



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 5: The Message of the Prophets

Lesson 1: God's Compassion For And Call To Israel—Isaiah 40; 52

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

Isaiah's era comes after the greatness of God's people began to weaken due to their in-fighting and wayward spirits. He spoke for more than 60 years, and even his wife was called a prophetess (Isaiah 8:3). Likewise, instead of living a comfortable life, Jeremiah took on the hard task of speaking truth into the Jewish kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem as they faced God's judgment at the hands of the Babylonians. It was the Lord's way of getting the people's attention since they had practically turned from Him.

Instead of leaving them stuck in the consequences of their choices, God wanted them to know He was still willing to receive them back. His words through Isaiah 40:1-2 were to "comfort" His people and speak "tenderly" to them. There is further foreshadowing of the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3) and the coming of the Messiah (52:13-15), for the Lord would continue to offer himself through the "remnant" who remained faithful to Him. Meanwhile, God never lost His place sitting enthroned above the "circle" of the earth (40:22).

The Lord called Isaiah to speak His prophetic words long before anyone fully understood them. God's righteousness is revealed even before such a promise is fulfilled. Even when it feels as though He has abandoned His chosen race (Isaiah 6:10), He keeps providing rumors of light that appear in the midst of the darkness. They didn't always know how to hear His voice, which is why He promised "my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I" (Isaiah 52:6).

In Isaiah 40 and 52 we further read that the unfaithful kings of Judah and Israel will one day see the ultimate Light of the world. He would be a descendent who is reminiscent of David's righteousness and would startle many nations. Kings will stand speechless in His presence, for they will see "what they had not been told; they will understand what they had not heard about" (Isaiah 52:15).

Also worth noting is that Isaiah 52 begins by describing some of the work of the Messiah in past tense. It's as if our future hope is anchored in a promise that He's guaranteed He would successfully complete His earthly ministry. His pleasure is not in the cross, but in what the cross makes possible.

OUR STORY

At various stages in life, we may relate to either Isaiah or the people of Israel. As a prophet, Isaiah was called to do something offensive that included sharing the uncompromising truth of God's judgment tethered to His enduring love. Each one who calls themselves a follower of Jesus will be called upon to in unique situations take on a similar role of a prophet, joining with Isaiah in saying hard things that need to be said to those who may not want to hear it.

On the other hand, we also may relate to the people of Israel. There are times that we know we're called to something great and eternal, but we settle for something pleasurable that's temporary. We hear, but we don't understand even though we've have been taught the right things. Sometimes knowing the lingo waters down the commitment in our hearts, for we come to God honoring Him with our lips but with far-off hearts.

Being lukewarm like this is one of the most confusing attributes both inside and outside of the church. It's such a common practice that we do need prophetic messages and people who show us where we're lacking warmth or enthusiasm for the Lord and His mission. Such indifference is often less about a choice to be apathetic and more about a desire to be satisfied or comfortable. In this type of state, we minimize our usefulness to God; however, with the proper prodding we can turn away from our addiction to pleasure and become caught up in the things that matter more.

OTHERS' STORY

The Christian's call is beyond speaking only to God's people. Isaiah's calling was specific to the Jews, and other prophets like Jonah were specifically called to non-Jewish nations. To Christians, this is the difference between challenging other believers and bringing a message to non-Christians.

Generally speaking, we are to challenge everyone. There is a place for the followers of Jesus to spur on, admonish and encourage one another. We likewise have to find a way to do the same for others outside of Christianity, remembering that they are not working off the same foundation or values we are. It's like trying to say something to a foreigner who doesn't understand your words but can pick up on your tone.

Jesus has come into the world and others need to hear of His salvation. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation," says the prophet Isaiah. The Lord has demonstrated His holy power before the eyes of all the nations so all the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God, which is for all people. No person on this earth is exempt from your opportunity to be a prophet to them.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Imagine what your church or Christian community would look like if Christians took their call as followers and ambassadors for Christ to a greater level. It wouldn't be without challenge, because there would be occasions where difficult emotions surfaced as the people of God called out the sin in one another's lives. Instead of friendships being strained, though, there would be a common agreement that wounds from a friend can be trusted. Everyone would agree that it only makes sense to depart from sin and "touch no unclean thing" for we are "vessels of the Lord."

Until we're willing to make that change, how can we expect the world to change? If Christians are afraid of speaking valuable truth because we might appear judgmental, we shouldn't be surprised when there is a lack of accountability in the world. Consider the fresh air of honesty and feeling of integrity we're responsible for depriving the world of simply because we won't fully give ourselves to the Lord.

Satan tends to use fear as a weapon against Christians because his only penetrating power is that of deception. Don't be deceived regarding your role as a prophetic voice in the church and the world. Even when it seems the righteousness of humanity and judgment is impending, salvation is here if there is a Savior and a faithful remnant of God's people.