 - God then cleanses Isaiah’s lips with a coal from the altar—
 - The pain of this is hardly noticed by Isaiah, it is rather a great relief—
 - There is nothing a person will want more than purification when they stand before the living God.
 - And then Isaiah is told that his ministry will actually harden the church.
 - But remember, God was hardening them that He might bring them into exile so that He can purify them and bring out a faithful remnant.
- You will not understand Isaiah unless you understand that.
 - As in our day, the church as a whole is corrupt, but we minister to the elect within the church, not that we can distinguish them, but that God can.
 - He is pleading through us, but the actual blessing of ministry only gets through to the elect who are contrite and seeking the LORD as their Saviour.

And that brings me to the next thing I want to show you—

II. Look at how Isaiah teaches us to fear the LORD rather than the nations—however menacing and powerful they may be.

A. It is always our tendency to be like King Ahaz whom Isaiah confronts in chapter 7.

1. Ahaz is terrified because two enemy nations (Syria and Ephraim) have formed a confederation.
 - Ahaz is looking to the rising Assyrian Empire for help.

- Isaiah confronts Ahaz and tells him that Syrian and Ephraim will not last, but that Assyria whom he is trusting will be the very one that destroys him until the Lord supernaturally stops them.
 - In chapter 10, the LORD explains that the Assyrian is his rod that He is using to punish Israel with—and that they will destroy all of Judah except Jerusalem.
 - Though they will intend to destroy Jerusalem, God will stop them.
2. The point?
- That God is in control and He is the one we need to trust—not Assyria or any other great nation.
 - He is the one we need to fear—not Ephraim and Syria.
- B. And all the while that Isaiah is talking about trusting the LORD, He points to the Son of God who is coming to bring the promised ultimate peace.
1. He is showing Ahaz and all the people of the church that it is to God’s coming Son that they ought to be turned—not to Assyria!
 - a. In Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah presents Jesus as the Son that would be born to a virgin.
 - He says that His name will be *Immanuel* which means “God with us.
 - b. In Isaiah 9:6-7, He says, **“Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”**
 - Those are divine names—this Son born to them will be the very Son of God!
 - Verse 7 says: **Of the increase of His government, there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice, from that time forward, even forever.**
 - He is the promised Son of David whose throne will endure forever!
 - His kingdom will never be brought down.
 - c. In Isaiah 11, we are told even more about the Son and His ministry.
 - Here He is described as coming from David’s line—from a root of Jesse...
 - And then we are told that He will be anointed with the Holy Spirit—(v. 2)
 - As a Son among us, He will be wise and holy and just.
 - Once again, we told that His reign will bring such change to the world that the nations will no longer fight each other (v. 6-9).
 - He will be a banner lifted up (see 11:10) to call the Gentiles.
 - As we saw in chapter 2, so we see here again—the Gentiles will come.
- What plans the LORD has for His people through His Son!
2. How foolish Ahaz was to look to the King of Assyria when the Son of David, the Son of God, was promised.
 - How foolish we are even now that Christ has been revealed to look to the rulers of this world to solve our problems...
 - and to live in fear of powerful nations when we have the Son of God to turn to.
 - We need an eternal perspective so we can have peace even when the world is in a sorry state.

- Yes, God is angry and He has raised up enemy nations now...
 - But the day is coming when those who trust the Lord will say, (Isa 12) **“Though you were angry, your anger is turned away and you comfort me.”**
 - And they will praise the LORD.
 - Those who trusted in Assyria or Egypt will be brought to ruin.
3. The point is, God is on His throne, ruling over the nations.
- It is not the will of the nations that is done, but His will.
 - Of course there are times when His will coincides with theirs... as when Assyria wanted to destroy nations—that was God’s will...
 - The King of Assyria got so swollen up with pride... not realising that the LORD was the one who raised him up.
 - It was God’s will to use Assyria as His rod for a time, but then it was His will to stop Assyria at the gates of Jerusalem.
 - If you are wise, you will trust the LORD.
 - You say, as Isaiah 12:2 does, **“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.”**
- The LORD wants to be sure that we don’t miss the fact that He rules the nations.
- He does not want there to be any doubt about it. So...
- C. To make it super clear, He declares through Isaiah what will become of Judah and all the nations around her.
1. This goes on from chapter 13 to chapter 24.
 - Isaiah speaks of Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria and Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt (another nation they turned to for help), Babylon (again), Edom, Jerusalem, Tyre, and the whole earth.
 - These were all nations with which they were familiar, and God (through Isaiah’s writings) tells them what will happen to each one—before it happens.
 2. This is followed by two great chapters of praise—chapters 25 and 26.
 - Chapter 25 begins with these words: **“O LORD, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.”**
 - His counsels are His plans—they are faithfulness and truth—they are certain and sure.
 - Chapter 26 opens with these words: **“In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.’ ”**
 - **In 26:12: “LORD, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us.”**
 - The more we learn to trust the LORD, the better off we will be!
 - We have hope in the resurrection: Isa 26:19: **“Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”**
 3. God tells about trouble that will come to Israel and Judah and Jerusalem (chapter 28-31), but there will also be restoration for the elect remnant.

- Chapter 35:10 speaks of that restoration and of how **the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**
- This is our hope.

D. Many of the prophecies about the nations were fulfilled in Isaiah's lifetime.

1. One major fulfillment that is highlighted in Isaiah is the marvellous deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria in 701 BC.

- Jerusalem was helpless, humanly speaking, before the Assyrian army.
 - With little effort, the Assyrians had swept through the nations, conquering them all; and Jerusalem, as far as their fortifications, was no different.
- We are told in Isaiah 36-37 of how the Assyrians taunted the people for refusing to surrender when they didn't have chance of standing.
 - But godly King Hezekiah would not be intimidated.
 - Instead, he presented all the threats of the King of Assyria and laid them before God in prayer.
 - Isaiah told Hezekiah that the LORD would not let Assyria enter Jerusalem—the very thing he had told Ahaz many years before.
- In chapter 37:36-38, we are told what God did.
 - The Assyrian army was encamped all around Jerusalem.
 - Verse 36 begins: **Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead.** ³⁷ **So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh.** ³⁸ **Now it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place."**

2. What a clear lesson this was for the people in Isaiah's day that God is the one who rules the nations... that He is the one who ought to be feared!

- What a clear lesson it is for the church in all ages!
- They could look at all the other nations too that Isaiah had prophesied about.
 - What God said would happen to them is what did happen.
 - There was no excuse for unbelief—unbelief is due to hardness of heart.

TRANS> But after this great victory where Assyria is not allowed to enter Jerusalem, Isaiah reveals something astonishing to King Hezekiah.

- In Isaiah 39:6-7, he says: **"Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,"** says the LORD. ⁷ **And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."**
 - In other words, even though God stopped Assyria from conquering Jerusalem, He will not stop Babylon!
- The rest of the book of Isaiah speaks about this.
 - God through Isaiah prepares His peoples for this terrible event.

- The prophecy is meant to comfort the godly people by telling them, as I have been saying to you, what the outcome will be!
 - The destruction of Jerusalem is deliberate on God's part!
 - The exile of His people is deliberate.
 - Though it will be extremely difficult for His people, it is part of God's plan to bring about His salvation through His Son at last.

III. In chapter 40-66, God, through Isaiah, tells what the exile will lead to.

A. In Isaiah 40, the LORD speaks of a great day when He will comfort His people.

1. The opening words are these: **“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” says your God. 2 “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.”**
 - This speaks of the coming of Christ who at last will fully pay for their sins—making a complete atonement...
 - But we will pick up here next week.
 - Isaiah is one of those books that we will spend two weeks on.

Conclusion: But take to heart what we have learned today from Isaiah...

- That the LORD at times becomes very angry with His church...
 - That He is forced to punish us for our refusal to turn back to Him...
 - That He pleads with us to repent and be washed through Christ.
 - But that even when we refuse, He still carries out His plan to bring salvation to the earth.
 - Those who do not repent and turn to Him will be cut off, but those who trust Him are assured of His blessing in the end.
- He is the one who is able to bless or curse.
 - The nations are all in His hands and He uses them to accomplish His purposes for His elect people.