

It's so important that we know and understand the prophet Isaiah. I can't stress this enough. If there is one book we must read to fully understand the Jesus we call the Son of God, and our Redeemer—it must be Isaiah--NOT Leviticus, NOT Deuteronomy, not even the beloved Genesis with all it's great stories. Isaiah.

Is that because many scholars think that this prophet predicted Jesus? Mmmm. That's a loaded question. Which came first, once could argue, the chicken or the egg?

Jesus famously read from the prophet Isaiah to announce his ministry. Was that because Jesus knew that the prophet had announced his arrival, and he was saying, “Aha! Look folks—he was talking about me!”

Or, maybe, scholars tell us, Jesus studied the prophet Isaiah intensively, and saw in the words that God spoke through this prophet-- the shape he wanted his ministry to take.

It's kind of like when we read a book and it contains a character that we really would like to emulate. I know you're going to laugh at this, but for me it was Melanie Hamilton from *Gone with the Wind*.

“What? That pale faced, mealy-mouthed ninny?” you ask. Well, that may have been many people's opinion of her character, but all I saw was her great faith—in God and in people, she always treated everyone with respect—even a prostitute she happened to meet. She had a steely, but loving resolve to protect the ones she loved. And she believed the best about people. I wanted to be like that.

Maybe Jesus was studying with other Jewish boys of his time and saw in the prophecies of Isaiah the vision of the Suffering Servant Messiah--words that captured the actions that would bring about God's kingdom--words that – even now—still echo through time.

*God speaks to us through Isaiah:*

*“Day after day [my people] seek me and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness  
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God...*

*“Why do we fast, but you do not see?  
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”*

*Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all  
your workers.*

*Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist.  
Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.  
Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow  
down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?  
Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?*

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo  
the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free...*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless  
poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them...*

*If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the  
speaking of evil,  
if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the  
noonday.*

*The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched  
places, and make your bones strong”*

You know, this is probably the best prophecy of all to read just before Lent: God -speaking through Isaiah -makes it clear that he does not want our sacrifices of fasting and humbling ourselves. This probably comes as a relief to all those who were planning to give up chocolate or carbs.

But Isaiah's vision-- which became Jesus' ministry- might be an interesting discipline for us. Maybe we could the vision during Lent. We could:

- Help loose the shackles of those who are bound by constant injustice.
- Break the yokes of whatever burdens us
- Lighten our bursting closets and give to those who are cold.
- Stop pointing fingers, and speaking evil of others
- Work on behalf of those who are being oppressed.
- Feed those who are hungry

These are great Lenten disciplines, and you know what else—if we really do these things—we will be setting ourselves apart from what the world expects, what the world thinks is important.

Imagine what the world would be like if the followers of Christ fought for justice for those who don't look like us, as if they deserved just as much justice as we enjoy?

Imagine what would happen if we broke the bonds of sexism, racism, and ageism—if we encouraged both girls and boys to be good at what makes them happy, rather than what encouraging them to follow traditional roles? What if we worked to undo the yokes of poverty and disease with the same fervor that we lobby for gun rights and the newest ipad?

What if we fed everyone who was hungry in body? Hungry in spirit?

According to Isaiah—and Jesus—THEN our light would shine out.

It would be like—I don't know—like going up to the top of Mount Battie and firing up a large bonfire, visible for all the town to see. And people would come and see what made such a glorious light.

Jesus tells us *if* we do these things, *then* we are the LIGHT OF THE WORLD! Follow his light and BE the light. Amen.