

"ISAIAH, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

April 6, 2025, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Isaiah 1:1-4; 40:1-5, 9; 53:3-6

Introduction.

We turn this evening to the final of the four sections of the OT.

In the first five books, call the Torah, the Pentateuch or the *Law of Moses* the foundation was laid for God's redemptive purposes following the fall, and for the revelation of Christ as the righteousness of God.

The 12 *historical* books gave further preparation for Christ through the prophets, priests, kings, temple and the sacrifices.

The five *wisdom* books or poetic books give us practical wisdom for addressing the problems, experiences, beliefs, attitudes and actions that are most common to human life.

Now through the 17 *prophetic books* of the writing prophets we have the nation of Israel, through the prophets, looking forward with great expectation to Christ, predicting the coming of the Messiah, the coming of His kingdom, and the coming day of God's judgment.

These seventeen books are divided into the Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. And the Minor Prophets, the twelve shorter books at the end of our English OT. Those twelve got grouped because they could all fit on one papyrus scroll.

They are not minor because they are of lessor importance, they are not, they are all prophets equal in importance to the major prophets. They are minor because their books are shorter.

The prophets make up over 25% of the OT. The prophetic word is the *exclusive* way for God's people to receive God revelation of His will. The only true and legitimate way to know God and His will is through His Word delivered by His prophets and later His apostles.

Over 140 times just in the prophecy of Isaiah he says "thus says the Lord, or the Lord says."

The writing prophets reveal God's character, His redemptive plan, and His call to live faithfully before Him. As we study them, may we respond with repentance, worship, obedience, and a firm hope in Christ, who is the fulfillment of all prophecy (Luke 24:44).

Isaiah

Isaiah is a intimidating book, but its message is huge and important for understanding the Bible. As much if not more than any other OT book, it gives us preparation and context for the NT. It is quoted in the NT more than all the other prophetic books put together (over 400 times), and second only to Psalms. It is called the theological masterpiece of the OT, the Romans of the OT.

The Bible as first written had no chapters or verses. In fact, the early Hebrew OT had no vowels, and the early Greek Bibles were written in all caps, with no spaces or punctuation.

In the 13th century a Catholic priest, Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury gave us our modern chapter divisions and two hundred years later a printer in Paris added the verses.

We don't know if Stephen Langton was having a little fun when he gave Isaiah has 66 chapters, just like the Bible has 66 books. And the first 39 chapters of Isaiah roughly correspond to the 39 chapters of the Old Testament, while the last 27 chapters (same as books in the NT) focus on the arrival of the Messiah.

If he wasn't intentionally thinking that, then maybe it was God who was having a bit of fun in giving Isaiah these divisions and structure.

As with all the other books of the prophets, this one is named after it's author. Isaiah was married to a prophetess and had two sons. He was a family man. He lived in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 1:1 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 prophesied from 739-681BC during a time of decline and persistent rebellion against God. Their hearts were far from God and they engaged in idolatry and meaningless worship and sacrifices and great injustices. Their apostacy led God to raise up Isaiah as one of the pre-exilic prophets to warn Judah of God's impending judgment if His chosen people don't repent and turn back to Him.

God is sovereign over all human history and He always announces and reveals His purposes to His servants the prophets well before it happens.

Isaiah 46:9-11 Remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’
11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

During his ministry, the northern kingdom, Israel, fell to Assyria, then Assyria fell to Babylon and Babylon pressed in on the southern kingdom, Judah. Isaiah played a key role.

Isaiah ministered in a time when the old world order was changing. God’s chosen covenant people who were a sovereign nation, was being taken over by Gentile nations. What would this mean for them and their relationship with their God? Is God sovereign if godless nations defeat Israel?

This is not unlike the state of Christianity in America. What was once viewed as a Christian nation with a general favorable disposition toward Christianity has shifted to decidedly post-Christian or even anti-Christian. How will the church respond in such an environment? Will the church bend to accommodate the new reality, like Israel, or will the church hold true and faithful to God, like Judah after exile.

All through Isaiah the problem is clearly stated.

Isaiah 1:2, 4 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.
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.

Judah was constantly rebelling against God and their rebellion took three forms.

Judah trusted in other kings and other nations.

Isaiah 31:1, 3 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very
strong,

but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!

3 The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.

When the Lord stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall,
and they will all perish together.

Later they trusted in Assyria and then when Babylon defeated Assyria, they trusted in Babylon.

To those who trusted in kings and nations, the Lord says:

Isaiah 40:15, 17 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales; ...

17 All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

They trusted in other gods, in the idols of the pagan and adulterous nation.

Isaiah 2:8 Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their own fingers have made.

Woe to those who put their trust in what their hands have made.

They trusted in themselves.

Isaiah 29:14-16 The wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.”

15 Ah, you who hide deep from the Lord your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, “Who sees us? Who knows us?”

16 You turn things upside down!

Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker,
“He did not make me”; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no
understanding”?

Isaiah 40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

Woe to those who trust in kings and rulers and other nations, in man and man’s ways, in idols.

Idols are impotent, worthless, deaf, dumb and blind.
Kings fail us, let us down, and kings die.
We are weak, youths grow weary, faint and fall down exhausted.

Isaiah 6

The essence of the message of Isaiah is summarized in his great vision at the time of his call to the prophetic ministry.

Isaiah 6:1-8 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” 9 And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

First, Isaiah exalts the kingship of God as Lord and King over His people. Earthly rulers rise and fall and die. The Lord is high and lifted up, ruling and reigning on His throne forever. Don’t miss the contrast. Despite whatever happens to rulers on earth, God remains.

A supernatural sign is given of a coming king, a son of David, in the Messiah, God with us. He will be mighty God and everlasting Father.

Second, he exalts the defining characteristic of God as holy. Isaiah’s vision of a thrice-holy God profoundly affected his ministry, his preaching, his writing. Twenty-five times in his prophecy he calls God, the holy one of Israel.

His deeds are holy, His dwelling place is holy. All that God does is holy.

Third, God is the universal God, the whole earth is full of His glory. God is not a local or regional deity. God created the whole world. God is sovereign over all the nations and all the gods. Including Assyria and Babylon.

Fourth, Isaiah exposes the utter sinfulness of God's own people. He announces, "woe is me." All are defiled by sin. Their iniquities have separated them from their God.

But Isaiah also announces the hope of atonement from the altar of sacrifice. This is astonishing, their sins are atoned for, paid for, forgiven, forgotten, never to be remembered again.

How? A special righteous suffering servant of the Lord is crushed for the iniquities of His people as He bears in Himself the guilt of their sin (Isaiah 53).

Fifth, Isaiah preaches and proclaims his message to a people who are rendered unable to hear the Word of the Lord. Part of God's judgment on the sinfulness of His people is to render them blind and deaf and dumb.

But the day will come when a people walking in darkness will see a great light. The great consummation of this will be the coming of the Messiah.

Sixth, and finally, Isaiah 6:11-13 flows from Isaiah's call to ministry, that he announces the exile of God's people and then the restoration and return.

It is noteworthy given our study of Romans 11 that the inclusion of the Gentiles is a prominent theme in Isaiah. There is a coming new era in God's people.

"Stated briefly, the purpose of Isaiah is to display God's glory and holiness through His judgment of sin and His deliverance and blessing of a righteous remnant."

Read Isaiah to get a vision for the holiness of God, to be humbled by your sin, and convicted to confess your sin and seek His forgiveness and cleansing that your sin be made whiter than snow.

Jesus

Isaiah lays the foundation for the New Testament. It shows how the promise to Abraham is fulfilled. All the families of the earth find blessing through faith in Isaiah's Servant-King.

Isaiah contains one of the clearest expressions of the gospel and the most comprehensive prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the entire Old Testament.

The Gospel According to Isaiah:

Isaiah promised that a virgin would conceive, and that her son would be Immanuel (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). Before His arrival, a messenger would come to prepare the way (Is. 40:3; Matt. 3:3; Jn. 1:23). This Son would become a stone in Israel—some would trust in Him (Is. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rom. 9:33; 10:11), and others would stumble over Him (Is. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:8; Rom. 9:33). That Son would arise in Galilee of the Gentiles (Is. 9:1-2; Matt. 4:15-16). He would have the government of all nations placed upon His shoulders, and that government would never cease to grow (Is. 9:6-7). He would be the Root of Jesse, and all the nations would stream to Him (Is. 11:10; Rom. 15:12). All the heavenly lights would collapse on the old Israel (Is. 13:10; Matt. 24:29), and the new Israel would be established. At the culmination of His reign, this Messiah would swallow up death forever (Is. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:54).

This would all be done on the basis of the vicarious and substitutionary death of the Servant of God, the suffering Servant. He is the one who took up our infirmities and who carried our sorrows to the cross (Is. 53:4; Matt. 8:17). He is the one who was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is. 53:7-8; Acts 8:32-33). He had done no violence Himself (Is. 53:9; 1 Pet. 2:22), but was numbered with the transgressors regardless (Is. 53:12; Luke 22:37).

He was pierced for our transgressions (Is. 53:5). He was crushed for our iniquities (Is. 53:5). He was stricken by God, smitten and afflicted (Is. 53:4). By His stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5) (Doug Wilson).

The solution to all the problems exposed in Isaiah, trusting in idols, in man and in self, is to trust in one person, the Messiah who is also the suffering servant, and the soon coming reigning King.

Read Isaiah to ignite a desire to worship and love Jesus, to be moved by what He endured and suffered to save us.

Implications and application.

Isaiah 64:4 From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for Him.

Read Isaiah to receive all the redemptive promises of God made to His people and still true today. Wait on the Lord. Know that nothing in your life is hidden from Him. He sees, understands, and is with you. Hope expectantly in the Lord; He will give you new strength to overcome.

Luke 4:17-21 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Today this Scripture is fulfilled.

God is real, present, personal with His people. God cares for His people, showing them His love and discipline. There is not much praise of God in this book, very little about our love for God. But we hear God's love for us, tenaciously pursuing us sending His Son, a redeemer, providing a way of salvation. This is the message and hope of Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:28-31 Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;

31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles;

they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.