

Intro Have you heard enough Steve Jobs quotes yet? The recently deceased multi-billionaire businessman certainly has made his mark and stirred incredible curiosity. His take on a relationship with God quoted in his biography clearly represents a popular majority viewpoint. His comment was . . .

The juice goes out of Christianity when it becomes too based on faith rather than living like Jesus or seeing the world as Jesus saw it. I think different religions are different doors to the same house. Sometimes, I think the house exists, and sometimes, I don't. It's the great mystery.

While Isaiah, the prophet of God, could not have related to Steve Jobs on a personal income or technology level, he certainly would have been at home with Steve debating the truth claims of Christianity. While the world has advanced from sun dials to smart phones, the way the human heart 'sees things' regarding God has not changed, certainly it has not become more sophisticated. Given Jobs intelligence, leadership skills and sophistication in so many areas, his comments about relating to God are almost embarrassingly naïve. We really need to listen to the prophet on this one.

The message of Isaiah is profoundly simple. God saves sinners.

We begin today a series of studies from Isaiah's anthology of talks and sermons that will help us understand, believe and proclaim this truth that God saves sinners. A comparative quote from Isaiah to represent his way of seeing things is found in 45:22:

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.

Borrowing liberally from the introduction I wrote for a sermon on Isaiah 6 preached in December 2007, there are three compelling reasons for dedicating ourselves to learn from the prophet Isaiah about God's invitation to be saved:

First, there are unsaved people all around us, in our families, in our church, at our work, in our class and in our neighborhood. Many of us need to be saved by God. Unresponsiveness to God's word and participation in meaningless religious rituals makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish who is saved and who is not. We are tempted to drown out these harsh realities with the soothing and intoxicating sights, sounds and smells of our hard earned complacency.

Second, Isaiah is a world class expert on the subject of God saving sinners. His name means 'the Lord saves.' He is the author of this Old Testament book which is an anthology of his best stuff . . . 52 years of sermons, teaching, visions and stories all carefully put together to help people from every nation through all time understand that God saves sinners. Isaiah announces the coming of Jesus as a child, born of a virgin. We respond in worship as he teaches us that this child will lead a world changing government of peace and wonder, he is the lively branch that gives hope when the whole stump appears lifeless and he is the suffering servant whose wounds provide our healing.

Third, God saving sinners is the message of the church. Hearing, understanding and announcing the good news that life with God can be restored through faith in Jesus Christ is the heartbeat of our mission. The Apostle Paul, a huge fan of Isaiah, set the standard for allegiance to the gospel by stating, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).' Our greatest joy is found in this life changing truth.

We turn our attention this morning to Isaiah 1:1-20.

The first verse shapes our thinking in two distinct ways that we can relate to easily. One, what we are about to read and understand is the vision of Isaiah the prophet of God. In other words, this is God's way of seeing things . . . the right perspective. Second, we read that Isaiah proclaimed these messages in the days of the 4 Kings listed there. In other words, there is another, a different perspective than Isaiah's about God that is prevalent. The days of these Kings were marked by spiritual complacency, apostasy and trouble. Then as now, it is hard to hear the invitation of God to be saved over the loud and persistent sounds of personal complacency and the death grip of control, performance and manipulation on our lives and culture.

God saves sinners. He does this by inviting you to understand and believe something about yourself and something about him.

God invites you to listen: believe the truth about yourself!

1:2-9

You need to listen carefully as the God of the Bible is making a charge, almost an accusation about you in these verses. The people of Judah, though loved and blessed by God, have demonstrated that the hearts and inclinations of people are against God and worthy of his judgment. What you believe about yourself is foundational to being saved by God.

God calls for the heavens and earth to serve as witnesses as he formally charges his people with rebellion and forsaking him. The prophet Isaiah follows in verses 4-9 by amplifying and substantiating the charges. As much as our instincts and impressions rise to defend our self importance and moral superiority, God's perspective is clear and painful to our lust for control. One thing is absolutely clear from God and Isaiah's point of view, you cannot be your own savior or co-savior.

The plain and substantiated truth about you . . .

1. You are a rebel against God.

2-3

The stars and earth are called to observe the spectacle of created beings living in rebellion to their creator.

The metaphors/comparisons of children and animals demonstrate the unnatural character of sin and take aim at the root of individual conscience.

Know and understand are terms of genuine relationship.

This is a striking challenge/invitation . . . listen, shouldn't people be able to reflect as deeply on life as an ox or a donkey?
Cmp Rom. 1:18-32

2. Your rebellion produces severe consequences.

4-8

v. 4 Two descriptive statements with three parts each that explains the grief and sorrow of life apart from God and under individual control and manipulation.

v.5-6 The sick body metaphor exposes the comprehensiveness of the impact of sin on a life.

v. 7-8 The desolate land and deteriorating shack in a cucumber field point to the hopelessness of life in rebellion against God . . . the life controlled by the individual.

3. You are alive by God's grace.

9

God has spared you in mercy from receiving the complete and just consequences of your rebellion.

God is able to powerfully save and transform even a deteriorating hut in a cucumber field!

Rom. 1:16-17

God invites you to listen: believe the truth about yourself!

1:2-9

God invites you to listen: believe the truth about him!

1:10-20

There are two basic truths you must understand and believe about God in order to be saved by him. Our attention is turned to them by the phrase in v.10 'give ear to the teaching of our God.' Again, understand that this is not a passive presentation, but God has declared that you are no different than the rulers and people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Is that an exaggeration for emphasis or is that to be taken at face value? God is in our face and inviting us to challenge him about two common and deadly assumptions that people like us make about him.

1. God is not impressed with your faithful but fake worship.

11-15

A possible response to the invitation of 2-9 is a defensive 'we are not rebellious! How dare you call us sick and desolate! Look at how faithful we are in our worship!'

God hates, has become weary of and promises not to listen to you who put your trust/value more highly than God's words your own system of worship. You have settled for a watered down version of God.

Your worship that God hates is described in these ways . . .

- Measurable and observable
- Procedural and consistent
- Contradictory and wearisome

Your way of doing church is the biggest reason why God does not want to come to church! God delights in people who humbly seek and obey him. Authenticity and honesty before him.

Religious ceremony tends to put God in the past, to become magical, to be man centered and man pleasing, to make God familiar and to blur his moral demands. Oswalt

2. God requires you to turn completely toward him.

16-20

What God wants or requires of you is summarized in simple heart terms of turning, cleansing, coming and obeying. A profound sense of our sin, this new self awareness drives us to the repentance described in these verses. God tells us to listen well so that we understand what it means to turn from our self focused religious ceremony to a genuine relationship with him. It involves these responses from your heart.

Heart/Attitude change about yourself and God. 16-17

Cleansing/forgiveness for your sin. 18

Obedience/submission to his will. 19-20

Summary: Note the final statement that puts God's invitation in perspective . . . 'for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' Who is this God that invites you, yes even challenges and dares you to be saved by him? By what right does this God establish such boundaries and claim such exclusive authority? Isaiah tells us repeatedly who he is . . . and why you should listen . . .

He is your creator.	1:2-3
He is the Holy one of Israel.	1:4
He is the Lord of hosts.	1:9
He is a God who speaks/reveals.	1:2, 10
He is a God who cares.	1:9, 18
He is a God who judges.	1:9, 20

Take Aways

1. Repent and believe today.
2. Pray for and invite people to church meetings to hear that God saves people.
3. Commit to engaging someone trustworthy with your questions about being saved. 2:5

Discussion Questions

1. You came away from the church meeting and preaching today stirred up about what? Why?
2. Read Isaiah 1:1-20 together as a group. Count or make note of the number of word pictures used to describe the points being made. Which ones arrest your attention the most? What is the point of the metaphor you have selected?
3. Describe or rate the intensity/passion index of Isaiah the preacher? Volume, pace, intensity, passion, edgy references (whole head is sick; my soul hates), name calling (Sodom/Gomorrah?) . . . why? How would such an attitude or mindset about truth be evident in your life? Who is the intensity aimed at?
4. Review the first point about believing the truth about yourself. What are some typical inner responses and questions that come in response to this description of yourself? Are some of these descriptions hyperbole/exaggeration to make a point?
5. How is an accurate self awareness/sense of sin a gift from God? Reflect on this statement from Ortland's Isaiah commentary . . . "once we make peace with mediocrity (in the area of our sinfulness) and resist the word's claims on our life we are in rebellion against God."
6. Reflect on the 2nd point of believing certain things about God. How connected are you to celebrating your faith by counting how much you do, doing things the same way and resting in the religious routines you have developed? What is the horrible reality behind the bloody hands analogy of verse 15?
7. How can genuine repentance and trust/obedience be taught better/more accurately in our homes, ss classes, children/teen ministries?
8. Spend time as a group sharing names of those you intend to invite to church meeting to hear that God saves sinners. Pray together for this teaching series and those your plan to invite.