

## Sermon Isaiah 1 God's Charge

Today we begin to look at the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapters 1-11. Isaiah was a prophet who lived around 700BC. He had a very powerful message for the people of God, Israel.

1. First of all, God's people have been unfaithful to God. They've been disobedient and ignored him.
2. Second, even though his people are unfaithful, God is faithful. God loves his people and even though they've sinned against him, He cares for them and wants to save them.

**Isaiah is a book about who God wants us to be as His people.** We are meant to be different. We are meant to stand out from the world. Yet, so often, we are so much *like* the world in the way we live. We often follow the gods of our world and the desires of the world. But this is not who God wants us to be.

**III:** Let's start by thinking about this: How would you describe yourself? If someone asked you to describe yourself in 5 words or less, what would you say?

(Pause for answers)

Hardworking. Intelligent. Good looking. Humble. Wealthy.  
What about Faithful? Loving? Obedient? Godly?

How would God describe you? You see, this is what matters. What matters to us is how God sees us. What God thinks of us. Not what the world thinks of us.

In our world today, we are often so interested in what other people think of us. So much of the world is driven by what WE want to be, or what OTHERS want us to be. We want to look good. We want to be well educated. We want to be wealthy. Maybe not wealthy, but at least *comfortable* in life. We want to be successful. And those desires easily become our gods.

If we are the people of God, what is important is who GOD wants us to be.

### So what did God's people looked like during the time of Isaiah? Chapter 1.

*Verse 2, God says: "I reared children and brought them up,  
but they have rebelled against me.*

*(verse 4) They have forsaken the Lord;  
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel  
and turned their backs on him.*

*(verse 5) Why do you persist in rebellion?*

### **They are rebelling against God. And look at what's happening in their nation:**

*(verse 7) Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire;  
your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you,  
laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.*

They are being destroyed by foreign powers. Their nation is falling apart, and God says it's because they are *rebell*ing against him. So God is *allowing* them to be destroyed by other nations because of their disobedience. But, verse 9...

*Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors,*

*we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.*

God is still looking after them. God is still helping them to survive. There is SOME hope. God has not abandoned them. Because God NEVER abandons his people. If it weren't for God, they would have been totally destroyed by now.

- **God still cares for us**

And that's the first thing we want to take home today. No matter how disobedient we have been, no matter how sinful and rebellious we have been against God, he still loves us and still cares for us. It's sometimes easy to think that, in our darkest times, God will abandon us. That we don't deserve his presence in our life. But God will not do that. He will not give up on us. But he will keep calling us back to him, to be faithful to him.

So in what ways do Israel (and us!) need to reform our lives? In what ways is God calling them back to him?

- **Let's have a look at the life of Israel.**

**A. First, their religious life.**

What were they doing in their religious life? What was "church" like for them?

**1. The were sacrificing:**

verse 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.*

They're bringing plenty of sacrifices to God. He has more than enough! But he's not pleased with them. Offering more and more, sacrificing more and more to God is not the answer to their problems.

**2. They were worshipping**

Verse 13-14

*New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—  
I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.  
14Your 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.*

They are having plenty of religious ceremonies and services. But God is not happy with them. They're meeting together and worshipping and celebrating, but that's also not the answer to their problems.

**3. And they were praying: verse 15...**

*15When 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!*

They are praying, and praying, but God is not listening. Why? Because their hands are full of blood. They sacrifice, they worship, they pray, but something is happening in their life that is not right with God. So what is it? What is the problem?

### **B. Let's look at their social life.**

How are they looking after each other? Verse 17...

*17 Learn to do right; seek justice.*

*Defend the oppressed.*

*Take up the cause of the fatherless;*

*plead the case of the widow.*

They're NOT looking after each other. They're NOT looking after the oppressed, the fatherless, the widows. What else? Verse 21...

*21 See how the faithful city*

*has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice;*

*righteousness used to dwell in her— but now murderers!*

verse 23...

*23 Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves;*

*they all love bribes and chase after gifts.*

They're being prostitutes. Following other gods, sexual infidelity, murder. Their leaders take bribes. Their life does not reflect their sacrifices or their worship. They sacrifice and worship and pray, but they are still doing evil to each other.

- **So who does God want US to be?**

What is our life like? How are we relating to God? We might be sacrificing to him. We might be worshipping him and praying and doing all the things we think we should do. But what about our heart? If our heart belongs to God, how are we dealing with the **sin** our life?

God says to Israel, through Isaiah, "You can sacrifice and worship and pray. But there is one thing that **must** come first. **A repentant heart.**

Sacrifice and worship and prayer mean nothing to God if we do not repent of our sin. Unless we turn away from the sin in our life. The **only** hope for Israel, and the **only** hope for us, is if our hearts are repentant. Listen to the great promise in verses 18-20...

*"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.*

There is the promise. If you are willing and obedient. If you are prepared to come to God with all of your sin and ask for forgiveness, if you are prepared to repent, then God will accept your sacrifice, and your worship and your prayers.

So what does it mean to **repent**?

It means to not only recognize that we have done wrong against God, but that we also want to **turn away** from that sin. Repentance is about asking for forgiveness for our sin and then **turning away** from that sin. We need to do both!

Often we make that step to ask for forgiveness. But do we make the step of turning away from that sin? Of actually dealing with that sin in our life? Do we walk away from temptation? Do we turn away from situations that lead us into sin?

This was the problem for Israel. And this is often the problem we face. We often delight in the world instead of delighting in God. We get wrapped up in the desires and pursuits of the world and we can forget about God. We indulge in worldly sin and we get so comfortable with it that we learn to live with it, instead of repenting of it. We go on worshipping and sacrificing and praying, but we leave the sin in our life. And we've all done that...

Verse 22... *your choice wine is diluted with water.*

When you take a nice choice wine, and add water, it degrades the wine. It dilutes it. And the water goes through the whole wine. It affects every part of it. And in our life, when we allow sin to remain in us, it affects every part of us – it dilutes us and degrades us. And it affects every part of our life, every day.

God is serious about sin. He wants us to have a relationship with him, but sin stands in the way of that relationship. And no matter how much we worship and sacrifice and pray, if we refuse to deal with the sin in our lives, then we refuse to relate to God in the way he wants us to.

Worship and sacrifice and prayer mean nothing to God if we are not repentant. If we are not dealing with the sin in our life. Asking for forgiveness, and then **turning away** from that sin.

C.S. Lewis said:

- ***“God doesn’t want something from us. He simply wants us.”***

He wants us. Our hearts. Our desires. Our life.

And when we give ourselves to him, he is **always** willing to wash away our sin and make us clean, and take away our shame and disgrace. He delights in our worship and sacrifice and prayers if we give ourselves, our hearts and our lives, to him.