

Sermon Transcript from May 8th, 2016
The Pain & Anger of God
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I just want to say, first off, the first part of this sermon might be a bit dry. So, just take notes and hang on. Hopefully towards the end maybe things will make sense to you. But, we have to do some ground work to understand what is going on in the Prophets. So, Isaiah 1. Let me read. I'm going to start in Isaiah 1:21 and read through Isaiah 1:26. Just a small little section of it and we'll read more as we get through the sermon.

So, Isaiah 1:21-26 says this: "See how the faithful city has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her—but now murderers!

"Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.

"Therefore the Lord, the God Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: 'Ah! I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

"I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City."

What a great Mother's Day verse, huh? Let's pray.

Lord, we, this morning, invite You to speak, God. We desperately need to hear from You. We need You to speak into our situations right now. Some of us very desperately. We need You to speak. We need to hear from You about where we're at. Some of us are really stuck right now. Some of us are about to throw in the towel. Some of us are hurt and broken and ravaged by our own wrong or the wrong of others. So, we ask, this morning, that You would speak. We are listening right now. Would You speak, God?

And God, would You use, even in the way that You choose and see fit, my words, God, as they come out, to explain Your words, God. Use me in all of the weak places that I am and feel. Lord, speak now. We desperately need Your help, God, to understand the Scriptures. So, Holy Spirit, go before us and be our leader and our guide today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

We just finished a series last week where we asked God, by looking at the Scriptures, a lot of hard questions. We asked God, "Why did You place all these seemingly arbitrary and peculiar laws in the Old Testament? And You seem to tie all these laws in the Old Testament to what it means to be holy and what it means to be human. Why did You do that, God?"

We asked God, "Why was there so much sexual violence and sexual inequality in the Old Testament?"

And we asked God these questions. We asked God, "Why does Your wrath seem to flare up in a moment through Your judgment in the Old Testament?"

And we asked, even just last week, "Why is there evil in this world, a world that You created? Why could You even allow such a thing in the world that You created?"

And it was a series called "The God I Don't Understand" and it was almost as if God was on trial, so to speak, in our series and we were asking Him so very hard and difficult questions that we wanted answers for. As we read through the Old Testament and were disrupted by all these things that we've read and we've heard God say. So, we almost, so to speak – not in an irreverent way – kind of questioned God like, "God, what's going on here?"

And we heard from God a lot of different answers. But, what if God spoke back to us, and not coldly. What if God was to ask us some questions? Not in some detached, philosophical rant about the complexities of the universe and how we'll never understand. Not something like that. What if God spoke back with concrete actualities of what's going on in the moment? And what if God spoke through a person and used that person's life and voice to speak to us? And what if God chose a person and used their life and voice to speak what He

was thinking, to speak what God was feeling, what God was doing and what God was hoping? What if God chose a person and used their life and their voice to show the world what He's thinking and feeling and doing and hoping?

If you can imagine such a thing, you have just entered the world of the Prophet and you have just entered the world of the Prophets. Isaiah is one of these prophets. One of probably the most well known and quoted. There's also Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and there was Jonah, just to name a few that you might know. If we were to be like, "Name one prophet," you might name one of those prophets. There's a whole section in your Bibles called "The Prophetic Writings" or "The Prophets." And, in these writings, it gives voice to what God was thinking, feeling, doing and hoping in the life of Israel.

The Prophets start with the book of Isaiah. You just read Isaiah in your reading that we're going through. Next is Jeremiah after Isaiah and then, after Jeremiah, a small book of lament called Lamentations. And then the book of Ezekiel. These make up the major prophets, and they're major because of size. Like, the volume of their literature is lengthy. So, they're called major prophets. Then, after that, you have the minor prophets. It starts with the book of Daniel and it goes all the way through to Malachi. And Malachi is where, in our ordering of the Bibles, most of your Bibles, that's where our Old Testament ends.

So, we have these collections of writings called The Prophets, and The Prophets were peculiar people. They were people that God had taken up to speak His heart and His mind and His voice to the people of God, and these prophets also stood before God on behalf of the people and oftentimes would talk back to God and go, "God, I don't know. I don't know if You should be doing this or You should be doing that."

So, they would have the voice of people before God, but then also the voice of God before people. But, what is a prophet? When you and I think of a prophet, what do we think of? A couple modern answers might be "a predictor of the future." So, if someone's prophetic, it means that they foretell the future. A defining feature of a prophet in our minds is that they can foretell the events in the distant future. Or a prophet is a social reformer. Think Martin Luther King Jr. Someone who is changing their society through advocating for change and prophetically speaking into the wrongs and the injustices of society. Or we think of it as a herald of Jesus. Like, the role of a prophet was to announce and foretell the coming of the Messiah.

Now, all these modern ideas of what a prophet is is kind of true, but not totally true. It does make up a part of what prophets do in the Old Testament, but not all of it. The prophets, if you were to look at the prophetic literature by the numbers, like what they actually said and did, all prophetic literature in the Old Testament and what they talk about, it would look something like this. There's a slide on the screen.

Less than 2% of the Old Testament prophecy is Messianic. Less than 2% is Messianic. Less than 5% specifically describes the new covenant age. Less than 1% concerns events yet to come in our time. So, keep that slide up for a second.

So, when we think of prophets, we think of, "Oh, we're reading this prophecy and this has something to do with us right now today. Like, this has yet to be fulfilled."

Only 1% of prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. Less than 5% describes a new covenant age. And then 2% talks about Jesus. Next slide. This means that a vast majority of Old Testament prophecy, more than 92%, addresses either Israel's immediate or imminent situation. So, this is what this means: this is why the Prophets are so hard to understand. 92% addresses Israel's immediate or imminent situation. So, when you're reading it, it has to do with them right then and there or in their future. Like, it's coming up to them. Not to us, but to them. And it has to do with their writings.

So, I would say to understand the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, you need to appreciate their historical contexts. That is, in order to know and appreciate what the prophet or the prophets are trying to do, we have to understand it in their own time and their own place. Or, said differently, you cannot understand the Prophets without understanding the covenants that God made with Israel, because prophets are covenant watchdogs. You might want to write that down. Prophets are covenant watchdogs.

So, what the Prophets are doing for the majority of their writing is watching after the covenant that God made with Israel. This is what they're to do. This is why they are full of rage and passion and emotion, because they are protecting and they are wanting to

protect the covenant. If you don't understand this, if you don't understand this here, good luck understanding the Prophets. You might get a spiritual shot in the arm and a verse here or there by reading through them. You might read something like, "Oh, I think that's Jesus. Yay." Or something like that.

But, you won't know what they are saying or they are trying to do unless, first of all, you understand the covenants first and then that the prophets are trying to guard the covenants. So, just bear with me here. Let me just walk through the covenants really "fast." Really fast.

First, here's the storyline of the covenants: there's three key passages that you have to turn your brain onto when you start reading the Prophets, Isaiah and so on. The first one is Genesis 12; the Abrahamic covenant. If you don't understand this covenant, it's really hard to understand anything in the Prophets or why the prophets are so made or why they're so made on behalf of God. It's impossible to exaggerate the significance of the promises God made to Abraham. If you actually missed this verse here in Genesis 12, you've probably missed the key that unlocks the entire Bible.

Genesis 12:1-3 says, **"The Lord had said to Abram [before his name was Abraham], "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.**

"I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Now, listen. There is a lot going on here, but just notice a couple things. Notice what God said He would give to Abraham and why. He said, "Abraham, I'm going to give you a land. I want you to go to a land I will show you. I'm going to give you a land. And then I'm going to make you a nation. I'm going to multiply your descendants even though you don't have kids yet and you're very old. I'm going to make a promise to you. I'm going to give you a nation. And then, I'm going to give you my presence."

That's why He keeps on saying, "I will," and, "I will," and, "I will." "I'm going to do this. I'm going to do all of these things."

And the reason why He's doing all of these things is that, "I'm going to bless the world through you. So, I'm going to give you a land. And then, in this land, I'm going to make you a nation. And then in this nation I'm going to give you my presence. And then, when all of this is set up, I'm going to bless the world through your descendants."

So, what this whole thing is for is God is saving Abraham so that He can bless the world. Or, in other words, God is after the redemption of the world or the salvation of the world and He is choosing to use people. Specifically, He is choosing to use this man Abraham and his nation, which will be called Israel. Essentially, God is saying this: "I am going to commit myself to you and I, God, am going to tie myself to you and your family. And then your family, as they turn into descendants and they turn, ultimately, into a nation, I'm going to bind myself to you and then, through your descendants, I'm going to bring about the salvation of the world. I'm tied to you. We're connected in this. You and I have a job to do. Will you obey me and follow me and do this?"

And Abraham said yes. And then God gave him a sign for this. Circumcision, which was the cutting away of flesh on the fruitful part of the male organ. I don't... that's enough of that.

So, to remember that God said, "Your descendants, I will bless." And then, in Genesis 15, God binds Himself to Abraham and his descendants and, in Genesis 15, this binding that God makes to Abraham is the tension of the rest of the Old Testament. There is a ceremony that takes place in Genesis 15. And, Abraham is to basically make a covenant – a blood covenant – and cut animals in half and make this pathway and Abraham and God were supposed to walk through it and they were to bind themselves to each other. But then, God puts Abraham asleep and walks through it alone. And this covenant is a blood covenant that God makes with Abraham and his descendants.

Now listen. Covenant. We don't use this word. We use this word in one context right now, and I would argue it's pretty loose. It's not really covenant. But, I hope it. It should be. But, I don't think we look at it this way. The only equivalent that we have of this is marriage. I think marriage is becoming more contractual than covenantal nowadays. Covenantal meant we're not going anywhere. We can't go anywhere. I'm bound to you. I said "yes" to you

when we were young and no matter who you turn out to be or what you do to me, I'm not leaving you. That is covenant.

And you're like, "Whoa. That's not what I signed up for."

And, if you're not married yet, that's what you're signing up for. Contracts are different. Contracts are made to be broken if everything changes. Like, "Whoa, whoa. Wait. Now, that's not a part. You broke the contract. You broke the contract. I'm out."

Covenants aren't like that. Covenants are like, "You broke the covenant and I am so mad at you and I'm so angry at you and this is going to take so much time and energy to get through, but let's get through it together."

That's covenant. The best definition of covenant that I've ever heard is this: "I will be to you as I should be, whether or not you are as you should be to me."

"I will be to you as I should be, even though you are not that way to me."

This is exactly what God was doing with Abraham. God was saying, "Abraham, I will be to you and your descendants as I should be even though I know that you're not going to be that way to me. And I'm going to bind myself to you. That's why you're going to go to sleep and I'm going to walk through this thing alone. I'm going to bind myself to you and your descendants and I'm going to save the world through your people, they like it or not. That's what I'm going to do."

That's what covenant is. I have to use this illustration quick, because I don't know how long it'll last. I usually only say this for weddings. But, Jay Z and Beyoncé have a song together and it's about marriage. And they have this line in their song alluding to tattoos they both share under their wedding rings of their wedding date. And a line in the song goes like this:

"This ink don't come off even if rings come off."

Meaning, if we fight and I take my ring off to fight you or if I take my ring off to get out of this thing, we can't because there's ink underneath it and that's permanent. I would argue that's what covenant is. And I hope they... anyway, that's a whole different thing. That's covenant. Like, this is permanent. This ring comes off, but that ink does not. That's covenant. God enters into covenant with Abraham, but He does it alone. God says, "I'm in this with you no matter what."

That's the first covenant. So, the prophets are guarding that. But, they're also guarding this. In Exodus 19, you get the second covenant. And this, Israel enters into knowingly. This, Israel actually does enter into as well with God and there are stipulations of the covenant and there are consequences for breaking the covenant. In Exodus 19, you get the Sinai covenant. Israel is saved from bondage and slavery and brought to the foot of Mount Sinai and given the commandments and the terms of entering into covenant with God. And all of them know the terms of the covenant. They all do. And Moses reads it out loud to all of them and says, "Do you understand these terms?"

And they say, "I do."

And then it says, "Will you?"

And they said, "I do."

"Will you?"

"I do."

"Will you?"

It's almost like marital vows. And they go back and forth. "If you do this, then God will do this. But, if you do this, God will do this. And these are the terms of the covenant. Do you?"

And they say, "I do."

And then Moses takes blood and he scatters it everywhere. Again, a blood covenant. We can't break this covenant. We're in this with God. Israel vowed to be a beacon as a light to the nations; a kingdom of priests. They said they would obey God and be faithful to Yahweh and His laws and the laws of the covenant because they believed with God that they would bring about the salvation of the world as they lived in the covenant, as they obeyed the covenant, as they follow God. They would partner with God in bringing about the blessing of the world.

And they said, "We do."

They finally get into the land and God makes a third covenant with them; the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7. Also, Psalm 72. You can write that down. Here, God promises that a descendant will come from David that will bring blessing to all nations. And so, you have these three covenants. The Abrahamic covenant, God binding Himself to Israel saying, "I'm going to save the world through you," then you have the Sinai covenant where they would say, "Yes. We want to partner with You, God, and we want to live in Your vision of what it means to be human. We want to live in Your vision of what it means to be saved. We want to live in Your vision on the way the world works. We want to live in this vision and we think that by following You in this vision, it will bring about the blessing of the world. Yes, God. We'll do that."

And then the Davidic covenant. Like, "You will raise up a king for Yourself, God. And then, through this king, You will bring about the blessing to all the nations through the kingship that we have here in Jerusalem and then through David's line."

Are you guys with me? Okay. I promise it'll pay off if you understand this background. So, remember: the prophets are covenant watchdogs. A prophet is someone who stood between God and man and felt deeply the plight of humanity and the pain of God. A prophet would stand before God and people and he would feel what it feels like to live in disobedient Israel; to live in their borders with their wicked judges and leaders. He would know what that feels like and he's be so angry that that was a reality in his people.

But then, he would also feel the hurt and the pain of God, because God hurt deeply because of what Israel did to God. And this prophet felt it and they said something about it. That is why there is so much anger and pain and agony and threats and promises and love and hope in the prophet's words. There's all of it bound up, and sometimes it goes in and out and you don't even know what's happening when. One minute there's judgment and the next minute it says, "Afterwards, you will be called a city of righteousness."

You're like, "Wait, you just told us we were all going to die. What are you talking about?"

There's this like, "I can't believe he would do this to me. I love you."

You're like, "Wait, what? What is happening?"

These are words of a lover. Someone who's been betrayed. To a spouse that keeps breaking God's heart, this is what the prophet was to be a prophet to. They're God's words to an unfaithful spouse. They would stand before Israel and say, "You said 'I do' to God and you're breaking your vows. You are unfaithful. You are breaking God's heart."

In the prophet's words, we get God's side of the story. We get how God feels about the brokenness and sin of the world. That's why there are all these conflicting emotions. There's hurt and hope and anger and tenderness and pain and promise, because God is in real relationship with Israel and real covenant with Israel. God knows what it feels like to be cheated on. God knows what it feels like to be betrayed. God knows what it feels like to be hurt, because He had bound Himself to a people that He was trying to do something with to bring about the blessing of the world and they kept giving Him the middle finger. Over and over again.

So, you just read two days ago, in the book of Hosea. Hosea 1. God said this to a prophet named Hosea.

"When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, 'Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land...' – that land means Israel – "...is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord."

God told Hosea, "I want you to go and I want you to marry a woman who is promiscuous and I want you to vow yourself to her and I want you to know that she's going to go and cheat on you and then, when she does, she's going to have children of harlotry. And then I'm going to have you go buy her back, because this is exactly what I do to Israel. I want you to feel how I feel, Hosea."

See, when a prophet entered into his duty, he was feeling the heart of God. "I want you to feel how I feel."

God said to Hosea, "Go, marry someone who will completely break your heart, who will cheat on you with other men and even get pregnant by them, because that's what happened to me when I married Israel, a whole nation of whores, and my heart is broken."

See, the prophetic writings of the Bible are like God's lemonade album. Now, let me explain that, because you might not understand what that means. If you understand what that means, you're probably thinking, "Finally, this guy's making some sense."

If you don't know what that means, let me explain his to you. A couple weeks ago, Beyoncé came out with an album called "Lemonade." And I'm not here to speculate whether it's a true autobiographical album or if controversy is a great way to sell records, but it's supposed to be taken, artistically anyways, as autobiographical. This album is supposed to be taken as autobiographical. And the album – and if you're going to listen to it, I highly recommend the clean version. You've been warned.

It's about being married to a man – namely Jay Z – who is cheating on her. And, what she's doing in this album, is expressing the full range of emotions going through the entire album. They are loaded. This album is loaded with emotion. With accusation, with putting him in his place. Like, "Do you know who I am and what I've done for you? Are you kidding me?" And even love and words of wanting reconciliation. All of that is in this album. All of it. There's a song in there. This song would be a good – if you're not of the hip-hop persuasion it might be a good gateway song into the album for you. It's with Jack White. It's called, "Don't Hurt Yourself."

In the chorus, this is what she sings. And this kind of stuff happens throughout the whole entire album. She says this to her husband, who is cheating on her. And, as I've been studying the Prophets and I listened to this album, wow. It has come alive. She says this, and she sings this with Jack White in the chorus:

"When you hurt me, you hurt yourself.
Don't hurt yourself.
When you play me, you play yourself.
Don't play yourself.
When you lie to me, you lie to yourself.
You're only lying to yourself.
When you love me, you love yourself.
Love God herself."

And, if you're thinking that last part's blasphemous, just calm down. That's not what's going on there. Even in the digital album, there's a slide that pops up that says, "God is God and I am not," when that part goes on. So, that's not what's going on here. It's probably an allusion to Jay Z's nickname, which is "Hova," which is short for "Jehovah," and she's probably saying something like, "You think you're God in this relationship? You're not God."

Which would be a great theme for a marriage retreat, by the way, I think. It would be a really good marriage retreat theme. But, when you're listening to this album, you hear someone who's been betrayed and cheated on and what it feels like. The whole range of all of the anger, all of the nastiness, all of it wrapped up in this. And this is what God is doing through the life of the prophets. He's raging in pain and anger against their unfaithfulness to the covenant; to their vows together. See, they had plans together. God and Israel had great plans together. They had plans to bring about the healing of the world together, plans to bless the world. Like, remember the covenant? And the prophets are pushing them back to that.

They're like, "Israel, remember that God has plans with us. God is trying to do something through us and in us."

But, Israel's too busy cheating with false gods and false lovers. Jeremiah wails. And this

is not just God saying this, this is Jeremiah feeling this. Jeremiah says, "My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water. They have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

God is saying, "I give them live and they have forsaken me. I'm their spring of living water. I'm the way they have life. I'm the one who delivers them. I'm their God and they've rejected me. And what they're trying to do is they're building their own cisterns. They're trying to make a life for themselves, but their life isn't holding any water. It's broken and they keep leaking out all over the place. And it's not fresh water, it's like gross cistern water, but it keeps leaking out and they can't even keep enough in it. That's their life without me."

At the end of that song I just told you about, Beyoncé says this in this like sassy, serious voice:

"This is your final warning.
You know I give you life.
If you try this again,
You're gonna lose your wife."

Like, that sort of thing that happens, that sort of emotion, that threatening, the anger, the love, but then also the hope for reconciliation, all of that is happening through the life of the prophets. They're saying this to Israel. They're threatening Israel. "If you don't repent, you're going to lose it all. You will lose your land. I will tell you right now you will lose your land. And then you will be exiled and you will be taken captive and prisoner to someone else again. Do you want that again? Don't do this again."

Warning. This is the tension of the prophets. God is betrayed, God is abandoned and God wants to leave Israel. But, He has made a promise that He wouldn't leave. Like, there is angst in God and the prophets are like, "I want to leave you, but I can't leave you. I want to leave you, but I can't because I made a promise to you."

So, in Hosea 2, he's like, "I'm betrothed to you with everlasting love and everlasting justice. I'm bound to you. I can't go anywhere. I made a vow to you."

But, God is so tired of their vain attempts to offer lip service of love. God is so tired of their vanity. God is so tired of Israel saying, "Okay, yes, yes. We love you," and then going through all the ritual. Look at Isaiah 1:10.

It says, **"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah!"**

Okay. First of all, Isaiah and God are comparing Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah. They don't think that God would discipline them and judge them like Sodom and Gomorrah because they're God's chosen people and God's like, "Think again. You are like Sodom and Gomorrah."

"The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the Lord. '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 goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies."

God is just like – if you can imagine if God was to do that in our church. "Oh, yes. You come and you volunteer and you come forward and take communion and you kneel and you go to the prayer teams. I'm so sick of that. Why don't you love me for real? Why don't you really love me?"

It's like that. Do you understand? "Your New Moon and all these things that you do, they've become a burden to me."

"I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you."

God's like, "I can't even look at you right now. Are you kidding me? You're going to come before me and open your hands in prayer, offer your hands in prayer? I'm not listening to you. I can't. I'm not. Why?"

"Your hands are full of blood!"

This is a double entendre. Their hands are full of blood because they keep sacrificing because they keep sinning. They keep sacrificing so their hands are full of blood sacrifice they're offering to God. But, their hands are full of blood because they keep destroying the poor and the powerless and the innocent people and oppressing them so they're guilty of bloodshed. So, Isaiah and God are fed up. See, this brings up a very important element to the world of the prophets. Is God just a mad spouse that ends up getting really hurt and bitter, who keeps saying things like, "Well, I've been wronged. I've just been wronged. I've just been wronged." Over and over again. So full of emotion. "I'm just so mad that they've done me so wrong."

That's not God. That would make God very one-dimensional. See, God is not just full of emotions, God is full of righteousness. God is full of justice. See, when Israel is not faithful to the covenant, the poor and the vulnerable suffer the most. When Israel is not living with righteousness and justice inside of her walls and executing righteousness and justice, then the most vulnerable people in that society suffer the most. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer and they get trampled on over and over and over again and God gets angry. So, so angry. People who are vulnerable get hurt when covenant is not obeyed.

The covenant that God has entered into with Israel was about the healing of the world, remember? And God is mad on behalf of not just His glory, but what's good for the world. It's good for the world that Israel is a light to the world and lives under covenantal relationship with God. That is the best thing for the world. Abraham Heschel, a Jewish writer, has a beautiful book on the prophets. In there, he talks about this. He says this in his book:

"The prophet is a man who feels fiercely. Prophets are full of feelings. God has thrust a burden upon his soul and he is bowed and stunned at means fierce greed. Frightful is the agony of man. No human voice can convey its full terror. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony. A voice to the plundered poor, to the profane riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet's words."

Sometimes there is no voice to the poor and the powerless in a society. And so, when covenant is broken, all these people get trampled upon and the way that God wants the world to work is not working that way and so a prophet is given the words and the voice by God to give voice to silent agony, to give voice to the poor, to give voice to how profane riches can be. And God is raging in His words. And this is what we find in the Prophets.

So, Isaiah would say this in the very next verse in Isaiah 1:16: **"Wash and make yourselves clean."**

This is right after God said, "I'm so sick and tired of all your gatherings, all your sacrifices, all of the stuff that you're doing. That religious activity, I'm tired of it. Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. You can't just oppress the poor and live in utter, broken fellowship with me and with humanity and then come to me and go, "But I offered a prayer. But I said a prayer, God."

God is like, "Just stop doing wrong. Can we start there? Stop doing wrong."

"Learn to do right; seek justice."

"Righteousness and justice. Do these two things. This is how I'm going to bring about the salvation of the world. Do these two things."

"Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

"Start doing righteousness and justice together. Start doing those things. And, as you start doing those things, then the world is set right and then you and I are going to be in right relationship, because you're not just looking to me as an incantation. You're not just looking to me as like a magic show where I'm making bad things in your life disappear and you have no skin in the game at all. We're in this together."

So, for the Church, I mean, we only get to Isaiah through Jesus. So, if you are a follower of Jesus here, these words are still heavy because still, in the prophets, though we get to them through Jesus, it's still pointing out the character and the activity of God. God is still

very offended. There's even a part in 1 Peter where He tells husbands, "If you do not treat your wives well, I will not hear your prayers."

And Peter says, "Treat them with respect as the weaker partner."

Now, I know that verse goes over well in this room. Right? You're like, "Oh my gosh. Here we go."

In that society, they were. They were. Fact. They were the weaker partner. They were the more vulnerable partner. Fact. That's just what it was like in the first century. And God's like, "If you don't treat them well as the vulnerable person in your household, I am not going to listen to your prayers. I'm just not going to do it. You're going to come to me and ask me all these things while you're trampling on the vulnerable even in your own house? I'm just not going to do it. I'm not going to hear you anymore."

Why do we think that we have the right to the ear of God if we're just living our lives in opposition to how He wants us to live? It just doesn't make any sense. What God wants to do is to bring about the healing of the world through His church. "Be a light of the world. I'm sending you out to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ."

This message is done in both word and deed. There is something that we have to live into and up to as followers of Jesus. There is no way around that when you read your Bibles. You cannot just say, "But, I said a prayer that one time at youth camp. I'm in."

Be afraid. Beware. You should be warned. You've been saved into something. You and I have been saved into something. So, we're called then to live into that. So, Isaiah ends the chapter 1 – this is just chapter 1, by the way – with an invitation. Here's the beauty of God. Like, God is deeply hurt and offended and angry and has this righteous anger like, "Do you know who I am? Why would you do this to me?"

And on the other hand He's like, "Hey, let's just talk sensibly here."

He says this in Isaiah 1:18, **"Let us settle the matter," says the Lord.**

"Let's talk sensibly about this."

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

"Though your sins are like scarlet and you have blood on your hands, they shall be as white as snow."

"Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If..."

There's a lot of "if" things in the Bible. Like, "Yeah, that's true 'if...'"

"If you are willing and obedient,"

There is an invitation today. If you are willing and obedient, if you will actually step into it, it's there for you. It's there for every single person here.

"You will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

So, in here, we find an invitation for forgiveness and wholeness. So, let me speak – it might be harsh, but let me speak to the followers of Jesus in this room. In your sin, you have rejected God as the spring of living water and you have tried to make lives for yourselves that end up holding no water. And the results of that is that you've walked in here this morning tired, worn out, beat down. Like, "I am thirsty. I've been trying to make my life for myself and I keep coming up dry."

In your sin, you have used your power to prey on the weak and the vulnerable whether you can trace it back to yourself or not. And though we call ourselves followers of Jesus, we can be standing in the way of the way that God wants to heal the world. We're followers of Jesus and He's like, "And you're in my way. You keep oppressing. You keep moving the cycle of brokenness onward and forward. And you're not doing anything to be about the healing that I want to bring through the Kingdom of God on the world. You're not bringing the

Kingdom of God to bear anywhere. You have good songs and you know what to do during the latter part of your Sunday morning gathering, but that's where it ends. Partner with me."

In our sin, we have cheated on God. We have made good things into god-like things and exchanged the truth of God for a lie and we're worshipping something that is not God and we're living for something that is not God and His glory and we've just turned it into something else. And it would be better to leave right now and go eat nachos or something than to enter into religious activity right now. It would be way better just to go, "Guys, just go home," than to just mindlessly go, "Okay, now, this is the part where I do this and I do that."

So, hear the prophet Isaiah. "Your prayers, when you spread out your hands in prayers, I hide my eyes from you. Even when you offer many prayers, I'm not listening. Your hands are full of blood of injustice, of sin."

Now, in your minds right now, you might be going, "Well, is he talking about heaven or hell or like I'm not saved anymore?"

No. Don't go there. That's just the way to intellectually wiggle out of this thing. Do something. If you know that you're causing injustice to happen through what you're using your money for, then repent and go make amends. If you, in the room, are holding a grudge over someone, let that go and walk up to them and say, "I forgive you."

If you need to make a phone call right now, go out and make a phone call and repent and then come back in and take communion and be forgiven. Like, make it right. Go do something about this. Don't just enter mindlessly into the routine of standing and singing. If you are going to stand and sing. Make sure that you've searched your heart. Make sure that if God is prompting you to do something, then do it. Do not – may God save us – enter into religious activity right now. Okay?

Let's pray.

Lord, if there are things that we need to end right now, I pray they would end. Things that we need to end and stop, call off that relationship, that deal, that thing. If there's ways that we need to reconcile and double down and make amends and say, "I'm in this thing," Holy Spirit, we need You to deliver us from vain worship, from songs that just are actions and kneeling in prayer and all that stuff that can become religious activity. Not all of that is beautiful when done without right heart. There is nothing probably more beautiful in the entire world.

But Lord, we want to be people who live in right relationship with each other and the city and You, God. Ultimately You. So, Lord, may we hear through the prophet Your heart, Your anger, Your passion, Your delight, Your wanting us to come and receive healing through Jesus. Reconciliation through Jesus.

I pray, God, if it's uncomfortable here in the next couple of minutes that we're just totally okay with that. We don't care, God. It could be uncomfortable for the next hour in here if we just linger. We don't care. We really just don't want to miss this, Lord. We don't want to miss what You want to say to us, what You want us to do, how You want us to live. We just don't want to miss it, God. We don't want to be about sermons and songs and religious activity when there's something more. There's a way that You want us to live in relationship with You and with the city.

Please, God, save us. Speak to us prophetically. I believe that You have. May we heed Your words, Lord Jesus. In Christ's name, amen.