

The unfaithful city

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Date: 24 July 2016

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[0 : 00] The first reading is Isaiah chapter 1, verses 1 to 20, and can be found on page 683 of the Church Bibles. 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, and they 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 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.

[1 : 33] They are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. Your country lies desolate. Your cities are burnt with fire.

In your very presence, foreigners devour your land. It is desolate as overthrown by foreigners. 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.

[2 : 47] 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.

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.

[3 : 55] 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. The second reading is continuing in the first chapter of Isaiah, Starting from verse 21.

That's on page 684 of the Bible. How the faithful city has become a whore. She who is full of justice. She who is full of justice.

[5 : 03] Righteousness lodged in her, But now murderers. Your silver has become dross. Your best wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts They do not bring justice to the fatherless And the widow's cause does not come to them Therefore the Lord declares The Lord of hosts, the mighty one of Israel Ah, I will get relief from my enemies And avenge myself on my foes I will turn my hand against you And will smelt away your dross as with lye And remove all your alibi And I will restore your judges as at the first And your counsellors as at the beginning Afterwards you shall be called the city of righteousness

The faithful city Zion shall be redeemed by justice And those in her who repent By righteousness But rebels and sinners shall be broken together And those who forsake the Lord Shall be consumed For they shall be ashamed of the oaks that you desired And you shall blush for the gardens that you have chosen For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers And like a garden without water And the strong shall become tinder And his work a spark And both of them shall burn together With none to quench them Well I'd like to add my welcome this morning Particularly if you're new I think I've seen some new faces here this morning Which is great You're very welcome if you're visiting And as you've heard

We're starting a short series this summer In the first nine chapters of Isaiah For those who don't know me I'm Andrew I'm a member of the congregation And I'm speaking this morning So as we start Let's pray Heavenly Father We thank you That you speak to us Through your word Open our hearts That we may hear What you have to say to us And put it into practice For Jesus' sake Amen Well we live in a world where Our performance is judged School reports End of year tests Exams Job appraisals We may get the verdict we expect Or we may not When I was working in the civil service One year I was convinced That I was going to get The top marking I'd earned it

I'd done everything That was asked of me I'd delivered Radical new regulations To the government's timetable In spite of all the political lobbying I was confident Going into my appraisal With a list of all my achievements But I didn't get the top marking All my expectations Were devastated And it's rather like that For the people of Judah As we see as we begin This new series They thought one thing But God's verdict Was very different Now the first five chapters Of Isaiah Before his vision and call In chapter 6 Are a general introduction With no kings Or specific events mentioned They introduce Isaiah's main themes It's rather like TV documentaries That give you an action-backed taster Of what's in store Right at the beginning

To grab your interest Isaiah's ministries We see in verse 1 Spanned four kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah A period probably about 50 years It covers Judah's changing fortunes From prosperity to exile Now God's people were already in decline They passed the glory days Of King David And King Solomon The nation is split Into two kingdoms The northern kingdom Israel And the southern kingdom Judah Judah Had Jerusalem And the temple And saw themselves As God's faithful people Because they continued With all the Old Testament sacrifices They felt confirmed in this Because they were at peace

[10 : 09] And relatively prosperous Under Uzziah And so Isaiah's message Is a massive wake-up call So looking at our passage today And it would be good If you could have the Bibles open At page 683 And there's an outline On the back of the service sheets It's very bleak I don't know if you got that When we read that through With God's Christendom of Judah 2 to 20 And Jerusalem 21 to 31 They're in rebellion against God And so we'll face God's judgment God is speaking And Judah needs to listen And judgment is the main theme But there are glimmers of hope If they respond to God Because God will judge rebellion But will restore those who repent And we'll be looking at two ways to live Rebellion or sin

Resulting in rejection by God Repentance bringing restoration by God And it's important to note In 11 to 15 How sin has corrupted The very thing they were proud of Their religion So our first point Rebellion will be judged That's 2 to 9 God is speaking directly As we see in verse 2 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 Imagine a picture A cosmic courtroom God the judge Giving his damning verdict And yet even with this You can hear The father's grief Over

And anguish Over his rebelling children Judah reinforces God's message In verse 4 Our 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 You can feel Isaiah's heartfelt yearning For God's people His desire for them To listen and repent We see that in 5 Why will you 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 Oh it's a brutal picture It's rather like a boxer Being constantly pummeled Or a badly injured patient Walking untreated Out of accident and emergency And in 7 We see how dire Their political situation is Your country lies desolate Your cities are burned with fire In your very presence Foreigners devour your land It is desolate As they were thrown by foreigners And the daughter of Zion Is left Like a booth in a vineyard Like a lodge in a cucumber field Like a besieged city That foreshadows

Their future exile But there are glimmers of hope As we see in verse 9 Because God hasn't destroyed them Completely as he did With Sodom and Gomorrah If the Lord of hosts Had not left us A few survivors We should have been like Sodom And become like Gomorrah However if they think That their religion Will save them They're in for a very big shock Because And this is the second point Religion will be rejected And that's 10 to 20 So starting at verse 10 Hear the word of the Lord Hear the word of the Lord You rulers of Sodom Give ear to the teaching Of our God You people of Gomorrah I mean how Judah must have Woken up when they were described As Sodom and Gomorrah Those were the evil cities That God had completely destroyed This was a message

[14 : 48] They needed to take to heart And we see God's Verdict On their religion When we look at verse 11 What to me is a 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 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 In 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

Even though you Make many prayers I will not listen Your hands Are full of blood What a damning Condemnation Of Judah's Religious practice They were diligent In doing the right things In terms of sacrifices Festivals And prayers But without The right heart Attitude We see that In 13 I cannot Endure iniquity And solemn assembly And I put a quote On the service sheet From Proverbs 15 Which Has the same theme God is fed up With their sacrifices He takes no delight In them Because they're An abomination to him Instead of pleasing God With their religion They're alienating him Furthermore God is not hearing Their prayers Because of their iniquity We see that in 15 Even though you Make many prayers I will not listen Your hands Are full of blood

And again There's a couple Of cross references On the service sheet Proverbs 1 And Micah 3 So God Directly challenges Their preconceptions They thought That by being religious They would find Favor with God But it's the reverse God's alienated By their religion Because of their iniquity Their continued rebellion Against his law You see They had religion But no relationship With God So you can see How religion In church going Does not make us Acceptable to God And while this is A challenge to us Who go to church It should be good news For those who don't Go to church Or see themselves As religious And if you're In that situation Today We're very pleased That you're here Because we're looking At how anyone Churchgoer or not Can get right with God

So just as Judah Need to hear God's message So we need to hear God today We need to examine ourselves If we are To see if we're going Through the motions Of our Christian faith Without our hearts Being changed Have we religion But no personal Relationship with God What do we pride ourselves in What might be Grace church's Religious practices We could be faithful At turning up Every Sunday Dutifully fulfilling Our rotas Making the effort To turn up Early Even when we're not Scheduled to do anything We're always there At the prayer gathering And the growth groups Having studied The passage before We read our Bibles Each day And pray through The grace church Prayer calendar Now please Don't misunderstand me All of these things Are good and beneficial We should be doing them But our hearts Need to be right And our hearts Will be revealed

By how we treat God And how we treat others Do we love the Lord Our God With all our heart And our neighbours As ourselves Do we seek first God's kingdom And his righteousness Do we take up Our cross each day And follow Jesus Do our lives Show the fruit Of the spirit And I know That there are people At Grace church Who show practical Christian love To those in need Both in the church And outside Members provide meals When someone has Had a new baby Or is unwell And you'll know Of others Who are doing Similar things And as a church We're committed To making disciples Of Jesus Christ Seeking opportunities To share our faith And to help one another Grow as Christians Through reading the Bible One to one Or prayer triplets And this won't be convenient It's costly With our busy lives And while I might be good It may be good That I may study the Bible

[19:51] And pray each morning It's not good If what I study Doesn't change my heart And my behaviour And from the recent series In 1 Corinthians I've been challenged Not to think of myself What I'm going to get out Of Grace church But what can I give How can I serve And yet when I visited My son's church Last Sunday I too easily slipped back Into thinking about myself I mean the songs Weren't familiar I found it difficult To tune into The introductory prayers And I realised I was thinking of me Not others My heart Hadn't been changed God said to Judah That he wouldn't Hear their prayers Even with many prayers And we all find Prayer hard It's always A spiritual battle And so we can be quite We can feel quite pleased When we're able to pray Especially when we can Pray regularly But the challenge God gives to Judah And us Is to get our hearts

Right with God first That's confession And repentance As we were thinking About it at the beginning If we want to be heard And have a personal Relationship with God And I find this Very challenging I know how sloppy I can be about Confessing and repenting Because I want to get on With my prayer list Maintaining our relationship With God Isn't easy When our lives Are so busy It's too tempting To be It's too tempting To be content With squeezing Grace Church activities Into our busy lives And being regular With personal Bible study And prayer But are we growing In our relationship With God We can go through The motions Of being faithful Grace Church members But are we growing In godliness And however I don't want To confuse you Because we mustn't Think that what we do Will get us into God's good books We all need God

Churchgoer or not To wash us Completely clean Because as we've been Thinking this morning We all rebel Against God We see that In verse 18 God says 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 None of us Naturally likes To go God's way It's only as God Renews our hearts That we'll want To live for God And so Faced with the evidence God must judge Judah As we see in 20 If you refuse And rebel You shall be Eaten by the sword For the mouth Of the Lord Has spoken And it sounds All very bleak So what hope Is there?

Well there is hope If they listen And respond to God As we see in 19 If you are willing And obedient You shall eat The good of the land The question for them And for us Is will they Will we Hear the word Of the Lord Will they accept His verdict On their lives And their religion Will we If they don't They're still in Rebellion against God They have a choice Between two ways To live And that's our Third and final point Repentance Or rebellion 21 to 31 So whilst God Must judge sin And reject Empty religion He offers hope Everyone who recognizes Their true spiritual state Who hears the word Of the Lord And repents God's focus Now turns to Jerusalem We see in 21 How the faithful city Has become a whore She who was full

Of justice Righteousness Lodged in her But now murderers Your silver Has become dross Your best wine Mixed with water Your princes Are rebels And companions Are thieves Everyone loves A bribe And runs after gifts They do not bring Justice to the fatherless And a widow's Calls does not Come to them How far Jerusalem had fallen The faithful city To a whore Righteousness To murder God's standards And laws Were not being upheld Everyone was living For themselves Getting rich With bribes And gifts At the expense Of justice And caring for the oppressed Sounds very contemporary And in 24 Therefore The Lord declares The Lord of hosts The mighty one of Israel Ah I will get relief From my enemies And avenge myself And my foes They're going to be judged

[24 : 47] Yet even in this God gives hope Because his judgment And punishment Will refine them By burning up All Jerusalem's impurities So that it will become A city of righteousness The faithful city again As we see in 25 I will turn my hand Against you And smelt away All your dross As with lye And remove All your alloy And I will restore Your judges As at the first And your counsellors As at the beginning Afterwards You should be called The city of righteousness The faithful city Zion shall be redeemed By justice And those in her Who repent By righteousness See God's call To repentance there Echoed in 16 and 17 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 women Whose calls They needed to Wash themselves And to do that They had to recognise They were dirty Because of their sin And needed to change By no longer Doing evil And learning to do good And as Christians We're called to do the same With God's help Putting off our old self And putting on our new self Created like God In righteousness And holiness As Paul says In Ephesians 4 And we've already seen In verse 18 God invites them To come to him In repentance He offers to restore them And wash them Completely clean And when we repent We're throwing ourselves On God's mercy Asking for forgiveness And cleansing And redemption And this is only possible Because of God's justice

In 27 God's justice Needs to be satisfied By Christ Taking the punishment Of our sin
That's how we That's how God Makes us completely clean So Judah was faced With a
choice We're faced With the same choice Because there's Two ways to live Repent and
be redeemed Or rebel and be broken Rejected and judged If we don't repent We're
continuing To rebel against God And we'll face His judgment directly We'll pay the penalty
For our own sin As it says in 31 And the strong Shall become tinder And his work a spark
And both of them Shall burn together With none to quench them We'll be totally burnt up
And destroyed So in conclusion This is a wake up call For God's people Judah needed to
hear

What God was saying To them And respond And repent The same is true For us today
We need to hear What God is saying To us And respond They and we Have the same
choice There are two ways To live Will we listen to God Take his word seriously Even
when it hurts Our pride and repent Or will we harden our hearts And not listen to God And
so rebel The promise is That if we listen to And respond to God He will refine And restore
us His goal is that We become more like Christ We need to examine ourselves To make
sure That our hearts are right And not deceive ourselves That we're okay Because we do
the right things Know our Bibles well And go to a sound church The warning is That if we
harden our hearts And continue in rebellion He will judge And destroy us