

Isaiah 1: 1-18

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Preacher: Jonathan Watson

[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Isaiah chapter 1.

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.

Now, with these words, the prophet Isaiah begins this great book of his.

But before we look more closely at these words, we should ask ourselves the basic and very important question, why did this man Isaiah put pen to paper and write out this wonderful book of 66 chapters?

[1 : 15] Why did he speak at all? Part of the answer to that question has to do with the people of his own country and nation.

These people who lived in the days of the four kings mentioned here, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. You see, the land and its people were in serious trouble.

And he wrote because things had gone wrong with this nation. And there were even more terrible things to come upon it.

It was this situation that called for Isaiah's message. And the prophet wrote in order to make clear not only the cause of all these troubles, but also to point very clearly to the only way to deal with them.

While this book of prophecy, and it's the biggest book of prophecy in the Old Testament, may seem large and daunting to us, it's very helpful to remember to keep in mind that there's really only one great message in all of these pages that make up the book of Isaiah.

[2 : 35] Isaiah gives us what is in effect a summary of it here in this opening chapter. Here the message of all 66 books or chapters is given in a nutshell.

So here then is a clear outline of the whole message. Here we read about the cause of the troubles. Here we see the false ways in which the people were trying to deal with their problems and to escape from the consequences of their problems.

And here we see outlined the only true way of deliverance and salvation. Now that is basically the setting, the background of these verses that we're going to think about.

But someone here might be thinking to themselves, us having read from this Old Testament prophet, well, that's all very interesting, I'm sure.

But what on earth has all of this got to do with me? I mean, come on, the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of these kings that I've never even heard about, or if I have heard about them, I've forgotten about.

[3 : 57] What has all of this got to do with the world in this day and age with all its complex problems and difficulties? Fair question.

Here's the answer. Every Christian ought to be convinced that what we have here is not something that only belongs to this chapter of the Bible or to the ancient days of these now obscure kings.

No, what we have here is the very message that runs right through the whole of the Bible. We're not dealing here with the ideas of a man, albeit a wise and religious man, whose ideas are nevertheless fallible and human and therefore quickly dated.

No, instead, what we have here is the infallible word of God that lives and abides forever. Because this man, Isaiah, was a prophet of God.

That means that Isaiah here is speaking and writing exactly what God revealed to him. Nothing more, nothing less.

[5 : 18] Isaiah wrote to the nation of Judah and to the citizens of Jerusalem, its capital city. That's true. But this is the main point.

What was true of the people of Judah and Jerusalem at that ancient period of history is true also of the whole human race throughout history, including our own day?

Well, you take that on board and you say, okay, you've answered my first question. But I've got another question. Look, you say, I not only couldn't care less about this chapter of yours, but I couldn't care less about the Bible as a whole.

Because let's face it, this Bible of yours is a book that was completed when? Before the end of the first century AD, and here we are now in the 21st century.

So how can it possibly have anything relevant to say about me and my life? Again, fair question.

[6 : 35] But here's the answer. The Bible is relevant to you and your life because it is a book that deals with men and women in their relationship to God.

And that is something that never changes. It is the same throughout the centuries. It's the same ever since the first man fell into sin at the beginning of human history.

And that is why as you read any part of the Bible, you quickly get the feeling that you're not merely dealing with things that happened a very long time ago, but with a very up-to-the-minute commentary on human life.

In fact, it is quite easy to demonstrate that the people of Israel at this particular time in their history, when Isaiah spoke in the 8th century BC, we're in exactly the same position as the human race is at this present moment in the 21st century AD.

So even though this is an old book, in a very real sense, the Word of God is also always new and up-to-date since it deals with vital human issues that have been left completely untouched by all the advances in human knowledge and science and technology that have taken place since this book was written by men of God's choosing.

[8 : 18] So what then does Isaiah the prophet tell us? Well, look closely at Isaiah's introductory words. These words in the opening verses are of vital importance because in them he gives us the reason why we must listen to his message.

The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos. In other words, Isaiah lays his cards on the table, as it were, and he shows us his authority for speaking.

What right have you got to speak to your people and then write down your message, Isaiah? Isaiah. And he would reply, Listen to my words because these words are not my own words.

Don't think that I am expressing my own thoughts. Don't think that I'm spouting my own pet theories. I am not setting myself up as a man who is clever or who has special understanding and insight.

I am not a man who has applied my mind to the nation's problems and as a result of serious study have come up with a wonderful solution. No, the first words in this entire book are the vision.

[9 : 53] The vision. Now we need to be careful with this word vision. Here it actually means prophecy.

The prophetic vision. The prophetic message. Vision is a kind of technical term in the Bible. In fact, as we shall see, the prophetic message which is described here as a vision has a very special character.

The prophecy of Isaiah is just one of the books of the Old Testament which fall into this category of the books of the prophets. And the prophets were a special class of person who claimed to be in a unique position because of a certain thing that had happened to them.

You can read about that, by the way, in Isaiah's case, in Isaiah 6. A special event that happened in his life where he saw the Lord high and lifted up.

And at the end of that vision, he was commissioned by this God with God's message to deliver to the nation. So Isaiah says that his book is a vision.

[11 : 15] And that means it's not the result of his own investigations or his own insights. No, he says, it's the vision. The vision that Isaiah, son of Amos, saw.

And the man is saying, listen to me. You've got to listen to me because I am a prophet of God. And then to make this all crystal clear, Isaiah says in the second verse, Hear, O heavens, and give ear to earth, for the Lord has spoken.

The Lord has spoken. In other words, Isaiah renounces any particular wisdom or insight of his own. And he says, in effect, I am nothing but a mouthpiece of the Lord God.

I'm just a channel, a conduit, an instrument in the hands of God, and nothing more. I am only a voice who is speaking to you exactly what the Lord has first spoken to me.

And I cannot stress just how fundamentally important this is in our whole approach to Isaiah's message. Because if you regard him as simply a man putting forward his own ideas, then of course, of course, you're entitled to exercise, criticize his message and say, it's out of date.

[12 : 48] But Isaiah is saying to you, hold on a minute. You cannot do that. You see, the Lord has spoken.

And that is Isaiah's claim. He's saying, what I am putting before you here is a vision I received from the Lord. So what is it then that Isaiah has to say to us?

Well, his message, as far as we're concerned this evening, based upon these opening couple of verses, is a threefold message. Very, very plain, very clear, very simple.

But I think very powerful. First of all, the first thing in Isaiah's God-given message is this. The human condition, whether of men and women in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, or in the days of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The human condition is something that is so unnatural we could describe it as being monstrous.

[14 : 20] Monstrous. In the whole of the universe, the human condition is something that is unique.

There's nothing like it. It is totally extraordinary. The condition of the whole world, including every single one of us here this evening, is an astonishing fact and sight.

Isn't that what he's saying in these words? He speaks to the heavens. Hear, O heavens! And then he speaks to the earth. Give ear, O earth!

For the Lord has spoken. And what is it that the Lord is calling the heavens and the earth to bear witness to? to this unique fact in the whole of the universe.

Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. Hear, O heavens!

[15 : 38] Listen! Give ear, O earth! He's calling upon the heavens and earth to bear testimony. And by this, he doesn't mean angels and men, but the literal, physical heavens and the actual, material earth.

And he calls them to look at men and women in their sin. Hear, O heavens! Give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken. And this is what God has to say to the heavens and the earth.

Look at these children that I have reared and brought up. They have rebelled against me.

In the next verse, Isaiah brings in the ox and the donkey. The ox knows its owner, the donkey its master's crib. But these children of mine, Israel, in this case, does not know.

My people do not understand. God is saying, do men and women in their fallen condition not totally amaze you, astonish you?

[16 : 54] Look at what they've become. You stars in the heavens, he says, you behave as you are meant to behave. You obey the laws of your nature.

You move in your orbits and never miss your time, which is why all those people rushed to certain parts of the states to see that eclipse. They always keep time to the very second.

Earth, you revolve on your axis, you move around the sun and you always do it precisely. You behave as you were meant to behave. You obey the laws of your nature and your creation.

But have you seen the human race? It doesn't do that. Do you see how the heavens and the earth bear witness against the human race?

Spring and summer and autumn and winter, seed time and harvest, these all reflect God's work of creation. But men and women, they are just full of contradictions.

[18 : 00] everything behaves as it's meant to behave, everything, everything in the whole universe that God has made except one thing, human beings.

Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. There's something unnatural about that, isn't there?

In their present condition, they are like a blood on God's landscape. They are a contradiction in God's creation. They are in the wrong.

They are not functioning as they were meant to. Now that, of course, is a thing that the world doesn't realize.

The world tends to start with the way things are and the world assumes that this is how things have always been. By the way, that's why we see politicians and government set up committees of investigation and their public inquiries and so forth.

[19 : 15] In examining the problems, what are they doing? They are simply looking at the obvious outward symptoms. problems, they never get to the root cause of all of these problems.

They should stop, as we should stop and we should ask this question. Was this world and our life in it meant to be what you and I know it to be?

Were men and women created, for example, in order to spend most of their time and energy inventing terrible weapons of mass destruction like Kim Jong-un to threaten wiping their fellow creatures off the face of this earth?

Is that what God intended? God made man and woman at the beginning and he said, the two shall become one. Did God do that in order that men and women might cheat on each other and get divorced?

And we could go on and on, couldn't we? Giving examples of how things are wrong and out of order and out of joint. We need to face such questions, don't we?

[20 : 34] This is how the Bible begins. It is the first thing God has to say to us. He takes us into the garden. He shows what happened. The world was never meant to be like this.

The story of the human race was never meant to be the way you now see it and feel it today. This fallen world is an outrageous phenomenon.

It is something that should really astound us. And that's why Isaiah begins like this with God's message. Hear, O heavens, give ear for worth.

Be amazed at men and women. They were meant to be the lords of God's creation. They were meant to be the crowning glory of God's handiwork.

But they have become creation's monstrosities. That is the first proposition in Isaiah's message from God. God. All that we were born into is wrong.

[21 : 39] The condition of the human race is about as far away from what God intended to be as possible. And I want to ask you this evening, have you realized that?

Here is a message that only the Bible preaches to you. Everyone else starts with the way things are. And they want them to be better.

But according to the Bible, you will never make things better until you realize that they are all wrong and have got to be made anew and afresh. You need a new birth.

You need a regeneration. You need a new creation. We need a radical new beginning. And then the second point in Isaiah's message is that men and women are in this condition because of their own actions.

In other words, there is no one to blame but themselves. God says, children have I reared and brought up, but they, they have rebelled against me.

[22 : 58] that's the reason why they're in trouble. That is why their lives are in a mess.

That is why they're afraid and anxious. You see, they have done it themselves. Now, it's quite possible there may be someone here this evening and you hate this Bible because of the kind of things you hear and read in it.

But really, you should admire the Bible because of its absolute honesty and integrity. It pulls no punches. It tells the truth, even when that truth hurts.

nobody tells us the plain truth about ourselves as God does in the Bible. The newspapers don't tell you the cause of your troubles.

Your psychiatrist, if you have one, will not do so. The great philosophers in the world will never tell it the way it is.

[24 : 14] None of them believe in what the Bible calls sin. They believe that men and women are, as they put it, more sinned against than actually sinning.

But the Bible tells us at the very beginning that our troubles are entirely of our own making. That we are where we are today because of what we have done, because we are fools, we are children who have rebelled.

that's significant. Our troubles are not due to our circumstances. The human race and you as an individual are not in the state you're in today merely because of certain conditions that are outside your control.

And neither is it because of bad karma, juju, or fate. But somebody asks, hasn't all this got to do with evolution and evolutionary law?

Isn't it that this is just the struggle of life as we progress on our way upwards and onwards to better things? On the basis of the Bible I have to say no, absolutely not.

[25 : 43] As a race we are not on our way upwards and onwards, we are on our way downwards and backwards. Men and women were never meant to be like this.

Man was made perfect and our world was a perfect world at the beginning. the world is as it is today because of our own deliberate action.

The Bible calls it a rebellion, a revolt, a refusal, a turning away from God. That is the Bible's message.

And that brings us to our third main point. Isaiah puts it like this, the root cause of humanity's trouble is sin.

Is sin. You see, what we have here in the opening words of this first chapter of Isaiah's prophecy is a superb analysis of sin. And Isaiah goes on to spell it out in some detail because it's only as we understand sin and see ourselves as sinners that we have any hope, any hope of being delivered.

[27 : 01] repentance first, then faith. That's the way it is in the Bible. We must go down before we can go up.

We must confess where we are wrong before God puts us right. We must understand what sin really is. What then is sin?

Well, let's be clear about this. sin is not so much a matter of the things we do as a matter of our relationship to God.

You see, the trouble with most of us is that we always think of sin in terms of individual sins. bad things that we do.

Is that not true of you? Is that not true of how you think? You say, oh, I mustn't do that because that is sinful. But my friend, there is something more terrible than that sinful action that you don't want to do in your life.

[28 : 14] You see, even if you didn't do anything wrong ever, your attitude towards God would make you a sinner.

Do you understand that? Sin, in its essence, is the very thing that the prophet talks about here.

sin, to use Isaiah's words, is rebellion. These children have rebelled against me, says the Lord.

It is revolt against God and we too must put our finger on this issue first of all and get it clearly established in our minds.

So let me ask you again, have you realised this? Let me put it like this, and this is perhaps very relevant in the light of this morning's sermon about the rich young ruler. You may be a very moral person.

[29 : 19] Nobody in this church could stand up and point a finger at you. Your life is an example to others as far as they can see. But what is your relationship to God?

You see, sin is rebellion against God, it is self-centredness. God made the world. God made it perfect. He made man and woman and made them for himself.

They were meant to live to the glory of God and to find their joy and their happiness in God. So why are we in trouble? Why is the whole world in trouble?

Because those perfect creatures who were made by God deliberately rebelled against him. And that's the message of Isaiah in this verse.

Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. That is the root cause of all the problems of the world.

[30 : 28] The problems are the symptoms. This is the root cause. It's a wrong attitude to God. Think of those early chapters in Genesis.

Think of the story of the fall. Did God really say the devil suggested to Eve?

Did God say that you must not eat from this tree? Of course he did. Why did God say that? God knows that in the day that you eat of the fruit of that tree, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

And the devil you see poisoned their relationship by saying that God is bad. God is a killjoy. God wants to keep you down. God cannot be trusted.

Therefore don't obey him. Rebel. Assert your independence. Stand on your own two feet. Take a stand for yourself. Stand up for your rights. And the man and the woman believed the devil's lies.

[31 : 39] And they harbored this evil idea about God in their hearts. They believed the lie about God and having started with this wrong attitude to God, their hearts became bitter against him and they rebelled against him.

They said, why shouldn't we do this? The serpent is perfectly right. Why shouldn't we assert ourselves and our own will? Why shouldn't we have this knowledge that is being kept from us?

So they deliberately asserted their free will and did that which God had told them not to do. And that, my friend, is rebellion. Rebellion is saying, I'm going to defy the king.

I'm going to defy his laws. I'm going to do what I think is right, even though it's a blank contradiction of what God has told me.

That is exactly what the man and the woman did in the garden. And that is why our world is as it is today.

[32 : 48] And why the only hope for the whole human race is the message found in this book. You know, you can give people better houses, shorter working hours, higher wages, lower taxes.

You can multiply the number of their satellite TV channels. You can supply them with better quality food and clothes. You can educate them to a level that our grandfathers could only dream about.

In fact, you can give them just about everything they ask for. But, as long as they are rebels against God in their hearts, this world will remain just the same as it is today.

And why is that the case? Saint Augustine put it like this, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

Men and women, like the heavens and the earth, are meant to obey the God given laws of their own creation. If they do not, in comes contradiction, in comes confusion.

[34 : 12] There follows misery and pain, anarchy and chaos, and ultimately judgment and damnation. So what Isaiah said eight centuries before the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is as true today as it was when he first uttered it.

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. Are you unhappy?

Is there a festering sore in your soul which you know you cannot cure because you've tried virtually everything? Do you feel that you're fighting a losing battle?

Are you always looking for happiness but can't get it? And when you lie in bed at night, does this recurring question come back to haunt you?

What's the matter with me? Why am I so unhappy? And why do I feel so empty and unfulfilled? Listen to the Lord's answer.

[35 : 33] Written here in Isaiah. You, just like everybody else born into this world, are a rebel against God and until you face up to that fact and admit your folly, until you surrender your life to him who has the supreme right to your life because he made you and he cares for you, I tell you this, you will never have peace.

Sin is serious because rebellion against the almighty God is serious. Do you remember what Samuel, the Old Testament prophet said to Saul, the very first king of Israel?

He said, rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. God is there is nothing more terrible than to defy the almighty.

It's much worse than drunkenness, drug addiction, sexual immorality, homosexuality, and witchcraft.

It's worse. It's worse. defying God, living your own life, thinking your own thoughts, finding your joy apart from God.

[36 : 58] This is the cause of human troubles. The amazing thing is, you know, why isn't life worse than it is?

But be sure of this. Such an attitude and conduct deserves and will receive the punishment of hell. There's only one explanation of why things are not worse than it is this.

We would receive nothing but hell, which is what we deserve, were it not that God is long suffering and loving and gracious and good.

Why did he send this man Isaiah to the people of ancient Israel with this message? Why did he ever stand up before the people of Judah and Jerusalem and say, the Lord has spoken?

Was it to condemn? condemn? No, no, it wasn't to condemn. It was to save. Come now and let us reason together, said the Lord.

[38 : 22] Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. It makes sense. Wash yourselves, he says.

Wash yourselves. remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Where can we be washed?

Another Old Testament prophet foretold that in Jerusalem a fountain would be opened for sin and for uncleanness. One of the English hymn writers said, there is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners, murderers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty states.

It's wonderful, isn't it? That God in His grace should say to the avenging angel, wait. Hold back.

[39 : 58] There are people in Livingston Free Church gathering on the evening of the 3rd of September 2017 that I want to tell my message of hope and salvation to once more because I want to see them saved and not destroyed.

God bless His word to us. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we pray that you would bring us to see ourselves as we truly are and then to turn our eyes away from self to you, to you, the God of grace and mercy, the God who sends prophet after prophet and preacher after preacher to declare your word that people may not be destroyed and perish forever, but that they might have everlasting life through receiving as a free gift, forgiveness and justification in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, open our hearts to this message. Put an end to our rebellion. Help us to come and reason with you that our scarlet sins might be made as white as the snow.

Only you can do this, O Lord, and we pray that you would do it for each and every one of us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.