



HIGHLIGHTS FROM ISAIAH

PART 1

ISAIAH

Rebellious Children - Isaiah 1

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders, please use these questions as a guide for discussion. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)

Connect: What does it practically look like for you to “trust in the Lord” this week?

Warm-Up

1. What would people who aren't Christians think about the type of condemnation and words that we see in Isaiah chapter 1?
2. What type of genre is Isaiah? What was the context that he was writing in?

Read Isaiah 1:1-15

3. What is your reaction to this reading? Any thoughts or comments or questions that arise for you?
4. Throughout Israel's history, how has God provided for them and looked after them? What was their response to God's love?
5. How did Israel's rebellion against God present itself? What were the repercussions for this?
6. Do we ever rebel against God? In what ways can our forsaking of God present itself in our lives?
7. Are we ever at risk of making light of sin? What is God's response to this rebellion and sin?
8. What was God's response to the various acts of worship in Israel in V12-14? Why was this so? How were they mistreating God?
9. If God prescribed this sort of worship in the Law, why then is Israel's worship deemed repulsive?
10. If God doesn't want this sort of religion, what does God desire of his people? How is this good news?
11. In what ways are we free to live with and for him?
12. Are we ever tempted to fall into doing stuff for God rather than being in relationship with him? What could help us reframe our thinking?
13. What does God want Israel to do in V16-17? What is the only thing that we can do in response to our sin?

Read Isaiah 1:16-20

14. Why is it good news that God invites his people to 'settle the matter' with him? How does God ultimately make a way for that to be permanently possible for both Israel and us? What is the alternative?
15. How can we be completely confident that our sins have been completely done away with?
16. What could help you grow in your awe of God's compassion, grace, and mercy for us?

Apply: How could you grow in seeing your freedom from sin and freedom in relationship with God this week?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you that though we are often rebellious and forget you, you never forget us. Forgive us for our sin and half-hearted worship. Turn our hearts fully back to you. Thank you for Jesus, who makes us clean and restores us to your love. Help us live for you. Amen.*

TITLE: ISALAH - Rebellious Children

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: Israel are rebellious and sinful and yet God calls them back to himself and offers forgiveness for them. We have the amazing confidence of our forgiveness through Jesus even though we too are sinful.

STRUCTURE:

- 1-9 The Lord Forgotten
- 10-15 The Lord Mistreated
- 16-20 - The Lord Who Forgives

- One time In Grade 3 it was lunchtime and we had all finished our lunches and then the bell rang for us all to be able to go and play.
- So we all ran down the hill to the oval but then a young Michael Calder was put off balance by a nudge in the back. And my face came slamming down into a wooden plank that surrounded a tree.
- Now I was in shock and I thought I was all okay, maybe in need of a hug from mum - but I was sent to the nurses office. And there I saw myself in the mirror for the first time.
- And what I saw was a uniform soaked in blood - and a lip that had been split open.

- I didn't realise how bad the situation was until I saw myself in the mirror.
- Isaiah 1 and Isaiah as a whole is like God holding up a mirror to his people Israel.
- He wants them to know just how far they have departed from his ways and from his will for them.
- He wants them to know just how HOLY he is and how this rebellion is disgusting to him and deserves punishment and his anger!
- But also, he lovingly wants them to know that they can come back to him. That he will fix them up and will forgive and restore them through the Messiah; the branch, the faithful suffering servant - if only they would turn back to him and believe in Him.
- Over the course of this term - we are literally scratching the surface of the book. If we were to go deep, we would be doing a 2 year long series in Isaiah straight - and I promise we won't do that to you...not just yet anyway

- But where are we in history? How have we got here? Well, we're probably looking around 730BC and we are a few hundred years after the glory days of King David.
- But in those years, things have gone downhill for the nation. The people have been split into two - the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.
- And while some of the kings followed in the ways of the Lord, the vast majority rejected the ways of the Lord and led the people to worship the other gods of the nations.
- They oppressed the vulnerable and neglected the orphans and the widows. Some even killed the prophets of the Lord.
- The nation was in a tattered state. The glorious promised land was no longer glorious; the shine had worn off completely. The promised land flowing with milk and honey and peace instead flowed with injustice, cruelty, and violence.
- And this is heartbreaking isn't it? God's people were far from him. God's people had forgotten him.
- But God hadn't forgotten his people.
- He was still faithful to his covenant promises and so God sent prophets to beckon his children back to him, to get them to look into the mirror! But their words will fall on deaf ears.
- As we'll see in chapter one, the diagnosis of the spiritual state of Israel is not a positive one. Even their acts of worship were repugnant to God because their hearts were far from him.
- But God's heart was still with his people.

- **The Lord Forgotten**
- In the first verses Isaiah calls on all the heavens and earth to witness what the Lord has to say about his people.

- These are big words from a great God! So listen to the one who knows all things, sees all things, who threw the stars into motion, and loves his people with an everlasting love.
- And what does he has to say? What he has to say is heartbreaking
- 1:2-4 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."
- God's people have rebelled against and forgotten about him.
- And remember - these are God's Chosen people!
- His beloved children!
- He brought them to be from a nation from a nomadic family, he rescued them from the oppression of slavery; he practically hand-fed them everyday for 40 years in the wilderness; he brought them into this promised land for them to enjoy his kingdom; even when they rebelled, he made ways back to him!
- He saved them to be his people with a purpose - to be a light for the nations for all people to come to know him as Lord!
- BUT they have completely forsaken him. Turned their backs against him. Forgotten the one who provided for them time and time again; spurned the one who loves them with an everlasting love!
- The terrible irony is that animals know who their masters are; they know who feeds them and protects them and provides for them.
 - On schedule I'm sure your dog or cat will be around your feet or whining at the door because they know that you are the provider!
 - But Israel have forgotten and turned their back on the one who provides for them. The animals are smarter than them!
- And this isn't God making fun of his people, this is the Lord's lament for his people!
- As we hear these words, we should hear God's heart breaking for his people - like a parent for a child who departs from them. "Why Israel! Why have you departed from me!?" Sin breaks God's heart.
- Instead of being a city on a hill and a light on a stand for all the nations to see just how great and awesome God is, Israel have become no different to the nations. They have become a family or a brood of evildoers of sinners.
 - Just to name one example - we read in 2 Kings 16 that King Ahaz (around the time of Isaiah) even sacrificed his son in a pagan ritual and engaged in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.
- And this was the king who was supposed to lead the people in the way of the Lord!
- They worshipped the gods of the nations and forgot about YHWH - the Lord of Hosts. The Lord Almighty. The Lord of all.
- And so because of their disobedience and sinfulness, their nation was in tatters. It was wounded, bloodied and taken advantage of by the nations. The nations were tearing strips off of them!
- But they still persisted in forsaking the Lord.
- The glorious city has been turned into a shack! The mighty people have been turned from a mighty palace into a tool shed in the middle of a paddock. Small. Precarious. Desperate.
- But there is still a glimmer of hope.
- V8 "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."
- The Lord has still got his people there. He still loves them; he still has a plan for them; even though they have forsaken and forgotten him, he hasn't forsaken nor forgotten them.

- Now it may be easy at this point to think “Oh Israel - there they go again. How foolish of them to forsake and forget the Lord like that! How terrible they were! I’m so thankful I’m not like them!”
- But if we’re honest, it won’t take too much of a look in the spiritual mirror to see that we forsake the Lord too, all-too-readily.
- We can forsake his purposes
 - We can be more worried about what we want to do in the world than what he wants us to do in the world.
 - We can prefer our agenda for our lives and disregard his agenda
 - We can forsake his place and only come to him as a last resort rather than the fountainhead of life!
- We can neglect our relationship with him and keep him as an optional aside rather than our Lord.
- We can compartmentalise our lives and not let him be Lord over all areas of our lives but only over some.
- We can forsake his ways And not take seriously how he wants us to live but instead preferring our ways to live.
- And the point isn’t that this should drive us to despair - no not at all.
- But it should drive us to the cross where our sin was dealt with.
- It should drive us to turn back to God with all our hearts and throw ourselves on his mercy and grace - knowing that he is loving and compassionate...which is the very thing Israel refused to do

- **The Lord Mistreated**
- Now at this point in the chapter, you could probably imagine someone rebutting Isaiah and saying
- “Look mate - that’s not fair...I mean, look at all the sacrifices that we are doing! Look at all the incense we are burning! Look at our fancy beautiful worship! That’s gotta count for something right?”
- Will, this is what he has to say about this:
- V10-11 “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..”
- They thought that they could treat YHW like any other gods.
- That is that all that they had to do was to tick off the religious box and do the right stuff. As long as they had the outward show - it would be all good!
- But in fact it wasn’t all good because God doesn’t desire a religious show...God doesn’t desire mindless actions...God doesn’t desire heartless ritual.
- In fact all of these things are like a stench to God. He hates them with all his being!
- Israel’s worship has become a burden to him! They have become an abomination and repugnant to him!

- V13 “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 going into a guitar shop and trying out new guitars, there is one universal rule that must be followed everywhere in every country in every shop and that is “no stairway to heaven”.*
 - *Yes - shop owners and employees have become so tired of amateur guitarists playing this classic hit again and again and so out of tune that it is now forbidden.*
- But for the Lord, he wasn’t tired of the quantity of the particular songs or of the quantity of particular animal sacrifices. (this isn’t a variety is the spice of life situation)
- But he was tired of the lack of sincerity of the heart in their worship! He was tired of how fake and disingenuous their worship was

- Because while the worship had all the outward show and bling - the hearts of the people were far far from God! That's why the worship has become so tiresome to God!
- It's insincere, it's a sham, it's hypocritical, it's treating God like a cosmic pez dispenser rather than the Lord of all creation who loves his people.
- Yes, according to the law all of these things were prescribed for Israel to do. If you go and read Leviticus, you'll see that there are countless and continuous sacrifices!
- But they weren't the end goal, rather, they were the means to an end!
- The sacrificial system, the purity laws, and all the festivals were supposed to drive people's hearts and lives back to God - not to be blindly and mindlessly followed!
- But this is what Israel was doing.
- Their hearts were hard, their guilt was piling up, all while claiming to serve God by sacrificing to him.
- They were living as people who had the outward show but not the inward devotion of the heart to God. And God detests this type of service. It's tiresome to him; repugnant to him; burdensome; To the point where he ceases to listen to their many prayers....//
- Religious actions and doing stuff for God isn't what God wants of his people. God doesn't desire or want Mindless outward show.
- But God simply wants US.
- Isn't this great news?
- God wants US - He wants a relationship
- He wants us to be able to enjoy relationship with him; delight in intimacy with him; and then go and tell others about him and serve him in the world!
- And this means that we can be free from mindlessly doing stuff for God;
- we can be free from trying to please God with our list of good things;
- we can be free from the burden of struggling to be "good enough" for God;
- Because he isn't a God that needs to be served but a God that desires his people to worship him out of love for him.
- He didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life for us.
- This is who our God is! A relational God who has come to bring us back to himself. There is no other god like him.
- But at the same time as having this reassurance, we too need to look at our own worship in the mirror.
- It was only a few decades ago that churches were a lot more full than they are now.
- Sunday Schools filled with kids who were sent along.
- But the reason they were so full is because they were filled with people who went to church because that's just what you do!
- And it made no difference to the rest of their lives.
- The word for this - is nominalism! Cultural Christianity! Essentially hypocrisy!
- And people who just go through the motions, take part in the Sunday worship - but their hearts are far from God - well that's just as detestable to him as the myriad of sacrifices of Israel.
- If you think this might describe you - return to God with your whole heart and life and not just your Sunday Mornings!
- And because he gave his life for us, we can have complete and utter assurance that he is the Lord who forgives.
- **The Lord who Forgives**
- The first 15 or so verses are full of rightful condemnation. And throughout Isaiah, we'll continue to see God condemning his people!
- And it's weighty, it's heavy...and we should feel the weight of that because rejecting the Lord is a weighty thing to do.

- but God doesn't leave it there. Even though his people's hearts were far from him, even though they had forsaken him, the Lord wasn't far from them and he hadn't forgotten his covenant with them.
- So he calls on them to come back to him. He beckons them back into his arms.
- He urges them to STOP sinning V17. Grieve and mourn for how you have lived against God's ways and then Abandon it. Put it away.
- LEARN a new way - learn to do right and seek justice V17; and
- SEEK new objectives - don't live for yourself Israel or for your comfort but SEEK to live for the Lord!
- Or to put it simply, the Lord calls on his people to have a whole-hearted and whole of life repentance.
- A life 180. A turning away from sin and a turning towards living for God
- There still is hope for Israel. There still is a way for them to live with God as King. There is still hope for us.
- And that is because of God's grace in letting both Israel and us return to him.
 - No matter what we've done
 - No matter how far we've walked away
 - No matter what our history - the call is the same. RETURN to him.
- And when we do, he offers a complete forgiveness. A clean slate. A fresh start.
- V16 "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."
- When God calls on them to settle the matter, this isn't about an intellectual debate or a logical enquiry.
- Or like a legal settlement behind closed doors because - Israel has no basis to argue from.
- Their record of sin is clear and infinitely long! They don't have a leg to stand on! Their guilty sentence has already been declared!
- They are destined for judgement! V20 "but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
- But in calling his people to 'settle the matter' this is our Lord in all his glorious compassion and mercy offering another chance, an opportunity for reconciliation and forgiveness.
- Wow. Who is like our God?

- Isaiah wouldn't have known how this would be possible...but we do.
- 700 years later, Jesus was born into this world as one of us. And grew up and was crucified for our sake. He took our sins and iniquity and guilt on himself and took them to the grave. And then gloriously rose again giving us new life.
 - The sin of both the Israelites and US have been placed on him!
 - It's not through the sacrifices of the old system that we are saved - it's through the perfect and once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus!
 - And it's through faith in HIM that both the Israelites and US have been saved.
- And so because of this...the record of sin can be wiped clean; the bloody stain made white; the relationship that was in tatters can be restored - because the Lord was gracious and merciful and abounding in love.
- And our Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever, and so we too can have this fresh start and forgiveness.
- All we need to do is return to him.
- See our sin for what it is and Repent. And the sins will be forgiven because of Jesus.
- As we'll see throughout this series, he is the true king, he is the Messiah, he is the branch of hope, he is the suffering servant, who has come to bring us back to himself.
- It's only through Jesus that we can settle the matter.