

To worship is serve; reflecting God's image

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- [0 : 0 0] The book of Isaiah, a few verses here in chapter 1. So Isaiah chapter 1. Isaiah is actually the longest book, I think 66 chapters, chapter-wise.
- I think Jeremiah beats it in word count because some of the verses are longer than others. It's not that important, but just while you're turning to your Bible.
- So Isaiah chapter 1 then, we'll read the first few verses, we'll skip a few, and we'll make our way through. So Isaiah chapter 1, verse 1, now hear God's word.
- 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 I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.
- [1 : 0 8] The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib. But Israel does not know. My people do not understand.
- Verse 5, why will you be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.
- Verse 9, this is just to keep the theme. 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 burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls and of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?
- [2 : 1 4] Bring no more vain offerings, incense, and abomination to me. Let's go down to verse 16. Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean.
- Remove the evil from your deeds and from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless and plead the widow's cause.
- Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be 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. Well, we pray that God would bless his word. It's not as complicated as it might first sound.
- [3 : 1 9] But we'll come back to that after we have sung this next hymn together. Please, with your Bibles, turn to Isaiah.
- Isaiah. So, the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah is a prophet. And what that means is that Isaiah speaks God's words to God's people on God's behalf.

That's what a prophet does. He speaks God's words to God's people on God's behalf. Now, that means that as we listen to the words of Isaiah, we are at the same time listening to the words of God.

The role of a prophet is never to say anything of his own doing. It's never to, you know, make up his own message.

[4 : 44] He's simply to declare what God has declared to him. That's how simple it is. Now, the message of Isaiah has quite a lot to say when you read it from beginning to end.

But our focus this evening as we look at chapter 1 and these few verses in chapter 1 is more to do with the unchanging reality. You ought to, as a Christian, take great comfort in the things that never change.

Great comfort in the things that never, especially those things that never change about God. You know, that is the very foundation of believing the promises of God.

That is the very basis that we have for being assured in our faith that, you know, these things that the people of old believed are not going to change for us. That's really encouraging. That's really good.

God is always dealing with his people, and God is always involved in everything. What Isaiah does is he tells you just how involved God is.

[6 : 01] So as you read through these chapters from beginning to end, you'll get to, when you get into the chapters of the 50s, you'll start reading about the suffering servant. The Messiah, the one who lives the perfect life, is marked with his transgressors, and then dies on the cross.

And of course, he rises from the dead, and there is blessing to a multitude of people. And what Isaiah is saying, just notice how involved God is.

That the triumphant God of Scripture is not one who is involved at a distance, sort of declaring orders to other people, but he is one that comes straight into humanity, and deals with the problems himself.

Just notice for a moment how involved the triumphant God of Scripture is. Now, to really understand why God deals with his people, you've got to understand what God's people are for.

To really understand the work of a mechanic, you've got to know the purpose of transportation.

[7 : 18] What is a car? What is a lorry? What is it? To really know the purpose of a doctor, or why the doctor gets involved in the way that he does, you really have to understand the purpose of a person.

Physically, that is, perhaps. So to really understand why God is involved, and why he gets involved in the things that he does, you've got to understand the purpose of people, from God's point of view.

What are they for? What do they do? What are they meant for? What did God create them? And the answer is very, very simply this. God created them to reflect him on earth.

The nation of Israel were to be a light to the nations, in the same way that Christians are to be the salt of the earth and the light. We're to be salt and light.

In the same way, we are to reflect God on earth. That's the purpose. Now, think about it this way. If the purpose is that we are to be reflectors of God on earth, that when people look at us, they actually get glimpses of what God is like, now begin to understand the type of involvement that God is going to have in your life.

[8 : 37] What happens when you become a dirty mirror? Well, God's going to have to come down and clean you. He's going to have to scrub you clean. He's going to have to make sure that you're restored back to the purpose, that you're meant to have this reflective purpose.

So, whatever God does is to restore you, to make sure that you are truly reflecting God. That's your purpose.

You're truly reflecting God. That's his will. That's what he does in the lives of his people. And therefore, whatever his people are like on earth, other people will make their mind up about God.

Let me say that again. Whatever God's people are like on earth, other people are going to make their mind up about God to a certain extent. Because that is where God has placed his image to be.

That's where God is demonstrating what he's like in his own people. So, if everything that we do reflects on God, everything that God does is to promote and protect that reflection.

[9 : 50] Okay? So, if everything that we do reflects on God, everything that God does towards us, or in our lives, is to promote and protect that reflection.

So, if the reflection is not, you know, showing God off to what he's meant to be, yeah, you can be pretty sure God's going to do a work within your life.

If it is what it's meant to be, then God is going to continue to bless it. Well, how does he do it? Well, he does it in a couple of ways. Firstly, if you're faithful, then God sort of blesses that faithfulness.

There is a link between morality and blessing. There is a strong link between living faithfully and receiving the blessings of God. It's not a tit-for-tat. It's simply where God pours out his blessing.

That when his people are faithful, God is that way towards them. So, God promotes his reflection in those people by just simply adding blessing.

[10 : 50] Those, however, who are rebelling, as Isaiah says here, who are not wanting to reflect God, but perhaps the surrounding nations or the people around them, individuals in particular, or whatever it may be, then it can get to the point where there's only one option left, and that is you have to remove them from the congregation.

In other words, you're saying, yeah, they're not part. They're not a mirror. They're not part of my people. And that's crucial to understand, because there is only two ways of dealing with it, isn't it?

That either, yeah, that can be described as a person of God, or that can't be described as a person of God. So, God protects and promotes his own reflective image in his people by blessing those who are faithful and by removing those who continue to be, and I want to stress the continuance of rebelling.

God is very patient. God is very merciful. But is there a way of life that you can live where at some point God removes you? And the answer is yes.

There is a way where you can live in such a way where despite God's patience, despite the fact that he is a merciful God, despite the fact that he is a God who blesses, he will remove, why?

[12 : 19] Because he wants to promote and protect his own reflection on earth through his people. Very important. So, the message of Isaiah is basically saying this, that there is only one hope, and that is the Messiah.

There is only one place of salvation, and that is the Messiah. He is the only hope that we have, and the only hope that we need. Paul then says in Corinthians and in Romans, that all of these things in the past were written as examples for us.

So, Isaiah is beneficial to the Christian. You think, well, how can Isaiah be beneficial to me? It's talking about a people and a place and a time. It's just nothing like the 21st century.

What on earth has it got to say to me? Well, Paul's pretty adamant that, you know, the Old Testament is there to learn from. Why? Here's why. Salvation never negates.

Salvation never does away with the need to learn from the past. But how many of us think that that's exactly what salvation does?

[13 : 32] That now that I'm saved, I don't need to learn about what came before it. I don't need to learn about that. No, no, no. Paul is saying, look, salvation doesn't do away with that.

In fact, salvation promotes that. It actually asks you to go back and have a look at the past to see how God deals with his people. So, don't run the risk of thinking that your salvation is somehow doing away with the past instruction.

No, you're to learn from the past. I think one of the reasons why perhaps many of us have come to this conclusion is I think because there is not a spiritual pride.

You know, you take the seven deadly sins. You know, they're all deadly. They're all deadly. You know, it's interesting that, you know, which is the deadliest sin, do you think?

And most people are going to say, you know, lust. Actually, lust is right down the bottom of the list. You know, it's, you know, the most, pride's the most deadly one.

[14 : 37] But what is the deadly sin of the church today? A slothfulness. A spiritual slothfulness.

You know, yeah, and now that I'm saved, everything's hunky-dory. Everything's just fine. You know, I don't, you know, salvation does away with the need of learning from the book of Isaiah.

No, Paul says. No, it doesn't. Salvation does not do away with learning from the past. So we begin. Isaiah, a message from God.

God has a message that he wants his people to hear. In short, God is saying this. Number one, why have you forgotten me? When the ox knows its owner.

I mean, that's a pretty, that's a pretty punchy statement, isn't it? You know, you've forgotten me, but the ox, well, it knows where it's to go at night, and the donkey knows where it's to go, but my own people have forgotten me.

[15 : 38] Why do God's people, who can experience his discipline, not change? I don't know what type of person you are, thoroughly, but, you know, we can hazard good guesses after we get to know each other after such a long time.

Are there some people who never learn? Yes. Are there some people who can experience the discipline of God, and it's quite painful, beneficial, but, you know, it ruffles feathers.

Still not learn? Yeah, absolutely. Well, that's another one of God's issues here. You know, why is it that I'm dealing with you, and the very things that should cause you to sort of come on, now you're just doing it again and again.

Well, the next thing, this is where God's mercy and God's grace steps in, in verse 9 in particular. You know, God has to step in when his people never change, and he steps in with mercy. He has to be so merciful where, let's say, he gets rid of a few of his congregation because they're just not willing to return to God.

They just constantly want to keep rebelling. Well, God's mercy has to intervene in such a way because what happens when you've got a group of people that keep doing the very things that destroy themselves?

[17 : 11] What do you do with a child who keeps doing the same thing that actually, you know, causes their fingers to burn you? Don't touch the hot plate.

And they do it again and again. What are you going to do? Well, at some point, you're going to step in and remove them completely. Why? Well, you're being merciful.

Have they not learned from their own mistake? Yeah, they've not learned. They keep doing it again and again. So you just have to remove them. That's what God does.

God is so merciful that, you know, sometimes he recognizes that, you know, you can't be corrected. And so what does God do when he's dealing with a person in the congregation that, you know, can't be corrected?

Well, he just has to just remove them. Why? Because he wants to protect them. He wants to bless. He wants them not to keep doing this to themselves. This is part of the message that God has here.

[18 : 14] Another issue here is that, you know, worship is a wonderful thing. But people here have begun to hide in worship to the point where God is no longer accepting their worship.

They're praying. God's not interested. They're giving their offerings. God's just, God's just not caring about it. And then lastly, why would anyone turn down forgiveness?

And they do. But why would anyone do that? Why would anyone turn down God's forgiveness? And they do do that. So forgetting God.

What happens when God's people forget it? Forgetting God. Well, one of the things that seems to happen is that they forget his grace as well.

Seems to go hand in hand. If I forget God, I also forget that God is a graceful God. Verse 2 explains God is a father who cares for his children, a father who rears his children, a father who has brought his children up.

[19 : 23] But now these children, according to God, have rebelled. They've turned against their father. But the ox hasn't, and the donkey hasn't. You know, I mean, that's, you know, God is sort of taking the mick out of his own people.

You know, look at yourself and look at the ox. The ox hasn't turned on its master. The donkey hasn't. But you have.

You've turned on your father. You have forgotten me. The children of God here have just living their own existence and not really recognizing that their existence comes from God and their care also comes from the hand of God.

So don't forget. Don't ever forget as you sit here this evening that your existence is in the hands of God but so is your care. So is your well-being.

It's not just I need God to keep me alive. No, you need God to care for you. And the children here are rebelling against that. They've forgotten God and so they're rebelling against the care of God.

[20 : 38] Verse 5 then explains something disturbing yet unfortunately common. Why will you be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel?

The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. What's God addressing? What do you think he's saying to his people here? He's saying this.

You know, there are some believers who will never learn from experiences no matter how painful they are. There are some believers who never learn from painful experiences.

Now let's just say for a moment that these painful experiences come about through not obeying God. And you know, God has to deal with you and you know, it's uncomfortable and you have still not learned.

And so what God is saying here in verse 5 is that why do you do it again and again and again? Why don't you learn? Well, here's the reason they've forgotten God.

[21 : 46] They have come to think that, you know, actually what I do and what God does aren't actually linked. And what God is saying in verse 5, no actually, they are very linked.

Very linked. There are a couple of answers I think for why this happens. And it's often summed up in the attitude of rebellion. Why are some people willing to live with the consequences rather than change?

I knew of a lady who gave her testimony. Her husband went out to work and she got hooked on online gambling.

At first, she was pretty good at it. A bit of bingo here, a bit of bingo there, a bit of poker playing online, you know, a bit of this and that. She won a few. Then she began to lose.

And then she lost a little bit more and a little bit more. One day, her husband found out. It was through, you know, banking statements and stuff like that. And so he did what I guess any husband would do.

[22 : 54] He confronted his wife. And she said, you know, yeah, it's wrong. It was a silly mistake. You know. And of course, this is a Christian couple, by the way.

And I'm telling you because they told the testimony. And so basically, you know, there was forgiveness. And for a couple of months, everything was fine.

But then she got back into it. Only this time, the debts were a lot bigger. And her husband found out again. And the conversation this time was not quite as gentle.

But there was still forgiveness at the end of it. It happened again. And then there was argument. It happened again. And then the relationship was on the verge of seriously breaking down.

It happened again and again. In the end, the addiction to the gambling was broken and the relationship was restored. But here's the thing. When she was asked, why did you continue to do it knowing that your relationship was going down?

[24 : 01] I went, why? And she says, here's why. Because the consequences became bearable. when your heart is hard to change, even you, the faithful Christian that you might be, are willing to live for consequences.

You're willing to bear them. Why? Because the attitude to change is just something you're not willing to do. So what God is saying here about his people, yeah, I know, God knows why his people aren't going to change.

It's because you have become so hard in your heart that you're willing to put up with the consequences rather than change. You are willing to suffer painful experiences rather than change.

Is that a pride issue? Yes, it's a big pride issue. But it's also an issue where they have forgotten the God who cares for them. They have forgotten the God of verse 2, of verse 1, of verse 2, sorry, who has reared them and has brought them up.

I think another reason why it continues to happen is, like I said earlier, is because believers can falsely believe that what I do and how God deals with us has no connection whatsoever. And the reason they do it again and again is, you know, is because, you know, this time, I'm going to get away with it.

[25 : 36] This time, it's not going to, yeah, I've seen it happen to other Christians, but it's not going to happen to me. No, no, God is saying that. If it doesn't happen to you, it's because I've been merciful.

Okay? If it doesn't happen to you, it's because I've been merciful. But don't ever assume presume on that mercifulness. Okay?

If it doesn't happen, it's because I have been merciful. Hence why God says, you know, why have I, you know, I've struck you down and yet you continue to rebel. why are you not learning?

So then, in such a situation where there is a temptation to believe that, you know, I can get away with it and not change, and my heart is hard, so hard that I don't want to change, but now I'm living with the consequences daily.

What do you think God's going to do to a person like that whom he loves? Well, interestingly, he doesn't get rid of them. Interestingly, his mercy, verse 9 in particular, listen to it, if the Lord of hosts had not left a few survivors, we should have become like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.

[26 : 56] In other words, only God's mercy can stop painful experiences. Only God's mercy can stop painful cycles.

Because if he doesn't, then we are leading our lives to a very quick and downward trend. God has to remove us completely.

How is he going to do it? It doesn't matter. He's going to take you out completely. Why? Are you going to like it? No, you're not going to like it. Because you're rebelling. But why is he going to?

Well, because he's merciful. Because he's loving. He doesn't want you to become like Sodom. He doesn't want you to become like Gomorrah. He doesn't want you to become utterly destroyed. So he intervenes and he brings you to himself.

He brings you to himself. In order for us to truly understand why we need God's mercy, we also have to understand why the worship of God here is rejected.

[28 : 01] Because the two are actually linked in a strange way. The issue here is quite simply this, that these are a group of people who want to worship God at the expense of doing good.

They want to worship God at the expense of seeking justice. They want to worship God, but they don't want to correct oppression. In other words, what they're doing is they're coming to perhaps even a service like this.

It's going to be a little different. Thinking that they're worshiping God, but they do no good. They've not sought justice. They've not correct oppression.

They've not done good to other people. That's the issue. They hide in their worship. In other words, they're using worship as a way to evade the demands of God.

Are you going to serve in the church? I spend that time in prayer. That's great. Are you going to do it? Well, I sing. That's wonderful. Are you going to, well, you know, okay.

[29 : 09] What are they doing? They are reinterpreting worship. God is sat there, metaphorically speaking. God is there.

They're bringing their prayers. They're bringing their offerings. And God is, God's rejecting everything. Why? Because they're, they're not seeking good. They're not doing good. They're not seeking justice. They've, they're hiding in worship.

Instead of doing the things that they are meant to do, they are not doing the things that they ought to do. They're just, yeah, there it goes, off it goes. They give their offerings and prayers to God, but God is just not interested.

You see, to worship God, God is saying here, properly, is actually to do good, to seek justice, and correct oppression. That's what true worship is.

Why? Because worship is responding to God and the world as you should. Romans 12, verse 2, puts it very, very, very clearly that to worship God properly is to know his will and to do it.

[30 : 12] In fact, the very word for worship in Romans, if I remember, this is going to test me, latreo, latreo, means to serve.

to serve. So the need for God's mercy here, you know, is not just needed in the area of a group of people not learning from their mistakes.

Yeah, it's definitely needed there, but God's mercy is also needed in the area of their worship because they're not responding to God as they should.

So how is God going to sort this mess out? Well, notice what he begins to do and notice where he begins to do it, verses 18 through to 20. It is a time for reasoning.

Time to reason it out. Time to consider. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. What does God say? Well, this is what he says, let your sins are like scarlet.

[31 : 17] In other words, you know, that's not a good thing. Your sins are like crimson. And though your sins are like scarlet, and though your sins are like crimson, red like crimson, I am going to make them as white as snow and as white as wool.

I was thinking about this. Yeah, how do you make something white? You've got a room in your house and you go into the room, there's nothing else in it.

And down the bottom hand, down in one of the corners, you've got rising damp coming through the walls. And over here, you've got penetration damp coming through this wall, which is not the same as rising damp, but we can talk about that another time.

It's my tradesman coming through, you see. How do you make it white? All you do is you, you go out to, you know, B&Q; or somewhere like that and you, you go and buy a few gallons of, of white paint because, you know, the damp's pretty bad.

And you come in and you start painting. And then you let it dry. And you go, that's not enough. Then you get your brush out again and you go over it again. And you think, that's not mad.

[32 : 34] You've got a few more coats and then suddenly, after several coats, after several hours, you look at the room, that's white. Only it isn't. Only it isn't, is it?

The walls are still exactly the same. The paint is white. The paint is white, but the walls are no different.

Think about it. The paint is white, but the walls are no different. What do you think God is saying when he says, I'm going to make your sins as white as snow? This is what he's saying.

Snow is naturally white. Naturally. That's the point. That's the point. In other words, what he's saying is this, I'm going to make you naturally, I'm not going to cover you up with whiteness.

I'm not going to make you appear to be white and bright and clean and perfect. No, no. I'm going to make you naturally white. Naturally righteous.

[33 : 38] That's the issue here. See, wool, sheep's wool, even though when it stood out in a snowy field, doesn't ever even look as white as snow, but nevertheless, that's not the point.

The point is, it's naturally white. I'm sure a black sheep. Snow. Well, it's naturally, that's the point.

The point here is, the color is not a metaphor for clarity and purity as such. No, the issue here is more to do with the nature of it. I will make your sins, you know, where you are naturally pure.

I'm not going to cover it up with a whiteness like you would a wool with paint. No, no. I'm going to make you naturally white. And that, there's a deep work of regeneration.

That is a deep work of God within someone's heart. So, when God says, your sins will become white as snow, he's saying, I'm going to change your very nature.

[34 : 41] I'm going to change your very nature. I'm going to make you naturally something different than what you are right now. So, verse 18, come and reason this out.

Think about that. Think about that for a moment. And so, don't reject my forgiveness. Don't reject my forgiveness. Verse 19, if you are willing and obedient, then good things are going to come your way.

Don't reject my forgiveness. Verse 20, however, if you refuse, why would you refuse forgiveness? But God's anticipating that some will. If you refuse forgiveness, then there's nothing, unfortunately, but judgment there.

God is speaking to his people who are to be a light to the nations. They need a nature change. People who are to reflect God on earth, pure and holy and spotless.

merciful and forgiving. God restores and blesses his faithful believers who return, who repent, who receive his forgiveness.

[35 : 52] So, we finish. And we finish with this exhortation. We need to understand that our whole life belongs to God. And therefore, we need to understand that God is allowed to make any demand that he wants on us.

Whatever God wants from us, God is allowed. He can have it. Whenever you consider how God is dealing with you, remember that God is dealing with you because you are to reflect him to the people around you.

when your heart is hard, then you are going to be willing to put up with the consequences because hard hearts don't change.

They need God to change them. So, when your heart is hard, you are willing to suffer painful experiences because you just don't want to change.

rather return to God. Return to God and receive. Don't reject the forgiveness. Worship. Take a good look at how you're doing it.

[37 : 06] Are you praying? Great. Are you singing? Wonderful. Are you serving? Are you serving? Are you worshipping God?

Are you serving? That's the point here, isn't it? That's the issue that God has with his people. Are you worshipping? Are you serving?

It's saying the same thing. Are you doing good? Are you seeking justice? Are you correcting oppression? Are you worshipping God? Being saved doesn't cancel out those kinds of responsibilities.

Being saved doesn't mean that you get a free pass on those. No, no. Being saved means that you have the opportunity forgiveness to do them. Forgiveness. Most importantly, don't think you don't need it.

Don't think you don't need it. And the longer you are a Christian, the greater the temptation is to believe that I don't need as much of it now as I did when I first came to Christ.

[38 : 15] Forgiveness. Don't think you don't need it. Now, we confess our sins every Lord's Day. I've made a point of it a long time ago. We would come and confess our sins every Lord's Day.

Do we always want to do it? Probably not. Do we always come and do it? Probably not. But should we always be wanting and coming to do it?

Yeah, absolutely. Do we know that's the truth? Yeah, of course we know that's the truth. That's how we deal with our own hard heart. We come face to face. What's your decision going to be today?

Am I going to allow it to get hard or am I going to get it right before God? You know, we all struggle with this. So don't go pointing the finger and say, this person struggles with it more. We all struggle with it.

None of us like coming face to face with God telling us off. It's just... Remember, God is always involved. God never sticks his nose into something that doesn't concern him.

[39 : 17] Everything concerns him. And everything about you concerns God. So go away from here tonight remembering that God is a merciful God.

Go away from here tonight remembering that God, you know, reaches out to you in forgiveness all the time. Reaches out to you in mercy all the time. But he does make demands that you do good, that you seek justice, and you correct oppression.

He does make those kinds of demands upon you. Why? Because he wants you to be like him. He wants you to reflect him. Then you'll be the light that he has called you to be.

Then you will reflect God on earth. That's the point. That's your purpose. And that is why God is never going to leave you alone. Jonah, but continually, continually work within your life.

Amen.