

The Prophets Still Speak
Isaiah 1:1-4 & 10-20

Okay, here's the scenario for today. It's late at night. It's a bit foggy and hard to see and you are on your way home in Runaway Bay. You are almost there and as you get to the bridge going over Lake Bridgeport, you see something weird. You slow down just in time as you realize the whole bridge has collapsed. You barely saw it in the fog but you are able to pull over and put your flashers on. You get out of your car with a flashlight and you flag down the car behind you. It stops and the driver rolls down the window. *"The bridge is..." "Hey, have you heard this new song on the radio? It's Taylor Swift! It's great!"* And they drive off and you see their taillights disappear.

Before you can do anything else, another car is coming and you flag them down with your flashlight. They stop. Window comes down. *"The bridge is..." "Hey, get outta the way, ya freak!"* And they drive off and you see the taillights disappear once again. Third car comes up, pulls over and rolls the window down and this time you explain that the bridge is out and they need to turn around. But they tell you that they are glad that you have that knowledge but they don't feel like the bridge is out. Thank you, though. And they drive off to their doom.

How does that make you feel? Well, welcome to the life of the Old Testament prophet. The prophets had a hard job. They were spokesmen for God. And rarely did God use them to preach happy happy joy joy messages. It was usually, *"If y'all don't stop acting the fool, God is going to smack you down."* And sometimes God would have them do crazy things to get His message across. Isaiah went nude for three years. (Isaiah 20) Jeremiah had to wear the yoke of an ox around his neck. (Jeremiah 28) Hosea had to marry a hooker. And Jonah tried not to be a prophet and got eaten by a big ol' fish. So, being a prophet was not a great job to have, at least this side of Heaven.

There were major prophets and minor prophets, not because of what they said or how important it was but just because of the length of the books they wrote. The prophets came on the scene in the days of Samuel, the last of the judges, and continued all the way to the end of the Old Testament. And while the job might not have been highly sought after, the prophets had some of the best stories in all of scripture. Think about Elijah and Elisha, Moses and David. And how could we forget all the great things that Obadiah did, right? Somebody tell me your favorite Obadiah story. I'll wait. Okay, maybe not. Anyway...

So, at the end of the Old Testament there was silence from God and from the prophets for about 400 years. And some people may think that the prophets' messages died with them. They prophesied mainly to Israel and to the surrounding countries and they spoke and wrote thousands of years ago so surely there is nothing for us to learn from the prophets, right? Well, I believe their messages are still valid, not just for us today but in some cases, valid for Israel today as well. I believe the prophets still speak to us today.

We are going to look at just four of the major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. And this is something I have been looking forward to for a while now. With the war raging in and around Israel right now, some of what the prophets said could very well come true in our lifetimes. That's exciting and a little bit scary so we need to know what they said and what we can take from it. We do have to remember that these books were not written to us or about us but there are some very pertinent things written that pertain to us and are affecting or will affect us.

So, let's start with Isaiah. When you study the book of Isaiah, the forewords in these commentaries go on for days about Isaiah the man and just what an amazing author he was. I'm talking Shakespeare-level quality with the excitement of Dante and the vocabulary of Homer or some other great writer. God gave him that talent and then used that talent to prophecy two things. There are two things that summarize Isaiah's preaching and those are judgment and comfort. In fact, the first half or so of the book is the judgment God is going to bring on Israel if they don't repent and start being

obedient. But the last half or so is about the comfort, the peace, the joy that comes with that repentance. Isaiah taught BOOCOD way before I ever did. He knew that there were benefits of obedience and consequences of disobedience. BOOCOD.

Let's read part of **Isaiah chapter 1**. Isaiah is found near the middle of your Bible between **Song of Solomon** and **Jeremiah**. Put a bookmark in there somewhere because next week we will read from Jeremiah. But for today I want to start with **Isaiah 1:1-4** and then skip to **verse 10 and read to 20**. Isaiah 1 says, *"The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2 Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." 4 Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.* Skip over to **verse 10**. *"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 11 "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. 2 When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? 13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. 14 Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! 16 Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. 17 Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. 18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; 20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

The great W.A. Criswell said that Isaiah *"is a master in words and in poetic form and flights of oratory. He is an artist in nomenclature and in language. Hyperbole, parable, epigram, antithesis, interrogation, dialogue, metaphor, simile, paronomasia, play on words—there is no man in human literature that rivals the mighty Isaiah."* I don't even know what all of that is but I know Criswell was a pretty good wordsmith himself so that is high praise. And we see some of that just in this first chapter.

He starts out by using language reminiscent of a courtroom. The people of Israel are on trial and God is the judge. But at the same time, Isaiah describes God as the Father of the ones being tried. Can you imagine being a just and respected judge and your own child comes into your courtroom accused of a horrible crime? Can you imagine the heartbreak of the judge who has to convict and sentence his own flesh and blood?

Verse 2 starts by calling all the heavens and earth to be witnesses in the case and then he says, *"I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."* As a parent, you know what it is like to have your child rebel against you. If your kid is older than about 24 hours, you know what rebellion looks like. You know from experience what the right way is. You made it plain to your child. They understood what you said and then turned right around and did the opposite. And you know that your own dog knows better, don't you? That is exactly what God is saying through Isaiah right there in **verse 3**. The ox and the donkey know what to do but God's own people act like they don't know.

This is the problem so many people have with obeying what God says to do. They know what the Bible says. God has made it plain. We have the Ten Commandments. We have the Sermon on the Mount. We have all of scripture. We know it's wrong to lie, cheat and steal. We know what God says about lust, greed and envy. We understand the words and we know that God, the Creator of us all has said it...but I...

That's what we say - consciously or unconsciously. I know God said not to worry BUT I have a lot going on. I know God said we gather together BUT I have to work on Sunday. I know God said to give BUT I have bills to pay. I know God said not to take His name in vain BUT I have a habit. I know God said...BUT I...

The great actor and not so great theologian, Brad Pitt, was interviewed by Rolling Stone Magazine in 1999 and the interviewer asked him at one point about religion. Pitt said, *"I would call it oppression because it stifles any kind of personal individual freedom."* (Rolling Stone, Oct. 1999) I know God said it BUT I want my individual freedom. Does that sound like your kid going through the terrible 2's? Or maybe even the terrible 22's?

Don't put that fork in the light socket! But I want my freedom!

Don't speed when you drive. But I'm a good driver.

Don't drink or do drugs. But I want to look cool.

Later on, God, through Isaiah accuses them of idolatry and they are all like, *"What? What do you mean? We don't worship idols."* Anything you put before God is an idol including yourself. And when you say, *"I know God said this but I'm going to do that..."* That is idolatry. Read verse 4 again. *"They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him."* How is that not idolatry?

Then in **verse 10**, God just flat out insults them. The commentaries wouldn't call it that but that's what it is. Look at it again. *"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah!"* Ouch! That had to hurt. These were not the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. But God is comparing them to Sodom and Gomorrah. Those two cities were so evil that God just absolutely destroyed them with fire and sulfur. Even the Quran has a story about those twin cities. Everybody knew that was as bad as it gets.

It's like when somebody today wants to insult you, they compare you to somebody really evil. I heard Hillary Clinton say this past week that Donald Trump was just like Hitler. That's the name everybody uses today. *"Oh, he's just like Hitler!"* Right? It's not because the person has killed six million Jews in gas chambers. It's just that is the worst person we can relate to. Same for the Israelites and Sodom and Gomorrah.

Then in this next part, God describes their worship of Him in extraordinary ways. And for this, I want you to remember the courtroom scene we are in. The judge is the Father. The accused is their child. The child has rebelled against the Father and committed a horrible crime. And then I want you to picture this. Picture yourself as the judge and you are judging your own beloved child and in the middle of the trial your kid comes to you and says, *"Here. I got you this present. It's a gold bracelet. I know you like jewelry. So, here ya go."* What would you say? You would say, *"I don't want your present, you little Hitler. I want you to repent. I want you to be sorry. I want you to do what is right."*

Then they say, *"Oh, ok, well then how do you like this pair of diamond earrings I got you? Just for you. Here you go."* Is it all better now? Is your relationship restored because they spent money on you? They have rebelled against what you told them to do and committed a horrible crime and they want to give you gifts to get back in your good graces. No remorse. No repentance. No change of heart at all. They plan to keep doing what they have been doing and every now and then they will toss you a gift to keep you quiet. Is that what you want? Of course not. And that's not what God wants either.

"The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. 2 When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? 13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me."

In the Old Testament, before Jesus came to Earth, they sacrificed animals to cover over their sin. That was God's plan and that was what He wanted because it was costly. Sin is costly. It was then and it is now. But God didn't want sacrifices made so He could have sacrifices. The sacrifices weren't the point. Do you see how ludicrous that is to God? He owns everything. He created everything. He didn't want their sacrifices of dead animals or even their sacrifices of prayer or praise or anything else.

Look at **verses 15-16** again. *"Your hands are full of blood! 16 Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. 17 Learn to do right."* You know what this is? This is the same kind of mentality that makes it hard for me to preach on giving. Because as soon as I say that God expects you to give to the church, what happens? *"Oh, there he goes again, Ethyl, preaching on money. It's always money, money, money around here."*

I will say it again. God doesn't want your money. I will even say it loud and proud. This church, Christ Fellowship, doesn't want your money! I'm serious. I don't care if you give a dime. That's between you and God and it's your blessing to miss out on. But it's not about money. It never has been. And some preachers make it about money and that is their sin and they will answer to God for it. But God doesn't want your money anymore than He wanted the Old Testament Israelites' dead bulls and goats. What's He gonna do with that?

He wants you to make yourselves clean. Stop doing wrong and learn to do right. No excuses.

"Well, my daddy had a bad temper and so do I. It's just how I was born." No, it's not. Stop it!

"Yeah, so I use a little bad language every now and then. It's a hard habit to break." Well, break it and stop!

"Yes, I watch a little porn sometimes but at least I'm not Hitler, right?" Stop it. Stop doing wrong and learn to do right. It's what God told the Israelites through the prophet Isaiah and it's what He is telling **us** today through the prophet Isaiah.

I love **verse 18** and I love how the old NIV translates it. Picture it. The Creator of the universe, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords said to the Israelites and is saying to you today, *"Come here. Let's reason together. Let me explain it to you and you will understand. It will make sense when you spend time with Me."* That's what God wants. When you are close to Him and you are willing and obedient, you will know what He wants and what pleases Him.

Yes, there is judgment. God is the Judge and He is a righteous and fair judge and He will condemn you just like He did the nation of Israel. But do you see the comfort He wants to give in **verses 18-19**? Do you see the amazing grace God wants to show you? The Almighty Judge does not pronounce the sentence. He laid the choice before the accused. The evidence was clear. The verdict: guilty. The divine Judge offered one more chance, however, for a new start. Obey and prosper or remain rebellious and die? (Layman's Bible Book Commentary, Isaiah, page 21)

Yes, the prophet Isaiah still speaks to us today and I believe He still speaks to the nation of Israel today. We are all guilty and what we deserve for that guilt is eternal death in Hell. That part I get from the New Testament book of **Romans chapters 3 and 6**. That's bad news. But the Good News is that Jesus (yes, Israel, Jesus) lived, died and rose again to pay the price for your sins and mine and He sits at the Father's right hand right now and is on the edge of His seat about to get up and come get His bride, the church, to be with Him. Are you ready?

If you died today, do you know for certain that you would go to Heaven? All you have to do is accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Repent of that old lifestyle and come reason with God. Come close to Him and He will come close to you. Do it right now as the music plays.