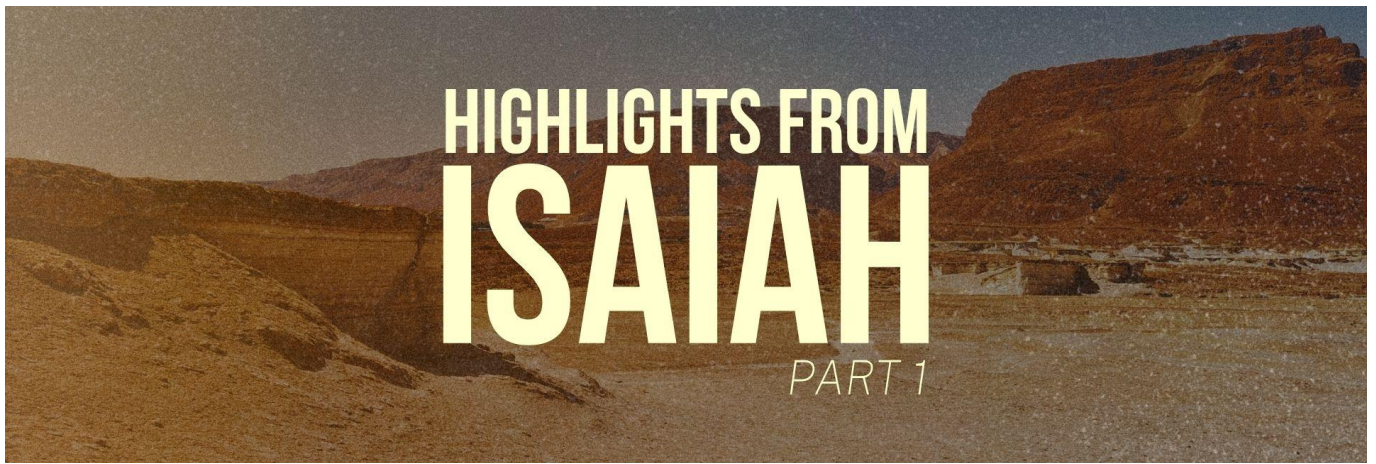




ISAIAH

Glorious Branch - Isaiah 3-4

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

Warm-Up

1. Can you think of a time when you only realised how good something was after it was taken away? What did that experience teach you?

Read Isaiah 3:1-15

2. In Isaiah 3:1–3, what are some of the things God says He will take away from Judah? What do these represent for the nation?
3. Why do you think Isaiah speaks about these events in the present tense, even though they haven't yet happened? What does that say about the certainty of God's word?
4. Verse 5 describes a breakdown of society — “the people will oppress one another.” What happens when a community loses justice, respect, and leadership?
5. Why would God remove these supports from His people? What do you think He wanted them to realise about themselves — and about Him?
6. How does Isaiah describe the attitude of Judah toward their sin? What do you think it means to “proclaim their sin like Sodom”?
7. How does this attitude compare with the way people treat sin in our culture today?
8. Deuteronomy 30:17–18 warned Israel that turning from God would bring destruction. What does this show us about God's justice and faithfulness to His covenant?

Read Isaiah 4:2-6

9. What/who does the “Branch of the LORD” represent? How is this promise different from the destruction described earlier?
10. Verse 4 speaks of God washing away filth and cleansing bloodstains. How does this cleansing happen through Jesus?
11. In verses 5–6, God promises His presence will cover and protect His people like a canopy. What do these images (cloud, fire, booth) remind you of from Israel's history?
12. How does Jesus fulfil the promise of God's presence with His people?
13. Read Revelation 21:2–4. How does this picture of the new Jerusalem connect to Isaiah's prophecy? How does this hope of life with God forever encourage you in times when life feels stripped back or broken?

Apply: How might trusting in the Branch change the way you respond when life feels uncertain?

PRAY: Lord, thank you for Jesus, the Branch who brings life and hope. Help us trust you when things are taken away, and rest in your presence and promise forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TITLE: ISAIAH - The Branch

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: The Lord will judge Judah by taking away their stability and security and beauty but will at the same time provide hope in the giving of the branch - Jesus.

STRUCTURE:

- The Lord Takes Away (3:1-12)
- The Lord Judges (3:13-15)
- The Lord Takes Away (3:16-4:1)
- The Lord will give the Branch (4:2-6)

- It's so often that you don't realise how good you've got it - until it's all gone.
 - *When your sporting team is top of the world, it's a great feeling - until the star players retire, get injured, or move to another team. you don't realise how good you had it until it's gone!*
 - *When your child acts up - you may discipline them by taking away their favourite toy, or access to technology - so that they realise how good they had it!*
 - *When you move from the peak of health in the 20's to the mid 40's niggles, to declining mobility in your 80's - you don't realise how good you had it until it's gone!*
- And for the people of Israel in Isaiah 3-4 - they won't realise how good they've had it, until it's all taken away from them.
- And as we've already seen last week - Israel had forgotten their God, they had forgotten the one who provides for them.
- They had forgotten what worshipping him actually meant - not endless sacrifices but the drawing close of a child of God to their father.
- The second half of Chapter 1 all the way to chapter 3 is again full of condemnation for the people of God. The land was full of idols, full of immorality. People were full of pride.
- But also in the midst of condemnation - there still are glimmers of hope!
- This is so often the pattern in the Prophets - YES Judgement will come, YES it's going to be hard BUT There is always a way back to God through repentance and faith in him.
 - All the people had to do was to drop their pride, confess their disobedience and return to YHW as their Lord.
- However, the news of the prophets fell on deaf ears.
- Judgement and punishment for God's people was unfortunately inevitable.
- And In Chapter 3 - we get this picture of the Lord taking away all that Israel held dear and valued. And the nation will be left in tatters.

- **The Lord Takes Away**
- 3:1 "For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water; the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor and the skillful magician and the expert in charms."
- The Lord is taking away the support, the supply, and their security!
- And notice the tense - it's present - as if it was happening right at the moment of writing.
- At the time of writing, Isaiah was still at the back end of the period of the kings. So this judgement that he is prophesying hasn't happened yet.
- But it's so sure that it will happen - that he writes it in the present tense as if it is happening at that very moment.
- The Lord is stripping them bare, confiscating all that they need and love.
 - The Support of bread - support of water.
- They're going to be brought to their knees literally.
- And not just materially, but also socially

- The soldiers and army's, the mighty men - they're going to be taken away, so the security that comes from an army, the supposed strength that they thought they had - GONE
- The Judge and the Prophet = the mouthpieces from God, the religious leaders, the source of justice - they're going to be taken away. So there'll be no justice and no word from God..GONE
- Even the pagan religious figures are going to be taken away - the magicians, the diviners - the things that they tried to trust in...GONE
- So when you take away the fundamentals of basic needs and when you take away all the religious and social structures, what are you left with?
- A completely dysfunctional nation.
 - V5 "And the people will oppress one another, everyone his fellow and every one his neighbor; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the despised to the honorable."
 - Society is going to be broken down and all order - Gone!
- And the leadership and kingship will be gone!
- Vv6-7 kind of reads like a Seinfeld sketch. Nobody wants to be the king or leader of a heap of ruins! It's like a game of hot potato!
- So in terms of the promises to king David a few hundred years ago - that one of his descendants will be on the throne - well that looks like it's completely forgotten about.
- No one wants to be king - let alone anyone from the line of David!
- So here we are left with Jerusalem having no support or supply, no security, no societal order - because it's all been taken away by God.
- But why?
- God was the one who gave them the promised land - he promised it, he brought them into it, why is he now getting rid of it? Is he being a bit of a turncoat - and being mean?
- Well - no.
- God is still acting according to the promises, to the covenant that he made with them.
- On the edge of the promised land, After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness the leader of Israel then - Moses told them that while there are covenant blessings - there is also the other side of the coin, the covenant curses.
- And in his final death-bed sermon to the Israelites - this is what he says:
- He says there will be blessings if they remain with the Lord
- Deut 30:17-18 " But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess."
- And what we are reading about in Isaiah is the outworking of that!
- Isaiah 3:8 "For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. For the look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves."
- They chose death and evil!
- Their deeds are against God - they've rejected him!
- And it's blatantly obvious for everyone to see and hear and know.
- They flaunt their sin - they display it all!
- Sin is no longer sin - it's just the new standard of morality.
- God has been completely pushed out

- And so because God is just - he judges them as their sins deserve.
- God won't let his people wallow in their rebellion and sin - he is judging them so that they will know who their God is.
- He takes away all their safety nets - almost in order for them to run to him if they are willing!
- He even takes away their things of luxury and beauty from the Women who were being overly almost flirty and were haughty
- V18 "In that day, the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents..." and the list goes on.

- This raises the question - is this how God operates today then?
 - If we go through some kind of suffering - is that because we've done something bad?
 - *"Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could...Somewhere in my childhood, I must have done something BAD"?*
 - No. Jesus once came across a blind man and his disciples asked him what his parents did to make this person be born blind...Jesus dismisses the question because that's simply not how God operates.
 - But as we've seen recently in James and in other series - sometimes times of trial and times of having things taken away from us, can be used to God to prod us back into relationship with him!
 - Sometimes it's when we are brought to our knees because of our situation that we are driven to our knees in prayer and dependance on God!

- But that's not exactly what this passage is addressing in the context of Isaiah -
 - Isaiah is really more laying out how serious their sin is and the consequences of that sin, and the penalty that that sin deserves.
 - Sin is serious business and deserves serious punishment! And God is holy and Just
 - When we take this gift of our lives that God has given us - and this gift of our breath and being and don't live for him with it all, then we deserve to have it all taken away!
 - We deserve what Israel deserved!
- But in that day...God won't treat us as we deserve...BUT

- **The Lord will Provide**
- V4:2 "In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel."
- God will provide a Branch.
 - *Now a branch may not sound all that impressive...*
 - *But if you think about it - a branch is actually quite vital.*
 - *It gives life to the fruit or the leaves, it provides nutrients and vitality*
 - *A healthy branch is so important!*
- And the branch that God provides here - is vitally important!
- This isn't just any branch - this is the Branch of the Lord.
- It's an interesting phrase *the branch*
- And we see this picked up elsewhere in the Old Testament.

- In Isaiah it'll be used again - to describe a branch coming from the stump of Jesse (King David's Dad) - essentially a branch in the line of David.
- In Jeremiah - he uses the phrase of the "Righteous branch" raised up for David (Or in the line of David)
- Zechariah talks about the branch as well - calling it God's servant.
- What is this branch then?
 - God's servant in the line of David?

- It's quite clear that Isaiah is referring to the Messiah! God's chosen set-part saviour.
 - And when the Messiah comes, he will bring life and vitality to his people.
 - And that Messiah is the descendant of David - Jesus! Jesus is this branch that brings life and vitality and fruitfulness.
 - If rejecting God and living in a life of sin leads to life being taken away - Accepting God and running to the Branch, the Messiah, or running to Jesus - that leads to life!
 - Through Jesus - God will restore the fortunes of his people!
 - Judgement is not the end! Judgement isn't the last word - Isaiah is prophesying that there are better things for the people of God! Grace will be the last word if only people would accept it!
 - Because through the branch - God gives his people the opportunity to be cleansed from their sins and instead be called Holy.
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- V3 "And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning."
 - Instead of the Daughters having the record of hautiness or overt flirtatious behavior being against them - The word here from Filth literally means vomit - God is going to wash away all of that!
 - And the same for the men here! The bloodstains are going to be washed away.
 - Everyone who has their name recorded for life, anyone who is clinging to the branch - and remaining faithful to him - they will be cleansed!
 - All through the branch.
 - But sin still has to be judged and purged. It still needs to be dealt with. It can't just be forgotten - otherwise God would be unjust!
 - And the way this is dealt with for both the Israelites and us - is through the once for all sacrifice of the Messiah. Of Jesus!
 - Who has taken that filth of our sin, taken the bloodstains and destroyed it in his death on the cross for us!
 - And since we will be called Holy - then that means that we will be able to live in the presence of God...
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- V5 "Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain."
 - In the days when Israel was wondering around the wilderness - God prescribed for them to build essentially a big tent. A booth.
 - This tent or tabernacle was to contain the symbols of the presence of God - and was to be the place where the people could meet with God.
 - And at the end of the book of exodus, when it gets finally constructed - immediately a fierce cloud of smoke filled the tabernacle - so much so that no one could draw near to the tabernacle.
 - Moses couldn't, the priests couldn't - the cloud of smoke was the representation of the presence of God there - but it was a fearful thing!
 - But here in Isaiah 4 - this smoke becomes a thing of protection for God's people.
 - Where God's people who have been made holy by the blood of Jesus can live with him!
 - Where God's people can rest in the very physical presence of God with them.
 - On that day - the branch will come, the people will be made holy, and God will live with his people.
 - They will be God's people, in God's place, living under God's rule!
 - And when will this all come about?
 - After all - we still live in a broken world full of sin and injustice, we still face difficulty and we still wrestle with holiness?

- Well in a sense - it came when Jesus first came. When the branch appeared! And our sins were taken away by his death!
- But these promises of the great fruit of the land, of God living with his people - that will come in their fullness when Jesus returns.
- This is what we read in Revelation 21:2-4
 - “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.””
- That’s what’s in store for all who turn to and throw themselves on the grace of God!
- The greatness of this new city is beyond compare! The new Jerusalem is so much better than the old!
- In Chapter 3 - God takes all the privileges away - he takes the security, the support and the supply because of the rebellion of his people
- But the promise for all who trust in Jesus is this new, better, and holy city where there will be perfect security in the presence of God, supply beyond our wildest imaginations, and no more pain or tears or suffering.
- We will live with GOD himself!!
- Tell me - which city would you want to be in?
 - The city of rebellion and desolation - or the city of life and abundance?
- It’s a bit of a stupid question really - because of course we want to be in the city of life!
- And if you want that, simply turn and trust in the branch, the messiah, Jesus. Respond to his love and grace for you, because your name is written in the book of life.
- Reject the things that lead to the city of desolation. Reject sin, reject selfishness, reject idolatry, reject immorality, reject living for yourself! And instead turn and live for Jesus.
- But sometimes - it does feel like we are living in a time of desolation. A time where life is complex and uncertain. Where we don’t feel secure - when it seems like God has taken the supply away!
- Again - remember what our messiah has done for us and what we are destined for. Something so much greater than this life.
- On that Day, we will see Jesus - the branch - in all his beauty and glory. And rest in his peace for eternity.