

Why Do We Need Isaiah?

~Luke 2:22-35; 3:1-6; 4:14-19

Pastor Tom
January 12, 2020

Last May, I attended a small conference I go to every year in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Thirty to forty pastors gather to receive instruction on a book of the Bible from a Bible Scholar. Then we discuss how we would preach different passages from the book. I have shared some fruits of that week with you. Over the years, we have gone through Judges, Psalms, Proverbs, Hosea, Amos and Micah from the Old Testament, Matthew and Mark, Romans, and the letter from John from the New Testament. Each year, I learn something new or gain some more perspective.

But every year, I start with mixed feelings about the book we will study. Sometimes I'm excited because of my experience with or love for a particular book. Sometimes I'm lukewarm because I haven't dug very deep into the book we're studying. Like the year we went through Hebrews. I lacked enthusiasm for it until I heard the introduction to the book by our teacher. His infectious enthusiasm for Hebrews spread into my heart. But, of us have some points of the Bible we enjoy and other parts, we struggle with.

You might even struggle with the Bible generally because you find it hard to read or connect to. I'm concerned about how you might respond to a series of messages from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Our teacher taught from Isaiah last spring. I thought going into that study "It will be good to understand the history and background of Isaiah a bit more. I don't know if I thought it would help me and you in our walk with God."

On the first day, in the first session of our study, the teacher said this; "If you want to follow Jesus, your discipleship journey must go through Isaiah." And I thought "Wait a minute. All of us already follow Jesus. Isaiah is in the Old Testament. Jesus is in the New Testament. Yes, there are a couple of verses in Isaiah that prophesy about Jesus. But how would going through Isaiah help us follow Jesus?" Some Christians might even ask "Why do we need any of the Old Testament and covenant since we are people of the New Testament and the New Covenant? We need help, guidance and strength for our lives today. Learning about some old prophetic sayings from the past can't help us follow Jesus today, can they? By the end of that week, he had me convinced.

Jesus grew up in a family steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures. So, maybe we could understand Him more if we knew more of the Scriptures He lived with. We could understand the significance of some of his actions or words if we knew their Scriptures. It's kind of like looking back at the life of someone we admire. The more we know about their family, where they grew up, and what they learned, the more we understand home. If we understood Jesus more, we have

greater insight into the One we follow. Jesus called us to follow Him. Luke 9:23 – Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me, He must deny him or herself, take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Following Jesus includes learning from His teaching, imitating His example, understanding His identity so we can respond to Him appropriately. It means to live in obedience to and harmony with His Father – our father. We must deny our selfish desires and instead directing our desires towards Christ. It involves denying. So we need to depend on Christ and the Spirit to empower us to live His way.

Perhaps the simplest summary of all this is found in the phrase “to become like Christ.” You know you’re following Jesus when you become more like Him. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 3:10 “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” Or Romans 8:29 – For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” So I might slightly adjust the scholar’s statement from that day to say this - **“If you want to become more like Christ, you must go through Isaiah.”**

But, “Why do we need to include Isaiah?” What’s so important about it? To answer this question, we’re not going to start in Isaiah. Instead we go to the Gospel of Luke to look for Isaiah in Jesus’ life. I pray that God will use this time to increase our desire to become more like Christ through Isaiah. So let’s start in Luke 2:22-35. This is a very common passage to read after Christmas.

Luke 2:22-35 English Standard Version (ESV)

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Mary and Joseph take baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for a purification and dedication ceremony. There Luke introduces us to a man named Simeon. Luke describes him as righteous and devout. God had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Lord’s Christ before he died. But notice in verse 25 one of Simeon’s motivations. Luke says Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” The prophets repeatedly emphasized the coming consolation or comfort for Israel. The people suffered great defeat, exile and humiliation compared to their glory days under King David and Solomon. So God spoke comfort and consolation to them through the prophets. In the fact, a major turning point in the book of Isaiah happens at chapter 40, verse 1 where it states “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” (Isaiah 6 –Holy Holy Holy). Remember in ancient Hebrew to emphasize something they repeated the word. So instead of saying “May great comfort or consolation come upon this people” they wrote “Comfort, comfort my people.” So in Simeon’s looking for the consolation of Israel, Luke’s Jewish readers would immediately go back to the consolation promised by the prophets. Their Isaiah spidey-senses are turned on.

But the dependence on Isaiah becomes much clearer in Simeon’s speech in verses 29-32. This entire speech is formed with language borrowed from Isaiah. In Luke 2:30, Simeon says “my eyes have seen your salvation.” Well Isaiah 52:10 says “the Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. So Simeon uses Isaiah to describe the baby as the salvation of God.

Then he says in Luke 2:31 “That you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.” Well Isaiah 40:3 talks about preparing the way for the Lord and verse 5 says “all flesh shall see it together.” So Simeon sees the way prepared for this child, the Lord from Isaiah. And all peoples will see it.” Then in verse 32, Simeon says “A light of revelation to the Gentiles for the glory of your people Israel.” That line comes quite directly from Isaiah 49:6 – “I will make you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Look at Mary and Joseph’s response in Luke 2:33. “And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him.” Why? We know Joseph was a devout man himself likely raised in the Scriptures. And He likely knows Isaiah. So, he hears this older devout Jewish man apply Isaiah language to his baby son. He and Mary experience marvel or shock.

Then Simeon says to Mary in verse 34 “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.” Well remember the passages from Isaiah we did before Christmas? Isaiah 7:14 – Isaiah says to stubborn King Ahaz, “the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Ahaz opposed that sign. People also would oppose Jesus the sign. What about the fall and rising of many in Israel? Well in Isaiah’s second encounter with Ahaz in Isaiah 8:14 we read “And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel.” Simeon said this child is appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel. Isaiah said the child will be a sanctuary and stone of stumbling. So those who reject Christ stumble over Him. Those who build their lives on such a stone will rise or live.

That’s a lot of Isaiah in just a few verses at a pretty key moment in Jesus’ life. So how does this passage answer the question “Why do we need Isaiah to become more like Christ? **Simeon uses Isaiah to describe Jesus’ identity and mission.** When we understand more of who Jesus is and why He came, I we can gain greater resolve to follow him with more intensity. We’re not just following one out of a buffet selection of religious leaders. We follow the One who fulfilled the hope of Israel’s consolation. If Jesus can fulfill the consolation of a whole nation, He can certainly meet our needs for comfort and consolation. So we are drawn closer to Jesus. Let’s look at another passage in Luke where we find Isaiah.

Luke 3:1-6 English Standard Version (ESV)

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

So Luke frames the start of John the Baptist’s ministry with a direct quote of Isaiah 40, verses 3-5. But Luke uses this quote not just to identify John as the voice or forerunner of Christ. He uses this quotation to establish the direction for the rest of the Gospel. This quote ends with the phrase “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” So this moves our focus

from just John's ministry to the entire Christian movement. All flesh will see the salvation of God. That's the story of the book of Acts. Jesus sends out the disciples as witnesses to the ends of the earth. So all nations will hear and see the salvation of God through Jesus.

Barry Webb writes "In salvation-historical terms, this quotation links Jesus' ministry with the prophetic promises of Israel of the past and the apostolic ministry of the future." It is a fulfillment of God's promise to accomplish a new thing in history (Isaiah 43:19) as John prepares the people for the salvation that is brought about by the life and ministry of Jesus. . . . With the arrival of the climax of God's covenantal relationship with his people, Gentiles will be able to witness the salvation of God."

So why must we include Isaiah so we can become more like Jesus? **Luke uses Isaiah to proclaim the missionary heart of God.** If you have received Christ, God's mission succeeded in bring Christ to you. You have seen with your spiritual eyes the salvation of God when Christ came into our lives. But after we see the salvation of God in our lives, we're called to spread the news of that salvation to others. So we need to ask for His strength and courage to share the good news with those around us.

So we've seen Isaiah show up in Simeon's words when Jesus was first presented in the temple. We see Isaiah quoted at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry. Now let's go to Jesus' own words in Luke 4:14-21.

Luke 4:14-21 English Standard Version (ESV)

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

So this is Jesus' coming out party. He begins his ministry in a very public setting. So He needs to introduce Himself to everyone there. But He grew up there. They already know him as son of Joseph. But they don't know Him on that much deeper level. Yet instead of using His own words, He uses the scroll of Isaiah. He quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2 from which Riley preached 2 weeks ago. Apparently, the book of Isaiah is so foundational, when Jesus wants to announce the essence

of what He's doing, He doesn't even use his own words. He quotes Isaiah. So why must we include Isaiah to become more like Christ? **Jesus uses Isaiah to describe why He came and what He brings.** For those of us who have already received Christ, Isaiah's words help us see what Christ has done for us in our spiritual poverty. He appointed someone to bring the good news to us. He brought us freedom from our captivity to sin and Satan. He has opened our blind spiritual eyes to see the light. He blesses us with His favor every day we live. So through Isaiah we learn more of what Jesus has brought to us. He is a good news bringing, captive releasing, blind eye opening deliverer. Jesus whole life lived out this mission. He continues to fulfill it today with those who receive and follow Him.

These 3 snapshots reveal that Isaiah has much to say about God's saving plan and the One He sent to accomplish it. We saw another example of this last September on our kick off Sunday. We focused on our theme verse for the 2019/2020 year. Do you see it on the bottom right of the message notes? Isaiah 52:7 – How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" That is good news language that Paul uses to describe the Gospel. From that verse we have our theme for 2019/20 – Becoming Good News Messengers. Then before Christmas learned more about Christ as we spent time in Isaiah 7-9. We saw in 2 of the most famous verses describing Christ's coming and identity. "Behold a virgin shall conceive and give birth" - Isaiah 7:14 which we read earlier. Isaiah 9:6 – For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah permeated the thoughts of Simeon, Luke and Jesus Himself. It gave them words to describe God's salvation plan. It also helps unveil the identity and character of our Savior. So if you want to become more like Christ you will find great treasure in Isaiah.

But as any good treasure hunter knows, you seldom find treasure laying out in the open. You may have to dig to find it. You may have to learn some new language to read a clue. You may have to go to some foreign place to discover it. You may have to think hard about the clues, references and images.

That is exactly what we will need to do with Isaiah. One scholar states that "Isaiah is the most complicated book in the Bible." Another writes "it is the most theologically significant book in the Old Testament." It is big – 66 chapters long. But it's not only big in length. Commentator Barry Webb notes "it is conceptually big. The vision begins with heaven

and earth being summoned to listen in chapter 1, verse 2. It ends with heaven and earth so affected by what they hear that they are transformed into the new heavens and a new earth in 66:22.

It jumps back and forth between poetry and narrative. We need to read poetry differently than we read narrative or story. Poetry contains many images to help fuel the reader's imagination. By that, I don't mean a fantasy world but the invisible spiritual world that we don't see but know exists. Isaiah contains lawsuits, hymns, terrifying descriptions of judgment and tender passages of comfort. Isaiah paints a grand picture of the Lord God and His Servant Son.

Isaiah also assumes we know the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament story. It contains countless hyperlinks back to something in the Old Testament that was common knowledge to the ancient Israelites. So we will need to work and dig deep to find the Old Testament passages Isaiah connects with that will give His prophecies so much meaning.

The book starts with discipline and judgment and ends with comfort and salvation. It reveals God's reshaping a people under judgment to become a people humble and ready to receive their Messiah. God must deal with their sin. Yet instead of taking their lives as payment, He puts forward a servant who will suffer on their behalf. Through this servant, they will be shaped into the new people of God. This is what God is doing with you and me. Isaiah talks about the past, present and future. When we begin to grasp its magnitude and majesty we can tremble and maybe even give up before we start.

But God has given us His Spirit. The Spirit helps us to see and understand His Word. Remember – 2 Corinthians 3:18 – And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” We learned that we can see the Lord's glory in the Scriptures through the work of the Spirit. When we see His glory, He transforms us just like Moses' face literally glowed after spending time in the Lord's presence on the mountain.

So though daunting and difficult, I believe our journey into Isaiah over these next weeks and months will lead to multiple treasure about Jesus. The more we discover about Him, the more we can know Him and become like Him. The more we uncover about His mission and identity, the more we will collectively join Him in what He's doing in and around us.

So I have two assignments for you this week. First will you pray individually and collectively that God will speak to you and us as a body through Isaiah? Pray that God will reveal Himself to you; guide you; direct you and speak into your life through Isaiah. Ask the Spirit to open our eyes to the depth of riches found here.

Second, will you read Isaiah 1-6 this week? We already did Isaiah 7-9 before Christmas. So if you want to check out those messages, please go to our website. But we will do Isaiah 1 and part of 2 next week followed by Isaiah 6, the week after that. Let God speak to you through His Word.

Let us start on Assignment 1 now – as we pray. PRAY – That we can all become like Christ.

Now we are going to move into our time at the Lord's Supper. (I'd like to invite the worship team to come forward at this time). We invite all of you who have a relationship with Jesus Christ to participate in this today. If you don't know Jesus, you can receive Him as your Savior and Lord in prayer in a moment. Then you also could participate.

To get our thoughts focused on Jesus and what He did for us, I am going to read from another passage in Isaiah. Then we will sing the song "When I survey and Wonderful Cross". Following that, will the communion servers immediately come forward and we will go into prayer for the bread.

Isaiah 53:1-9 (ESV)

53 Who has believed what he has heard from us?^[a]

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

²For he grew up before him like a young plant,

and like a root out of dry ground;

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.

³He was despised and rejected^[b] by men,

a man of sorrows^[c] and acquainted with^[d] grief;^[e]

and as one from whom men hide their faces^[f]

he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
 we have turned—every one—to his own way;
 and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
 yet he opened not his mouth;
 like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
 and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
 so he opened not his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
 and as for his generation, who considered
 that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
 stricken for the transgression of my people?

⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked
 and with a rich man in his death,
 although he had done no violence,
 and there was no deceit in his mouth.

- When I Survey.
- Lord's Supper.
- Read Isaiah 53:10-12.

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
 he has put him to grief;
 when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
 he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
 the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
 by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
 make many to be accounted righteous,
 and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
 and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
 because he poured out his soul to death
 and was numbered with the transgressors;
 yet he bore the sin of many,
 and makes intercession for the transgressors.