

I don't know about you, but I need my God to speak.

I need to know that He sees what's going on in the world, the war and the violence, that He sees what's happening to our brothers and sisters, persecuted Christians around the world.

I need to know that He sees future events.

I need the hope that in the end He wins.

and righteousness will be restored.

I need to be confronted and convicted about my need to return to Him, to repent.

You know, God has always spoken through some prophets of old.

Think about Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, the rest of the minor prophets, Elijah, Elisha.

He's always spoken.

And those fiery words of the prophets

should not fall on deaf ears.

They still speak today.

And so we're going to be starting just a brief three-week sermon series called Return.

And we're starting with Isaiah and hearing him call us back to God to return.

And then the next week we're going to be looking at Amos and he's going to be helping us to stop just going through the motions.

and get real with God.

And then the third week, it's going to be an encouraging word from Ezekiel about no matter what it's like right now on planet Earth, with all the things going on and all the cultures and society and all of that, one day the glory of God will return and that there is a kingdom coming.

And so that'll be an encouraging message.

So that's what we're doing in this message today and in the next two weeks.

We need God to speak and we need to return.

Well, of all the Old Testament prophets, really most commentators would say Isaiah is king.

It's the most beautiful poetry.

It's the most evangelistic.

Isaiah is like the Gospel of John of the Old Testament, and Isaiah is like the Apostle Paul of the New Testament.

And so we're going to look and see what he has to say to help us as he calls us to return.

Well, his name Isaiah, it means Jehovah has saved.

He was

probably born in Jerusalem.

And just to give you some background, he was related to the royal family in Judah.

He grew up in the court, if you will, of King Uzziah that reigned for 40 years.

And so he is one who was familiar with the politics of the day.

And we read in Isaiah chapter 6 that when

When Uzziah died, it really pulled the rug out from underneath Isaiah's feet, and yet God gave him the vision of God on his throne saying, Isaiah, it's okay.

And Isaiah knew that there would be another king much greater than Uzziah that would come and redeem his people.

Well, Isaiah was married to a woman described as the prophetess in Isaiah.

They had two boys.

Listen to these names.

Shir Jashub, which means a remnant shall return.

And Maher Shalel Hash Ba, say that three times, which means speed the spoil, hasten the booty.

And really what those names meant is they were prophetic names.

First of all, that God is about to bring judgment on these people, but also there would be an outpouring of God's mercy and grace.

The two sides of God's coin, right?

Judgment and grace and mercy.

And so these names were foreshadowing of what God was going to do.

Well, unfortunately, Isaiah was called to have a ministry of judgment.

That's no fun, is it?

You have to tell people they're doing wrong.

And for 40 years he preached that and the people didn't change.

They didn't respond.

And really his preaching was a foreshadowing of the preaching of Jesus that would be rejected.

And in fact, Isaiah gave Jesus a lot of hope when Jesus read the words of Isaiah, that just as his word was not accepted, so Jesus' word would not be accepted, but God would have a purpose.

And so Isaiah foretold that something was going to happen.

Judgment was going to come.

And sure enough, you know your history.

In 722 BC, the Assyrians swept down and destroyed the northern kingdom.

And then 587, 586 BC, Babylon came in, destroyed Jerusalem, killed thousands of people, and took thousands of captives and spread them along the Assyrian Empire and especially into Babylon.

And so the prophetic word came true.

Well, according to Jewish tradition, Isaiah met his death by being sawn in two, placed in a hollow log, and sawn in two.

And Hebrews references this, we believe.

And he was one of the heroes of the faith, as Hebrews 11 says, of whom the world was not worthy.

is what I meant.

Well, the big idea this morning is this.

The big idea is that the message of the prophets is not difficult to understand.

It's to turn back from chasing our idols of pleasure, possessions, power, self, you can add to the list.

The message is simply return.

And so that's what we're going to look at today.

If you have your copy of scripture, open it up or turn it on.

to Isaiah 1.

We're going to be looking at verses 1 through 4 and then just skimming down some other verses as well.

Verse 1 says, 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 his owner, and a donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know.

My people do not understand a 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.

Well, first thing we want to point out is that our condition reveals that it's time to return.

So Israel in the northern kingdom and Judah in the southern kingdom had both forgotten their God.

It was a time of relative prosperity for both kingdoms.

They thought they had everything they needed.

And if God wasn't going to come through, there was plenty of other gods in that area to choose from.

And so they turned to idols, to false gods.

They turned to materialism.

They were happy being people with resources.

They were happy with their daily lives.

They had food and water and investments and they were okay.

Why did they need God?

And they also were people who were overlooking the oppression of the poor.

They were overlooking the mistreatment of slaves.

They were overlooking.

And so they had sinned against God, not having a soft heart towards people in need like God does.

Basically, God was not necessary for them, they thought.

God might not be enough.

We're doing okay.

It's an indictment on them, but also it's just a foreshadowing what's going on in our country, right?

Where we're chasing idols, the idols of sports and sex and the sacred dollar.

It's the relativism, the thought

that we can make our own rules and really who says what's right and wrong?

It's us teaching our children that they can choose their own gender, their own morals.

Who's to say what is right and wrong?

It's a celebration of me, right?

It's everybody cater to me.

It's a lack of spiritual fervor about the things of God and a faltering love life for God.

And you might say, Listen, I'm not doing those things.

I'm staying sexually pure.

I am not engrossed in these sins.

what about sins of omission?

a lot of times I think it's interesting, as Christians we focus on sins of commission.

The lying, the swearing, the cheating, the stepping out, the being mean to people, the cursing, all those things.

And we forget that perhaps your greatest sin or mine might not be those, it might be sins of omission.

The things that we know God has called us to and we're not doing them because we're too busy.

We got to make money.

We got to take care of our families.

We don't have time to worry about the oppressed or the downtrodden or the needy or the widows or the orphans or the foster care folks.

We don't have time.

Maybe the reason you need to listen to the message this morning and maybe the reason I need to listen to what I'm preaching is that our greatest sins are sins of omission.

The kingdom of God is passing by truth and justice and mercy.

and all that God wants to do in saving souls who need him and we're standing still and that train is passing us by.

Maybe that's our sins.

That's part of the sin of the people who call themselves the people of God.

And the root cause was just simply they lost their fear of God.

You know, I love to focus on the love of God, right?

And that's the most

This morning in Psalms, I was just reading about this wonderful love of God, and that's where I start everything in my ministry.

But there's also the holiness of God.

And we've got to be brought back to the truth, no matter how loving and forgiving our God of grace is, that He has intentionally tied His own hands and He cannot blow off unholiness.

And He's created you and me to be holy people.

He could not just say it doesn't matter.

That would be denying His holy matter, that sin can't make it to heaven.

There's certain truths that we cannot change.

And they had lost sight of that.

So our condition reveals that it's time to return, but secondly, the consequence of not returning is it's high, it's very high.

Let's look at verses 5 and then 19 through 20, and I'm guessing it's like today.

the problem with consequences, we don't see them immediately sometimes.

They're delayed.

And so we think, oh, I've gotten away with it.

Or it's not really that bad.

I know that God is omniscient.

He knows everything.

He sees everything.

But because I haven't suffered immediately a consequence for me stepping out of his will,

I'm in a bad relationship.

I'm not honoring him or I'm not helping the people I know he wants me to help.

Maybe it's not that big of a deal to him.

And so we blow it off.

Maybe God doesn't care.

Well, look at verse 5.

Why will you still be struck down?

Will you continue to rebel?

The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint.

Look, verse 19.

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.

But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

So notice those consequences.

They would be struck down.

I don't know exactly what that means.

I know in a few years for the Northern Kingdom, 722, that was like 20 years after he wrote this probably, the whole Northern Kingdom was struck down.

Maybe that's the main

meaning here of this prophetic word, but there's a secondary and a tertiary meaning, right, that could apply to all cultures of all time, that God won't blow this stuff off.

And there are consequences.

The whole head is sick, verse 5 says, so they would be sick.

You do know that sin, besetting sins, leads to physical sickness.

That sin leads to emotional sickness.

that sin leads to mental sickness.

Now I'm talking to believers here.

As believers, you have been born again, you have been redeemed, you have new natures, and you and sin don't mix, right?

Sin in your life is going to make you sick in some way.

And so when we play around with it, we think, okay, I'll just ask forgiveness, but there's consequences.

And the point is, Isaiah saying, instead of eating the good of the land, they would be eaten by the sword.

Part of maturing and growing up as a believer is understanding that the wages of sin is death.

Would you agree with that?

I mean, I'm learning that still in my life.

I can't get away with stuff.

I can't get away with impure thoughts or critical thoughts or bad attitudes.

I can't get away with any physical or spiritual acts of sin.

I can't get away with sin.

It's going to cost me something.

Sin always kills something or some relationship or some blessing.

We can't have it both ways, right?

Just like someone can't sleep around and escape the consequences of God's judgment on that.

Someone can't gossip about others and enjoy the blessings of God.

You can't judge other people and not be judged by God.

You can't store up the idols of money and comfort and apathy and not pay the price.

And part of growing up as believers is just realizing it's not worth it.

Sin

is not worth it.

And so we fight.

And one of the signs, would you agree with this?

One of the signs of sanctification, being made more like Jesus, is your continuing battle against sin.

You continue to fight it.

And sometimes you don't master it.

Sometimes you mess up.

I do.

But you continue to get right back up and say, God help me, and keep battling.

Keep fighting.

That's how you know that you're being sanctified, made more like Jesus.

You get sick of sin.

You get tired of it and what it does to you and what it does to relationships.

And you want something better.

And you realize your identity in Christ, I'm better than that.

I don't have to act out that way with my signature sin.

God's gonna help me and people will help me and the Word of God will help me.

The Holy Spirit will help me.

And so it's this maturing that it's just not worth it and that you can't hide anything from God.

I remember when I was an 11-year-old boy living in New York, just north of New York City, in Mount Kisco, kind of a suburban town.

And fireworks were illegal in that time.

I don't know if they still are or not.

But we, 10, 11-year-old boys, knew some older teenage boys

who had got some fireworks from Canada and brought them down.

They sold us to us younger boys.

We thought, how cool is that?

And so our house backed up to some woods and then beyond the woods was a big field and then some more woods and then another neighborhood.

And so we went out into the field with our fireworks and we were having a good time shooting off fireworks during the daytime where people wouldn't see them as much.

right?

And this field was dry grass.

You can imagine what happened.

And I can't remember, so boy, it looked like hundreds and hundreds of acres.

It was probably 20 acres of grass is all.

It's not that bad, is it?

And we burnt the whole thing down.

The grass caught on fire.

We went to our clubhouse, got an old rug that my mom had given us for the clubhouse, started to hit it, that just fanned the flame.

And then it took over this whole field and I'm thinking it's going to go to the neighbors and burn down houses, you know, and all this stuff.

And then we hear the bells and the sirens because they had a community fire department, right?

And we ran, right?

That rug caught on fire that we just threw it off and ran.

We ran back to our houses

and went down in our basements and hid, right?

And after nothing was wrong.

the fire department came and after it had burned down lots of acres, they put it out and everything.

And I thought, all right.

So it was supper time.

I'm eating supper and there's a ding dong and the bell rings and my dad gets up and goes and answers the door and it's the fire chief in his full regalia.

And I'm 11.

And he comes in and he says, describes it, someone thought that one of the boys' clothes caught on fire.

It was that rug.

And he wanted to make sure things were all right.

And he wanted to check out how this happened.

So out came the whole story, right?

And I confessed and cried and everything like that.

But it was a lesson for me in life.

that actually what goes around comes around, right?

But also you don't get away with sin.

The Bible says in the Old Testament, your sins will what?

Find you out.

Anybody found that out to be true?

I have over and over and over.

Oh, the rest of you?

No.

Okay.

Well, I'll pray for you that you find that out sometime.

Your sins will find you out.

You can't hide anything from God.

And the people of the northern kingdom, and Isaiah's preaching to his own people in the southern kingdom, the people of Judah, they were thinking they could hide their stuff from God.

But what does the Bible say?

We got a slide for this one.

There's nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.

What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight.

What you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed.

One version says, shouted from the rooftops.

First Corinthians 4.5, he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives in people's hearts.

Life is too short to try to hide from God, yes?

Life is too short and it's too precious to live in the darkness of regrets and secret shame.

So we remember that there's consequences to all this.

The third thing is returning requires removing evil, an act of the will.

It's not wishful thinking.

Look at the words of the text in verses 16 and 17.

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

So notice here that Isaiah doesn't say be sorry or cry or resolve to do better.

He doesn't give the okay to blame it on somebody else or your bad upbringing.

He gives a list of imperatives, some action steps, like take a spiritual bath.

You know what that's like?

A time of just total confession and getting right with your God again.

How long has it been since you've, well, not just had a bath, I hope you do that, but a spiritual bath, a spiritual shower?

How long has it been since you've just come clean with God?

Remove all the evil from your life?

Those things you know are displeasing to God.

Learn to do good.

Stand up for what's right.

How long has it been since you've been a person of action and stood up for something that's right or against something that's wrong.

Stand up against the mistreatment of others.

Take action for orphans, those in foster care.

Take care of widows.

So he's saying, stop it.

Stop to do wrong.

Learn to do right.

And you might say, okay, I know right from wrong.

Well, this is day of relativism.

And let me tell you, the millennial generation, Generation Z, and especially Generation Alpha, that's coming up, a lot of them don't know right from wrong.

As a pastor in my church, I constantly had to teach young couples why it was biblical, why it was godly, why it was smart to save themselves for marriage and not do the easy thing of just being partners and living together.

I'd explain to them the whole thing of marriage and symbolic of the bride of Jesus and his church and the purity and all that.

They didn't know.

You can't just assume that people, next generations know this stuff.

And so we have to teach them how to be holy and godly.

We have to teach them that the Word of God is the standard and that God has a beautiful design.

You know that God's design, God's plan is so much more beautiful and fulfilling than the plan of the world.

But you got to believe that you got to trust God.

You got to believe that His way is beautiful.

It was designed for joy and grace and long life and beauty.

And His way is best.

And that the Word of God is the standard, not your best friend, not social media, not TV, film, or the government.

And in a day where there's no absolutes, it's good to go back and remember that God has some laws for us to help us because he loves us.

How long have you recounted the Ten Commandments in your life, right?

How long has it been?

And maybe some of you, I'll mention, I'll say the short version, maybe you could say them with me.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make idols.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

You shall honor the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

You shall honor your father and mother.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not bear false witness, lie.

Do not covet what your neighbors have.

Those are meant to keep us in bounds because God loves us and He wants us to enjoy the better purpose for our lives.

And the next generation needs to know those.

You know, the dietary laws of the Old Testament have passed away.

I'm glad because I go catfishing and I like to eat catfish, right?

Amen?

Pointing at them right back there, the fishing couple.

I'm glad that dietary laws have passed away, the hygienic laws.

I'm glad the cultic, the sacrificial laws have passed away.

I don't have to sacrifice my dog or cat or pig, or what that'd be.

unkosher or cow or whatever.

I'm glad those have passed away.

But you know what hasn't passed away is God's moral laws, like the Ten Commandments.

But are we passing those down and we take them seriously that, oh, wait a minute, I lied somebody to their face.

I lied to somebody's face yesterday.

I coveted what my next-door neighbor has.

And it's good to be brought back and realize

that God is serious about this.

I shared with you an acrostic for prayer, and it's P-R-A-Y.

You start off your day, your devotional, with P.

Praising God for who He is, that's adoration.

Praising Him for what He's done in your life, that's thanksgiving, and all your blessings.

And then the A is ask, that's your intercession and petition for yourself.

And then Y is yield.

that R is repent.

P-R-A-Y.

R is repent, but it also is return.

And I think that's what Isaiah is saying.

There needs to be a daily turning back.

I can't do it once and be done.

It's not one and done.

Every single day I need to repent of something.

How about you?

Every single day I need forgiveness for a sin of omission or commission.

How about you?

And so it's this constant, constant repenting.

The last thing I want to share in this passage, verses 18 and 19, is there's a promise for those who return, complete cleansing.

Look at these beautiful words.

Come now, verse 18, come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Man, that's the gospel.

Does anybody need cleansing your life from sins, past, present, the ones you're going to do?

I do.

That comes, salvation past.

When you say, Jesus, I need you, I'm not going to make it there on my own.

I'm going to stop being the little god of my life.

Jesus, come into my life through your Holy Spirit and save my soul, forgive me of all my sins, and you start leading my life.

What a great day that is.

I wonder if anybody needs to make that decision today, maybe for the first time in your life getting real with God, truly repenting and believing.

It's the gospel that God has come to us.

We didn't have to go to Him.

He's come to us with a Savior and we can depend upon it.

And it is grace and it is love and we can be cleansed of our sins.

It's no fun being grimy and dirty, is it?

I'm talking to mostly believers now, right?

It's no fun to have last week, right?

The encumbrances, the sin that so easily entangles us.

That's no fun to live life that way.

I remember just a few years ago, a guy called our church, and I knew him, he used to be in my life group, and he lives on a farm.

and they raised horses, and it was time to bale some hay, and the storms were coming in, and this was July.

And no joke, that day it was 101 degrees.

And he said, I'm just behind.

Do you know some youth at the church, some big high school guys that will come, just three or four of them, and they can help me get the hay bales out of the field, already baled, and

load them up on the truck, the cart, then take them to the barn and get them hoisted up and fill up the top of the barn with these, I need your help, I don't want it to rain and ruin these hay bales.

So I said, yeah, I'll try to.

So I got two big high school guys and I went with him because I'm so young, right?

And I went with these guys and it was 101 degrees in the afternoon and it's like, hurry, hurry, hurry, the rain's gonna come.

So we're out there and

some of you Kansas people, you've picked up those hay bales and put them on the truck, right?

And then you take them and you got to get them up in the barn and all that.

And we did that as fast as we could, hour after hour.

And truly, it was only like 4 hours of work, but we were exhausted and dehydrated and we were dirty.

There was little stubbles of hay all over us and sweat and grime and dirt and we stunk.

And then we went home, right?

And so I got in my car and started down the road and my shirt, I didn't have a shirt, I just had shorts.

My shoes were covered with, so all I was wearing was my shorts, no shirt, and I'm driving my vehicle and I come to a red flashing light and

I think I stopped and then I go through it and sure enough there's some red lights behind me and

it's one of the sheriff's deputies.

It's a woman and so I pull over and she may after a while she makes her way up and there I am hair matted down stink

filth, hey, every, I mean, and she comes up and looks at me like this and what's going on?

And I explained the whole thing to her and she said, you didn't come to a complete stop.

And she said, so next time do that, now get out of here.

She didn't want anything to do with me.

But the point of that stupid story is when I got home, just the feel of getting all that off me.

And here's the application in my life.

I've had moments like that with sin all over me.

And how good it felt to just return to my God, to repent, to get right with Him, and take a spiritual shower with His grace flowing.

You know He's for you, not against you.

When we talk about God's judgment, He's for you.

And he's asking you, come back to me.

Stop it.

All this stuff you're living for and saving for and investing in, and you think it's going to make your life happy?

I'm going to make your life happy.

And so he's calling us to return and just take that spiritual shower.

It's, yeah, it's like that waterfall or that water.

I mean, that's what I need in my life.

So here's application.

So what do you need cleansing for today?

You get your own categories.

Maybe some sins of commission, I get it.

Maybe some of omission.

Is it more attitude, like a judgmental attitude, pride?

Is it you're wasting your life?

You don't care about, in your actions you're not showing that you care about anybody but you.

Is it apathy?

Gossip, unfaithfulness?

I mean, what is it?

here's some confessions.

I'm going to read these to you from scripture and then let's respond, okay?

As we close.

John 3.20, Jesus says, everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come to light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Here's the confession.

God, I confess that I have resisted coming fully to the light because I have secret sins that nobody knows about and I don't want to expose them.

I don't want to face it.

Maybe that's your prayer of confession today.

Or second, Isaiah 64.6, all of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

So God, I confess that I have no authority to judge people who have fallen in big ways because I have less noticeable sins in my life that disgust you just as much, even though I think they are far less repugnant.

Maybe that's your confession, or third Proverbs 28:13: He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces.

them, finds mercy.

So here's the prayer.

God, I agree with you that confessing my sins to you means nothing if I'm not willing to renounce them.

Or the last one, number four, James 5:16, therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

You realize

that when you confess your sins to God, you're forgiven, but when you share your life, when you confess your sins one to another, that's when you are emotionally and physically healed.

And so your prayer would be, God, I agree with your word that healing comes when I do more than confess my sins secretly to you.

Healing comes when I honestly share my failures with another person.

See, the power to change is going to come from God's Spirit, yes,

God's Word and God's people were in this together.

And so Isaiah would say, return, return to your God.

Whatever it is that's holding you back, give it up.

Remember who Jonathan Edwards was, a great preacher during the First Great Awakening, 1722, and he took this seriously.

He made lists of his resolutions about giving up and forsaking his sins.

And here's one of them, resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

I don't know when the last hour of my life is going to come or when it's going to come for you.

But I don't want to be caught thinking, doing, saying, acting, or not acting the way I should with compassion the last hour of my life.

So again,

Isaiah says, return to me, thus saith the Lord.

So let's repent of whatever we repent of, need to repent of, and let's return and realize that this is a daily cycle, a rhythm of repentance.

And when we do that, our lives are going to change.

I want you to receive the blessing, God.

I want it to.

And I promise you this, God has a better story.

Trust him in that.