



Isaiah

Big Idea:

God can use pain to purify us, there is a future hope found in the shoot of Jesse.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The book of Isaiah is the first of the books of the prophets and is often labeled a major book of prophets. The major distinction is due to its size in comparison to some of the shorter prophets. Israel had gone from a set of tribes following a leader who directly interfaced with God and served as the head of government and the religious obligations of the people, to a time of Judges where individuals would serve to deliver the people. Next, they were ruled by Kings who ruled the nation and would lead them in battles. Because the kings struggled to live up to the calling that God had for them prophets were elevated to be dramatic messengers to the kings and the people for how to navigate difficult circumstances and for turning back to God to be a holy nation.

Prophets often serve to warn of God's upcoming judgement to the people as a consequence of their actions and are often a collection of their sermons to the people over a large span of time. The book of Isaiah opens with several warnings to the people.

Read: Isaiah 1:10-17

Questions:

What stands out to you in this passage?
Does this language seem overly harsh if the people are failing to do what is outlined in verses 16-17?

Devotional thought:

Often, I am what the Bible would call "wise in my own eyes". Which really just means... not. I can think back to several times in my life where people would warn me of the consequences of my actions, so that I would not be surprised when they finally came to pass. They warned me because they loved me, sometimes I listened, other times I did not and ended up exactly where they had predicted. Prophets functioned in much the same way. God was loving his people by giving them a warning and showing them where the path was on would lead.

Discuss:

Have people share what they first think of when they think of the word holy, and why they think that.

Read: Isaiah 6:1-7

Why do you think Isaiah has this reaction to his vision?

What is painful can often be purifying.

Read: Isaiah 6:8-13

Isaiah has an amazing vision of the Lord, recognizes his own inadequacies and in the moment of humility is purified by God. As soon as God asks for someone to carry His word for Him, Isaiah volunteers. The mission he is given though is one where God warns that people will not listen and there is no end in sight.

Discuss:

Have you ever taken on a job, task, or project that everyone thought was a no-win job?

Chapter 6 ends with the image of a stump that is also called a seed. Chapters 6-10 warn that the path they are on will lead Israel into captivity of the Assyrian empire. Assyria was a powerful but brutal nation, that had thrived on conquering other nations and assimilating them into their own culture. Through each of these warnings God promises redemption.

Read: Isaiah 11:1-5.

We see here God is offering a promise of something better and astute readers will see something of Jesus in this prediction as well. Ancient prophecies can be referring to a time in the near future from when it is written, a distant future or both at the same time or even some of each. This can make understanding it

challenging. What can be helpful is to keep the big picture in mind. Isaiah then goes on to predict that Babylon will conquer Assyria and then in turn will be conquered by the Medean empire.

Read: Isaiah 31:1

We are often tempted to trust in our own ability or the ability of those around us, God warns the people to not depend on outside nations for their safety.

Next the leaders of the Assyrian empire arrive and threaten the nation of Israel to try to force them to comply.

Read: Isaiah 36:1-10

King Hezekiah then makes a wise move and goes to the prophet Isaiah to seek the counsel of God.

Read: Isaiah 37:1-7

Question:

Have there been times in your life where you obviously had nowhere to turn but God? If you are comfortable share that time.

After a great deliverance King Hezekiah's confidence is riding high, he makes a poor choice in displaying his wealth to outsiders in chapter 39. The prophet warns that his foolish choice will bring down the punishment that God had warned them against.

The first 39 books of Isaiah are warnings and prophecies to trust in God. These are often harsh warnings of future consequences. In chapter 40 the book pivots to one of hope and continues to exhort the nation to trust God for a future redemption.

Read: Isaiah 40:1-8

Notice that this is the same answer the prophet John the Baptist uses to explain who he is. Matthew 3:3 and Mark 1:3.

Read: Isaiah 40:31

Notice the continued refrain of trusting in and waiting on God.

Question:

How can waiting be a sign of trust?

Read: Isaiah 42:1-4

Many of the next chapters are God sharing His promise of blessing with the nation and encouraging them toward a future hope that Israel can bare witness to the other nations how good God is.

The next chapters of Isaiah focus more on what the servant of God will look like. This servant is both the follower of God and the special root that will grow in David's line. The most noteworthy of these is Psalm 53 where it describes Gods servant as suffering and being exalted.

Jewish poetry often uses Chiastic structure. That is a structure that if you were to look at it looks something like this.

A
B
C
B
A

In this form of structures the points at A will be similar and the point of B will be similar and the main point a section will make is point C.

The book ends with one of these chiasm bits of structure.

56-58
59
60-62
63-64
65-66

Both chapters 56-58 and 65-66 contrast what it is like to be wicked vs a good servant of God.

Chapters 59 and 63-64 both cover the repentance as a key to following God.

The point the author is trying to make is found in chapter 60-62

Read: Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:14-21.

Jesus opens his public ministry with the proclamation that the hope of Isaiah is being realized in him.