

Lesson 20 Lecture

Isaiah 1:1-31 and 6:1-8:22

Last week, Carol gave us a quasi-break from this year's theme of God's warnings to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms due to their disobedience and sin and the corresponding coming destruction. She shared some prophecy from the book of Joel regarding the future. Unfortunately, it wasn't a complete break from this year's theme, because what did the prophecy cover? - The **end times**' coming destruction as a result of sin and the rejection of God. Today, we are taking a quick visit into the book of Isaiah to hear his warnings to the two kingdoms. Isaiah contains more prophecy than any other book in the Old Testament. We get to go over one of the more significant prophecies in today's reading along with a glimpse of God's throne room – a place all believers will one day see.

Isaiah tells us that his service spanned the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all kings of Judah. Many Bible scholars and church historians have suggested that Isaiah's service briefly spanned into Hezekiah's son, Manasseh's reign. Manasseh was a really bad and wicked king. The Bible scholars and historians suggest that Manasseh had Isaiah sawn in two – from top to bottom. In chapter 11 of Hebrews – commonly known as the “Hall of Faith” chapter in the New Testament – we read in verse 37 that among the many tortures the faithful Old Testament prophets received for their faith was that they were sawn in two. For those historians who claim Isaiah's fate, this is the verse they are referencing.

Those who proclaim the modern day “prosperity doctrine” must not be reading chapter 11 of Hebrews. The prosperity doctrine claims that the greater faith you have, you will have greater wealth and be free from problems in life. Therefore, if you are suffering, it is a result of your lack of faith. If you read about the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11, you will find most, if not all, suffered terribly **as a result** of their faith. Moreover, God saw their great faith and their

corresponding treatment important enough to single them out in His Word. When I think of the prosperity doctrine, I go through a progression of emotions. Given emoticons have taken over using our words, I'll share with you this progression of feelings I have about this doctrine. Let's begin with "Hmmmm". Next, "Oh, brother". Things then heat up and "Grrrrrrr". Finally, I conclude this progression of feelings with my final opinion of the prosperity doctrine. I'll let you interpret for yourself this emoticon and what I think of this poppycock of a doctrine.

Even more bluntly, not only is the prosperity doctrine unbiblical, but also it is hurtful. I know there are a number of you lovely, faithful believers that are going through really hard times at this very moment. Do you think it would be helpful to you if some prosperity doctrine-wielding hack came up and told you the reason for all your pain and suffering is because you don't have enough faith??? You wouldn't believe the things people said to Vickie and me during our trial – even Christians! Thankfully, James Sparks, Emilia's son-in-law and who was helping us in the middle of the trial, spoke the truth. In looking at our circumstances, he said, "*Boy, you must be doing something right!*" He knew that as you draw closer to God, you become a greater target of the devil.

I'm from the Midwest, and in the summers, it is mind-boggling to see the bugs that surround a light in the darkness. As you get closer to the light, the amount of bugs gets more intense. Jesus is the Light of the World, so as we draw closer to Him, we're going to encounter pests and unpleasantness. While these pests can't kill us, they sure can be distractions. The question is, are you willing to go through the distractions to get to the Light? If you think about the prosperity doctrine's true motives, you will understand its source. As a believer, Satan has lost his ownership of you, and he can't get you back. However, that doesn't mean he is going to leave you alone. It's actually quite the opposite. As a child of God, you are an enemy of the devil. Therefore, he will use whatever he can to diminish

your faith and joy in the Lord – including introducing pestilence-type distractions like the prosperity doctrine. It was designed by Satan to do two things:

- First – to deceive people into believing in the doctrine and then only for them to find out that in this sin-filled word, pain and suffering will come no matter what. Then those who believe in the doctrine will be devastated because they think it's **their** fault because they don't have enough faith.
- Secondly - this component of the evil agenda behind the prosperity doctrine is to take those believers who are **already** suffering and make them feel the their lack of faith is what is causing their suffering. Then the proponents of the doctrine are paraded out as examples of the alleged validity of this nonsense – showing them in their big houses, fancy cars, and God-awful plastic surgeries.

I apologize for spending so much time on this topic, but as I prepared for this lecture, the clarity of the evil behind the prosperity doctrine really upset me. As I said, I know many of you are going through the wringer right now, and I'm here to tell you it's **not happening** because of your lack of faith. - That is a just plain cruel doctrine. As I've shared a few times with you before, Jesus' suffering at the cross came with a purpose – to save us from our sins. If our Lord and Savior's suffering had purpose, it is reasonable to conclude there is a purpose in our suffering as His adopted children. What that specific purpose is for each of you, I don't know, but I do believe God will reveal it in this life or the next. Suffering is no fun, but is it **not** due to a lack of faith.

Beginning with verse 2 of chapter 1, God begins to express his issues with His people – from the perspective of that as a father. He tells the people He reared children and brought them up with loving care, but they have rebelled against Him.

In verse 3, it isn't enough that he emphasizes that animals at least recognize their owners, but even the dumbest and most stubborn animals – oxen and donkeys – know their owners. This is how blind in their sin and rebellion had become. In verse 4, we read, “*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.*” Notice all these indictments have a common theme – they are all **choices**. **God's** choice was to create them and nurture them to adulthood. What was **man's** choice to respond to all this great love and care? – Spurn the Holy One of Israel and turn their backs on Him.

All of these issues God has with them, though, are merely the **symptoms**. God gets to the diagnosis of the cause of the symptoms in verse 5b, “*Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted.*” *In other words, our sin has made our head and heart sick.*” Each sin we commit is a wound to our soul. Spiritual and emotional wounds often end up causing physical wounds – they impact our health. The fruit of sin - guilt and shame - are among the most powerful and toxic feelings we carry around, and Satan knows it. He keeps speaking lies into your ears that your sin wounds are beyond healing – you’re hopeless. Without confession, repentance, and forgiveness, these soul wounds cannot be healed.

King David confirms the physical impact of sin not dealt with in Psalm 32:3-4, “*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*” Have you felt the burden of a sin not confessed or not dealt with? Do you have a root of bitterness regarding someone who hurt you? Are you carrying around unforgiveness for a sin committed against you? These are heavy burdens that weigh you down and can cause physical deterioration. There’s good news, though – David is going to give you the answer to your problem in Psalm 32:5a,

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.”

David owned his sin – he took responsibility for it and confessed it to the Lord. That’s a courageous step – to admit your sin. That’s a vulnerable feeling isn’t it? What’s the primary fear in confession? – Unforgiveness and maybe even ridicule.

Biblical truth tells us that is **not** the way God responds to confession does He? David tells us how God responded to his confession in Psalm 32:5b, *“And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”* This is confirmed in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* Isn’t that a glorious promise? There’s no point hiding your sin or being afraid to expose your sin to God because He already knows it. All He’s asking you and me to do is to confess it and ask for His forgiveness. He’s coming from a place where His preference is to be merciful and forgiving as opposed to condemning and judging.

David tells us in Psalm 51:17 what kind of condition our heart needs to be in in order to get to the point of confession, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise.”* To come to grips with our condition before God is a sacrifice. We must sacrifice our pride, our fear, our arrogance, and everything else of our flesh. What consideration, or return, do we get for such a sacrifice of the flesh? - God’s faithful promise of His forgiveness and blessing. What is the **very first thing** Jesus lists of the “Blesseds” in His sermon on the mount? *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:1). “Poor in spirit” means a contrite and humble heart before God.

Forgive me for jumping around in today’s reading, but let’s go to the scene in Isaiah’s vision in chapter 6. God has given Isaiah a vision of God on His throne in heaven. In response to coming into the presence of God, Isaiah cries out in verse 5,

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” I am simply amazed at how many proud and arrogant Christians there are. I do not understand how anyone who claims to know God through His Son can operate in any kind of pride or self-assurance. I don’t care how holy you think you are, Isaiah 64:6 reminds us, *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”* Whatever holiness each of us has is **solely** because we are covered by the holy and righteous blood of the Lamb of God.

Isaiah is overwhelmed by the holiness and righteousness of God – His sinful condition is immediately made obvious, and he confesses it. Just as David told us in Psalm 32 what God did when he confessed his sin, look at what God **immediately** did upon Isaiah’s confession in verses 6 & 7 of chapter 6. No doubt under the orders of God, a seraph brought over a burning coal from the altar and touched Isaiah at the very place Isaiah confessed the problem – his mouth. Then he hears what we all want to hear from God when He touches us, *“Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*

The encounter. The confession. The Atonement. That’s the story of every human who comes to believe in God. This process makes us right before God and allows us to enter into a relationship with Him. God begins His relationship with Isaiah with a question, *“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* In awe of what God has just done for him, Isaiah demonstrates his grateful heart by saying *“Here am I. Send me!”* Did you notice something missing in God’s question of whom shall He send? He didn’t say where or for what purpose. Yet, Isaiah said he’d go even without knowing where God was going to send him. Would you do that? I’m not sure I would. I’d like to think I would, but such an open-ended ask like this is really a challenge of trust in God’s provision. Fresh off the revelation of

God, Isaiah's revelation must have sank so deep that he had no problem agreeing to go wherever God told him to go. Imagine what a difference we could make in this world if we all had such unwavering faith?

Getting back to chapter 1, taken from verses 11-15, God lays out heavy condemnations of the people's empty attempts to maintain ritualistic sacrifices and worship. *"Your incense is detestable to me."* *"I cannot bear your worthless assemblies."* *"I hate with all my being your New Moon feasts and appointed festivals."* *"I hide my eyes from you; even you offer many prayers, I am not listening."* *"I am weary of bearing them."* Here's the thing, can you be exasperated about something or someone if you don't care for it/him/her? Despite all of this rebellion, sin, and worthless worship, God still has enough love for them in Him to be wearied and exasperated. He still has enough concern for them to express His feelings of frustration. Again, if He no longer cared, why would He waste His emotions in communicating this to them?

God's judgments are statements of truth. Romans 2:2a confirms this, *"But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth."* Don't we want a God Who is going to be truthful? People who reject God based on the truth of His judgment, are, therefore, rejecting Him for other truths of God, which should seem friendlier – that He is merciful and forgiving. Jesus said in John 8:32, *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* If truth sets you free, and the opposite of truth is deceit, what do you think lies and deceit produces? – Bondage and, ultimately, judgment. This is what Jesus went to the cross for – to free us from the bondage of sin, which is rooted in deceit.

The same heart that sent Jesus to the cross is the one that speaks to the people in Chapter 1, verses 16-17. God instructs the people to *"wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong."* He makes His love

for them even more obvious in telling them what they need to do to get right with Him. See the progression:

- *Wash and make yourselves clean*
- *Take your evil deeds out of my sight* – how is this possible given Hebrews 4:13: “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*” What’s He really commanding?
- The very next commandment – “*Stop doing wrong.*”

At this point, there is a shift from being told what **not to do** to being commanded what **to do**. This is part of repentance. Repentance literally means to stop going in the wrong direction and turn around, but it doesn’t mean to turn around and stay put – or just stop your sinful ways. While stopping sinning is a good start, we were created to be fruitful. Repentance is not only stopping, but also turning around and heading back in the other direction. What direction is that? Chapter 1:17 tells us, “*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.*” In other words, do good.

All of these are examples of goodness, but there is a fundamental thing we must understand deep within our hearts before we attempt to start doing what is good. There are a couple of questions we must ask ourselves before we seek to change our actions from evil to good. First, is what I am looking to do coming from a place of gratitude, appreciation, and loving devotion for what Jesus did for me at the cross in forgiving me? Or am I doing these things in some sort of penance to offset all my wrongs and sins? If your answer is the latter, you have a problem, and eventually, you will burn out on your efforts to do good. Good works are not meant

to be acts of penance. Let's look at what Peter said in the first chapter of his second epistle verses 5-9, "*make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.*

Look at the progression Peter lays out and his progression concludes:

- From faith, add goodness
- From faith and goodness, add knowledge
- From faith, goodness, and knowledge, add self-control
- From faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, add perseverance
- From faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, add godliness
- From faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, add mutual affection
- From faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, add love.

The good works we should be doing are out of love for Jesus – love for God. If you love someone, don't you want to express that love in acts of goodness and kindness? When it comes to God, the way we demonstrate our love towards Him is by being examples of His love to those He loves – the people that He sovereignly brings into our lives. This diagram shows that we only have one thing to do – **believe**. God steps in and gives us what we need to proceed down the path. Even on the faith step, which is our choice, God entices us to make that step of faith in

that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We look at what Jesus did on the cross for us, and that step of faith becomes an easier step to take. God's side of the deal? – To die on a cross. Our side of the deal? - To believe. Sounds like a pretty good deal, doesn't it?

The second question we need to ask before we start our turn back from our evil ways is connected to the first question. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us and guide us down that return path to goodness. A lot of times we think we're doing something that seems good, but we never asked the Holy Spirit if this was in line with His will. Alleged good works that are not authorized by the Holy Spirit, at a minimum, mean He will not empower you to do those works. You are then left to your own efforts, which will ultimately wear out. Holy Spirit driven works bring with them all of His gifts and wisdom that give us supernatural strength, patience, wisdom, and love.

His heart for these stiff-necked people continues to be revealed in verse 18, “*Come now, let us settle the matter,*” says the *LORD*. (*The KJV uses the phrase “reason together”*) “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*” The Hebrew word for “settle” is “*yakach*” – pronounced “*yawh-kah*”. It basically means let's talk this out to prove what is right. What is God reasoning or settling with the people as to what is true? Despite all their empty worship and sin, which come with the colorful simile of scarlet, there is another option given in a simile – their sins can go from scarlet to white as snow. How is such a conversion of scarlet to white as snow possible? Verse 16 tells us to wash and make yourselves clean. What are we supposed to wash ourselves with?

- Ephesians 5:26, “*to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*” The apostle John called Jesus the “Word”.

- Hebrews 9:22 says, “*In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*”

What makes us scarlet? - Our unforgiven sin. What makes that scarlet turn to white as snow? - Being washed and cleansed with the blood of the Word of God, Who shed His blood so there could be forgiveness.

We see evidence of the certainty of God’s counsel via His omnipresence in verses 1-9 in chapter 7. The first king during Isaiah’s reign as a prophet was Uzziah, who was a good king and a godly man. His son, Jotham, was also a good king and a godly man. The next king, Ahaz, was one of the worst kings in Judah’s history and a wicked man. The King of Israel, Pezah, and the King of Aram (Syria), Rezin, had formed an alliance to attack Judah. God, despite Ahaz’ wickedness, gave Him another chance to turn to God. Knowing the future, God instructed Isaiah and his son to go tell the trembling Ahaz to chill out as Israel will be a shattered nation within sixty-five years.

The key verse in God’s counsel to give to Ahaz is verse 9, “*If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*” One of my favorite parts of a Sunday service is when God’s Word is read, the congregation is asked to stand. I see this request as not only an act of reverence to the Word of God, but also a statement of one’s faith. The word “*stand*” shows up 50 times in the NKJV of the New Testament. In virtually every usage of the word, it is related to a proclamation of one’s faith in God. More importantly, these commands to stand are typically in to prepare for a coming attack from the enemy. If God is telling us to stand in response to an attack, then He must know an attack is around the corner. Again, God’s omnipresence allows Him to see the future, so if He says an attack is coming, He’s going to be right because He cannot lie.

For most of us who are willing to be brutally honest with ourselves, standing for our faith can sometimes be very difficult. We are tired, worn down, afraid, weak, and even doubting. I'll be the first to confess my periodic moments of fatigue and fear when I'm in a position that mandates I stand in my faith. In my search through the New Testament on the word "stand", I found this beautiful nugget in Romans 14:4, "*Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*"

When we rely on our own strength, we are at our weakest. If you recall, I talked about in my last lecture the paradox that human strength really means human weakness. I quoted from 2 Corinthians 12:9&10, "*For My [Jesus'] strength is made perfect in weakness...for when I [Paul] am weak, I am strong.*" If we choose to believe God and His Word, then **He** provides us the strength to stand. We are wise to say, '*God, I don't have the strength to stand.*' By saying this, we are acknowledging our weakness, which is actually a **good thing**. The next thing to say to God after confessing we are too weak to stand on our own is, '*God, I need Your strength to get me to stand.*' The amazing thing about faith in the God of the Bible is if you are willing to take the time to truly get to know God's character and His relentless devotion to you, you discover how **totally secure** you are in His devotion. Philippians 4:19 promises, "*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" What's the key word in that verse? - "**all**". What does "all" mean? – Everything. If you truly believe in God, you can find that peace that passes all understanding amidst any circumstance because of His **total** and **complete** provision for you. Not only does He give you the strength to stand in your faith, He will fight your battles for you. (1 Samuel 17:47) All of this is available to every human, but it is each of us' choice to believe or not to believe.

I'm going to close with the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*" As each of us build our respective foundations of faith, there are some cornerstones to which we **must be sure** are laid. One of them is the virgin birth. Modern day translations have replaced the word "virgin" with the phrase "young maiden". The truth of the matter of this blasphemous replacement is the modern day translators don't believe in the virgin birth, so they are inserting their doubt upon the reader of their translations. The Hebrew word is "almah", and it clearly means "virgin". *The reason that the virgin birth is so important has to do with Jesus' qualification to be the perfect Lamb of God.* With Adam and Eve's sin, they passed the sin gene down to every generation of humanity. In order for Jesus to be the sacrifice with no blemish – the requirement of the Old Testament sacrificial lambs, He must be without that which causes the blemish – sin. By impregnating Mary with the seed of the Holy Spirit, which is perfect and holy since He is a part of the triune Godhead, the sin gene did not impact Jesus. Notably, Jesus also had to choose not to sin during His lifetime, so His position as the spotless Lamb of God was validated both biologically via the virgin birth and willfully by His commitment not to sin.

Had Jesus not been the sacrifice without blemish, He would not have been resurrected. If He was not resurrected, how could He be given the name Immanuel, which means "God with us"? God the Father fully accepted His Son's perfect condition as the permanent sacrifice for humanity's sin, and He proved it by resurrecting Him from the dead. Jesus' mission did not stop as just our victorious sacrifice. In His resurrection, He became God with us, and has been with each of us every moment upon our confession of faith in Him. Is the virgin birth a hard thing to believe? Maybe, but it is the truth regardless of whether or not you believe it. And what did we learn about the truth today? – It will set you free.

The truth is, all the near-term judgments that God warned of and His prophets prophesied have taken place, with no exceptions. If God's near term judgments have proven to come true, is it unreasonable to expect that His future prophetic judgments won't come true as well? Even though He laid out all these judgments on His people, did He ever stop loving them and beseeching them to repent and return to Him? At this stage of human history, He's looking to us to be that voice and that example of His faithful love for the people He's brought into each of our lives. I believe this church age we are in is just about over. What follows next is the 7-year tribulation period – it is going to be the most devastating period of judgment man has ever seen or ever will see. Do you know someone you don't want to go through such a terrible time? God asked Isaiah "Whom shall I send?" If He asks the same of you regarding these people you know aren't yet saved, will you respond as Isaiah did, "Here am I! Send me!"? He will give you the power to accomplish His will if you take that first step of faith. Just look at where it will lead you. Let's pray.