

Happy New Year everyone!!

This week is determined week in human history. Sociologists could write books about the first 7 days of January. Because right now, all over the world, people are at the peak of their optimism, discipline, and self-confidence.

Right now:

- About a third of adults made New Year's resolutions.
- Most of them made more than one – because apparently one area of life falling apart isn't enough, we want to fix everything at once!
- And studies show that the average resolution lasts less than 4 months.

One survey found that fewer than 10% actually finish the year strong making good on their resolution.

Which means the most successful resolution most people will keep in 2025 is probably: **"I will stop making resolutions."**

So, if you're feeling extremely committed to your goals right now, congratulations – you're experiencing the most determined week of the year. Enjoy it while it lasts!

Now, I think we all realize, human beings weren't made for once-a-year new beginnings. We were made for daily renewal.

We were created for a kind of transformation that doesn't depend on a date on the calendar, but on the God who makes all things new.

And that's exactly the heartbeat of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah speaks to a people who desperately longed for restoration, hope, and a fresh start – not because the year changed, but because their world was broken, their strength was failing, and they needed a Redeemer who could do what resolutions never can:

Not just *inspire change* – but **sustain it**.

Not just *demand commitment* – but **empower it**.

Not just *call us forward* – but **carry us through**.

And so today, on the first Sunday of the year, we don't just open a new calendar – we open an ancient promise from an everlasting God:

A God who says in Isaiah:

- *"I am doing a new thing..."*
- *"Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow..."*
- *"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength..."*

So yes – the world is making resolutions today. But the church has something better:

We have a God of renewal.

A Christ who completes what He begins.

And a Spirit who strengthens what we commit.

So, if you're ready, let's step into the new year, not with self-powered promises...but with **God-sustained hope**.

Let's step into this New Year with a new series in the book of Isaiah. I want to help us get familiar with who this Prophet is and the circumstances in which he's ministering to the leadership and people of Israel.

Getting acquainted with Isaiah.

First of all, I want to remind you, Prophets serve two primary functions... foretelling and forthtelling. For sure they told the people what was coming, but the vast majority of their ministry was reminding the people what God had already said.

Isaiah is often thought of as the greatest of the writing prophets. His name means "the Lord saves." He ministered during the same time as the prophets Amos, Hosea and Micah. He began his Ministry in 740 B.C., and

his ministry lasted 60 years covering the reigns of 4 kings. Thus, he came to be referred to as the "Prince of Prophets."

[Transition] - Now, let's get our bearings as to the circumstances in history when Isaiah served as a prophet.

The world scene:

To this point in Israel's history, they had three kings—Saul, David and Solomon. Under King Solomon Israel became a rich and powerful kingdom, but the people were oppressed and burdened with heavy taxes and forced labor. When Solomon's son Rehoboam came to the



throne, they appealed to him to lighten their burdens. He refused. It's a classic case of how the poison of pride destroys everything it infects—the people, the leadership, ultimately the nation.

Now, the nation of Israel was made up of the 12 tribes born out of the 12 Sons of Jacob, who was later renamed, Israel. Because of King Rehoboam's prideful leadership, the ten northern tribes of Israel

rejected Rehoboams' prideful leadership, and they set up a new kingdom, the kingdom of Israel. The southern kingdom became known as Judah. So remember...North–South...Israel–Judah.

Now, for the first time the Jewish peoples were divided into two separate nations. They each set up their own capitals and centers of worship. The Northern Kingdom called Israel set up their center for their worship in Dan, while Jerusalem remained the worship center for the southern kingdom of Judah. And in this southern kingdom of Judah is where Isaiah primarily lived and ministered as a Prophet, beginning somewhere around 742-740 BC. This is important to remember throughout our series...Isaiah served 700+ years BEFORE CHRIST.

By the time Isaiah began his ministry both kingdoms were experiencing national security problems. Assyria, their neighbors to the northeast were the rising superpower, and these guys were bullies with a capital B. Israel was facing an existential threat of extinction. Slowly but gradually Assyria began encroaching and annexing parts of Israel in the north, and later Judah in the south as well.

Despite the Prophets like Isaiah and his contemporaries (Amos, Hosea, and Micah) advising the leadership to turn to God and rely on his power and protection, Israel and Judah entered into alliances with Assyria for protection from them and other nations. And this was the beginning of the end for Israel.

The northern kingdom of Israel was dismantled and carried off by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. but the southern kingdom held off the Assyrian attack because King Hezekiah turned to God and the city was saved. It's

fascinating story, you can read about it in Israel's history books in 2nd Kings 18-19 and 2 Chron, 32.

[Transition] - The troubles the remaining kingdom of Judah had outside its borders were equally matched by the troubles inside its borders. The state of the union was in serious moral and ethical decay. The first couple of chapters of Isaiah give us some insight as to the condition of the nation, the church and the culture. Look with me at Chapter 1:2-9

Getting acquainted with the "State of the Union" Isaiah ministered to.

The nation of Judah and its capital Jerusalem are likened to rebellious, unappreciative kids who have turned their backs on the only one who loves them and can provide for them. None of the kings Isaiah minister to were totally inept. They managed a fairly sound economy and devised clever policies, yet the land was devastated, the internal framework fragile and their foreign policy was ineffective. Isaiah tries to give them wisdom—>The real key to national well-being is righteousness before God.

Proverbs 14:34 says, "Godliness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." Disgrace is what Judah was facing.

[Transition] - The spiritual condition of the church undoubtedly contributed to the national trouble. The state of the church is discussed in verses 1:10-17.

The state of their church (1:10-17).

They are compared to Sodom and Gomorrah. They had abandoned the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and embraced all sorts of other foreign gods. They polluted their worship and diluted their devotion.

They kept the outward practices of their devotion to God but there was no substance to it on the inside. They kept going to church, participating in church events and even bringing offerings on Sunday, but in their relationships, in their families, in their neighborhoods and in their businesses, there was no evidence of godly behavior. What we begin to realize right away is that, Religious looking behavior disconnected from any real heart surrender is an irritant to God. These people were praying for their neighbors on Sunday and then preying on them through the remainder of the week. It's a classic description of hypocrisy.

[Transition] - In fact, the entire culture preyed on each other. Look at verses 21-23.

These verses are actually a poem of lament over the state of the society in Judah. They point to the moral, ethical and spiritual decay. Isaiah likens them to a prostitute who cannot be faithful to her husband, the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel. If you read on, chapters 2-5 address more of the same.

[Transition] - It was a wicked and depraved society, that had wondered far from God's ideal. Now I know all this sounds dreadfully depressing and a real downer. But, here's a reality; unless we're willing to completely honest about the brokenness in our lives, we'll never recognize our need for renewal and restoration. Isaiah brings an honest message to the people, a message with two very critical aspects to it: There is penalty... BUT there is also promise!

The Penalty and Promise of Isaiah's message.

First, the honest message Isaiah brings clearly communicates a penalty for the rebellion and injustice practiced in the people's lives.

The choice to ignore God and rebel against his ways, his counsel, his principles and laws bring two things on a person.

First, rebelling against God's ways eventually brings on pain and suffering. Sometimes it's mental or emotional anguish and sometimes it's physical.

This teaches us there are natural consequences of pain and suffering when the moral and ethical laws God built into the universe are violated. The reason for this is because God has designed his creation to function in accordance with his Holy and righteous laws. When you and I cut across the grain of those laws we live in ways we were not designed to live and pain and suffering result.

Now, please understand. Not all pain and suffering you and I experience is brought on by our choice to ignore God. Some of the pain and suffering we experience is the result of the sin filled world we live in. It's the sinful choices of others that bring pain and suffering into your life.

The book of Romans tells us, "*The whole creation groans looking forward to its redemption.*" Some of the pain and suffering we experience is the result of the sin of others, and some is the result of the sin cursed creation we live in. To carry the attitude that all "trouble" or "struggle" in someone's life is the result of their own rebellion from God is unbiblical, irresponsible and incredibly damaging to people.

But, this is not the pain and suffering Isaiah has in mind. Instead, the pain and suffering in Isaiah's talking about is the pain and suffering that is brought on a person when they stubbornly refuse to stop their rebellion from God and turn to him.

In a sense, God gives the rebellious people what they want. They reject God's presence and involvement in their lives and so he allows their evil to play the role of judge and disciplinarian in their lives.

Notice Chapter 1:31, "*The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire*"

And look at Chapter 3:8-9, "*Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.*"

In other words, they have seen the wall there and they continue to bang their heads against it. They understand that fire burns and they keep putting their hand into it. They know about God, but they refuse to follow him. Their evil deeds are the spark that will set the fire that will consume them.

You and I can't ignore the fundamental wisdom and principles of life as God has designed them and not get burned. You and I can't ignore God's Word and way in matters of life, and money, and relationships, and our health, and our words...we can't ignore God's design in these matters and expect to get away with it. God says in your rebellion you will bring about your own destruction.

B. The second thing a sustained pattern of rebellion against God brings is the direct judgment of God. Look at Isaiah 2:6-9:

*"You, Lord, have abandoned your people, the descendants of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and embrace pagan customs. **7** Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. **8** Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made. **9** So people will be brought low and everyone humbled— do not forgive them."*

If the pain and suffering that is experienced as a natural consequence of violating God's laws doesn't serve to wake a person up to their need to turn to God and walk with Him, then ultimately the direct judgment of God is experienced. God is a loving God, but he is a Holy God and because he is holy it is impossible for him to just overlook sin and rebellion. The very essence of his holiness requires that sin be punished.

I also want you to notice that the judgment God brings is delivered with one hope in mind...that it serves to discipline, train and draw the people back to himself.

Notice the verses that follow the announcement of coming judgment in Chapter 1: 24-26. *"**24** Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah! I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. **25** I will turn my hand against you;^[b] I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. **26** I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City."*"

Slag is the scum and waste that forms on the surface of molten metal and emerges when metals are being melted or ores reduced and purified. The picture is one of God bringing discipline, turning up the heat on them in order to purify his people and restore them to beauty and intimacy with him.

[Transition] - Now, here is the fascinating thing about Isaiah's message both for his original hearers and for us this morning. As clear and as decisive as the penalty for rebellion is announced, the **promise** for redemption is stated. He gives them a pathway to renewal and restoration.

Isaiah clearly declares the promise of renewal and restoration.

Look at Chapter 1:18-20, "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. **19** If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; **20** but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

And now see verses 27-28 just below that.

"Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. **28** But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish."

Then skip to Chapter 3:10-11.

"Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. **11** Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done."

Isaiah doesn't mince any of God's words to his audience, so it's important we don't mince words now. God says turn to me, come to me. >No matter how deep the stain of sin, I can remove it.

>No matter how long you've walked without me, come to me now.

>No matter how impure your life has been I can cleanse you and make you as pure as freshly fallen snow.

God says I can take the dirtiest, filthiest, blackest heart and make it as white as wool. If you will come to me and follow me, I will be your provision and your protector and your healer.

All you have to do is admit you have lived your life by your own rules and it has not worked out so well. And now you realize that you need to align with God's rules. When you live by your own rules God says it will lead to bondage and sorrow. And left unchanged it will lead to the judgment of God. But when you turn to God it leads to freedom, healing, joy, hope, rest and peace.

We all need a redeemer who can do what resolutions can never do. We long for a redeemer...not more resolutions.

Conclusion:

God's message to us through Isaiah is clear. Sustained rebellion and rejection of God bring pain and penalty, yet He reaffirms his promise to deliver them if they will turn to him.

Have you turned to God yet in your life?

- No one's sin is too big.
- No one's rebellion has gone on too long.
- No one's secret is too dark.

- No one's shame is too mortifying.

God can see all of it and he promises to forgive and cleanse and restore the heart that will come to him. Will you come to him today?

Some of you need to start your New Year with a new direction in your life.
Some of you need to give your heart to Jesus in this New Year.

Others of you need to get back on track in this New Year.