

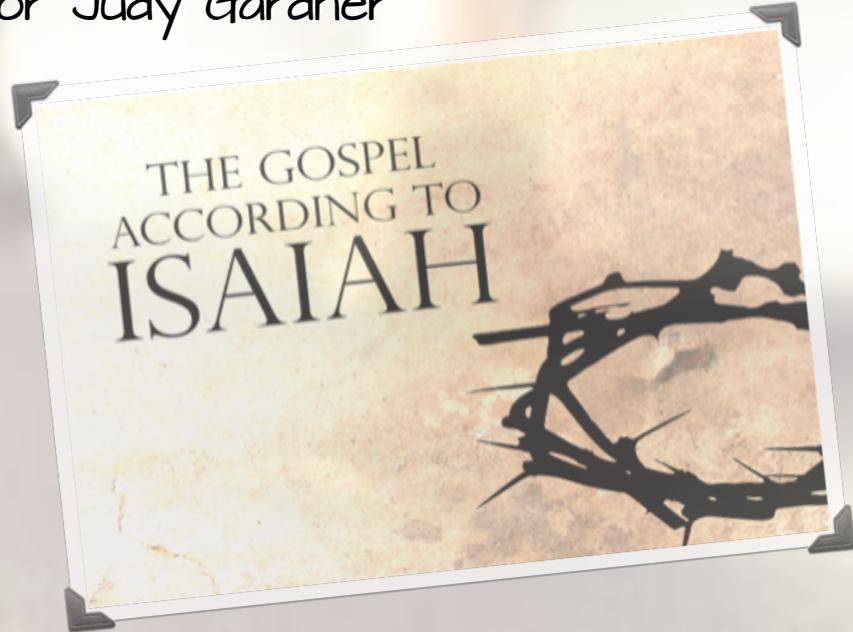
January 22-26, 2024 Edition

# Following The Year<sup>(s)</sup> Of ^Jesus Part 108

## The Gospel According To Isaiah

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we are going to be looking at the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was a priest. He was part of the social and religious elite. And yet he gave all that up to answer the call that God made to him. Isaiah told Israel all about what the Rescuer would look like. What He would do. How He would put everything back together again (it's almost like a nursery rhyme when you think of it).

The people of God had been waiting for thousands of years for Him to fulfill His promise. It was a promise that God had actually made to the dreaded serpent way back in Genesis chapter 3. After Adam & Eve had been tricked into choosing their own way and disobeying the one rule they were given God makes a few pronouncements. This part of the Bible is often referred to as "the curse" and I always thought that He had cursed Adam & Eve for what they had done. But He didn't. He never cursed them. He does tell them about the consequences of their actions. Eve would struggle in child birth and her relationship with her husband would be strained (so that's where the problem with husbands and wives got started? I wonder what marriage would be like without that little problem to deal with?). Adam would struggle with his work and would have to fight the ground to feed himself and his family. But no curses for Adam & Eve. God could never curse His kids. Instead the curse that rightfully should have fallen on Adam & Eve is sent into the ground and to this day the Bible says that all of the created universe groans in anticipation of the day when God will redeem not only the humans but the creation as well. Then God turns to the snake and He says this:

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.  
Genesis 3:15 (NLT)

Theologians call this the "protoevangellion" which is a big religious word that simply means "first gospel". It is the first time in the entire Bible where the gospel is preached and it's fascinating to me that it was preached to the serpent by God Himself. It's pretty general in nature but if you've read the New Testament then you've got a pretty good idea of what happened- Jesus (the Descendant) comes to this earth and is killed on the cross (the serpent striking His heel) but in so doing (and without realizing it would happen) the serpent's head is crushed and the very first prophecy is fulfilled.

By the time Isaiah writes (some 700 years before Jesus would be born) the people of God had been waiting for centuries for this Descendant. Isaiah would spend an awful lot of his time describing who the Descendant would be. What He would do. How He would do it. We will spend this week looking in detail and how Isaiah describes this Descendant Who would change everything- including the lives of people like you and me who would live 2,700 years after Isaiah wrote these words.

**Tuesday Reflection:** So I think we'll begin our look at Isaiah by talking about what is wrong with the world from Isaiah's perspective. In Isaiah chapter 6 we read about the call of Isaiah by God. It starts off like this:

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Isaiah 6:1 (NLT)

Now when Isaiah says it was in the year that King Uzziah died he's giving us more than a historical marker- he's giving us a cultural and spiritual marker as well. The people of God had a lot of really bad kings in their history. Uzziah had been one of the good ones for most of his reign which had lasted over 50 years. He had done what God asked him to do and lived a life that honored God for most of his reign and because of it Judah had enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. But Uzziah let that go to his head and for the last few years of his reign had started to believe it was because of Uzziah and not because of God that things had gone so swimmingly. At that point Uzziah and Judah had started having problems. On top of that there was the nation of Assyria who had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and so at this point things are starting to look pretty bleak in Judah. When Isaiah says that it was "the year King Uzziah died" he's painting us a picture- things don't look good.

I think we've all been there, haven't we? When was the "year King Uzziah died" for you? When was it that things looked awfully bleak and you had no idea how anything would ever be ok again? For Isaiah it was when the king died. For you it was different- maybe you experienced a loss. Maybe you got sick. Maybe you lost a job or found yourself in financial trouble. Whatever the reason, we all have those moments in our own lives. Things look bleak and we're not sure what to do or what will happen. What do you do when you find yourself in that place? Do you know what Isaiah did? He went to church.

He was in the Temple and while he was there he encountered God. And because of his encounter with God he got a really good look at what exactly is wrong with the world. He looked up (a pretty good place to focus on when things seem to be falling apart down here) and he saw these angelic beings flying around and singing something:

Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. *Isaiah 6:2-4 (NLT)*

What were they getting at? Were they making sure that Isaiah knew that even if things looked bleak down here on this plane that in reality God was still in control? Maybe. Probably. But I'm not sure Isaiah was listening at that point because of what comes next. We'll spend tomorrow talking about that but for today maybe spend some time thinking about the moments in your life that were "the year King Uzziah died" moments. How did you handle it? What did you think? What happened? Did you let the compelling nature of the experience distract you from looking up to the Lord and letting Him change your perspective? How might things have been different if you had?

**Wednesday Reflection:** So when last we left Isaiah he was in the Temple with the Lord and some seraphim (scary angelic beings) during a particularly bleak time in his life. What do you think happens when people come face to face with the living God? If you've been with us as we go through the story of the Old Testament then maybe you'll remember that if people see God's face they die. So that's something the heroes of the Bible try to avoid. But we don't read that Isaiah sees God's face- what he sees is the train

of God's robe and it fills the temple. But even just experiencing the robe of God gives Isaiah a certain experience and leaves him with a particular feeling:

Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies. *Isaiah 6:5 (NLT)*

Why? Why did he think it was "all over?" Why did he believe he was doomed? Because he had finally seen God for Who He really is. And when we see God for Who He really is we see ourselves for who we really are. And what are we? Well, Isaiah hit the nail right on the head- he saw how messed up he was and he saw how messed up the world was. It's interesting to me that he is in the Temple looking for God and we finds what he's looking for he realizes it's more than he bargained for. But his reaction is interesting to me as well. Usually when people are presented with an experience of the living God they have one of two reactions- we either focus too much on ourselves or we focus too much on other people. If we focus too much on ourselves then we figure that we are what's wrong with the world and we are so bad that there's nothing that can be done to redeem us. If we focus too much on others than we generally think that we're ok- it's the rest of the miserable humans who are the problem.

Isaiah hits the nail right on the head- the problem isn't just Isaiah and it isn't just the other people- it's all of the above. What's wrong with the world. Me and you. G.K. Chesterton was asked once to write an essay for a British newspaper answering the question, "what's wrong with the world?" It was just after WWII and there were an awful lot of possible directions to take the essay. He responded to the question with a postcard that had only two words on it. In response to the question, "what's wrong with the world?" he simply wrote- "I am."

That's what Isaiah is faced with at this moment. People- we're the worst! Judy and I have made a commitment in our relationship not to complain (much) and not to talk negatively about other people (much). If I get to heading down one of those paths and I say something like, "can you believe that?", she'll say something like, "yeah... people... we're the worst." I know immediately what she means. What's wrong with the world. Ed is what's wrong with the world. Judy is what's wrong with the world. And you are what's wrong with the world. I am a man of unclean lips living among people of unclean lips. Isaiah hit the nail right on the head. But that's not the end of the story. One of the seraphs takes some tongs and pulls a coal out of the holy fire that is burning in the Temple. Why does he need tongs? It's not because it's too hot. The word Seraph means "fiery one". The coal isn't too hot for the seraph- it's too holy. Even the Seraph can't touch it. But the Seraph brings the coal over to Isaiah and touches it to his lips. Isaiah and anyone reading his account of what happened who knew anything about the holiness of God would have figured that Isaiah was about to be wiped out. Nobody can withstand the holiness of God. But Isaiah wasn't wiped out. Instead, he was healed:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

*Isaiah 6:6-7 (NLT)*

Ok... what just happened? Why isn't he dead? Why instead of being dead is he healed and forgiven? Because of the third option. Remember when I said that when people come face to face with Who God really is that they generally have one of two reactions? They either focus too much on themselves or they focus too much on everybody else. Well, there's a third option that I think God is trying to get us to notice here- don't focus on yourself or everybody else- focus on God. On the God Who (even in the Old Testament) wants to bring healing, grace and forgiveness to the people of this world. The New Testament revolves around a common theme- we are sinners saved by grace. If you are someone who tends to feel a lot of guilt and you struggle to believe that you will ever be ok you need to focus on the second part of that statement- I am a sinner saved by GRACE. Grace is all about God's fondness of you and the favor He wants to pour into your life. But if you are someone who tends to think that you're pretty darn cool- the problem is everyone else then you need to focus on the first part of that statement- I am a SINNER saved by grace. God's hope is that no matter which side you tend to lean towards that by focusing on the message of the gospel (I am a sinner saved by grace) you will start to lift your eyes and focus on the One Who provided for your salvation. The Descendant of Genesis chapter 3. The One Who loves you. Now how does that make you feel?

**Thursday Reflection:** Isaiah didn't just talk about what was wrong with the world- he also wrote about what God would do to fix this broken world. He wrote about what the Descendant who would come to rescue us would look like and what He would do:

In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all... The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord. Isaiah 11:6-9 (NLT)

The Descendant would come to put everything back the way it's supposed to be. The recreate a world of justice and peace. Not the kind of justice where wrong doing is punished but the kind of justice where there is no wrong doing that needs to be punished. It was the way things were in the beginning and it's the way it will be again one day. Perfect peace brought to all relationships- our relationship with God, with other people, with ourselves and even with the creation. We will live in a state of constant and perfect justice and peace. But how would God bring us back to that place? By sending a King:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

Now this King is described over and over in the pages of the Old Testament. Lots is written about Him in the Psalms. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and many other prophets were

given insight into what this King would do. One recurring picture was of the conquering King Who would rule with an iron scepter. He would drive His enemies under His feet and establish God's throne forever. But there was another description of this King that didn't seem to fit with the conquering King- the suffering, healing, servant King. Isaiah talks about this aspect of the King quite a bit:

Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or raise his voice in public. Isaiah 42:1-2 (NIV)

This servant would do what a king is supposed to do- bring justice to the world. But His methods would be unorthodox. This King wouldn't shout or raise His voice in public. In other words- He would attempt to change the hearts and minds of the people without controlling public discourse. But how is that possible? That's the way a king changes things, isn't it? By making his voice heard and obeyed above all others.

But not the servant King. The Servant king would carry out the function of a king but wouldn't use the typical methods of a king. He would change the hearts and minds of the people of the world not by force but by attraction. How would He do that? By how He treated the people of this earth:

He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth. Isaiah 42:3-4 (NLT)

This King would be a healing king. He wouldn't crush the broken or put out the flickering. Instead He would restore them. He would heal them. He would use them to help Him change the world. In fact, Jesus (as it would turn out) LOVED what everyone else considered to be hopeless cases. He was attracted to them. And He showed the world that nobody was too far gone for His healing to restore them and give them a future.

So here's the thing- Jesus came to this earth not just so that He could take your place, He also came so that you could take His place. That means that when it comes to the healing of the King there is both blessing and responsibility. The blessing is that we are healed as a flood of mercy and grace comes pouring into our lives. But the responsibility comes when we realized He also came so that I could take His place- which means that if Jesus wouldn't crush me then I dare not crush myself or anyone else. I need to follow in the footsteps of the healing King and carry His message of grace and mercy into the world- maybe starting with myself.

As Rabbis studied the prophecies of the promised king they found themselves getting confused. How could the conquering king also be the servant king? It doesn't make sense. It's not possible to a king to rule without using the traditional methods of a king. The Rabbis of Jesus' day thought that they were waiting for at least two and maybe more messianic figures who would carry out different functions to usher in God's kingdom. But when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist look at what happened:

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." Matthew 3:17 (NLT)

I never knew this before but it turns out the first half of God's statement, "this is my dearly loved Son," is a direct quote from Psalm chapter 2- a messianic prophecy about the conquering king that would come and rule the nations. The second half of God's statement (who brings me great joy) is a direct quote from Isaiah 42- a messianic prophecy of the servant/healing King. God is letting anyone who would listen know that Jesus would be the perfect combination of the conquering King and the servant/healing/suffering King. And then He showed us what that would look like. Maybe the most graphic illustration of the perfect combination of the conquering King and the servant/healing/suffering King is when Jesus hangs on the cross. Is He suffering? Check. Is He being a servant? Check. Is He healing the nations on the cross? Surprisingly, yes- check. And is He conquering His enemies and ushering in the kingdom of God on that cross? Even more surprisingly, yes. Check, check, check and check. How did He do that? I don't know... I guess it's just Jesus being Jesus. Always surprising us. Always doing exactly the right thing at the right moment for the right reason. Just another example that He knows what He's doing. Do you thing you can trust that kind of God with your life?

**Friday Reflection:** The following is from Max Lucado's book, In The Grip Of Grace, that I share in these reflections about once a year. Especially in light of our discussion of how many different factions of Judaism existed in the first century. The same could be said of modern American Christianity. So many flavors. Who's right? Who's wrong? What does Jesus think of all of this? Max Lucado helped me see things in a much different way than I was told growing up.

### **Life Aboard The Fellow-Ship:**

God has enlisted us in his navy and placed us on his ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore.

This is no cruise ship; it's a battleship. We aren't called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call. He found us among the shanties of the seaport and invited us to follow him. Our faith was born at the sight of his fondness, and so we went.

We each followed him across the gangplank of his grace onto the same boat. There is one captain and one destination. Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

There is concern, however, regarding the disharmony of the crew. When we first boarded we assumed the crew was made up of others like us. But as we've wandered these decks, we've encountered curious converts with curious appearances. Some wear uniforms we've never seen, sporting styles we've never witnessed. "Why do you look the way you do?" we ask them.

"Funny," they reply. "We were about to ask the same of you."

The variety of dress is not nearly as disturbing as the plethora of opinions. There is a group, for example, who clusters every morning for serious study. They promote rigid discipline and somber expressions. "Serving the captain is serious business," they explain. It's no coincidence that they tend to congregate around the stern.

There is another regiment deeply devoted to prayer. Not only do they believe in prayer, they believe in prayer by kneeling. For that reason you always know where to locate them; they are at the bow of the ship.

And then there are a few who staunchly believe real wine should be used in the Lord's Supper. You'll find them on the port side.

Still another group has positioned themselves near the engine. They spend hours examining the nuts and bolts of the boat. They've been known to go below deck and not come up for days. They are occasionally criticized by those who linger on the top deck, feeling the wind in their hair and the sun on their face. "It's not what you learn," those topside argue. "It's what you feel that matters."

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

Some think once you're on the boat, you can't get off. Others say you'd be foolish to go overboard, but the choice is yours.

Some believe you volunteer for service; others believe you were destined for the service before the ship was even built.

Some predict a storm of great tribulation will strike before we dock; others say it won't hit until we are safely ashore.

There are those who speak to the captain in a personal language. There are those who think such languages are extinct.

There are those who think the officers should wear robes, there are those who think there should be no officers at all, and there are those who think we are all officers and should all wear robes.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

And then there is the issue of the weekly meeting at which the captain is thanked and his words are read. All agree on its importance, but few agree on its nature. Some want it loud, others quiet. Some want ritual, others spontaneity. Some want to celebrate so they can meditate; others meditate so they can celebrate. Some want a meeting for those who've gone overboard. Others want to reach those overboard but without going overboard and neglecting those on board.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

The consequence is a rocky boat. There is trouble on deck. Fights have broken out. Sailors have refused to speak to each other. There have even been times when one group refused to acknowledge the presence of others on the ship. Most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because of the quarreling of the sailors.

"What do we do?" we'd like to ask the captain. "How can there be harmony on the ship?" We don't have to go far to find the answer.

On the last night of his life Jesus prayed a prayer that stands as a citadel for all Christians:

I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. (John 17:20)

How precious are these words. Jesus, knowing the end is near, prays one final time for his followers. Striking, isn't it, that he prayed not for their success, their safety, or their happiness. He prayed for their unity. He prayed that they would love each other.

As he prayed for them, he also prayed for "those who will believe because of their teaching." That means us! In his last prayer Jesus prayed that you and I (and every other believer on the planet) be one.

**Prayer:** Father, forgive me for the times I've clustered with those who are like me while being suspicious of those who aren't. Show me how to live in unity with others who follow You. In Jesus' Name, amen.