

*On August 5, 2010 the San Jose mine in Chile, that had reached a depth of more than 2,000 feet, collapsed. 33 men were trapped underground for 69 days, battling starvation and hopelessness. As the world watched, teams drilled a shaft to reach them, then drilled a wider one to get them out. Finally, they were saved, but not by their own effort.*

We find ourselves in a similar situation because we are buried under a weight of sin. We cannot reach God.

**You cannot save yourself. You need the Lord.**

Old Testament Prophecy is most often poetic discourse.

What we are reading is conversation between God, the prophet, and the people of God.

In this case, the prophet Isaiah is writing to people in his future who will be exiles in Babylon.

For them it seems that all has collapsed, and God has given up on them.

Their city and land have been destroyed and they are not even there.

They are slaves living in the slums of Babylon under an oppressive and idolatrous government.

And they are struggling... as we will see in this chapter.

1-39 The Book of the King

Though Israel is rebellious, breaking God's Law, corrupted, and inviting God's judgement...

God reigns over all the nations and His Messiah King is coming.

40-55 The Book of the Servant

Though Jerusalem is destroyed, and God's people are slaves, the Servant Messiah is coming.

He is going to lay down His life for His people.

56-66 The Book of the Conqueror

Though injustice appears to be reigning, and people are corrupted by sin...

The Conquering Messiah has a plan to save His people and He is coming.

Because they cannot save themselves.

Chapters 56-58 describe those who faithfully seek God against the backdrop of the fake worship of most people.

Chapters 60-63 describe the conquest of the Messiah and the future glory of Israel.

Chapter 59 is the hinge, the pivot. It is how we get from the one to the other.

Otherwise, we would not know how it could happen, because they cannot save themselves.

Thus they sit, miserable, in Babylon. Why? God tells them through Isaiah.

**I. The Prophet speaks: Your sins have separated you from Yahweh.**

**Isaiah 59:1-8**

The interpretive key in this passage is all in the pronouns.

You have to know who is speaking to whom about whom and why.

What we are reading is in the setting of a trial.

God's people are in the dock. Isaiah is the prosecuting attorney. God is the judge.

There is no defense attorney... as we shall see. God's people are in trouble.

After the introduction (vs. 1) from Isaiah about the Lord...

In verses 2-3 Isaiah is speaking to the people of God about themselves.

In verses 4-8 Isaiah is speaking to the judge about the people of God.

In verses 9-15b God's people are speaking about themselves. "us" They are pleading guilty.

Beginning in verse 15c, something amazing begins to happen in the court. We will come to that.

The prosecution begins in verse 1. What we learn right off is that this horrible situation is not God's fault.

This is not to say that God is not in control. He is, over every person and every nation. We know this.

But He has constantly shown that He is able and willing to save. And He does save!

He saved them from Egypt.

He saved them from plagues, starvation, and invading armies.

He sees their misery even when He could justly turn a blind eye.

He hears their prayers, even when He does not have to hear.

God is a God who has great mercy, patience, and goodness and He has saved them over and over.

“But...” Do you see this word at the beginning of verse 2?

In verses 2-3 we find Isaiah, the prosecution, delivering the accusation, the indictment.

Three sets of parallel accusations.

vs. 2 Your disobedience has broken the relationship with God. Now He doesn't hear your prayers.

vs. 3ab Your hands are covered in blood and sin. **Isaiah 1:15**

vs. 3cd Your mouth speaks lies and mutters wickedness... not aloud, under the breath.

Our first impulse, in response to such an accusation is to say, “Really, I’m not that bad. Am I?”

In verses 4-8, Isaiah, as the prosecution, gives to the court the evidence against them.

Lest we forget that we are like these Israelites in exile, I will state the evidence in the first person, “We.”

Because Isaiah is speaking about us. This evidence applies to us. We are like them. All people are.

What is the evidence that they (we) have sinned and broken fellowship with God? (4 exhibits)

Exhibit A vs. 4 We are dishonest. This is the misuse of the legal process for illegal means.

We live in a society where we think that the courts are for me to win against my opponent.

Spouses get divorced and go to court to get as much as they can get, not for fairness or justice.

When someone hurts us, we do not think about what is right, but how much can I get.

In our courts and politics, we are prepared to lie for friends and slander enemies.

We do not want justice. We will not trust God for justice. We want to win.

Exhibit B vs. 5-6b We spread poison. The verbs “hatch” and “weave” portray plans to do harm.

A terrible dynamic of our present society is how sure people are that they are right.

And when people are sure that they are right... about COVID, or Biden, or Trump, or Democrats, or Republicans, or their nasty brother, or their parents, or their ex-boyfriend, or the one who hurt them...

When people are sure that they are right, they feel entitled to employ all manner of behavior...

Gossip, lies, slander, schemes, plots, plans, secrets... in order to prove their rightness.

The result is poison and wrongness. The ends never justify the means, though we think it does.

Exhibit C vs. 6c-7 We like works of evil, injustice, and sin.

We like to make trouble. We have become a society expert in calling evil good and good evil. **Isaiah 5:20**

We slaughter the unborn and call it reproductive rights or freedom.

We riot and burn and assault people and call it action against injustice.

We insist that greed is good because it makes capitalism go.

We say it is good to be prideful if you can back it up with accomplishment.

We praise sexual freedom and are then confused when people commit sexual atrocities.

We tell young men and women that they need not be the gender given to them by God.

We have made an industry out of making up our own morality and ignoring God.

Exhibit D vs. 8 We do not make peace or justice.

“The way of peace” = Let us meditate upon that thought for a moment.

Do we know the “way of peace?” Are we committed to walking that way? I think Jesus did that.

Is this your way? Or do you argue and fight and war with others? Do you like making fights?

We live in a poisoned, political, polemic society. Everyone wants to win against others.

Are you part of it? Or are you devoted to the “way of peace?” (shalom)

Do you even know how to be a man or a woman of peace? May I read **Matthew 5:3-9**? Is this you?

How do you feel? Under condemnation? Prosecution?

If you grasp the chapter thus far, you will feel like saying what the people say beginning in verse 9.

## II. The People speak: Our sins cause us to despair.

**Isaiah 59:9-15b**

Do you know what they are saying in these verses? “We are worse off than we thought.”

In my evangelism I used to ask people to rank their righteousness on a scale of 1-10.

Most people would give themselves a 6, not bad, above average, but not great or perfect at all.

Now we discover that we are actually more like a 1. Moreover, together we are a mess.

Remember what Isaiah said about himself? **Isaiah 6:5** If this is Isaiah, what about me?

The people here are confessing their sin. They are displaying repentance and then despair.

Consider verse 9. What are they saying?

They don't know justice nor righteousness and they want light but walk in gloom.

Let me ask you all a question that I have found humbling and revealing.

Do you want justice and righteousness in this country? Almost everyone would say yes.

Ok, how do you imagine it if it were to happen? What will it look like?

What laws? Who is in charge? Can you design it? What happens to those who don't agree?

You see? I don't know the answers. Nor do you. These questions are beyond us.

And what does life feel like for people who really see their sin? Verse 10.

Blindness... groping, groping, stumbling, like dead men. Is there a better description of where we live?

God's world is a beautiful place, full of hope... and we stumble through as if in a fog.

All the while we are moaning and growling, hoping for justice. (vs. 11) But we find none.

Because salvation is far from us... because our sins separate us from God. (vs. 12)

What sins? We describe them in verses 13-15b.

Anyone who tries to depart from evil gets attacked.

What happens to the person who won't bake a cake for the gay wedding?

What happens to the guy who says we should not act like a child and tweet insults at our enemies?

What happens to the person who prays and speaks of God's love for sinners in public?

It is important to recognize where Isaiah leaves us midway through verse 15.

To confess means to agree, and the confession of verses 9-15 comes with a mood of utter despair.

Why? The clue is at the end of verse 11. They realize that they cannot save themselves.

The people of God are admitting their sin, but as they do so they realize that they are doomed.

They deserve the sentence of separation, death, judgment, and hell. There is nothing they can do.

When a person wants to come to God and be saved, confession and repentance is not enough.

You cannot just confess and repent your way to God. We need to be saved and we cannot save ourselves.

Unless God does something, we are toast. And God has done something.

### III. **Yahweh sees. Yahweh gets up. Yahweh gets dressed. Yahweh saves. Isaiah 59:15c-21**

"Yahweh" is His covenant name. It is who God is, eternal, faithful, committed to love His people.

The Lord sees the sin and injustice. But the Lord also sees something else.

He sees that his people are doomed, there is no defense attorney, there is no one to intercede for them.

Even the prophet Isaiah, whose name means "God is salvation" is insufficient for the task.

So, God Himself will bring salvation. Remember Isaiah 59:1? This is who He is.

vss. 16c-17 Yahweh gets up from the seat of justice, puts on His armor, and sets out to save. **Isaiah 9:2-7**

There is no one else who can do it. **Revelation 5:1-10** He alone is worthy to save.

vss. 18-19 When He comes to save, His enemies and the enemies of His people will fear.

**Revelation 19:11-16** He is our mighty conquering savior.

All who will not turn and repent will be judged and tremble.

The "wind of the Lord" is His Spirit.

The Lord's coming is with the glory of the sun, the river of life, and the Spirit of the Lord.

vs. 20 He is the Redeemer. This is new in Isaiah. He is the one who buys us out of slavery.

He is the one who pays our debt and rescues us from the penalty of sin.

We realize we need a redeemer. He comes and redeems us... everyone who repents. (vs. 20)

vs. 21 The Lord speaks again, closing out the chapter.

His new covenant is an everlasting covenant, and it is effective because the Spirit of God is on us.

And the word of God is in our mouths... forever.