

The Need of a Savior

Overview of Isaiah 1–6

Please open your Bible to Isaiah 1:1–4. We will make an overview of chapters 1 thru 6 in a moment and see various dimensions of sin — all of which expose our desperate need of a Savior.

Here is a photo of a microscope slide that has human blood on it — a blood smear. If you were to hold the slide in your hand there would not much question about the fact that it is blood smeared out on the slide. But while we can see the big picture that it's blood, once we put it under a microscope we can see what the blood is made up of, right down to the cell level: red cells, white cells. We can see what comprises that big drop of smeared out blood.

Now, a comparison as we begin. Use your imagination. Imagine placing a drop of sin on a slide. We could tell just from looking at it that it is sin. But what if we could then put it under a microscope and see different parts of what make up sin? Have you considered that there are a lot of different aspects at work when we rebel against God? In Genesis 3 we have a short account of humanity's fall into sin. There we have primary information about what sin is — it's rebellion against God. This morning we will put sin under the microscope of God's word in the opening chapters of Isaiah.

Isaiah's prophecy is addressed to God's people specifically, but in examining Israel's sin against God, it helps us understand different underlying aspects of sin. Understanding different ways our hearts rebel against God is certainly helpful in our fight to put sin to death. We will discover how it can conceal itself in our hearts. No doubt we will see ourselves as we look at Israel this morning. But here's the overarching point of this sermon: I want us to see and feel how desperately we need the Lord Jesus whose coming we celebrate. In this season it is easy to get distracted with soft lights and dinner parties with spiced lattes. But let us pay close attention to the fact that we would perish under the eternal judgment of God had he not come. We need a Savior, else we die.

Isaiah 1:1–4 — 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. ²Hear, 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. ³The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." ⁴Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

PRAY

I Will Get Relief from My Enemies

In considering the need of a Savior we do well to ask what we need to be saved from. Surely the answer must include that we must be saved from our sin. But ultimately we must be saved from God himself. Our sin is means through which we rebel against God and his rule and reign over all he has created. Our rebellion against him makes us foot soldiers in the cosmic system of rebellion that the Bible often refers to simply as ***the world***. (You have seen, and will see that term in John as we work through the Gospel in our community groups.) **James 4:4** tells us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. I am born naturally into the world as a rebel citizen. I demonstrate my rebellious nature as I choose my way over God's. In the opening chapters of Genesis, God said that in the day they violated his command and ate the forbidden fruit, they would die. Death is the final punishment that God executes against rebels.

In **Isaiah 1:24** God the LORD declares, "Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes." It is not merely our sins that we need to be saved from as though it were just our sins that were killing us and God is some neutral party. Our sin exposes that we are treasonous enemies against God, and what does the scripture say, but that he takes it upon himself to get relief from his enemies? God is the enemy of rebels. God executes the death penalty against sin. Why do we need a Savior? We must be saved from God him, or he will avenge his holiness against our sinfulness.

Now have your bibles ready to go, and let's look through these chapters at key descriptors of sin.

We are rebels. 1:2 — ... they have rebelled against me.

Sin is rebellion against God. It is understanding that God claims authority over our lives, but we reject and supersede his authority with our own. In plain language, "Nobody's telling me what to do, especially God. I will do what I want when I want, and I am the only person that I answer to. Sin is rebellion, and rebellion is one of the three root sins that dwell in every human heart. Rebellion is a foolish assault on the sovereignty of god. It is an effort to shove God off of the throne of the universe and put myself on it. As a primary root sin, it is no wonder Isaiah begins here. When God says he will relieve himself of his enemies, the most obvious aspect of being an enemy of God is that you want to dethrone him. If we are to be saved from God, when he sets about to relieve himself of his enemies, we need a savior. We cannot stand against his omnipotent and righteous judgment against rebels.

We are defiled pretentious worshipers. 1:11 — What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

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We are created for communion with God in a relationship of worship. We are made to be worshipers. God is seeking true worshipers, again as you saw in John 4 in your community group. But what we see in 1:11 is that sinners merely go through the pretense of worship as though they were not rebels. They do the things worship does, but the heart — the seat of the will — is in rebellion, far from God. In v 14 Holy God says he hates their worthless worship and he rejects their religious actions because they are evil doers, even against the most vulnerable — orphans and widows. If God would be so offended by the pretense of worship, offered through the sacrifice of bulls and goats, how much more offensive is the pretentious worship of those who trampled under foot the blood of Jesus, with defiled hands and unrepentant hearts. If we are to be restored to the high state of worshipers of the living God, we will have to be made clean from sin, and given a heart of repentance to turn away from wickedness. We need a Savior.

We are adulterous idolaters. 2:8 — Their land is filled with idols.

God has made us for himself and created us to worship him. Our souls are hardwired to be satisfied in worshipping God. When we reject God's good rule over us, it does not fundamentally change the fact that we remain worshipers. What does change is what we worship. We depart from the intimacy of satisfying communion with our life-giving God and crank out an infinite number of idols through which we seek to be satisfied. The Old Testament, and the prophets in particular often describe idolatry as spiritual adultery.

The next item in God's indictment against his people, beginning in 2:6 and continuing on into chapter 3, is that they have adulterously departed from him and are seeking to be fulfilled and satisfied by fortune tellers, in possessions and money, in security provided by other people. Rather than coming to the eternal God, who has determined the end from the beginning, who provides for his people, and pours out, infinite blessing, and who has undertaken to protect him by his own hand, they have turned to other men. How arrogant, prideful, and stupid to think that humans created from dust and idols formed from decaying possessions could satisfy the immortal soul of one created for God's glory. In 2:22 he commands them to "Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?" The omnipotent God who is exalted over all will humble the proud and terrify idolaters with the splendor of his Majesty.

Constituent components of sin are pride — we think we are both wiser than God and more sufficient he is — pride, and idolatry: We seek satisfaction in our possessions, our relationships, our families, in

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sex, in drugs, in fast cars, in prestige, in power or position, in entertainment, or a thousand other things that we turn to as substitutes for the soul-satisfying Bread of Life. If we are to be delivered from our decadent addiction to lying idols that cannot satisfy, delivered from disorienting insane pride that causes us to follow fools, if we are to be spared the devastating terror of his blazing holiness, we must have a Savior.

We are rebels. We are defiled, pretentious worshipers. We are adulterous idolaters. And all of this is done in the light of God's kindness and grace to us.

Our sin against God is aggravated sin, committed in the face of his sustaining grace and kindness. 5:4 — What more was there to do for my vineyard?

It is shocking to hear news of a murder. Occasionally, we will hear of a bar room, conflict that results in someone being gunned down in the parking lot. Two strangers have a fight and one kills the other. But there have been cases, even recently, of young men who have murdered a parent or grandparent who has cared for them, provided for them, and sacrificed in order for that child to have what they needed. That grievous sin is aggravated to a higher level of wickedness, in light of the relationship that the adult had with the child.

All of our sin against God is done in light of his loving kindness and grace extend it to us. Read with me the first four verses of chapter 5, as God continues his indictment against Israel.

Isaiah 5:1-4 — Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ²He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

Sin is not just against the sovereign king. Sin is against the sustainer of the universe. He holds all things together by the council of his will. He puts breath in our lungs that we use to defy him. The nourishment that he provides that we might offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to him we used to advance unrighteousness. Though he has given us eyes to see and appreciate the beauty of his Holiness, we look away to worthless, evil things and call them good. He first loved us that we may know love, and love him as he is worthy of. But we give our affections to infinitely lesser things and

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sin against the one who created us for his glory. Israel's aggravated sin against God's benevolent commands gained his righteous wrath, indicated by the use of the judgement word "woe." Six times in chapter 5 God pronounces woe against those who are hardened in their sin and will not repent. Woe means that God is going to directly measure out punishment on those who practice iniquity.

What about you? Have you ever practiced iniquity? Have you ever sinned in light of God's life-giving grace and sustaining power in your life? All your sin is committed in light of Holy God's grace. How will you escape the woe of God's righteous judgment against your sin. Answer: You won't. You need a substitute. Even when this righteous prophet Isaiah stood before God in chapter 6, he realized how terminally sinful he was in light of God's holiness. He did not wait for God to pronounce judgment on him. He pronounced woe on himself, convinced that there was no way a sinful soul could survive in God's presence. And it is here that we turn a corner.

When Isaiah encounters the eternal holy God that both he and the nation have sinned against, he is at once aware of who Holy God is, and who he is as a sinner. In light of that, he understands that his personal sinfulness and rebellion against God justify God's pronouncement of the death penalty against him personally. Even the righteous prophet Isaiah will perish under God's righteous wrath. Unless sin is cleansed. Unless guilt is taken away. Isaiah needs a Savior. And God, who is rich in mercy, undertakes to save him by cleansing his sin and taking his guilt away.

There's a lot of dread and darkness as we have looked with a microscope at some of the underpinnings of sin, and the deep roots that find hard places in our hearts. Have you not, through the truth of God's word and the help of the Holy Spirit, felt your life-or-death need of a Savior?

Well, if we only come away with an awareness of sinful guilt — if I stop here, I would be guilty of Gospel malpractice. Because God doesn't leave it here. In the opening chapters of Genesis, in chapter 3, we have that cryptic prophecy, that first telling of the Gospel, that a son would be born to crush the power of sin and Satan. Here in the opening chapters of Isaiah we see God's redemption plan being teased out and written in bolder strokes.

Isaiah 1:18 — 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."

Isaiah 2:2-3a — It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the

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nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

Isaiah 4:4 — the LORD shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and cleansed the blood stains of Jerusalem from its midst...

How is that going to happen? God intervenes. God takes it upon himself to wash Isaiah from his sin and gives him life in place of death. God looks mercifully on his sinning enemy, he takes his guilt and atones for his sin. How is this possible? It happens through the work of his Savior Son promised in Genesis 3. The good news that God saves sinners is increasingly revealed through the rest of the prophecy of Isaiah. He redeems sinful people, dragging them out of the dominion of darkness and death, bringing them into the kingdom of his beloved Son. He shows the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Though we are by nature enemies of God, God the Father sends God the Son as a substitute penalty-bearer for those who will look to him in faith and turn from their wicked ways to the Lord and Savior.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas! Warm fuzzy feelings are nice and sentimental. But a startling awareness of our hopelessness apart from Christ's substitutionary death, and a profound gratitude that he came to seek and save us should **mark so much more of our season than candles and consumerism**. Every itemized indictment in these first chapters mark and catalog our guilt before holy God. Our response should be as the prophet's: Woe is me, for I am undone. Oh, how I need a Savior!

It is not in us to save ourselves from the damning indictment of sin. Look away from yourself. What **you** can do — your flesh — it's no help at all. See the great lengths God has gone to make peace between you. Our greatest Enemy — righteous and just in his condemnation of sin — has undertaken to save us from the death penalty we have earned. Look to Christ and live. He is the Savior of the world.

PRAY