

GOD’S GOSPEL CALL TO A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE (Isaiah 1:18-20)

The young man told his pastor that God was calling him to preach. Knowing what he knew about the young man, the pastor had some doubts as to whether the fellow heard God correctly. Nevertheless, the pastor scheduled an opportunity for the young man to preach his first sermon. To put it mildly, it did not go well. After the sermon, one lady turned to her friend and said, “Do you think he is really called to preach?” The friend replied, “Well, he may have gotten a call, but it wasn’t long distance.”

This morning we are going to focus on the four-letter word, *call*. It is found almost 200 times in the Bible. When you include its related words, such as *calling* and *called*, the number balloons to over 800 times.

We use the word *call* in a wide variety of ways.

- Before you got up in the morning, or maybe the reason you got up is that *nature was calling*.
- When you went to bed the night before, you did so because it was time to *call it a day*.
- When you narrowly avoid a wreck, you refer to it as *a close call*.
- If your boss asks you to step into his office, he may want *to call some things to your attention*.
- As he does so, he just might *call you on the carpet*.
- When you have a health scare, it is *a wakeup call*.

There are so many other phrases in which we use the word call: This is a call to arms. Before class begins, the teacher has to call the roll. I am at your beck and call. That was a bad call. That’s a tough call. Hey, I call the shots around here. I’m going to call your bluff. I call the meeting to order. Don’t call it quits. Duty calls. There is no reason to resort to name-calling. Call off the dogs. Let me call to mind what I really said. It was a judgment call. Drastic times call for drastic measures. You made the right call. Can I give you a call? Don’t call us; we’ll call you. You called? Your call is important to us.

The Hebrew word that is most often translated as *call* or *called* is found more times in the book of Genesis than any other book of the Bible. Isaiah contains the second most uses of that word. I am feeling impressed to spend some time with you in the OT Book of Isaiah. It really is a remarkable book.

Isaiah is a long book. At 66 chapters, it has the second most chapters of any book in the Bible. If, however, you judge the length of a book by how many words it has, Isaiah comes in as the 6th longest book. There are 25,608 Hebrew words that make up Isaiah.

By way of comparison, we just finished the NT letter of Hebrews. It is the 31st longest book in the Bible. While it contains only 4953 Greek words, we spent 41 weeks studying that letter. If we examined Isaiah at the same pace we did Hebrews, it would take us approximately 212 Sundays, which is over 4 years. We are not going to spend 4 years in Isaiah, and we are not going to go verse-by-verse through all 66 chapters.

I propose to study Isaiah in a different way. Isaiah has been called the 5th gospel. As you know, the word *gospel* means *good news*. There is much good news to be found in the pages of Isaiah. Although we won't find His name, we will find Jesus in this prophetic book. We are going to spend 12 weeks looking at the Gospel according to Isaiah.

We will begin with, "God's Gospel Call to a Rebellious People." The fact that God calls rebellious people to Himself is itself good news. If God didn't call rebellious people to Himself, none of us would make it because all of us were born with rebellious hearts and rebellious wills.

I am convinced that McDonald's is far better at marketing than they are at making hamburgers. Some years ago, their slogan was "Have it your way." That's a genius slogan. No matter what it is, people want to have it their way. We want it our way rather than God's way because we are rebels. Despite our longstanding animosity towards God, He still graciously and lovingly calls us to Himself.

Look with me at Isaiah 1. Let's simply read vv. 2-5a. In v. 10, the prophet likens the people of Judah to two cities which God destroyed because of their rebellion and wickedness. Look at the charge God brings to the leaders of His people in v. 23. Despite their wayward condition, God still calls out to them. Our text is vv. 18-20. I want you to notice three truths.

God's Gospel Call Features a Merciful Invitation

The first word of our text is *come*. *Come* is also an often-used word in Scripture. It is found 104 times in Jeremiah, 101 times in Isaiah, and 74 times in the Gospel of John. John wrote five books in our NT. In addition to his gospel, he also wrote three letters, and the last book of our Bible, Revelation. When you add up all the time the word *come* shows up in those five books, it number 119 times. John used the word *come* more times than any other Biblical writer.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus often issues the invitation *to come*. In John 1 we find two disciples of John the Baptist who are literally following Jesus as Jesus moves about. Jesus did not invite them to do so, yet they are trailing Him. Jesus turns around, looks at them, and asks, "What are you seeking?" That is a polite way of asking, "What do you want?"

They inquire, "Rabbi (Teacher), where are you staying?"

Jesus answers, "Come, and you will see" (John 1:35-39).

Three chapters later, in John 4, Jesus meets a woman at a well. He engages her in conversation. Before long, Jesus tells her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The two talk further and before long, she tells all the people of her town, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (4:16, 29). She was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah for whom the people had long-awaited. If you come to Jesus, you will soon find yourself inviting others to come to Him, as well.

In John 5, Jesus rebukes the religious leaders. He tells them that John the Baptist, God Himself, and the Scriptures authenticate that He is the one whom the Father promised. Then, He says to them, "Yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life" (5:33-40).

In John 6:35, Jesus proclaims to the crowds, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.”

A chapter later in John 7:37-38 we read:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

When Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus, He had the audacity to address a dead a man. To that corpse that was four days dead He cried out, “Lazarus, come out!” and Lazarus did just that (John 11:43).

Jesus went to the shore of Lake Galilee sometime after His resurrection. While several of His disciples were out on the lake fishing, Jesus built a campfire, where He cooked some fish and heated up some bread. As they neared land, Jesus called out to them, “Come and have breakfast” (21:12).

On the very last page of the Bible, the Apostle John writes these words: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water or life without price” (Revelation 22:17).

Let me make a few observations about this invitation.

1. The Timing of the Invitation Is Immediate.

The second word of the invitation is “now.” Jesus never invites us to come to Him tomorrow because we are never promised that we will be here tomorrow. All we have is today, and all we have of today is now.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Let me take you back to Chicago. That date is October 8, 1871. It is a Sunday night. The evangelist D.L. Moody has preached the gospel to a large crowd. As he closes the service, he encourages the people to evaluate their relationship with Christ, and he asks them to come back next week to make a decision. He wants them to think things over and make sure they are ready to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The service ends and the people disperse.

At 9:00 that night a fire began in Chicago. The fire raged Sunday night, all day Monday, and was not fully put out until Tuesday. That fire claimed the lives of 300 people. The fire destroyed 3.3 square mile of Chicago and left 100,00 people homeless. The church in which Moody preached had to be rebuilt. Many of those to whom Moody preached were not alive to come back the next Sunday, and for those who survived, there was no church building to return to.

Moody said later:

I have never since dared to give an audience a week to think of their salvation. If they were lost, they might rise up in judgment against me. I have never seen that congregation since. I will never meet those people until I meet them in

another world. But I want to tell you of one lesson that I learned that night which I have never forgotten, and that is, when I preach, to press Christ upon the people then and there and try to bring them to a decision on the spot. I would rather have that right hand cut off than to give an audience a week now to decide what to do with Jesus.

If we are to come to Christ, we must come now. Don't wait for a more opportune time. The only time of which you are assured is now.

2. The Nature of the Invitation Is Mutual.

God invites us to come to Him that we might reason together with Him. The VOICE Translation puts the beginning of v.18 this way: "Come on, now, let's walk and talk; let's work this out." God invites rebellious people to come to Him with their complaints. Basically, He is saying, "Come, give Me a piece of your mind." God is big enough to handle your criticism. But after you tell God what you think about the job He is doing, you must be willing to let God tell you what He thinks about the job you are doing. God is willing to make that deal. Are you?

David Darnell is a Hebrew scholar, a former seminary professor, and he lives right here in Enid. He has written a commentary on Isaiah. Under Isaiah 1:18, he wrote these words:

Through the prophet Isaiah, YHWH is issuing an invitation to His people to enter into debate with Him—to bring their minds, their questions, their objections, and their honest feelings, to enter into an open discussion with their God.

God is willing to make that same deal with you. Keep in mind, however, that it is to be mutual. In addition to saying what you want to say, you must honestly hear what God has to say to you.

You may not particularly like what God has to say, but keep in mind, God does not lie, and God does not make mistakes. You can be certain that what God says about you is true. Since God is loving, you can also be assured that whatever God says is meant for your ultimate good.

Some people are mean. They say things just to hurt you, just to inflict pain. God never does that. Yes, the truth often hurts, but this hurt is a necessary part of healing. The healing is found in the second half of v. 18.

That brings us to the third truth about the invitation.

3. The Promise of the Invitation Is Full Forgiveness.

Again, I like the way the VOICE Bible renders the latter part of the verse: "Your wrongdoings are bloodred, but they can turn white as snow. Your sins are red like crimson, but they can be made clean again like new wool."

It appears that Isaiah has in mind a red dye that was used in his day. The dye would attach itself to the fibers of the material, and once it did, it was permanently stained.

God, however, can accomplish what no detergent can do. He can take a sin-stained heart and make it thoroughly clean.

That is what David longed for in Psalm 51. David prayed, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (51:2, 7).

What David prayed for, you and I can experience through the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Let me tell you about Aaron Burr. He served as the Vice President during Thomas Jefferson’s first term as president. He was dropped from the ticket when Jefferson ran for re-election. One of the reasons for that is that while he was still Vice President, he challenged his political enemy, Alexander Hamilton to a duel even though dueling had been outlawed in New Jersey where the duel was held. It was also against the law in neighboring New York. Witnesses say that Hamilton shot first, but he fired in the air, not wanting to harm Burr. Burr took aim. The bullet that came from his gun struck Hamilton. He was rushed to a friend’s house, but the brilliant 49-year-old lawyer who had served as the first United States Secretary of the Treasury under George Washington soon succumbed to his injuries.

Burr’s life was rather tragic. His father was a pastor. His grandfather was the great Jonathan Edwards, one of the most respected and accomplished ministers America has produced. Unfortunately for Burr, by the time he was two, his father, mother, and grandfather had already died. He was shuffled to and raised by other family members.

At some point he rejected the Christian faith that his elders had so strongly held.

He died in a boarding house at the age of 80. I read that when he was an elderly man, he was approached by a young man who said, “Mr. Burr, I want you to meet a Friend of mine.”

Burr asked, “Who is he?”

The young man answered, “He is Jesus Christ, the Savior of my soul.”

Burr reportedly scowled and replied, “Sixty years ago I told God if He would let me alone, I would let Him alone, and He has kept His word!”

You have a choice to make. You can leave God alone, or you can accept his merciful, gracious invitation to come and reason with Him.

I want you to notice a second truth.

God’s Gospel Call Includes a Life-Giving Prescription

Look at v. 19. This verse serves as both a prescription and a description. God, through the pen of Isaiah prescribes or encourages His people to be willing and obedient. If they will come to Him and deal honestly with Him, He promises them that we will eat the good of the land. In other words, they will enjoy peace, rest from their enemies, and they will be blessed.

The same is true for us. God promises to bless us if we will turn our hearts toward Him.

Tragically, many choose to ignore the voice of God, and they heed other voices.

Bible teacher J Vernon McGee wrote that someone has stated it this way:

- Philosophy says: Think our way out.
- Indulgence says: Drink your way out.
- Politics says: Spend your way out.
- Science says: Invent your way out.
- Industry says: Work your way out.
- Militarism says: Fight your way out.
- Religion says: Pray your way out. Give your way out. Serve your way out.
- Jesus Christ says: I am the way . . . (He is the way out).

What is holding you captive and from what do you need to be freed? Bitterness? Anger? Depression? Worry? Fear? Dark thoughts? Addiction? Hopelessness?

Jesus is your way out. Trust Him. Rely on Him. Receive Him, and receive the blessings He will bring your way.

Finally . . .

God's Gospel Call Contains a Sobering Declaration

Let's read v. 20. Isaiah offers an alternative. If we ignore God's invitation, if we don't go to Him, this is what we can expect. Verse 20 is the exact opposite of v. 19. The opposite of "willing and obedient" is "refuse and rebel." The opposite of "eating the good of the land" is that we will be "eaten by the sword."

Isaiah is warning his people, "If you disregard God, war will come. You will be destroyed by the enemy." He is saying, "If you don't do v. 19, you will experience v. 20."

The verse ends with the declaration: "For the mouth of YHWH has spoken." What God says He will do, He will do. What God promises, He will perform. What God warns, He will carry out.

God is not a politician who makes empty promises. God is not a slick salesman who misleads people with false claims.

In church we often use words that we rarely hear outside of church. One such word is Amen. What does that word mean? The context of when you use that word determines to a large extent what it means. Sometimes the word means *truly*. A modern equivalent might be, "Right on!"

When I say something that Rodney agrees with, he says, "That's right!" That's what *Amen* means.

When I am praying, however, and I end my prayer with *Amen*, it means something just a bit different. It means, "Let it be so." When you and I pray, we can't make our prayers be answered in the way we want them to be answered; so, we say, "Let it be so."

When God say something, there is no need from Him to say, "I really hope this happens." He says, "I have spoken," and because He is God it will be as He has said.

Have you ever stopped to think that darkness is what makes the light even brighter. Illness is what makes health an even greater blessing. Poverty is what causes us to

appreciate wealth even more.

In the same way, it is our rebellion that proves the gospel to be such good news. God is not inviting good people to come to Himself. This invitation in Isaiah 1 is not issued to religious overachievers. The good news is that God is calling rebellious people into a relationship with Himself.

I know I qualify for that invitation. I bet you do, too. Let's take God at His word and accept His invitation. Let's respond to His gospel call.