

Prayer Week
The Bigger Your Sin the Bigger God's Love
January 23, 2011
Scripture Reading - Isaiah 1:1-20

Most pastors, especially those concerned with leading unbelievers to Christ, are afraid to talk about sin and even more afraid to talk about God's wrath against it.

- You'll hear a lot of pastors talk about John 3:16
 - **John 3:16 (ESV)**
¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- But you'll hear far fewer talk about John 3:36
 - **John 3:36 (ESV)**
³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God remains on him.*

The reason for this is obvious, they're afraid.

- They're afraid that if they tell people the truth, that they are a sinner and that the wrath of God is upon them as a result, it will turn them away from God rather than leading them to Him.
- Unfortunately, all too often they are right.
- Pastors know that no one likes to be told they're wrong, especially in a fundamental and comprehensive way, and so they avoid talking about sin to please them. They know that people come to church to be built up, not to be torn down, and so they do their best to do so by focusing on the positive.
- Pastors also know that people HATE "fire and brimstone." They know that the idea of God hating sin and punishing it eternally in Hell is absolutely appalling to most people and so they avoid talking about it as much as possible, and many of them avoid talking about it all together.

Though it is totally understandable, the problem with this thinking is twofold.

- 1) It's not Biblical
 - a. The preachers of the Bible, *including Jesus*, spent A LOT of time talking about sin and the wrath of God against

it. This is especially true of the OT prophets like Isaiah.

- 2) Unless we understand the enormity our sin and the enormity of God's wrath against it, *we'll never understand the enormity of God's love for us.*
 - a. In other words, unless we really get John 3:36 (that the wrath of God remains on us because of our sin), we'll never really get John 3:16 (that God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son to remove that wrath from us)

This was the point that a pastor made at our monthly pastor's meeting this past Thursday.

- He said that if we want our people to understand the love of God, we have to be willing to teach them about their sin and the wrath of God against it.
- He used two texts to prove his point.
 - o **1 John 4:10 (ESV)**
¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
 - o **Luke 7:47 (ESV)**
⁴⁷Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

The more we understand the enormity of our sin and the enormity of God's wrath against it, the more we will understand the enormity of God's love for us. It's with that heart and that conviction that I want to look at the opening text of Isaiah with you today.

A Brief Introduction

Isaiah 1:1 (ESV)

¹The 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 whose name means "God saves" prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah for about 50 years from 740 to 690 B.C.

- Jewish tradition suggests that Isaiah's father Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah, King Uzziah's father, and thus Isaiah may have been of royal descent. This would be one way of explaining Isaiah's access to and boldness toward the kings of Judah that we see in his book.
- Other extra-biblical evidence suggests that Isaiah may have been a scribe. This which would explain the rich literary quality of his writing.
- Isaiah prophesied during a very tumultuous time in the life of Judah's northern neighbor, brother, and rival Israel, who God had Assyria overthrow in 722 B.C. because of their ongoing rebellion and sin against Him.
- Though life in Judah was not as tumultuous as Israel (at least not yet), it was not without its ups and downs.
- Uzziah and Jotham were good kings who followed God for the most part and enjoyed much prosperity, but who mixed worship of the one true God with worship of the pagan gods of the surrounding nations.
- Ahaz was a bad king who did not follow God. Because of His unfaithfulness, God allowed Him to lose 120,000 men in one day in a battle against Israel, but rather than repenting and turning to God for help, he turned to Assyria instead. Because the One True God wasn't working for him, Ahaz closed the doors of God's Temple, made alters to other gods in every corner of Jerusalem, and even sacrificed his sons on the alters according to the abominable of the pagan nations around him.
- Finally, there was Hezekiah. Hezekiah an exceptionally good king who trusted and held fast to the Lord and did not depart from following Him until very late in life. He opened the doors of God's Temple in the first year of His reign, he tore down the altars his father had built, and with God's help, he led his people to take an amazing stand against a seemingly unstoppable Assyrian army.
- So that was the world of Isaiah. A world of tumult in which disaster was never more than a stone's throw away, a world where trusting God wasn't easy and where few were able to do it well and none were able to do it perfectly, a world full of temptation to follow pagan practices and to mix worship of God with worship of idols, and a world where, though it often didn't seem like it, God was in complete and sovereign control

and working all things for the good of those who loved Him and had been called according to His purpose. A world just like the one we live in today.

With these things in mind, let's look at Isaiah's powerful opening section in which he lays out five truths about Judah's sin, all of which very much apply to us today.

Five Truths about Judah's Sin and Ours

- 1) Our sin is rebellion against God
 - a. Comment at wedding reception Friday night
 - i. "We don't hear sin referred to as rebellion against God enough"
 - b. That's exactly the way Isaiah refers to it in v. 2 and v. 5
 - i. **Isaiah 1:2 (ESV)**
²Hear, 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*."
 - ii. **Isaiah 1:5 (ESV)**
⁵Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue *to rebel*?
 - c. It's critical that we see our sin as rebellion against God because: 1) that's the way He sees it, and 2) we have such a tendency to minimize it.
 - d. It's easier to see our sin as rebellion when we think of God as our Father.
 - i. God is Father to all of us in that He has begotten us all
 - ii. But God is father in a special way to those whom He has chosen
 1. God not only begot Israel, but He chose them to be His people, adopted them as His children, and brought them up as His own (Is 1:2)
 2. The same is true of born again believers today
 - iii. When we think about our sin in this context it takes on more weight.

1. When you tell your child to put their book away when they're done reading and they don't do it, it's not the book that's a big deal, it's the rebellion.

2) Our sin is stupid

a. **Isaiah 1:3 (ESV)**

³The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

- b. Dumb farm animals like oxen and donkeys were smart enough to know who owned them and took care of them, but Israel was not.

- c. Despite the fact that God had created them, chosen them, adopted them, revealed Himself to them, provided for them, and delivered them time and again for hundreds of years, Israel continued to turn their back on God and look to things other than Him for their provision, comfort, and satisfaction. Ex. King Ahaz

i. **2 Chronicles 28:1-6 (ESV)**

¹Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done, ²but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals, ³and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ⁴And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree. ⁵*Therefore the Lord his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus.* He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with great force. ⁶For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed 120,000 from Judah in one

day, all of them men of valor, *because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers.*

ii. **2 Chronicles 28:16-20 (ESV)**

¹⁶At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help.

iii. **2 Chronicles 28:20 (ESV)**

²⁰So Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him.

iv. **2 Chronicles 28:22-23 (ESV)**

²²In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord—this same King Ahaz. ²³For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him and said, "*Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.*" *But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.*

- d. We do the same stupid thing
- i. We continually turn to things other than God in hopes that they will help us out and they end up being the ruin of us

3) Our sin is comprehensive

a. **Isaiah 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴Ah, 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.

i. Battered relationship

- 1. Forsaken – same word used for divorce
- 2. Despised – Dislike intensely
- 3. Utterly estranged – Bond of love completely broken

b. **Isaiah 1:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. ⁶From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and

sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

i. Battered body

c. **Isaiah 1:7-9 (ESV)**

⁷Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. ⁸And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. ⁹If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

i. Battered land

d. **Romans 3:10-18 (NIV)**

¹⁰As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." ¹³"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." ¹⁴"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷and the way of peace they do not know." ¹⁸"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

i. The same spot we're all in

4) Our sin will not be forgiven by going through the religious motions

a. **Isaiah 1:10-15 (ESV)**

¹⁰Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ¹²"When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary

of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

b. When you read this it seems so obvious that empty religious rituals are *not only* not enough to atone for sin but actually grieve, anger, and weary God, and yet it is so easy to fall into them. It is so easy to think that if we just keep going church every Sunday, praying every night, and reading our Bibles every morning that we can do whatever we want the rest of the week and still stay right with God. Isaiah makes it crystal clear that this is not the case. Our sin will not be forgiven by going through the religious motions.

c. So what are we to do?

5) Our sin will be forgiven if we repent and follow the Lord

a. **Isaiah 1:16-20 (ESV)**

¹⁶ *Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. 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 like crimson, they shall become like 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 eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

b. **Isaiah 53:5-6 (NIV)**

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

