

Isaiah 58

Isaiah 58:1-14 (NKJV)

1 "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins.

2 Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God.

3 'Why have we fasted,' *they say*, 'and You have not seen? *Why* have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers.

4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as *you do* this day, To make your voice heard on high.

5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD?

6 "*Is* this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?

7 *Is it* not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, '*Here I am.*' "If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

10 *If* you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall *be* as the noonday.

11 The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

12 Those from among you Shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

13 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *From* doing your

pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking *your own* words,
¹⁴ Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

First I need to take care of some business. Last week I extended the promises of peace in scripture to the family. And that was wrong. Jesus said as much. God does not promise peace to the family. But He does promise peace to His people in any family. And proper submission to God inside a family often **leads** to peace. But it clearly is not promised. OK, with that said...

Our topic for this morning is "**when the outside looks good and the inside is not.**" Or "**how we deceive ourselves by our insincere devotion.**"

Do you know what one of the **hardest things to do** in our lives is? It is to **tell the truth** about ourselves. And what is one of the most important things for **our Christian discipleship**? **To tell the truth about ourselves.**

Why is this so hard?

It is easy to answer. It is hard because none of us wants to look at ourselves in the mirror and say, You are a coward. You are a fool. You are selfish. You are greedy. You have no self control. You are a liar. You are sexually immoral. You do not trust God. You are afraid of losing the approval of people. You are a worrier. You are sluggard. You are a glutton. You sow dissention. You are a gossip. You are a slanderer.

We will go through amazing mental gymnastics to find a way around our true guilt. And sometimes it works with those people around us. We can trick them into believing what we want to believe about ourselves. But God is never fooled.

Last week we looked at the person that **God invites into His presence**. He who is broken and he who is bowed is he who is blessed. What we see this week are the imposters. They are the people who **look** like they are broken and **look** like they are bowed. But at the end of the day they resent God because God does not give them the response they are trying to earn from Him. The difference between those who **are** humble and those who **act** humble is infinite with God. The first person is one who does something **to please God** and is satisfied with the knowledge that **God is pleased**. The second person wants **to act** like he wants to please God but he is doing what he is doing to get some kind of other payoff from God. To God those two

people are nothing alike. One has the disease of Christianity and the other simply has the symptoms.

Now we always want to see ourselves as the true and noble person.

Sometimes we hope beyond hope that good things are true of us. And praise God, in His people there truly is **improvement**. There is positive change.

There is **sanctification**.

But, as always, we need to ask ourselves the hard questions. If God treated me like He treated Job, if I was faithful to God and did the right thing even though it was hard to do, and I get rewarded with suffering and anguish, would I still love and trust God? Would the satisfaction of knowing that I pleased God be reward enough? Or is my **right living** an attempt to get out of God **what I really want**, and what I really want has very little to do with pleasing Him? If we knew our hard obedience would not be rewarded with a payoff in this life, would we think that maybe we would do it differently if we just had the chance? This is the stuff that gets close to home. It gets under the skin of our Sunday best.

What we will see this morning is what God **wants** and what God **is never fooled by**. And we do well to look at our own motives to see where we stand.

1 "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins.

It isn't hard at all to know the intent of this passage. God is calling the people out. God is looking through the façade to the real heart of the people. And for the most part He is not at all pleased.

Have you ever been angry with how gruff someone may have been in pointing out your sin? Well we better be careful with that. Because, as we have seen in Isaiah, God does not seem to care much about our feelings when we are stubbornly refusing to do what He says. The prophet's **clarity** is more important than His **tact** when **God's honor** is on the line.

So we know what is coming. God is going to call out the sins of Judah. And guess what? They aren't going to **look** like sins. They are going to **look** like religion. They are going to **look** like devotion. They are going to **look** spiritual. But they aren't.

Isaiah 58:2 (NKJV)

2 Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God.

Now I understand sarcasm. It is my favorite form of communication. A few minutes ago, when I was studying this, Ruth told me that last week in Sunday

School when I asked her if **anything I said helped her** she said with a very sincere look on her face, “why no”. She told me last night she was being sarcastic. I thought it was funny when I thought she was serious. It was even more funny when she told me it was sarcastic.

What we see here is the sarcasm of God. They seek Me daily. They delight to know My ways. As a nation, which would be better read **AS IF**, they did righteousness. That is the point. Here are a people pretending to be righteous. They act like what they really want to do is what God wants. But they have a very odd way of showing it.

He is describing sheer hypocrisy and duplicity. They are **religious**. But they are not **spiritual**. They pretend all the right things. But they are not real. If you asked them, do you love God? Do you delight in God? Do want to please God? They would say, oh yes. I do. But then sit in the bushes and watch what they do with their time and money and energy and you see the real self that is in rebellion against God.

³ **'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'**

Here are these followers of God. Look how sincere their question. Why aren't you taking notice of the acts of service we are doing? Why don't you give us the approval and blessing we are after? It is like you don't even notice all this good stuff we are doing for you. What is wrong with you after all? You are not producing what a good God would produce for us.

And in the next sentence we see why.

"In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers.

Here might be another good refrigerator quote. **God knows what you are up to.** You might fool everyone. They might be taken in by your feigned sincerity and your tears and your good works. But God has a terrible habit. **He looks at the facts.** And the facts are the undoing for all of our charades. The facts undo all the lies we hope to believe about ourselves.

This is what the people were doing. They were taking advantage of their laborers. Now this does not mean they were expecting that people would work hard for the wages they were being paid. That is not exploitation. It means that they were taking an unfair advantage of the laborers in some way. Now look at this. These people are fasting. They are depriving themselves of food for God. They are making themselves suffer. But they absolutely refuse to value the thing that God values. They absolutely refuse to obey in the one area that is most important to them.

4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.

Fasting is a wonderful thing when a person so wants to be heard by God that he will spend even those things his body must have in order to be heard by God. Fasting was recommended by Jesus. Going without food is a very good discipline. But sacrifice is never a substitute for obedience. God is never tricked by this slight of hand. He knows what is going on in our hearts and in our heads. God was disappointed in the fast because it was being done for the wrong reason. If these people really wanted to commune with God, if they really wanted to come clean with God, God would have been thoroughly pleased. But no matter what **they pretended**, God knew that was not the case with these people.

God goes on in verse 6 and says what He really wants. And it has not changed.

To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Do you see what He is talking about? He is talking about love. He is talking about taking all the people around you and making **their** best interest **your** interest. It is about seeing needs and meeting them. It is about helping people to find their way out of the bondage of their sin. It is about making it a point to be involved in people's lives to help them break their yokes. It is not about evaluating their yokes and condemning them for having them. It is about getting in their faces and saying I will be the person who will help you if you will have it.

It is not about what we can **get** from a fellowship. It is about what we can **give** for the glory of God. It is not about **meeting our needs** for meaningful involvement. It is about **laying down our lives** to see that the needs of others around us are met. That is true spirituality. It is never about what can I get from others. It is always about what I can contribute. And as long as we live in a sinful world, there will always be the needs of the struggling human.

And what does God say when real spirituality breaks out?

8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He

will say, 'Here I am.' "If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

Do you see what this is all about? It is about relationship. Does your heart long for the closeness of the Lord? It is found when you allow Him to guide you to **caring most** about **that which He cares most about**. That is when your light really shines. That is when spiritual healing happens. That is when God's glory breaks out. When **you** care about what **God** cares about and apply yourself to meeting the needs of those He loves.

Here it is. Here is what our soul craves. But we don't get it by pursuing it. We get it by pursuing God and what God loves. We get it by caring about everything but that which we feel we must have. We get it by dying to ourselves and living for God's will.

I assume we are here because we want God's best for our lives. We are here because we want closeness to God. We are here because we want to cry out to God for His presence and we want Him to respond by saying "I am here". We are told here what it takes. We need to love people like He does. We have to put ourselves second in this equation. We must be willing to spend ourselves for the best interest of others. Instead of looking at others for **what we can get**, and evaluating them by **what they don't provide for us**, we look at them for what we can provide. We look to be the one to help to set them free. That is what Isaiah is saying here. He is saying stop being the problem and start being the solution.

¹⁰ If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday.

This is the same God as the God in days of Isaiah. What God cares about is people. We can do all kinds of spiritual things toward God, but if we do not extend ourselves to meet the needs of those around us, we really aren't in tune with what God really wants. But when we start extending ourselves, when we start going beyond our borders, when we care so much about the needs of others that we are willing to spend our comfort to meet their needs, then we are barking up the right tree.

¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

We have a tendency to want God to first satisfy us before we reach out to meet the needs of others. But sometimes it is the other way around. He wants us to display that we really understand and appreciate His love for us and to reach out to others, willing to spend whatever we have for their benefit. And that is

when God pours out His blessings. He shows us which way to go. He satisfies our souls, even though nothing else might be satisfied. He strengthens us from the inside out. He nourishes us completely. We will be like a well watered garden or a spring that never gives out, even in the middle of a drought.

That is what He is promising. But we need to get this. It is not when we are looking to get stuff for ourselves that we get this. It is not when we are telling God that He must give us what we need or we will not be happy with Him. This all comes when we say, I am willing to be spent by you for the needs of others. I welcome the price that must be paid for the benefit of those you love. I will not resent it. I will not resist it. I will welcome it.

12 Those from among you Shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

It looks like this is talking about the city of Jerusalem. When His people do right, they become the heroes. Oh we all know what it is like to do the right thing for the right reason. There is an effect. But sometimes it seems miniscule. Sometimes we wonder if we are really accomplishing anything at all. But God says we are. When we are faithful to Him, when we love others like we love ourselves, when we say no to our flesh's longing and yes to the will of God, we are building up His kingdom. And only He knows how much we are really accomplishing. We are found to be repairing and restoring.

13 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words,*

We started with false fasting. It is doing a thing that **could be very right**, but the reason for doing it is very wrong. It is that which God **did not demand**, but people did it for a show about loving God. And it was all false.

Now He talks about that which He did **strictly demand**. And what did the people do? They compared their pleasure and God's pleasure and they said, you know what? I want **my** pleasure. The issue isn't really about pleasure as much as it is the contrast between **that which pleases God** and **that which we choose instead** of that. Let me ask you. Who of us ever chose something opposed from what God said because **we thought it would make us miserable**? Most of the sin we choose we choose because there is some pleasure in it for us. And pleasure isn't the issue. Unbelief is the issue. Lack of faith is the issue. God promises us pleasure. God promises us wonderful

things. But we must wait for it. We must trust for it. It isn't that He is against it. He has provided a lot of wonderful things that provide us pleasure. We have food. We have sleep. We have marriage. We have friendship. We have His body, We have thousands of wonderful gifts that God has given us. But that never seems to be enough. We tend to always want that one more thing that God **has not given to us** for our pleasure. But we want that pleasure anyway.

Christ is calling us here into the true and lasting Sabbath that is in Him. The rest that we find in Christ that starts now **imperfectly** and extends into eternity **in perfection**.

And what does that rest consist of? It consists of turning away from the things that God does not allow, that God does not provide. But we know that if we pursue it in the flesh, if we pursue it against His will, we can obtain it. True spirituality says **no** to all that. And true spirituality becomes satisfied in that which God **has** given us. We call living the life that God has called us to a **delight, honorable**.

Living this life of rest means abandoning things.

not doing your own ways,

Nor finding your own pleasure,

Nor speaking *your own words*,

This doesn't mean **not doing anything**. It just means not doing those things that are **opposed** to that which God wants. The ways we take are either **His** or **ours**. His ways have lots of good stuff in them. It is full of things we can give thanks for. It is full of the pleasures God designed us for. But we have that horrible tendency of wanting our own. We want that which springs from our flesh.

We want to find **our own** pleasures. They are pleasures. They feel good. They give temporary solace of some kind. They grant euphoria, or escape, or status, or strokes, or anything temporary. Really, who doesn't want this? Whose flesh does not crave something that God forbids?

And I think it is interesting that it says, **not speaking your own words**. Your own ways, your own pleasure, your own words. All of this comes from the flesh. It is the world. It is life apart from God, independent of God. It is life from the "**I am and there is none besides**".

Look what James tells us. He is talking about the same kind of thing.

James says **James 4:1-10 (NKJV)**

¹ Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they not come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members?

(Do you wonder where church conflict or marriage conflict or relational conflict comes from? Where does the lack of peace come from? Here doctor James tells us. It comes from the desires we have that arise from within our flesh. It comes from wanting what we want and not running all our wants past the authoritarian sieve of God's Word. After all, we have **our own words**. We have **our own opinions**. We have **our own theories**. We have **our own excuses**. What does God know anyway? And that is where the trouble starts, when we start thinking because we think **we should** have something, that means we have **a right** to it. Since we cannot imagine ourselves **not having it**, that means **we must have it**.)

² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

(James is telling us that we aren't getting this stuff because God sure isn't going to give it to us. What **we want** is not what **He wants**. It has nothing to do with laying down our lives for the best interest of those around us. It has nothing to do with giving to meet a need even though we may get nothing in return. No. The wars all come when we set our hearts on something **we want to get**. And we rationalize and justify it. But God isn't going to give it because we are wanting something outside of His will. We are wanting something He does not want for us.)

⁴ Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Do you see what James does here? He turns this self seeking spirit of pursuit into what it really is. Idolatry. And then he defines idolatry as friendship with the world. Idolatry and friendship with the world is having more comradery with the world system than with the Kingdom of God. Living for satisfaction and status and pleasure and comfort and any other thing that all the human beings **that surround us live for** rather than living solely for one thing... to please God.

⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Here we have again the same message we see in Isaiah. God is jealous. He takes idolatry personally. It raises God's passion. He is angry when we give ourselves to the world. He is angry when we chose other loves than His. But

there is always a path into His favor. And it is always bowing. It is humility. God is always willing to extend His grace to humility, to surrender, to confession, to repentance. So He continues.

7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.

9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Here we have what we must all do. Here is the attitude we must all have. And it isn't hard. We only need to do one thing. We need to tell the truth and nothing but the truth about our past and present. We need to confess that God is right and we are wrong. We need to allow the sinfulness of our sin to work its way into our thinking and feeling. That is what humility does. That is bowing. That is all it takes to convince us that **all we need is God**. What **He** is to us is better than any **friendship with the world**. What He offers is better than ...

**Doing our own ways,
or finding our own pleasure,
or speaking *our own* words,**

And look at where we will arrive if we will submit to God's plan.

14 Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

God is never dismal to the repentant. He always holds out hope. He always holds out promise. He always offers what our souls truly crave.

Many of our paths have been leading us in steady direction. We can look back and we can see that God was disillusioning us with what the world had to offer. He was preparing us for something much better. He was preparing us to be ready to delight ourselves in God. He was preparing us to see through doing **our own ways** and **finding our own pleasure** and **believing the ideas that originated in our own heads**. He was preparing us to delight in God, to find our satisfaction in our relationship with Him. And it is **then** that He can bless us with the best He has to offer. It is **only then** that He can lay eternity in our laps. It is then that He can lavish on us His goodness in a way that will only do us good.

So where are we trying to do good things so we can get those things we demand from God? Where do we look good but we are not good? Where do we depend upon **Doing our own ways**,

**or finding our own pleasure,
or speaking *our own* words,**

Maybe these are the reason our souls have so little delight in God. To the degree that we will allow God's word and God's spirit to break us and to humble us we will find that we will grow in our delight in God. And we will find that **His** blessings and **His** gifts are all we need.