

PM Isaiah 1 A Call to Serve

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[0 : 0 0] Let's read God's Word together now, reading from the Old Testament. We're going to read from the prophecy of Isaiah and from the first chapter, reading from the beginning down to the end of verse 20.

Isaiah chapter 1. That's on page 683 of the Pew Bibles. Isaiah chapter 1 at the beginning. 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. 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. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib. But Israel does not know. My people do not understand. 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. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel?

The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From 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.

Your country lies desolate. Your cities are burned with fire and your very presence foreigners devour your land. It is desolate as overthrown by foreigners.

[1 : 5 4] And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah. 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. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?

Bring 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.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you.

[3 : 0 0] Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes.

Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. 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.

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Amen and may the Lord indeed bless to us this reading of his own holy, inerrant and inspired word. In that psalm we sang those words at the end there, wisdom to me you impart.

[4 : 14] And the wisdom of course that David is speaking of there is the wisdom that God gave him to understand the reality of his situation as a person who had sinned against the Lord and who required to confess his sin that he might receive the forgiveness of God.

And that great wisdom we might say is one of the greatest ways in which God grants his mercy to people in this world.

Is to grant us that wisdom whereby we recognize our own need to confess our sin before God.

to recognize our sin and to confess that sin before him. As we come to think a little bit about that I want us to turn to Isaiah chapter 6 and to read some verses in that chapter down to verse 9.

Isaiah chapter 6 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 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 and one called to another and said Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory.

[6 : 15] And the foundations of the thresholds shook the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke 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 then one of the seraphim flew to me having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongues from the altar and he touched my mouth and said behold this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for and I heard the voice of the Lord saying whom shall I send and who will go for us then I said here am I send me and he said go and say to this people keep on hearing but do not understand keep on seeing but do not perceive

Amen this is God's word we read first of all in Isaiah chapter 1 and that chapter sets out very clearly for us the reality of what things were like in Isaiah's day in Judah and Jerusalem they had sinned against the Lord they had turned away from him and sought to do their own will sought their own as it were that they sought what they felt was good for themselves we might put it in another way they had become a selfish people and they were caught up in that selfishness to the degree that people were ready to trample on others to get what they wanted there was injustice evident among the people there was brokenness in many people's lives but there was this evident selfishness where the people had turned from seeking after the Lord to seeking after the fulfilling of their own desires and

Isaiah is given the unenviable task of making this reality evident to the people now it's kind of interesting to see how the book is arranged because we have chapter 6 which we read which appears to be the call of Isaiah now whether it is specifically the call of Isaiah as a prophet or whether it's a more focused call for the ongoing work that he was going to have I guess is not evident really for us and people might argue one way or another but it does seem though that these first few chapters leading up to chapter 6 serve as a kind of introduction to how things were in the land and the work that Isaiah had to do to communicate

God's truth among a people who were walking in sin who were seeking after their sinful pleasures rather than seeking after God a people who were nonetheless religious but whose religion was empty and vain because it was not truly the desire of their hearts and that is very evident in what we see here in chapter 1 where we read that the Lord does not delight in the religious observances for that very reason that they were doing it for themselves and not for the Lord and I guess that's a trap that is very easy to fall into to do religious things for ourselves rather than for the

Lord and to delight in them even but to delight in them for the wrong reasons and fail to recognize the reality of the situation that we stand before God as those who are sinful now when we turn to the vision that Isaiah had recorded for us in chapter 6 and verse 1 onwards Isaiah has a very profound experience of God's presence in the temple and he is overcome at the sense of God's holiness holy holy holy as the Lord of hosts the angelic beings declare the whole earth is full of his glory and the temple shakes and the response that Isaiah has is woe is me for I am lost for

[12 : 06] 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 and I find this fascinating because what we know of Isaiah is that he was a man that had served the Lord from his youth a righteous man of good report and yet you know think of that in the context of the wickedness that was evident in the land at the time yet his response when he encounters the holiness of God in this way is that he cries out woe is me he's undone even though we know that this was a man as we can see it from a human perspective who lived a righteous life but this is to recognize something that is so important for each of us to recognize that encountering

God's holiness has a tremendous impact upon a person's life because when we see our lives in light of God's holiness we cannot but tremble if we have a true vision of his holiness because the difference is so profound and even the most righteous of us have sinned against him and deserve his wrath and his punishment we deserve that his righteous anger his burning holiness would wipe us off the face of the earth yet that is not what we see God doing here he doesn't come to Isaiah and say I'm going to wipe you off the face of the earth he allows

Isaiah to have this encounter so that Isaiah recognises something of who he is himself but also that he would recognise more of the glory of God you know it's interesting when we consider the law God's law I think we tend to think about it particularly in terms of how it relates to us and of course that's an important aspect of the law thinking for instance of the ten commandments we think of how God commands us and how he speaks into our lives you know we are commanded there to have but one God and we if we are honest with ourselves if we consider the reality of our lives is

God the one true ultimate focus of our lives is he the one that we put above all things and seek him above all things and the reality is that that simply is not true of any of us even the most faithful of us will confess and acknowledge that we have not done that in the entirety of our lives and there are times when we have come very far short of that and yet we see all these other commandments we see the breadth of the law of God and what we see is that we stand guilty but there is another perspective to this and that is that these laws also point us to glorious truths about who

God is that he is the all faithful one that he is the one who is perfectly righteous that he is the one who is perfect in all his ways and so the law encourages us to see both of these things but the reality is that we can read these words but until we encounter personally in our lives something of that holiness ourselves that God would reveal it to us then we're probably not going to take it all that seriously we might even learn all the ten commandments and still not really take it all that seriously but when we recognize that they said before us the perfect standard of

[17 : 35] God that reflects something of his glory for us to see and to recognize how far short of that glory that we come and we see that this serves a great purpose because it prepares our hearts it prepares our hearts to see our great need and it prepares our hearts to recognize in what way God meets that need and then we see in verse 6 that one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongues from the altar and he touched my mouth and said behold this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for so we see here that atonement is of great significance now to understand this from a

New Testament perspective we recognize that the altar is the place that signifies the place of sacrifice and of course ultimately points to the sacrifice that Jesus offered on behalf of his people and the burning coal I suppose reminds us in a couple of different ways of holiness but also of God's righteousness and also of his judgment but it's symbolic therefore of how in Christ all of these things are met as it were and so when the angel comes and touches Isaiah's mouth with his lips with this coal and he says your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for it's pointing us to that glorious reality that will be fulfilled in

Christ and it reminds us that the only way that our sin can be atoned for is through faith in Christ Jesus through faith in the fact that he has taken our sins upon himself and that he has borne the wrath of God in our place and what we see here is that this has a profound effect upon Isaiah because it prepares him it prepares him for what God has for him to do now the Lord says to Isaiah whom shall I send and who will go for us and immediately the response of Isaiah is here am I send me and the

Lord says to him go and he gives him the words to say now he has been given incredibly difficult ministry here there is just no way around that but he has been called to a particular ministry by the Lord but the reason that he is ready to go the reason he has this immediate response is because God has been at work in his life and he has touched his life in a way that is transforming he has helped Isaiah understand his own sinfulness and God's righteousness and how God deals with Isaiah's sinfulness and makes him ready to proclaim God's righteousness so so that he will be ready to go and to preach the word of God to those to whom he sent because if you think about it why would anyone go to preach the message that Isaiah was given if they did not have that call he's being called to go and preach to a people who are so hard against the message of God that the expectation is that they will continue in that way for the for the for the for a large part in a way the large part of the people will continue in that way now there are of course some who do turn but the majority of the people for the most part they refuse to hear and that is the expectation in this context and Isaiah was called to that ministry and we might say well what was the point well the point was that he was being obedient to God's call upon his life he was being obedient to the transforming power of

God at work in him and he was responding to this amazing reality to know his sin forgiven to be assured of it to be confident in that and to also have clarity on who God is as the holy one now there were people who were preaching a false gospel in those days just as there are in these days and they were very ready to speak easy words messages that people somebody could accept without any challenge to their lives but Isaiah was called to do something very different now if you were called to go and speak to a people who you were told before you went that they would not respond positively you'd probably say no way

[24 : 27] I'm not going I mean I guess you could say you see something of that in Moses experience because he's called to go and speak a challenging word into the Egyptian nation of the day and he pretty much knows that they're not going to respond positively and he doesn't want to go initially of course he does go because the Lord works in him and draws him to that point but there is a hesitation there and it's not surprising I mean I don't think any of us should be surprised at that because that is I guess the natural instinct of any of us to respond in that situation but if we have caught a glimpse of the glory of God then that brings about a change in our experience it helps us to understand properly the gospel because you know if we don't understand our own sinfulness then we don't understand properly what we've been forgiven and if we don't have a sense of being forgiven or at least in the right way in as full a way as we ought to then it does have an impact on our readiness our willingness to serve because if we're not thankful to the

Lord for what he has done for us then we are likely not going to respond as positively as we ought to when his call comes in that way and so the Lord often has to do a great work in our lives to bring us to that place of willingness and to bring us to that place of thankfulness because he has indeed done a great work in Christ Jesus and he desires that we would be transformed by that but sometimes we are very unwilling and very slow to learn and yet the Lord is gracious and he works in his people's lives to draw them more and more to that place and so we're given an encouragement here to lay hold of this hope that as we know more of him that it will transform our lives that it will shape our lives and that it will bring us to that place of obedience where we will see as Isaiah said here am I send me even though it may go against our own kind of sense of how we think things should go our own desires maybe in a certain sense the desires we maybe have for an easy life without too much challenge without too many difficulties but you know the reality is is that where the

Lord is at work often his people labour travel and experience burden and difficulty and challenge because we are in a spiritual battle and we if we are obedient to him can often find ourselves facing up to great challenges spiritually speaking and sometimes these challenges can be evident in the way that things happen in the world around us but the Lord encourages us to trust him and to lay hold of his sovereignty in the midst of that because what we see here in Isaiah's experience is that he is essentially laying hold of that great truth that God is sovereign so even though Isaiah may have wanted to see you know great things happen the work of

God flourish many people recommitting their lives he has to leave that in God's hands because God is doing a great work we see through the book of Isaiah that a lot of that work that you could say the foundation of it is being laid in Isaiah's experience and Isaiah's ministry and the things he's pointing towards in terms of how this works out in Judah's experience these things are worked out maybe decades down the line where Isaiah maybe is not even going to be party to it but he sees the glory of what God is doing and he points to that and he encourages the people to see that and even when they go into exile the encouragement is there that although they have endured

God's punishment as a nation that God's mercy is extended as well so that when they return they will know much of God's blessing as they come to return to the land in due time and of course these things all pointing also ultimately towards what Christ would achieve and even pointing to the glories of heaven as we see in the final chapters of this great prophecy but these prophecies point us to this great reality that God is sovereign so we must trust him and commit our way to him and seek his will above all else because that is the only confidence really that we can have is that he will work out his sovereign will and that he will do it in a way that will be to the glory of his name and to the blessing of his people let's pray heavenly father we thank you and we praise you for your word would you pray heavenly father that you would help each one of us to take your word to heart and above all we pray that in your mercy that you would grant us a renewed vision of your holiness that we would even tremble at the glorious reality of your holiness that we would be in awe of who you are and your righteousness and your perfection and that that would have a powerful impact upon our lives that it would shape our lives in a profound way that would be to the glory of your name and for our blessing and indeed for the blessing of the church we do pray heavenly father that we would see a renewed awareness among your people of your great holiness a renewed sense of the holiness and glory that belongs to you and that when people come to visit our churches when people come to hear the word they also might be challenged by an awesome sense of the holy

[32 : 51] God whom these scriptures proclaim so bless us we pray grant us your grace and your mercy guide us according to your will and forgive us our many sins we pray in Jesus precious name Amen God Den God, winning hands God God God God God God