

Sermon Transcript from May 8th, 2016 The Prophet Pastor John Mark Comer, Bridgetown Church

Hey. Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 1. Isaiah 1. Anybody never been here before or it's your first, second or third time or something like that? Yeah. Somebody here from was it Arkansas? But, you go to school in Mississippi? And I remember that. And it's your mom with you from Arkansas? Welcome. Yeah. You are a long ways from Arkansas. So, well done. We're happy you're here. Anyway, if you're new or visiting and it's your first or second time or whatever, we are, I don't know, nearing the halfway point on this thing called The Year of Biblical Literacy. Short version is, as a generation in all honesty, we are illiterate when it comes to the Bible. So, in 2016, we set out to change that. At least in our church.

So, as part of it, we are reading through the Bible from cover to cover altogether as a community. And the reading for this coming week is we finished up Hosea this morning, in theory. If you're behind a little bit, don't worry about it. The reading for the coming week is Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah. And that sounds terrifying, but each one is like two or three chapters long. It's okay. But, as far as the videos we have on the docket from thebibleproject.com, there's actually five videos this week. Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah. That should be a ton of fun. It's a stressful week, I'm sure, for Tim and company across the river at The Bible Project getting all of those out.

Now, here's the thing. We're reading through the Prophets right now and we just finished Isaiah and Hosea. The Prophets are a little bit easy to get lost in. Am I right? Yes. Anybody like, "What the heck," right now? This is your moment. Yeah? My wife said to me the other day, she's like, "And I thought Leviticus was hard. This is way worse." And she was like not in a good mood after that morning time or whatever. It's not hard at all to get kind of upside down in the Prophets.

So, next up is a short, three-week series that we're calling "The Prophet," and my hope is that, in a few weeks' time, you'll have your head and your heart kind of around this part of the Bible and this facet, really, of the heart of God. Now, to start off, when I say "prophet," what exactly comes to mind for you? It's kind of an odd, weird word, right? A lot of people hear the word "prophet" and think of kind of a social activist. Kind of like the ancient Hebrew equivalent of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or something like that. And the prophet was. He was a voice for those on the margins of society. He was all about this quadrilateral that we read all through the Old Testament. The orphan, the widow, the poor and the refugee. Like, over and over again the prophet, on behalf of God, was an advocate for the orphan, the widow, the poor and the refugee.

So he was, in a sense, a social activist. But, he was more than that. Other people think of the prophet as kind of a social critic. Like his job was to kind of call out everything that was wrong in society. Kind of like the ancient equivalent of Radiohead or something like this. So, it was a really good week if you're a music fan and in particular for Radiohead fans. Am I right? You all know? Yes. Exactly. New record today.

So, okay. To bring you up to speed if your head's in a corner somewhere. So, last Sunday, Radiohead's social media and website goes black. Like, nothing there. And the whole world just starts to freak out. Are they done as a band? Is it like a new, secret, surprise record coming out that's like anti-technology because Thom Yorke is all anti-Spotify and all that stuff. He's anti-everything. But, that in particular. And nobody knows. And then Tuesday it comes back up and there's a new single out and another new single. Whole new record today. There's this crazy, weird music video based on this horror film from 1977. It's super odd. There's all this nerdy backstory that we don't have time for tonight. And the new single's called "Burn the Witch" and there's this haunting chorus. "Burn the witch. Burn the witch."

And the whole thing is this not ambiguous at all, kind of anti-Donald Trump mantra. It's seriously like this whole Thom Yorke, anti-mob mentality, fear based thinking that is spreading the world right now. So, you know, Isaiah is kind of like Radiohead in a way. Like, meaning he's an artist. Isaiah's medium is poetry. And he's also a performer. Like, read Isaiah. He does weird, symbolic stuff like Isaiah was found walking around Israel butt naked at one point. And that's kind of tame if you compare him to Ezekiel or other people like that who would lie on his side and eat food that he would bake over cow excrement for a year. Like, there's weird stuff there.

And that's because the prophet is getting at the soul, not just the mind, not just the cerebral. So, he is a social critic calling out everything that's warped in the world. Then,

of course, other people think of the prophet as a fortune teller, as if all he does is predict the future. This is especially true if you grew up in like an end-times kind of church where there's all sorts of hubbub around that. But, here's the thing. The prophet does predict the future. But, honestly, it's really rare. Scholars would put the percentage of the prophets that are about the future at well under 10%. I read one a few days ago that put the number at 2%.

So, yeah, it's there for sure. Kind of that eye over the horizon to the future. But, it's really rare. Now, there are bits and pieces of truth in each stereotype, but, more than anything, here's the thing: the prophet was an intermediary between God and humanity. He was a man of two worlds. His job was to stand between heaven and earth and push and pull the two together. Unlike Dr. Martin Luther King or Thom Yorke, when the prophet spoke, he spoke for God. He would stand up, literally, and say, "Yahweh says," quote, in the first person.

Now remember, this is a world with no social media, no internet, no newspaper, no news service or TV, no mail system, for that matter. So, if you were a king and you got a message that you wanted to get out to your kingdom or to the world at large, you had one and only one option. You would send your envoy. Your envoy was usually not like a paid messenger. He was actually part of the royal court. He was there with you in the throne room there for decision making. And, when the time was right, you would send your envoy out to say, "This is what the king has to say," and then quote the king in the first person.

So, it's kind of like the imagery here is that Yahweh is the Creator God, He's the King of all of the universe, and the prophet is His envoy that He would send out to the Kingdom of God and to the world at large. But, here's the thing: the prophet is just kind of a weird dude. Right? Can we say that out loud? When I imagine Isaiah or Hosea or Joel or Amos, I imagine a guy with kind of a crazy beard. Like very east side, and I mean that in a good way. And, you know, crazy hair and fire in his eyes and a little spittle on his mouth and Birkenstocks. Of course Birkenstocks. I just imagine this guy. And I'm not sure I'm all that off.

Now, of course, there were, you know, prophets from the priesthood and from the aristocracy in Jerusalem and all of that. But, as a general rule, the prophet was a loner; an outsider on the fringe of society. His voice cut across the grain of the status quo. He was there to kind of disturb and agitate and turn things upside down. He was almost always a thorn in the side of the power brokers of the day. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a famous Jewish professor in his seminal book on the prophets, writes this:

"The prophet was an individual who said 'no' to his society. Condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency, waywardness and syncretism. His fundamental objective was to reconcile man and God."

That's it. That's what he's after. To reconcile man and God. But, because he's a bit odd and weird and out there and artsy at times, the prophet is hard to read. The other day my wife, as I said, literally said, "Man, this is harder for me to read than Leviticus. It's so repetitive and so much of it is angry and he's mad and he's torn up about this, that or the other."

And she's not alone. Even Martin Luther – you all know who that is, right? The theologian. Changed Western Europe 400 years ago. Even he, this is one of the top scholars of Western European history, said this:

"The prophets have an odd way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly matter, ramble off from one thing to the next so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."

Like, when a professor says that, you know you're in trouble. When he's like, "Man, that makes no sense at all."

I love this honesty. When you read the prophet, at times it feels like he is all over the map. And part of that is because the prophet is not – and this was helpful for me – an author, he was a poet. And his book wasn't really a book at all, it was more like a collection of poems. Like an anthology. All sorts of poems grouped together around a theme. So, when you open up Isaiah – and this is, you know, there's variation depending on which book you read. But, you're not really reading a book like the Gospel of Matthew or Mark or Luke or John where there's a narrative arch and every story is a part of a literary plot line and all of that.

It's more like you go to Powell's and you pick up a collection of poems by somebody that you like. It's an anthology and it's like grouped around themes. Poems about judgment. Poems before the exile. Poems after the exile. Poems about hope. Poems about this, that or the other. So, that's kind of like how you read through. But, the problem is, there's usually little or no narrative heading between poem after poem after poem. So, at times, you just feel like you're back and forth.

So, what I want to do next is I want to aim all of that intro from the last few minutes at Isaiah 1. That hopefully is open in your lap right now. The plan for this mini-series is to unpack three passages in Isaiah, starting right here in Isaiah 1, for a number of reasons. One, just because Isaiah, when you're reading through the Bible, is the first prophet that you come to. But then, also, because he's kind of the archetype of the prophet. He's everything in one place. If you can wrap your head around Isaiah in the next week or two, then you can make sense of all the prophets. Okay? Okay? Cool. Great. So, here we go.

Isaiah 1:1: **"The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amos saw during the reigns of Uzziah,"** – remember these guys from our reading a month or two ago? – **"Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."**

The opening line here is very important. Everything that you are about to read is set inside a much larger story, and if you miss that, if you miss the context, you will end up reading through the prophets kind of searching for a feel good shot in the arm, and usually ripping it way out of context. So, to bring you up to speed, here's the context: Israel – if you remember this point in the story from reading 1 and 2 Kings a few months ago – is divided at this point into two kingdoms. Ten tribes up in the north called Israel, which makes it a bit confusing, and then two tribes down in the south, Judah and Benjamin, called Judah, but sometimes also called Israel to make it even more confusing.

Now, Isaiah is down in the south. Jerusalem, the capital and Judah has nothing to do, or little to nothing to do, with the north. He's down in the south and, you know, the north is a lost cause already in route to exile. But, Judah is not far behind. Judah is in a state of spiritual and moral decline, on a trajectory straight for the exile in Babylon. So, it's very important when you read Isaiah that you get Isaiah is speaking to people who are in open rebellion against God. Okay? So, if you read it and you're like, "Is this how God feels about me?" Hopefully not. Okay? Hopefully you're following Jesus and you're at a very different spot. But, people who were in open rebellion against God, hostile, nonchalant, "Who cares what God has to say."

Isaiah and all the prophets before the exile that we're reading right now – and you notice we're not actually reading in the order of your Bible. That's because we're reading the prophets before the exile and then we'll read some other stuff and then later we'll come back to all the prophets after the exile. So, Isaiah and all the prophets before the exile are God's last ditch effort to turn Judah around. He's warning her, "Listen," over and over, prophet after prophet, poem after poem, "Listen, you need to turn around, change direction or you will end up in exile."

Okay. So, that's the story that we are about to step into. Now, you're ready. Isaiah 1:2. He goes off.

"Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth!"

The imagery here is of an ancient courtroom and Isaiah calls heaven and earth, the cosmos, to witness Israel, in the imagery, is on trial for a crime. God is the judge and you, the reader, are the jury. And here's the prosecution's opening remarks:

"Yahweh has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, the donkeys its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.'

"Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken Yahweh; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him."

Okay. So, right out of the gate: is God in a good mood here or a bad mood? Yeah. Bad. Not so hot. So, it's Monday morning. 7 a.m. You wake up. You make yourself Chemex coffee. You take a seat on the couch or your favorite chair. You open up your Bible. You take a deep breath. You invite the Holy Spirit to shape your mind, your heart, from the inside out; to set you on a trajectory for the presence and the power of Jesus all day long. You

ask God to speak over you and you start to read and, 10 seconds later, you're reading, "Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption!" And you're just like crying in your coffee at that point. Like, "What is this? What did I do? Did I oversleep? What did I do? What is God saying?"

So, you just skip to Matthew and call it a day. The reality is not a lot of us wake up in the morning and read Isaiah or Jeremiah or any one of the prophets. In fact, a lot of us don't like to read the prophets and one of the reasons – let's just call out the elephant in the room, okay? One of the reasons is because God, in the prophets, is angry a lot. Not all of the time, but a lot of the time. And He even sounds, at least to me, mean a lot and ticked off and like He just has all this emotion. And, in particular if you're kind of a millennial like me and you're from the west coast where we're all like nice to each other and we drive a hybrid or I ride a bicycle. Like, "Ding, ding!"

Whatever. You know. And you're a millennial and we're not even into politics because it's mean and everybody's so mean. I'm just like, "Gosh. I don't disagree with you. No, of course not, man. You want to get a matcha latte?"

Whatever. You know? So, to get mad at somebody is unloving in the world that we grew up in. So, we read this and we just kind of think, "God, why are You so upset? Just take a night off. Pour Yourself a glass of merlot and just watch a little Netflix, God. You just need to take a deep breath, okay? Why are You all worked up?"

Now, part of this is just because we're reading an ancient Hebrew prophet. He's not like a late-modern, west coast millennial who's all chill or whatever. This is an ancient Hebrew prophet out in the desert. It's a time of violence and bloodshed and injustice. So, he's torn up. And that's a huge part of it. But, here's the thing even once you explain that part away: the genius of the prophet is the prophet exposes you and me to the heart of God. To what one scholar that I read recently calls "the divine pathos." And, by that, he means "the inner emotional world of God."

Like, we forget this a lot that God is emotional. God feels and God feels deeply. God is not an idea or a doctrine in a systematic theology textbook or a force out in the universe. No. God is a person. When I say person I don't mean a human being like you or me, I mean a relational being. He is a person and He has feelings. Good, bad, highs, lows. He gets angry and sad. Actually, the first emotion that we read here is one of sorrow. "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."

Like, God has highs and lows and joy and peace and anger and betrayal and jealousy and excitement. God feels all of that. Now, God's not fickle like you are I are. He's not immature. He's mature. He's not selfish and He doesn't brood and He's not in a funk for a day or two like some of you or a decade or two like others of you. God's not like that. But, God is emotional. And we see this in Jesus. If you don't believe me, read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Jesus is not Spock. Like, "Do not worry."

That's not Jesus. Like, Jesus goes around and there's tears in His eyes. I think of John 11. He's literally sobbing, weeping from the gut out over the death of His friend. Or I think of Matthew 23 where Jesus is angry and He's just ripping language right out of Isaiah. "Woe to you. Woe to you. Woe to you."

That's not like hipster Jesus that we're into. That's like spittle out of the mouth, angry eyes Jesus that we just don't really like to talk about. But, Jesus is not Spock. Jesus is an emotional being. That's what God is like. And so, the prophet, of course, as an envoy of God, is emotional. He feels and he feels deeply and what he feels is what God feels. He is tapping in with poetry to the heart of God Himself. Our problem is that we're not emotional enough when it comes to our relationship with God. We've grown numb, bored, nonchalant, lackluster and, as a result, we start to slide off course. We need the prophet's emotional voice to break through and wake up our heart and mind.

But that, of course, raises the question: what exactly is God so angry about here? Why is He all up in arms? Well, there are three major things that God is angry about in Isaiah and in all of the prophets. And we see all three right here in chapter 1. And all three, I would argue, have staggering implications for you and me a millennium later on the other side of the world as we are practicing the way of Jesus.

Now the first is – if you're taking notes, go ahead and right this down – breaking the

covenant. Israel is in a covenant with God. Meaning she's locked in relationship with God Himself. A covenant is essentially a promise to be in relationship with somebody. So, it was a huge part of the ancient world. Not so much today. The closest thing we have to a covenant in the modern world is marriage. Like, "Will you, through death and sickness and health, poverty and all of that, will you so promise?"

"I will," or "I do."

That's the closest thing we have to a covenant. And God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. "I will be your God and you will be my people." That's the famous line, a refrain, all through the Bible. And, you know, Israel's end of the bargain was the Ten Commandments. And you know the story. God was faithful; Israel was unfaithful. And there are two metaphors that you read here in Isaiah and all through the prophets for God and Israel's relationship. The first is that of a family; of a father and his son or daughter. We just read that in verse 2.

"I reared children and brought them up, but they rebelled against me."

So, in this metaphor, Yahweh is like the dad, Israel's like the child, the son, the daughter, and Yahweh is this loving, good father. But, Israel has rejected God and said, "I want nothing to do with you, dad. Get out of my life."

And God here is hurt and He's wounded deep inside and He's emotional as if you're a parent. You and only you know the depth of your feeling that you have for and about your son or your daughter or your kids. That's how God is. The depth of feeling that God has for Israel. The other metaphor all through the prophets is that of marriage. We just finished Hosea this morning. And in Hosea's metaphor, Yahweh is like a faithful husband is Israel is like Hosea's unfaithful wife. Like, a good, loving husband, but the wife is cheating on her first love and goes off to become a prostitute. It's just unthinkable. Hence the semi-violent emotion at times here in the prophet.

Have you ever been in a divorce court? Have you ever known people really well that we're going through a divorce? Most of the time it is semi-violent. It's just nasty and anger and bitterness and betrayal and jealousy and hurt and people are wounded at the core of who they are. I mean, some of you know from experience. Your mom, your dad or your own story. It is just gut-wrenching. Like, that's the kind of emotion that literally bleeds onto page after page in Isaiah and all through the prophets. God is like this wounded lover, so in love with Israel, but just rejected by His bride. And the prophets are, what our good friend Dr. Timothy Mackey, calls "covenant watchdogs." Meaning, over and over again, the prophets call Israel back to her relationship with God.

"Come back to your father; to your dad. Come back to your husband; to your lover. Come back to your God."

The point for you and me is that God is passionate about His relationship with His people; with you and with me. God's love for you is fierce. It is fierce. The opposite of love is not hate, it's apathy. And that's why love and anger are not at odds with each other. If you love somebody, when stuff goes sideways in a relationship, you get angry, you get mad because something comes up from the depth of your being. So, God's love for you, love for me, love for His people is fierce to the core.

So, that's the first thing. For breaking the covenant. Second, if you're taking notes, is for injustice. Skip down to – I don't have time for all of it – verse 10. God goes on to say this:

Isaiah 1:10: **"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah!"**

And by that He means "people of Jerusalem."

So, this is just not what you want to hear from God.

"The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they do me?" says Yahweh. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and of goats. When you come to appear before me, who as asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?"

Okay. So, remember, Judah is in open rebellion against God, okay? Hostile. But still, she is at the temple every single Sabbath to make a sacrifice and worship. You see the incongruity there? And God is like, "What in the world is up with this?"

But, she still wants God to bless. Isn't this so how we are? We want to do our own thing. Like, "God, it's my life. I'm okay. Thank you. Mind Your own business."

But, we still want God to bless us. So, we come to church or we tithe or we read our Bible in the morning or we take the bread and the cup or we pray and we sing a little bit. "Come on, God. Come on." And then we go back to our life as it is. And God just sees right through all of that facade. I mean, He just sees right through to the heart. Which is why He goes on in 13.

"Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me."

You would light incense at the temple to pray and also to cover the stench of all the sacrifice of all the dead animals.

"New Moons," – that was a monthly day of worship – **"Sabbaths..."** – the weekly day of rest and worship – **"...and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals..."** – that thing you do at church once in a while or whatever – **"...I hate them with all of my being. They have become a burden to me."**

"I am just tired. I'm weary."

Can you imagine God saying this to Bridgetown about church? That's horrific.

"When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers,"
– "Da, da, da, da, da. I'm not listening."

Like, that's actually really immature. That's probably not the right tone there, but that's what He's getting at. God is just fed up. He's over it. And, if you know where this is in context, this is after hundreds of years of God calling Israel to the covenant. And God's just done. He's like, "This is just ridiculous. I'm done."

Now, okay. So, all of that set up, what is God so angry about here? Like, okay. Breaking the covenant. But, what is God so up in arms about? Well, look at the next line. End of 15.

"Your hands are full of blood!"

That's double entendre there. So, on one hand your hands are full of blood because you're at the temple and you make a sacrifice and you slit the whatever's throat. But then, also, it's the blood of injustice. Keep reading.

Isaiah 1:16: **"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right."**

In Hebrew, that's this word "tsaddiq." It means "righteousness" and it means "right relationships with the community at large and in particular with the vulnerable in the community."

It's like, "Do right. Take care of the vulnerable. Seek. Go after. Pursue justice.

"Defend the oppressed."

Or, that can be translated, "Fight the oppressor."

"Take up the cause of the fatherless;"

"The orphan, that kid without a mom and a dad here in the city in the foster care system or on the other side of the world in an orphanage down in Nicaragua or whatever, do something about that. Don't just stand there. Get off your butt and go do something

about it."

"Plead the case of the widow."

There's all sorts of noise in the news this week about inequality between men and women in the workplace, in particular in Silicon Valley. I mean, it's 2016 and it's still a huge problem. Take that, multiply it by a thousand. If you were a widow in the ancient Near East, you had little or no way to make a living other than your body and sex. And you were easy prey for the oppressor.

"Plead the case of the widow."

God is saying, "Care about those that society at large does not care about at all. And God is just worked up. He's angry about what? Not about Himself at all. This is not a selfish anger. This is an unselfish anger. He's angry about injustice; about the treatment of that quadrilateral. The orphan, the widow, the poor and the refugee. Nothing makes God angry like the mistreatment of the orphan, the widow, the poor and the refugee. This has massive ramifications for you and for me living millennia later in America in the era of globalization.

So, you know your stuff. Globalization is only a few decades old, really. It started out as this great idea. "Hey, what if we outsource everything to the other side of the world, southeast Asia, Africa, South America or whatever, and everything gets cheaper for us here in the West and we get to buy not one t-shirt, but fourteen and then people around the world get a job and climb out of poverty."

It was this great idea that has been a colossal disaster at a global, historic scale. The truth is the rich ended up richer and the poor ended up poorer. Our clothing is now 20% cheaper than it was in the 1980's. Like, just do the math in your head. I'm really bad at math. So, imagine in a creative way or whatever your style is, like, if you were living in 1980 it would cost you more to buy the exact same clothes that you're wearing today. And it's not because clothes are cheaper, it's because clothes are cheaper for us. It's the exact same cost. This is the world that we live in. The clothes we wear, the shoes on our feet, the food we eat, the phones we carry around in our back pocket are often – not always – deeply connected to injustice around the world.

And at times it just feels not only gut wrenching, but like a lost cause. Like, "Who are we to stand up against the multinational corporation and unfair trade and debt and all of that." Like, who are we? One man, one woman, one family, one missional community, one church. Like, who are we? And that's why I love small, tangible expressions of justice like Compassion International. Like sponsoring a child. All of you can do that. It's like thirty-something bucks. All of you can do that.

My family and I sponsor one little girl in Zambia. Have for actually 10 years now. She just graduated from high school. She's enrolled, now, in college. She wants to become a nurse. We're trying to get her a visa to come visit us for a summer, which would be so fun. Pray for that if you think of it. It's been such a great journey for me and for my family, because it connects our heart and our family with the staggering disparity between our life here in Portland and her life there in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Honestly, a lot of you know I have a daughter that's adopted. The reason we adopted four years ago was because every year – I read through the Bible every year – I remember for years, every year, I would get to the prophets and I would just read over and over and over again about God's heart for the fatherless. And, at first it was like, "Oh, wow. That's kind of Bono-ish, but cool. Whatever."

And then it started to get under my skin. Like, after a while as you hang out with Jesus and you hang out with the Bible, you realize to follow Jesus you have to do something for the fatherless. You have to sponsor a child or adopt or anything in between. You have to do something to partner with God's heart for the fatherless. So, this morning, it was just such a special time. We woke up early, not of our own free will or volition, but because our three kids just like, "Happy Mother's Day!"

It's like, "It's six freaking a.m. But, that's great, kids. Good job."

So, the kids are all on the bed and they all had cards that were all ready to go. And you know, as a kid, you just can't wait anything. Like, they came home from school Friday with all these cards and they were like, "Mom, here's your Mother's Day card," and she's

like, "No, no, no. You have to wait."

And they're like, "No, please!"

So, she made them wait. So, literally first thing this morning the kids rush in and all the kids are on the bed and here's your card and here's this like... hideous necklace we made you that's like, oh, so bad.

But, I love your heart, kid. I love your heart. Wow. You are not an artist yet. So, we're there and we're on the bed and I'm half awake and there's my daughter and she's Ugandan, so she's clearly not from me. And she's a beautiful, beautiful little brown girl and just this huge smile on her face. I'm just like, here she is on Mother's Day. She has a mom. She has a dad. She has brothers. Well, I'm not sure if that's a good thing or bad thing. But, she has brothers and she's loved. And our family has all sorts of problems and issues, but she is loved. I think she is pretty well loved. And then I got up and I made coffee and I read the end of Hosea this morning. I love that line. "In you the fatherless find compassion."

Like, that's the God that we read about. But, for every Sunday – that's my daughters' name – there are who knows how many others with no mom, with no dad, with no roof overhead, with no breakfast to eat in the morning, in poverty or whatever. And that is something that God is angry about. God has feelings about that. God's not like how you are or how I am. When I read the stats about the number of kids in global poverty I'm like, "Wow. That sucks. Umm, want to go get a beer after at Tilt? Wanna like hang out?"

Like, right through like there's no empathy. God is not like that. God is just torn up from the inside out and He's angry about it, in particular the connection at times between His people here in the West and injustice around the world. So, secondly, injustice.

And then finally, if you're taking notes, is idolatry. So, breaking the covenant, injustice and then idolatry. Look down to the end of the chapter at Isaiah 1:27. God goes on to say this:

"Zion will be delivered with justice," – there it is again – **"her penitent ones with righteousness."** – There it is – **"But rebels and sinners..."** – those who want nothing to do with it – **"...will both be broken, and those who forsake Yahweh will perish."**

"You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. You will be an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire."

Wow. That is intense. Now, this whole little section here is a reference to idolatry. Particularly the worship of the Canaanite goddess of fertility, Ashtoreth. So, people would go to a garden-like area and have sex with a shrine prostitute in front of the sacred oaks of the goddess Ashtoreth in the hope of getting pregnant. And notice here that at the beginning of the chapter, people are at the temple worshiping Yahweh and then, by the end, they are at the sacred oaks worshiping Ashtoreth. Can you see the incongruity there? The temptation for God's people has always been "God and" not "God or." Meaning most of us don't want to pick between Yahweh and our other god of choice. We want to worship Yahweh and worship something else too or someone else too.

That was the temptation in the ancient world and it's still the temptation today. "Sure, I want to follow Jesus. Absolutely. I just want to have sex with my boyfriend too. Sure, I want to follow Jesus. Yeah. I'm all in. I just... my money is my money. Keep your hands off of it, God. Sure, I want to follow Jesus. But like, humility? No, man. I 'like' myself on Instagram."

You know that Trinidad James song? It's so good. And, by the way, if you've done that, I hope you just feel so much shame and guilt. Like, I think that is from God, actually. I'm not sure. It's not "God or," it's "God and." We want to have our cake and eat it too. And that is what the Old Testament writers call idolatry.

So, to back up for a minute, why is God so angry? Well, one, for breaking the covenant. Like, He's locked in relationship. He's passionate about His people who are off in left field. Two, for injustice. In particular, the care for the orphan, the widow, the poor and the refugee. And three, for idolatry; the worship of another god. And even though I don't like

it when God gets angry – I don't like to read this at all. But still, the deep, gut emotions of God that we read in the prophet have a role to play. They shock us out of our apathy. One of the great temptations for the people of God has always been apathy. Especially in a great city like Portland. I love this city to death. It's so hedonistic, and I don't even mean that in a disparaging way. But, we are literally full of food and drink and everything in between that, literally, it's like we've lost our hunger, our thirst, for God Himself and we just grow complacent, lazy, bored, numb.

There's a cycle that we see all through the Bible and down through history: apathy leads to compromise leads to decline and, in the end, it's tragic, leads to death. Apathy, compromise, decline, death. You can chart that in the story of Israel and there's a chance you can chart that in your own life or somebody you know

The prophet, listen, he breaks through, just with his piercing, ear-splitting poetry, practically screaming at you with a megaphone turned up to 11, "Wake up out of your apathy."

The the prophet, things that are minor to you and me are major. The prophet has a deep sensitivity to email – I'm sorry, to evil. Wow. That's like... where did that come from? I hate email. Maybe that's what it is. I don't know. It's a deep sensitivity to evil. Oh my gosh. You remember like, okay, 10-15 years ago, and some of you are too young to remember this, so just show me a little grace. But, 10-15 years ago, before the era of Spotify, okay? So, even when iTunes was out, but it was new. Remember when you got a new record or a new album and you would burn it to disc? Remember that back in the day? It was like "burning disc" and it was the radioactive sign? Anybody remember that? Twenty-five and up you're like, "Yeah." Everybody else is like, "Wait, what?"

So, remember, music was expensive, a CD was 18 bucks or something back in the day. And I played in bands for years. I love music. I would always have friends who would offer to burn me a CD. Now, it was illegal. Remember the video? Like, "Piracy is a crime. You wouldn't steal a purse."

And we all laugh or whatever. Remember that? Oh, yeah. But, the thing is everybody would do it. So, I had this one good friend in particular who was like a muso and just impeccable taste in music and he would always be like, "Man, do you want the new this?"

And I'm like, "Uh, no. No. No. Stop it. Stop it. It's illegal. No."

"But, dude. Everybody's doing it. Everybody's doing it."

And sometimes, I would give in. But, rarely. Rarely. Most of the time I would actually follow Jesus. But, there's some – do you remember that? It's weird. There's some unwritten rule of the human psyche that says if enough people do something, it's not really wrong anymore. And it all starts with apathy. And then we compromise when we grow emotionally numb to the reality of sin. The voice of the prophet cuts through all of that. Through all of our apathy, through all of our compromise. Through all of our numb. Debt. "Ah, it's not really a big deal."

The voice of the prophet cuts through and says, "No. It is a big deal. And he's passionate and he's angry and he's upset and he's torn and he's sad and he has the courage to call sin out as sin and to call you and me to take our relationship with God seriously. Once again, Heschel says this:

"The situation of a person immersed in the prophet's words is one of being exposed to a ceaseless shattering of indifference and one needs a skull of stone to remain callous to such blows."

So well said. And we need the voice of the prophet in both the Bible and in the church. In the Bible, prophets take up as much space in the library that is Scripture as the New Testament does. But usually, we relegate it way off to the said. But, every year, there's something so good for you and me here. Every year, as I'm reading through the Bible, when I get to the prophets, something happens in me and it's not always comfortable. In fact, it's usually uncomfortable. But, reading the prophets makes me take a long, hard look at my life. Because you can't help but as you read accusation after accusation after accusation, you can't help but me like, "God, is there any of that in my life? I don't think I'm in open rebellion, but am I?"

And you know what? That's actually not all bad. If you degrade into guilt and shame and

fear and insecurity, that's unhealthy. But, it's not all bad to do a little soul searching from time to time. We need the voice of the prophet in the Bible and we also need the voice of the Bible in the church. So, we don't have prophets like Isaiah anymore. What I would call "Prophets" with a capital "P" who speak and say in the first person, "God says..." and then write it down and we call it the Bible. Like, none of those anymore. But, we do have prophets with lowercase "p" or men and women who are prophetic, who play a like, similar role in the church today and in the Kingdom of God. Who have an ear towards the Holy Spirit and an uncanny ability to hear from God. I mean, we all have the ability to hear from God, right? But, some people just have an uncanny.

We all the ability to prophesy. The New Testament makes that crystal clear. But, some people just have this gift for it to hear from God and then pass along His heart and His mind to the Church. Some of you have this gift. You're hard wired by God to play this role in the Church. Some of you know it. Others of you actually don't know it yet and you will discover it soon. Some of you are really good at it. Others of you are still in route. You're still practicing and it's all new and awkward for you and that's okay. But, if this is you, you need to cultivate this gift. Come to pre-gathering prayer at four. Get around other people who have the gift. Join the prayer team. That's a great place. Start to exercise that muscle. We need your voice.

Because, there is this temptation – and it's been around as long as the Old Testament – to kind of silence the voice of the prophet. Like, that would happen all the time. I think of Jeremiah who was literally shut in a dungeon underground, like locked up with bread and water because the people did not want to hear what he had to say, because it was not self-help, it was not feel-good, it was not pat on the back. "Shut up. Get him out."

And even in the New Testament, where so much has changed and now we have the Holy Spirit and our heart is right from the inside out so we don't have to read "judgment, judgment, judgment," almost in a very different place as the people of God. But still there's that line in Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, "Don't quench the Spirit; don't treat prophecies with contempt."

Man, because there's a temptation to say, "That's weird," or, "I don't want that," or, "Man, you're kind of funky," or, "I'm okay. I'll just do my own thing."

Man, don't. When you do that you quench, you put out the fire of what God, the Holy Spirit, is up to in your life, in your church and in your community. But, we do it a lot because the prophet is not always a shot in the arm. A lot of the time he is. Paul writes that prophecy's exhortation is comfort and encouragement. But, not always. And either way we need the voice of the prophet. Now, before we wrap up – and thank you for your patience with me – just notice one more thing. It's not all judgment. Okay? Not here in Isaiah 1 and not through the Prophets. There's a lot of judgment for sure, but the prophet is always oscillating back and forth between judgment and then hope.

Usually he starts with judgment and then he makes the shift to hope. The prophet is a bad news first kind of person. That's one of the reasons I like him. The best. The prophets, before the exile, are usually about 80% judgment, 20% hope, because Israel's just in open rebellion. Then the prophets after the exile are usually kind of flip-flopped. More like 80% hope, 20% judgment. Because now, exile is here and people are under the discipline of God and now are like, "Oh, God. We're so sorry. We need Your help now to come back."

You see that in Isaiah. The first 39 chapters were from the perspective of before the exile and so there's all this judgment. And then, in chapter 40, the entire timbre is literally 180 degrees in the other direction. Now it's after the exile. Opening line in chapter 40, "Comfort, comfort my people. Tell her her sins have been paid for, her hard service is completed. It's over. It's done. I will make a way in the wilderness."

Like, that's the opening part of the second half of the book. And we need to hear both. We need to hear, even though it's so unpopular, so not Portland, so not millennial or whatever, we need to hear about God's judgment. Especially now. Especially in a world of self-help Christianity where God becomes this cosmic life coach to cater to your every need and desire; to "maximize" your life where it's all about you. You are the center of God and His world. And, in particular, with our Portland kind of left coast progressive, educated view of God as this sappy teddy bear with a hybrid and a Coexist sticker on the back whose highest virtue is tolerance and for whom love means "I never get mad at anybody about anything."

Like, this is so the air we breathe. And we need to hear about judgment. I think as a generation, and I mean that in an elastic term, we just don't talk about God's judgment a lot. I think my parents and my grandparents did a lot. If anything, too much. But, I think our generation just kind of sad, "No, that's not cool. Let's move on from that."

And part of it is because – with great respect for my parents and my grandparent's generation – I think they lost the heart behind judgment. Judgment, at least judgment on the people of God, all through the Scriptures, in the Old Testament and in the New, it is restorative, not punitive. Meaning God's end goal is always to fix something that is gone awry. Judgment is about healing. It's about God's attempt and agenda to put the world to rights. I mean, there's a great metaphor right here at the end of chapter 1.

If you look at Isaiah 1:21: **"See how the faithful city has become a prostitute!"**

Isaiah 1:22: **"Your silver has become dross."**

Then, watch what he does with that metaphor. Skip down to 24.

Isaiah 1:24: **"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.'"**

Which, by the way, here, is His people; Judah.

"I will turn my hand against you; I will..." – listen to this – **"...thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. I will restore [you] your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness,"** – and, then again, there it is – **"the Faithful City."**

Wow. The metaphor here is of a refiner's fire. If you grew up in church, you know that metaphor really well. It's overplayed because it's so dang good. An ancient metallurgist would heat gold or silver up to a boiling point and then all of the imperfections in the metal – all of the stuff that was not gold or not silver; that was something else – would bubble up to the surface and then, at the right time, with skill and care and acumen, he would carefully scrap the dross off the top and then he would take the metal out of the fire. That's kind of like what God does with His people. With you; with me. He lets us go through the fire. Of a breakup, of a failure, of unemployment, of divorce, of disease. Not that He caused all of that stuff at all. Usually He does not. But, He lets you and I go through it and, in seasons of hardship – I mean, you know this – what happens is that all of the imperfections that are down deep in your heart and your soul all kind of rise to the surface and you start to see all of this stuff in your heart, your mind, your life that you had no idea was there.

You're like, "Oh my gosh. Look at all that entitlement I think God owes me. Wow. Look at my – I have no gratitude at all. Look at my anxiety. I'm rack-brained. I don't trust God. I just don't trust God at all. Wow. Look at my pride. And I thought I was so the center."

And all this stuff is there right in front of you at the surface. And then God, in His time, says, "Let's get rid of that. Let's get rid of that. You don't need that anymore. Whew. You don't need that anymore."

And then, in His time, He starts to take you out of the fire. This is what God does with His people. And this idea of judgment, a restorative judgment, is not just an Old Testament idea. It's all through the Bible; Old Testament and New. Jesus said more about God's judgment than any other writer in all of the New Testament. But, the one tweak that the New Testament writers make is when they talk about God's judgment and how it's restorative, one of the spots they go to a lot is this metaphor used all through the Old Testament in Job, in Proverbs, in Hosea we read it, about how God's judgment is like discipline. It's like God's a father and Israel or you or me, we're like a son or we're like a daughter and God's judgment is like discipline.

And this is something we just don't really talk about in the church. Like, the discipline of God. When was the last time people were like, "Hey, how are you?"

"Well, God's really disciplining me right now."

"Oh, that's cool. That's cool me. He must really love you a lot."

"Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah."

"He's not read the book about how spanking's bad for kids nowadays. He's not read that yet."

Like, we just don't talk about this. This is all through the Scriptures. As a father disciplines the son he loves, so our God disciplines you. No discipline seems pleasant for the moment, but painful. But, afterward, it yields fruit of righteousness. This week I had to discipline my oldest son. He's 10 years old. Don't tell him that I told you this. That's really passive-aggressive. Whoa. Okay. But, I have this great son; my firstborn. He's smart as a whip and he's just this obsessive reader. I mean, he read through all of The Lord of the Rings novels at seven. Like, he's just so into it. Reads at least one novel a week.

So, he's a great kid. But, the problem is he just has no work ethic at all. He's just like type seven on the Enneagram, life of the party, social. If you saw him he's be like, "What's up, man? How's it going?"

He's all like Gerald. He's just this awesome, "What's up?" You know? But then there's just no work ethic, no focus, no self-discipline. He's just listening to Coldplay and reading his book and like, "Whatever. I don't want to practice whatever. I don't want to do chores, dad."

So, he's really not doing well at school right now. So, I had this kind of lame meeting with his teacher and we put together a plan. Like, how do you teach your kid work ethics? Like, I have no idea. But, I'm trying to figure it out. So, I sat down with him Monday night and I have this great relationship with Jude.

And I had to have a really hard talk with him. Like, "Hey, you're smart as a whip. But, smart and charming will not get you very far in life. Like, you have to actually work hard."

And he was like, "Really?"

"Yes. And you're not doing great at school."

He's like, "Did my teacher say really good things about me?"

I'm like, "No?"

So, I had to discipline him. I had to take away his book that he takes to school with him everyday. And I buy him a book at Powell's every week and I had to say that I'm not going to do it anymore. But, we have this reward system and everyday – it's a point system – if he gets over a 90 then I give him a dollar for that day towards Powell's, and it's all just to manipulate him into good behavior or whatever. So, I had to discipline him and it was just lame. Like, as a dad, I hate that. I have no desire to do that. But, already by the end of the week, his teacher sent me an email and said, "He's way, way, way better. Thank you for whatever you did."

My thing is I discipline Jude because I am way more interested in Jude's long-term joy than his short-term happiness. Way more interested in Jude 20 years from now as a grown man. Smart and charming and one heck of a hard worker, living up to all of his full potential. I just have so many dreams. And not like in the weird dad like, "You will become an NBA star."

Like, no you won't. But, good kind of dreams. Like, train up a child in the way they should go. I just see this vision over what God is up to. I have no idea what he'll do for a living or whatever, but I just see so much potential. And I want to just see that unleashed into the world. I love this kid so much. And, frankly, if that means that the next month or two or three of fourth grade suck, I don't even care. I mean, I care, but I'm way more interested in who he is becoming and him shaping the character that will give him joy over a lifetime than I am with his kind of happiness tomorrow morning when he goes to school.

And that's me. I'm just a dad. I'm young. I'm trying to figure out how to parent. I'm unwise at times. I'm lazy. I'm selfish. Can you imagine what God the Father is like towards you; towards me? God is so much more interested in your long-term joy than your short-term happiness. He's so much more interested in your character than He is your comfort. Because He knows that's what will yield an actual life of joy and peace. That's it.

So, He's willing to put you through discipline. A season where life isn't great, where this is happening or that is happening. He's willing to put you into the fire if need be to just let stuff come to the top and clear it off. But, the beauty about judgment is, because judgment is restorative, it's a father's discipline, judgment always, 10 times out of 10, leads to hope. And that's why in the prophets it's like one moment you're reading about judgment and then there's this undulating move over to hope.

Life is hard. It's really hard at times. And, just because you're a follower of Jesus does not at all mean that you're immune. Not in the least way. But, God is a loving, good Father and you can trust Him. You can trust Him to lead you and guide you through hardship and out the other side. And this is where reading the Prophets, reading Isaiah and Hosea, is like, man, the wind at your back. In all honesty, I would love to just stand up here and be all like, "Hey!"

I'm honestly just not really doing well right now. I feel like I am in a season where God is disciplining me. And I don't really get it. I kind of thought I was pretty great. I don't really feel like I need it, you know? There's no secret sin you don't know about or whatever. Like, pretty much you see it. I just made fun of you all for taking selfies. I'm sorry. That was not very nice. It was true, but it was not very nice.

Like, there's no secret sin or whatever, but I just feel like God is disciplining me right now. I'm at a really kind of just low place emotionally. I sense that Jesus is with me. I don't feel alone. I just, every day, sense that. I wake up in the morning, I open my Bible, I sense that Jesus is with me. I have no clue where we're going right now. I have no clue. But, I really feel like Jesus is with me. But, man, it's just a rough season for me. I don't have time to walk you through all of it. Not because it's a secret, just because I don't have time. But, I have this sense right now where, for me, reading the Prophets right now is like water for my soul. Even if hope is only 20%, man, that 20%, Isaiah 40. I just can't stop thinking about. There's a couple passages in Isaiah I just can't stop thinking about.

Isaiah 50:10: **"Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust and fully rely in the name of the Lord as God."**

Isaiah 30:15: **"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."**

Isaiah 43:19: **"See, I am doing a new thing! Behold, it springs up. I will make rivers in the desert."**

Isaiah 40:31: **"Those who wait on the Lord will walk and not grow weary; they will run and not faint."**

Isaiah 40:1: **"Comfort, comfort my people. Tell her that her sins have been paid for."**

Hosea 6:2: **"On the second day he will raise you up, on the third he will make you new again."**

Like a father I am churned up by my mercy within me. Like, even though it's a drip here, a drip there, a line here, a stanza there, I am just – I lap it up. It's like water for my soul. Some of you are at that spot. You just need the voice of the prophet to speak hope over your life; over this season, good or bad, whatever you're going through. So, all of that to say in closing, we need the voice of the prophet. We need to hear about God's judgment. Some of you just, you need the Spirit of God to break through your apathy tonight. You're in that trajectory of decline from apathy to compromise. You're in it and you need God to pierce it and to stop you and to get you back on track and to push and pull you back into relationship with Jesus. To start following Jesus. Not just believe, but following Jesus. Some of you need to hear about God's judgment tonight.

Others of you need to hear about God's hope. You need God's comfort because, right now, you just feel like He's disciplining you or maybe it's not Him at all, but just life is hard. You just need comfort, hope. Don't despair. Trust God. I'm with you. The best is yet to come. God's a loving, good Father. His intent for you is good. You need to hear that.

Some of you need to hear both at the exact same time. So, this coming week, read the Prophets. Like, if you're behind or you're not reading through the Bible with us, just start. Like, just start. Tomorrow morning, go to our website. All the information is there. And just start tomorrow morning. I think it's Joel we're on for tomorrow.

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But, right now, to end, I just want to ask you to open up your heart to the prophetic voice of God and I just want to ask the Holy Spirit to speak by direct deposit into your mind and your imagination. So, go ahead and stand up with me.

