

Week 1

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 "Confrontation of God's People"

Begin with prayer:

Lord God,

Thank you for this opportunity to spend time in your community and your Word.

Help us to grow closer together, and to build one another up as we study and discuss.

We pray for hearts that seek after you and righteous living. Help us to love and serve you, by loving and serving those around us.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Read the text for today. (Suggestion: Go around and read it out loud, each person taking a verse.)

Ask: What stood out to you about this text? What, if anything, doesn't make sense? What caught your attention and sparked curiosity?

To help understand Isaiah 1:10-20, let's back up to verse 9. Due to the sadness and devastation in Israel, in verse 9 the people are saying to themselves, "It's a good thing God left a few folks still living, or else we would be no better off than Sodom and Gomorrah way back when!" In verse 10, the Lord picks up on their reference to those evil cities, and turns the tables on the Israelites by addressing them **as** Sodom and Gomorrah! It didn't go over well. What Isaiah is targeting in his speech is their insincere and false religious practices. Few people get as upset as religious "posers" when they are told that their religion is bogus.

"You think you make me smile when you come to the Temple and offer sacrifices?" God says through Isaiah, "Just the opposite! I choke on the smoke, my eyes are red from it. You think I don't see your hearts? You think I don't look at how you treat the poor the other six days a week? How can you confess sins you don't even know you have? How can you praise me when you so clearly have no idea who I am? The whole thing is fake, it's a spectacle, and it makes me sick."

Imagine that you have told a close friend about something that you value. They look you in the eyes, nod, smile, and tell you that they share that value completely. But then the next day you see them doing something that is totally opposed to that value! They have shown that they do not respect you and do not take your values seriously.

Surely this is magnified for God. People who treat the poor with such disrespect clearly do not understand God's heart or character. And anyone who thinks that some worship is better than no worship is proven wrong by passages like Isaiah 1. God would rather be ignored than praised by people whose lives are at odds with his holiness and goodness.

This passage from Isaiah 1 takes on a brighter meaning when paired with Luke 12, and the words of Jesus to his disciples. He shares with them that the kingdom is theirs, as a gift of grace. But Jesus goes on immediately to say that receiving such a gift means being faithful stewards of it. We cannot be true citizens of the kingdom by grace and then live any old way we want. We must be watchful. By watchful, Jesus means more than scanning the horizon for the return of the master. Watchful also means doing what Isaiah says near the end of this passage: taking care of God's special people, tending the poor, working for justice, and living as citizens **of** the kingdom. Not living as people who take comfort from knowing they are **in** the kingdom.

Isaiah's words to Israel did not go over well. The question we need to consider today is this: How does Isaiah's message apply to the Church today? Some of us may be tempted to say his words only applied to the ancient people of Israel, but the call to live consistent lives of discipleship comes over and over again to each generation of believers. When confronted with prophetic words, are we convicted by them and led to an honest evaluation of our own lives? Or do we react with the eye-rolling anger, unable to see the error of our own ways?

Let's talk about it:

- Isaiah was addressing the people of Israel as violent, overfed, arrogant, and detestable – the same label earned by Sodom and Gomorrah. What if someone walked up to you and started saying the same things about you, your church, your family, or your nation? Consider how you might react, and how your community might react to such a comment. Talk about your response.
- What bothers you most – the fact that someone is saying these things, or the possibility that some of them might be true?
- Read the list below. Take three minutes for everyone to think and come up with a list for us today. To Israel God says, "I have had enough of..."

A multitude of sacrifices
Offerings of rams and fat
Blood of bulls, lambs, and goats
Incense
New moon festivals
Making many prayers for the show of it
People being oppressed
Murderers in the city
Bribes
Orphans and widows being ignored

To us God says, "I have had enough of..."

- Read Luke 12:35-48
- What does it look like for a person to do justice (take a look at Micah 6:8)? Does it mean "be perfect"? Or might it mean something closer to "keep trying even if you fail"?
- How can we do justice here at Calvin? In Grand Rapids? What does that look like on a regular basis?
- How do we contribute to systems of privilege? How does that affect you?

