

Religious Profession

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Bible Text: Isaiah 29
Preached on: Sunday, April 4, 2010

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If you will, look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 29. I am going to read from verse one down to verse 14. Probably will not get all the way through, but at least we will have the context.

I have entitled this message, “Religious Profession.” And that is really what we see the Lord condemning here. That is all around us. In fact, it is in our own heart even with the grace of God. We struggle in this flesh with a religiosity that is more concerned about how we appear to men rather than what our true state is before God. That is a danger. Whenever you think that how men approve you in what you do is better than or more important than what God has to say.

You know, if we were to go to the jails and do a poll by profession I wonder how many we would run into that really see themselves as guilty that are in jail. You know, you talk to different ones. Everybody says, “Man, I am innocent.” Really? You know, is our justice system so bad that every single person that is in here is innocent? But that is man’s profession. That is how they want to appear before men, regardless of what the truth is. And so that is really the homework for the justice system, trying to figure out who is and who isn’t. And it gets into a game of appearances many times. But before the Lord no such game can be played. The Lord is such that he knows those that are his and he deals with them in justice. He doesn’t just look the other way. There has never been an innocent sinner ever.

You say, “Well, how then can a man hope for heaven?”

It is by justice being satisfied. It took the work of a substitute that God might be just to declare sinners righteous before him. But why are sinners condemned? Why does a chapter like this start off with the word “woe?” Well, when God separates out the wheat from the chaff and brings condemnation, brings judgment, you can be sure that everyone that he condemns is justly condemned. There is not going to be any innocent sinners in hell. That word just put it out of your vocabulary. It doesn’t exist. If they are there, it is because God has shown them for what they are. And any of us sitting here would be there were it not for God having worked out his perfect righteousness that he might be just and the justifier.

So we are going to look at this subject here in this text, religious profession. Verse one.

Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust. Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.

Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.¹

And our Lord Jesus Christ made some of his harshest statements when you read the gospels. He made them against religion, those who had a profession of religion, had an appearance of righteousness or holiness before God and yet what appeared to men to be upright, to be moral and, even as we hear many talking about today, how to get right with God, giving sinners methods for making themselves right with God, do you know how the Lord Jesus called such? If you look over in Matthew chapter 23 you will see the

¹ Isaiah 29:1-14.

answer. We could read the whole chapter, but we are just going to look at verse 25 down to verse 28.

He says:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”²

Isn't that how our chapter begins in Isaiah? Woe?

..for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.³

See, there is a difference in how men perceive men and how God perceives men. Without that perfect righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ came and worked out on behalf of sinners, all within is uncleanness, all within is deadness. There is no good thing within any of us.

Now when you come back here to Isaiah chapter 29, who likes to hear a message of woe? You know, that is not why people come to what they call church. That is not why they dress up and get all cleaned up on a Sunday and go out. You know, I am looking for a message to lift me up here. Well, you don't want a false message. You don't want a false hope. You know, if you go to the doctor and get all cleaned up and go and just when you get in there tell him, “Look, I just came so I could fulfill my obligation to come for my annual visit and you don't need to check anything. I feel fine. Just sign here, this piece of paper and I will be good to go.” There are a lot of people that is all they want. That piece of paper says they are in good shape. Never really check it out. You know, that is not why you go to the doctor. You might as well stay home.

And, you know, as we come before the Lord and open this Word, is it not that he would examine our own hearts? Christ said:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”⁴

And they are just concerned about how they appear unto men. But that can only last so long. You have to deal with a holy God. And it is probably the most difficult thing for religious people of our day to endure such condemnation.

² Matthew 23:25.

³ Matthew 23:25-28.

⁴ Matthew 23:27.

You know, talk to your acquaintances. Everybody is just using the name of Jesus, talking about this and that about it, just all {?}, you know. I have been blessed. That is a word that is being thrown around today. You know, you just... it is like they are on a drug. And then you think, whoa, wait a minute. Let's kind of evaluate some of these things you are just rattling off. And all of the sudden they feel like you have rained on their party. You know, who are you? The devil? Why? Because you are just trying to ask some questions in truth concerning their hop. You know? I don't want to be deceived. I don't want them to be deceived. So let's talk a little bit more about your hope. Let's talk about that foundation that you are all giddy about. Is it really based upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ or is this some thing we just raise our hands and swoon and praise the Lord? Bless Jesus and off we run.

You can imagine the anger of the nation of Israel as one like Isaiah had to stand there and deliver a message that begins with woe. Now you think about that word woe. Just designed to catch attention. Just like the word behold.

“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!”⁵

You talk about an extreme, these were people that they had David as their father. Now who is this prophet Isaiah standing up saying woe to us? We are of David's lineage. Who are you to preach woe unto us?

But, you know, our Lord who is the truth, he declares it without compromise and so will any that he has taught. Ultimately it is the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge each and every one who lives and dies under the false delusion that somehow their religiosity will be a refuge for them in the day of trouble. That is the warning.

We saw it already in chapter 28 of Isaiah. When you read in verse 20.

“For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.”⁶

That is how Scripture describes any kind of righteousness that you or I should ever try to work out. Wrap yourself as you must. It won't provide the protection.

I remember being in some remote places in Africa a number of years ago where your only protection against the mosquitoes... and if you want to talk about mosquitoes try sleeping out in the open air with nothing but a sheet. You just spend the whole night hunkered down trying to wrap yourself. And when you get up in the morning your body, your skin actually looks like it has been shot at by an army of little miniature soldiers, you know. It is red pin pokes all over it. And then when you lift the sheet it just looks like you took red paint and just through a brush at it. These things ... the sheet is no protection.

⁵ Isaiah 29:1.

⁶ Isaiah 28:20.

That is how it is described here. People that confide in their profession. They confide in their will in some measure that somehow they are going to approach unto a holy God. It says here in verse 21 what the Lord does with such.

“For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim...”⁷

These were battles that in the day Israel had won, had fought for... God had fought for the defense of Israel. But now the Lord will rise up just as in that day and the whole point is fight against you.

“...he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work.”⁸

Notice it is called his strange work.

“...and bring to pass his act, his strange act.”⁹

I have had people when you get preaching like this they look at you kind of funny, you know, like, this guy is strange. What is he talking about? Where is the God of love? Well, the only way you are going to find God to be a God of love is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Other than that, be prepared to meet a holy and just God who will not spare. He spared not his own Son that he might deliver him up. Why would he spare a sinner outside his Son? So this is the call here for us to consider.

Now coming back here to Isaiah 29 we see here an example of God’s judgments against mere religiosity and it is to bring us to ask the question: Why on earth would we run to profession? Why would we run to a ceremony? Why would we run to a some act that I do and try to cover ourselves with it and think that somehow we are cared for, no matter how appealing to men.

We live in a day of methods where preachers are telling people it is easy. Just get right with God right there where you are. Bow your head and close your eyes and say this prayer and you will be right with God. That is a sheet that will not cover you. I will guarantee you. And the...

You say, “Why do men preach it then if they know it is a lie?”

They don’t even know it is a lie. They are so deluded, they believe it to be the truth and they preach it as the truth. That is why they do it with vehemence. That is why they build their ministries around it, because they really believe it is true. But it is a lie. How far will a deluded man go? We have got lots of instances in the world as far as deluded men and what they do. And people are in shock. How could a person do that?

⁷ Isaiah 28:21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

We had this sad case right recently here of this taxi driver killing this 12 year old boy. You say, "How could that be done?" It is shocking and we all cry, "Arrest him." You know, give him the death penalty. It is abhorrent. And yet I am telling you there are just as many child slayers standing in the pulpit today declaring lies before men and binding their souls to hell that a whole justice system in this world doesn't even think about and we cater to it. They give money to it. They pay for them to keep going. And the Lord says their day is coming.

That is what is described here in the part that I read there in verse 10. You know, there is a slumber. There is a spirit of deep sleep where their eyes are closed and it says the prophets and your rulers and seers, those are the preachers, hath he covered. But people flock to hear them. They flock to follow them, believe in a lie, because it is the blind leading the blind.

So God here gives an example of just judgments. First of all, in the physical destruction of the temple that is prophesied here. But then, secondly, as I just read for you in verse 10, actually back in verse nine, by a judicial blindness and hardness that he brings over people.

The physical temple being destroyed. When it says, "Woe to Ariel," that is not a common name that you would think of. But we know he is talking about Jerusalem, because it says there the city where David dwelt. Well, you know that Jerusalem is David's city. So this is not a message of woe against other nations. You know, this is bringing it home right there to Jerusalem where the temple was. This is where Solomon built his temple. So you can imagine the shock of people. Here is a lone voice in the wilderness, Isaiah crying out, "Woe." Not to Syria, not to Babylon, but not to Moab, but to Jerusalem. Woe. Woe to Ariel. Again, this could be referring to the time of Isaiah when the Lord would bring the Babylonians in and cause that temple to be destroyed and the people of Israel to be taken away for 70 years of captivity and then brought back. It could be that it is talking about in the time of Christ ultimately when Christ, as he was going to the cross and those women were weeping. He said, "Don't weep for me. Weep for you. Weep for yourselves, because your house has been left to you desolate." And 40 years later the Roman army came in and destroyed Jerusalem. We read about it in the book of Josephus, just an historian of the day. He wasn't even an inspired writer. But he describes the destruction of Jerusalem. That day where blood flowed in the streets described in terms of up to the horse's bridles, such a massive destruction. That was almost close to 2000 years ago. And that temple still has never been rebuilt, in spite of all of the plotting of men. There is a big old, what they call dome of the rock on it sitting on it right now. But the Muslims came in and took care of that. They built one of their holiest shrines on top of the foundation where the temple used to be. It stands there as a dare now for anybody to try to take it back.

Do you suppose that is all part of God's purpose? Absolutely. When the Lord destroys something, he destroys it. When he purposes that it be done, it is done. But what was the reason that he said here in verse two:

“Yet I will distress Ariel?”¹⁰

And here is the vanity of religious profession because at the end of verse one:

“...add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices.”¹¹

Some might argue, well, God said, “Kill the sacrifices.” Why is he telling us now it is wrong? It is the wrong lamb. You know, there is a particular Lamb of God that John the Baptist declared of Christ. Behold the Lamb. But when he came, he fulfilled every jot and tittle, satisfied the law and laid down his life. That is why he said, “Destroy this temple. In three days I will build it.” He wasn’t talking about that physical temple. He is talking about the temple of his body that should suffer and die. God spared not his Son that he might satisfy, his Son might satisfy every requirement of the law both in precept and penalty and thereby save every sinner from Adam all the way to the end of time that God the Father has chosen. It is not every sinner. Otherwise there wouldn’t be any judgment, but every sinner that God the Father has chosen and given to his Son, purposed to honor through the death of his Son. That is their salvation.

So you can see how God deals with just mere religiosity. There were sacrifices going on. In fact, even when Christ died, do you remember? The veil was rent in twain from top to bottom. That shows that God did it, not man. If it was man he would start at the bottom and rip it. He would start cutting up. This was from top to bottom, that a new and living way had been opened through the Lord Jesus Christ.

But do you know what? They sewed that back up and went right on in their way for another 40 years all the way having wrath to wrath until God finally brought in the Roman army in 70 AD and wiped it all off, destroyed it.

But as powerful a lesson as that is of God’s hand against religious, mere religiosity, the greater judgment, I believe, is what I read for you in verse nine and 10, that ultimate blindness and hardness, if God is pleased to leave sinners to themselves.

You talk about being unable to convince men of a lie. If God causes them to believe a lie, you will never cause them to believe the truth. And that is what we see here. We see how great is that blindness if God should ever leave us to ourselves. He says in verse nine:

“Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.”¹²

Here is a spiritual drunkenness, of which people are drunken today. They are being served up drinks, strong drink during worship service. But it is not with wine. It is not

¹⁰ Isaiah 29:2.

¹¹ Isaiah 29:1.

¹² Isaiah 29:9.

with alcohol. You know, in their minds, God forbid that alcohol should ever cross their lips. They are of that mindset and yet all the while they are serving up a spiritual cocktail that is destroying men's souls, that is leaving them, causing them to leave places of worship feeling good about themselves, just like a drunk man does when the whole world is spinning out of control and they are a danger to others and a danger to themselves, but they don't know it.

Why? Verse 10.

“For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes.”¹³

Why do you read about families in a fire, you know, where when they go in they find that they were killed lying in bed? the whole house was aflame around them, but no one woke up. That is how deep this sleep is.

“...the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.”¹⁴

What we see here is the ignorance of intellectual people. It is not because they are not smart. There are a lot of philosophers and doctors that are under this blindness and darkness. I mean, they can take... they are Greek and Hebrew scholars, but, you know, there were Greek and Hebrew scholars in Christ's day. You talk about dotting your Is and crossing your Ts, that... these Pharisees and scribes, they could tell you exactly what the middle letter was of a particular word in the middle of a particular chapter of a particular book, because they counted everything. That is how they proved it to make sure that everything was copied exactly right. A lot of people think, well, if I just knew the Hebrew and Greek, then I would know the truth. They... the whole generation knew it, but they didn't know that they missed Christ. Such was the slumber. Such was the depth of the blindness and the depravity of the heart.

And I know sometimes we think, well, it is better not to be educated than to be educated. Well, it doesn't matter in spiritual things. You could have been one that never went to school, but you are not favored anymore before a holy God than one that did. That is why it says there in verse 11 and 12:

“And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed.”¹⁵

Now the words... just like this Bible, everybody reads it. Where isn't it found? Go into a hotel room. Open the drawer. There it is. You find it in doctor's offices, sitting on a table. Pick it up and read it.

But it is:

¹³ Isaiah 29:10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Isaiah 29:11.

“...a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned.”¹⁶

See and this is where people get, they go wrong. They think, well, I will just ask my pastor. He has got a degree. Let me check with him first. Did you ever talk to somebody about Christ? Just simply endeavor to point them to Christ and they say, “You know, that is different than what my pastor... let me talk to my pastor on that.”

“Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed.”¹⁷

That is how learned men deal with some verses. Where it says:

“Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”¹⁸

Well, you know, that has been debated for years. We just... those are verses we just can't understand. So let's move on. Don't let that be a bother.

That is how learned men reason.

“And the book is delivered to him that is not learned...”¹⁹

I liken this to Bible studies that people get together. It is a pool of ignorance. No one knows anything, but we are going to organize a Bible study. Come on. You know, everybody is invited. Let's sit around in a circle and let's discuss these things.

“...saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”²⁰

That is ultimately what you come to. Well, you know what? We really... we better not try to get too precise in our doctrine, because it causes division. Really what we are here for is just let's be united.

All of this was going on in Isaiah's day. And no one got it, that those very sacrifices that they were taking to the temple every day and the ceremonies that they were going through, they were really in a way of worship that they were still lost, like people today. Some getting up. They were probably disappointed today if they got up to see the sunrise, because it was hidden. But they follow suit, get up front. Everybody is talking about Christ today. Everybody is talking about his resurrection. But sit down with them and ask them, “What do these things mean?” Really, with regard to the Scriptures. And you are going to find the same ignorance. Well, we can't get too detailed.

Christ was pretty detailed. He said, “I lay down my life for my sheep and they hear my voice and they follow me.” He died according to the Scriptures. We better find out what

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Romans 9:13.

¹⁹ Isaiah 29:12.

²⁰ Ibid.

the Scriptures have to say about him, not only who he is, but why he came and what he accomplished and where he is now. Everything else, dear friends, is nothing but religiosity. And it is a form of a drug, a drink that has people in a deep slumber, entertain them on the road to hell. Such is the case. But God, but God.

And that is quite a woe when you think about it.

“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel.”²¹

You will not hide behind a profession. You will not hide behind many activities that you consider to be just and right before a holy God unless it is the work of Christ. Then you have the very wrath of God encamped against you. That is what verse three is about.

“And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit.”²²

That is talking about séance. It is kind of weird when you read it. Imagine going and sitting in a dark room and all of the sudden this voice comes out of nowhere and you don't know where it is and it is a voice of the dead. That is how they are being described. The very way that they worship in deadness is how they will die, in deadness.

“...out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.”²³

Where, then, is your boasting? You know, a whisper is something that somebody has brought low. Right now there is cries, you know. It is easy to profess. It is easy... but in the day of God's judgment when light is brought to it, unless you have a righteousness or I have a righteousness that is just as equal to as God's own and that is only through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of your pomp and circumstance will be brought to the dust as nothing.

Well, there is a lot more here, but, Lord willing, we will pick up on that next time.

Apart from Christ there is no hope.

“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!”²⁴

All right, brother Mike.

²¹ Isaiah 29:1-2.

²² Isaiah 29:3-4.

²³ Isaiah 29:4.

²⁴ Isaiah 29:1.

