

When God Hates Your Worship

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Bible Text: Isaiah 1:10-20

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Our text this morning is Isaiah 1, verses 10-20.

“10 Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: 11 ‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?’ Says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. 12 When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword’; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Dear heavenly Father, dear God, I thank you for your Word. I thank you, dear Lord, for the beauty and for the power of it, dear God, for your holiness. Dear Lord, we are Sodom, we are Gomorrah. We have turned from you, dear Lord, and we have walked away from your words. We have followed after the world and we have loved its ways. Please let us hear your Words, dear God. Please let us repent.

In Isaiah 1:10-20 we learn from Judah and God’s commentary what it means to come before God in corporate worship; it shows how we ought to prepare ourselves for corporate worship and it helps to understand many of the details of corporate worship from God’s perspective. There is nothing more wonderful than the nearness of God and

this passage really is a passage that speaks of the nearness of God and the breaking of it and how it happens to a people to no longer have the nearness of God but yet they go through all of the rituals and all of the duties of religion. You know, God has always made a way for his people to be near him. When God was with the children of Israel in the wilderness, he made a tabernacle and what was the tabernacle all about? It really was about one thing: God can be near you; he can speak to you; he can show himself to you. And in the temple, it was the very same thing, that God desires to be close to his people. There is nothing more wonderful than to be near to God.

This happened to a family in our church just this week who experienced a great sadness and the father came to prayer and testified to the nearness of God. It was such a beautiful thing to hear that because his words just spoke of the fact of the nearness of God and the strength, the beauty, how one can sorrow on the one hand but on the other hand, at the very same time, rejoice in the Lord.

This passage of Scripture draws all of these issues together of the nearness of God or the lack of it, the duties of worship and what affects it. So, it's a very helpful passage. We come together every week to worship God and so this passage here is before us to help us understand things, to remind us of things that maybe we've forgotten, to help us understand the worship of God.

Here is one of the critical issues that exists as the Lord is speaking to Judah at this time, with these words and it's really revealed in the last few phrases of Isaiah 1 and that is that this was a garden that had no water. There was the form of worship but the water and the nourishment of it wasn't there so it's dead. It's a picture really of how a faithful Bible regulated worship can be an abomination before God, how you can do all the right things in worship, you can have all the right sacrifices lined up. In fact, you can go beyond what Scripture commands and not just bring calves, not just bring cattle but fed cattle; you're going to go beyond it. How it is that a people can do all the right things on paper, to do it by the book, and yet have completely empty kind of worship. This is always an issue with the remnant. You can keep the Sabbath, you can do all the right things but in the heart, in the home, in the shop, there are sins of commission and omission that destroy the worship of God as it exists among the people of God.

So the problem with Israel was that it became a day for their religion but it was not a day that reflected their hearts and their lives on the other six days of the week. So, the problem with their worship wasn't the worship, it was what happened before the worship and that's what we find here. This passage has a very clear focus on corporate worship and it encompasses actually the three categories of worship that God has provided for his people. There are three categories of worship: there is personal worship; there is family worship; and there is corporate worship. These are the ways that God has given his people to draw near to him. Think about that: that God would provide such an elaborate and practical way for his people to draw near to him, to being near him in the same way that the children of Israel were able to be in the tabernacle. Now, the Lord has given these ways of drawing near to him.

So the focus is corporate worship in the passage but when you drill down into the meaning of the passage and what it actually is saying, it implies private worship and what happens in your family and really your whole life outside the congregation. It includes your work as worship. It includes your words as worship. It includes absolutely everything so what we find is corporate worship actually becomes a center that sums up everything in your life and if you disconnect everything in your life from corporate worship, it's an abomination to God. What we find here in this passage is that everything is tied together with our corporate worship.

You have an outline before you and I'm going to try to touch on six things that are there before you. First of all: how a religious people can go through the motions of worship and still be like Sodom, that's verse 10. Secondly: how biblically ordered worship can become an offense to God, that's verses 11-15. Thirdly: how an offensive people to God can repent, that's verses 16 and 17. Four: how a repenting people can be cleansed, verse 18. Five: how a cleansed and obedient people will be blessed, verse 19. But how a disobedient people will be destroyed, number six in verse 20. But the hope that there is for God's people is also found in this passage, "Thou your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

While we're talking about worship, I just want to register a reality: we can so easily criticize the innovative, pragmatic worship that exists in our day, that has become more like a circus; where the church has become more like an entertainment center rather than a place to bring your whole life before God; where the music is hyped; where worship leaders are playing on your emotions and trying to bring you up and take you down somewhere; where there are video clips and plays and manipulation and hand-shaking in the middle of worship and puppet shows and clown shows and jugglers and mime and liturgical dance and drama and even antics, bringing motorcycles onto platforms and all kinds of things to just grip your imagination. Or, the whole elaborate Roman Catholic sham of trying to find every way to tweak your imagination to get you interested because you're not interested and you're going to need a candle to get interested. You're going to need the guy on the motorcycle to ride up there or the guy that bungee jumps into the sermon.

We can talk all day long about the unregulated, bankrupt, worldly, entertainment driven worship that exists in the church today but that's not what this passage is about. It's about a people who have attempting to regulate their worship with a level of seriousness and didactic precision that really would take your breath away when you take a look at it. So, what about regulated worship? What about worship where the elements are prescribed by God? Where the forms of worship are fulfilled? That's the kind of worship that we're talking about here in this passage of Scripture. So, it's really a lot more about us than it is about those bad guys out there who are hang-gliding into their worship services and bouncing beach balls around the congregation. It's about a people who are thoughtfully, carefully engaged in worship but yet God hates it as we have already seen in the text.

Now, before we launch into this text, just a very brief word about how we ought to think about Old Testament worship because this is definitely a commentary about Old

Testament worship and I want to give you some interpretive principles here on how do you interpret Old Testament passages about worship. Just the story is this: the forms of Old Testament worship are fulfilled in Christ while the heart and the principles remain. Christ abrogates the shedding of blood and bulls and goats and all the elaborate ceremony of Old Testament worship but the heart of worship really remains the same. In the New Covenant we still, though, need a sacrifice as we did in the Old Covenant and that sacrificial lamb is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Covenant, we still need a priest and that priest is our faithful and compassionate high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Covenant, we still need a temple and the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the New Covenant, we need a lamp and that lamp is the Word of God and also the light of the world himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Covenant, the priests need clothing. In the New Covenant, a kingdom of priests, we're all become priests, are clothed in the robes of righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Covenant, you were circumcised. In the New Covenant and in the Old Covenant, you came with a circumcised heart.

So, the heart, the principle of Old Testament worship is fulfilled in a New Covenant people. While the ceremonies are abrogated and ceremonial law is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, there is still much we can learn from Old Testament worship. One of the most important things that we can learn from the worship principles that we have here today is: "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." We need to turn to him and repent. This is a great privilege that we have here. It's to look back and say, "O Lord, come and help me. Forgive me of my sins."

Let's begin in the text. First of all, verse 10, how a religious people can go through the motions of worship but still be like Sodom. "Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah." We're confronted first of all, with these two phrases: "the word of God" and "the law of God." The word and the law. When we read that, we just have to recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill." What the Apostle Paul said, "The law is good if it is used lawfully," or what Solomon said in Proverbs 28, "He who turns his ear away from hearing the law, even his prayer will be an abomination." It is a loving Father who gives his law. His law allows you to know him and to draw near, to think the thoughts after him. You know, when you're close to someone, you think the same thoughts. If you've been married for a long time, you know how that works. Your wife looks at you and she says, "I know exactly what you're thinking." And you say, "Tell me." And she tells you and you say, "Oh, that was exactly what I was thinking."

To know someone is to know how they think and to anticipate it and this is how we know God is by knowing his law. So we can see how his mind works, what he thinks is good and what he actually hates. In order to know him, we know him, we're close to him when we learn his law. So, there is this first reminder to pay attention to the law, to hear and give ear. These are the same verbs that were used in verse 2 when Moses is quoting the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 to hear and to grasp the gravity of the situation, that there is a prophecy that is being fulfilled. Moses, way back, prophesied that this would

happen to Israel, that their worship would become dead and unholy and really an abomination before God.

It's interesting that God goes first of all, to the representative heads of Israel, "you rulers of Israel." He speaks to the rulers first. God always deals with representative heads. He deals with fathers as heads of households; he deals with heads of state; and in the church he deals with elders. So, he first of all goes to the head. He speaks to the rulers first and then he speaks to the people. What that means for me is that your elders have got to pay attention to this first. We've got to process this ourselves and ask ourselves what dead worship might exist, what disconnection there might be from our lives to the praises that we sing on Sunday. It starts with us. Judgment does begin in the house of the Lord but here the judgment begins with the heads of Israel.

Then, after dealing with the rulers, then the people. "You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah." Isaiah, speaking the Word of God, is doing something very interesting because he's speaking of Sodom and Gomorrah here. We just read in verse 9, "Unless the Lord of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah." He was just speaking about Sodom and Gomorrah and he's saying, "It's the remnant that made you not be destroyed like Sodom." And then, I don't know if this is sarcasm or what it is but it sounds a little bit like sarcasm, then he calls them "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah." There are many references, I believe there are around 27 references outside of the book of Genesis where Sodom is mentioned, but the only difference between Sodom and Gomorrah and Judah, and I'm going to add Israel, is that Judah will not be destroyed in the same way that Sodom and Gomorrah will be destroyed. The difference is in God's mercy on Judah; he extends his grace upon whom he will.

We know that Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented if miracles had been done in them, that's what Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew. They would've repented if they had seen them, but God chose not to. He had determined to make Sodom and Gomorrah a picture of his wrath and there are many pictures of God's wrath in the Bible that really give a premonition and information about what final judgment will be all about. But Israel is not going to be wiped out in exactly the same way as Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ezekiel 16 speaks of the judgment on the southern kingdom and he says this: "your elder sister is Samaria who dwells with her daughters to the north of you. Your younger sister who dwells to the south of you is Sodom and her daughters." And then he says: "you became more corrupt than they in all their ways." And he says: "look at this, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom and she was and her daughter had pride and fullness of food and abundance of idleness. Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor or the needy and they were haughty and committed abomination before me, therefore, I took them away as I saw fit." I just want you to notice the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are very much like the sins of Israel that are going to be identified in point number three: how a people ought to do good.

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were exceedingly grave and God is speaking of them here but there is even hope for those who are like Sodom. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow." This is the great hope. This is the gospel in this passage. This passage is primarily about worship that is stripped of the true gospel. There is this false gospel around that says walk an aisle, pray a prayer, it doesn't really matter how your life is lived. This is a complete affront to that false gospel because what you find is both repentance and fruit in keeping with your repentance. This is gospel worship that's spoken of here and what God is saying at the very beginning is that to have this kind of worship is like Sodom. You become a sister of Sodom when you worship like this. It's very grave to so disfigure the gospel, to disconnect worship from life, to disconnect faith from works and to say that one just has to go through some particular religious duties. There is something greater there. It's actually the greatness of a heart that longs to obey God.

So then, there are these accusations that are brought in verses 10-15 and this is explaining how a biblically ordered worship can become an offense to God, this is point two in your outline. There are these 11 graphic illustrations. We like to think of worship in terms of "is it contemporary or is it traditional worship?" God doesn't think that way. God thinks in terms of this: is it acceptable worship or is it unacceptable worship? Is it true or is it bankrupt? Is it worshiping in spirit and in truth or is it just an outward show that's completely disconnected from Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday?

So these accusations are to define God's position and disposition about the unacceptable worship. Now, I've written down 11 graphic illustrations that are in this section but I want us to grasp the terminology that describes really the heart of God and why his wrath would be so against fake worship. You know, people all the time say, "You know, the people in the church are fake and they're not happy about it." Well, you can never get more unhappy about fake worship than God.

First of all, he says it's worthless. He says, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the Lord." It was just worthless. He's saying: "Why are you even doing this? If you don't really believe me, why don't you go do something else?"

Secondly, he says he's fed up. He says, "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle." He's just fed up with it. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 15, "In vain they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." And the Lord is speaking about this same matter that you're just doing the doctrines of men, you're just doing it for yourself. And he's fed up with it.

3. He has no delight in it. "I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats." Worship has to do with delighting God, to bringing delight to God. When we gather together, what are we doing? Well, we're bringing delight to him. We are as sons and daughters sitting, standing, singing to bring delight to his soul. Somehow the sweet aroma of the sacrifices of his people are a delight to him and he loves it. Well, he either loves it or he doesn't love it and in this case he's saying, "I do not delight." This is a reflection of

what we read in 1 Samuel 15:22 where Samuel said, “Has the Lord great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams, for rebellion is the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” There is no delight in heartless, obedience-free worship. You just can’t show up and expect your worship to be acceptable if there has been a neglect.

4. I’ve not asked for this. Verse 12, “When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?” He’s not saying: “I didn’t ask for the sacrifices” because he did ask for the sacrifices. He said: “I didn’t ask for it to be done like this. You’re trampling the courts. This is a game. You’re just walking around and you’re actually trampling everything that I intended for this. Yes, the floor is there, the walls are there, the curtains are there, the labor is there, everything is there. The sacrifices are there but what you’re doing there, I did not ask you to do that. I asked you to come with a whole heart.”

5. He says cease and desist. He says, “Bring no more futile sacrifices.” Don’t do it. Just don’t do it anymore. It’s better that you don’t.

6. He says it’s an abomination. This is God’s reaction, “Incense is an abomination to Me,” he says. I mean, incense was commanded to be brought into the worship of God but in the incense was meant to be a delightful aroma to the Lord but incense offered by people who really don’t care, is an abomination to him. What is sweet smelling aroma to God? What is the incense that delights his soul because as we gather together, we really are here to delight him. We really are to be a sweet aroma. He has gathered us to do that. Imagine that: that he’s brought us here to do that one thing and what a sweet thing it is when we’re able to do that all together.

But what is a sweet smelling aroma? Well, it’s the satisfaction of God in the redemption of sinners. It’s the fact that his wrath has been satisfied because there is a circumcised heart and there is a sacrifice that has been given for those sins. It’s his pleasure in the healing of the wounded. It’s his pleasure in the drawing of children and making of sons and daughters and adopting them. It’s his pleasure in having true sons and daughters who love him from the heart, who walk about the world and their eyes are lifted up toward heaven. They are calibrating off of him in everything. In all of their conversations, their desire is to be aware of him. It’s the sweet smelling aroma of the wrath of God being satisfied and the gentleness and the mercy and the happiness of God toward his children whose sins have been atoned for because he’s bringing many sons to glory.

I believe that incense as it goes up before God in its beautiful form, that delights him. It encompasses so many things about our lives when we turn toward him, when we trust in his blood. When we don’t obsess about our sins but we actually recognize he has forgiven our sins, he’s freed us from the curses of the law. While on the one hand we can see our sin and be sorrowful, we are set free from those curses. We know it and you can see it on our faces. These are the delightful sacrifices of aromatic incense that God has for us. It’s delight in those whose hearts delight in the Lord.

How much pleasure does God get in the healing of his children? How much pleasure does he get in their redemption when his wrath is satisfied? Have you ever had your wrath satisfied? It's a very sweet thing to abandon wrath and to have mercy. To have wrath at one point but then to have mercy, it's a very sweet thing and this is what is happening with incense.

7. He says he cannot endure it. "The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting." That's verse 13. So, he says he cannot endure these scheduled events. You know, God does design the schedule of your life, that there are particular events in your life. There is preaching, there is prayer, there is singing. These are things that happen when God's people gather together. There is a whole day set aside for the Lord called the Sabbath day. Your schedule. And what he's saying is that "you can have your schedule perfect but I cannot endure the meeting when these other things are happening in your life."

8. He says he hates it. Verse 14, "Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates."

9. They are troubling to him. "They are a trouble to Me," so troubling that he is "weary of bearing them." He is just so weary of the troubles from it.

And then he says he ignores it. He speaks of spreading out hands. You know, "When you spread out your hands," verse 15, "I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear." There is nothing wrong with the spreading out of their hands. There are many outward expressions of worship that are legitimate in Scripture but when there is no true heartfelt repentance that is evidenced by a life that is changing, then it is ignored.

Our outward expressions are thought to be a sign of righteousness and you can look at people and say, "Oh, they must be so righteous." Possibly. Could be. But we should not be making any judgments about the outward appearances and the outward expressions of worship because it goes much deeper than that. Anyone can raise their hands. We probably are people who should be raising our hands more. We should probably be expressing ourselves more beautifully before God in all of our worship, not just when we're here. But he brings up the spreading out of the hands. This is a normal part of worship.

And then it is condemned. You have bloody hands, "Your hands are full of blood." This doesn't mean that these people were serial killers, by the way. Their hands being full of blood doesn't mean that they were going around murdering people. This is a figure of speech. It means that they are killing true righteousness. They appear one way in the assembly but they kill godliness outside of the assembly. They want to keep their reputations up; they want to appear godly. They like the respectful meetings in the marketplaces if they're leaders. They don't mind lying; they don't mind cheating on their

taxes; they don't mind stealing from their employers or employees as long as they can have an emotional, genuine experience of worship when they come into the congregation.

This whole thing has to do with what your life is like on the outside. This is why David said in Psalm 15, "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved." He's talking about life outside the sanctuary that affects God's disposition to you inside the sanctuary. Backbiting, doing wrong to your neighbor, it's all these kinds of things. In other words, the worship here is really loaded with everything out there. It's not something separate necessarily. It is separate in a way but it's not completely separate.

Now, I just want to draw out a few thoughts from this. First of all: I want to address the whole matter of compartmentalization of your life. There is this very popular idea about worship and it's actually a very wrong idea. Here's the idea: if you come in to worship and your heart is right, then your worship is acceptable. In other words, if you can come in to worship and somehow you feel that your heart is right, then it's acceptable worship. It can be a compartmentalized thing. It's not always, but it can be nothing but a compartmentalization of your life where you end up having some kind of an experience with God but it's very isolated. It doesn't really get outside the walls; it's a feeling that you get. And you can get feelings like this so easy. All you have to do is play the right music. All you have to do is order it in such a way to jerk the emotions. You know, you can listen to the most defiling song lyrically and it can move your heart to tears. It can move you emotionally and this is one of the great sins of modern worship. Where people use music to manipulate people to have an experience here when there is no reality out there and you have whole churches based on this wherein thousands of people are gathered and their emotions are so moved.

Many years ago, there was a young girl that came to our church, a dear friend of ours, and she came in here and she was used to seeing elaborate musical explosions and smoothings and things like that in worship and she said, "You know, you really have to work for worship around here. It's kind of hard to worship around here." What she meant was: I'm used to having my emotions taken to the top of the mountain, soaring and then thrown down in a swoon and then brought up and then soothed again by the music. Well, you can do that with music. We could do that to you every week, by the way. We could manipulate you and make you think something that isn't even true about yourself.

This whole idea of compartmentalization is really important. They were doing something religious thinking it was acceptable but their heart was disconnected with it. One of our dear friends, Jeff Pollard, a few years ago gathered my family and our interns in his living room and he was telling us stories about his former life as a rock-and-roll star and after that as a pastor and leading worship. He tells a story about a youth group that he was

leading and he said the music was phenomenal. The harmonies were beyond imagination; the roof would lift off. It was the most intense, passionate worship using the very best lyrical renditions of songs. He tells about how it was just amazing and how it was so loved by the kids. Then, what he said was that during the time their hearts seemed to be turned toward God and then those kids would go home and they'd dishonor their parents, they'd kick the dog and yell at their siblings and they'd turn the television on and watch some stupid video or get enraptured in their pornography. While their hearts were so engaged, so moved, so taken to the heights and the depths and the soothings that the music provided but their lives were never changed. So he said I'm not doing this anymore. I'm not doing it anymore. So he stopped.

But this whole idea of the compartmentalization of your life is the reality of Judah and their worship. They had all their ducks in a row; they were doing it by the book. They were coming in and something was happening to them in the time of worship but when they walked out, there was no change in their lives. They were giving lip service. The principle here is that your worship is no better than your life. If you want your worship to be acceptable, then Monday morning is where you begin and then you build towards this time. Or you have lived a gospel life of recognition of your sin and embracing the greatness of the mercies of Jesus Christ as your high priest as he forgives you of all of your sins and you walk in the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ and your life is saturated with the gospel. You don't have this false gospel that's being preached today that you have this moment of emotional effect but your life isn't changed. That's a false gospel.

We often judge our worship in terms of how we feel. This is a wrong measure. The first judgment that we make about the worship is how did it make me feel and that makes it acceptable. Have you ever had somebody ask you, maybe many of you not lately but maybe in other lives, you would walk out of church and people would say, "How was the worship?" Have you ever been asked that question? "How was the worship?" "Oh, it was so great!" Well, what that meant was: the highs were high, the lows were low and the mids were smooth. That's what it meant and you just felt so good. "How was the worship?" So, when we ask ourselves that question, "How was the worship?" when we walk out of here, we should be thinking something different than that.

God's pleasure has nothing to do with how you feel or how you act in worship and I want to say that in a qualified way: it can have nothing to do because God does regulate worship. God does specify how worship should be conducted and my perspective is that only God can determine what should be done in worship, not man. We shouldn't be making it up on our own. There are ways that God has no pleasure in how you feel or how you act in worship if these other things are not happening.

You came and sacrificed, he saw many, many, many sacrifices but the question is: does God hate your worship? That's the big question. Not is it contemporary or is it traditional. Is it acceptable or is it not acceptable. The whole hope of worshippers is that "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." I think this means the fine-tuning of worship in the church begins at home. It begins when you think about your boss and how you relate to the people around you. That really is going to define the fine-

tuning of your worship and it really speaks about how regulated worship can be abominable to God. While God does prescribe things and you go by the book, that is not enough at all and you have to ask how much have you polished up your own house to come to a place like this. And yet there is a great disconnect because the heart of obedience is the heart of the matter.

Obedience-free worship is a contradiction to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It isn't New Covenant worship and it wasn't Old Covenant worship. That has not changed one bit. Nobody was ever purified by the blood of bulls and goats physically, their hearts had to be circumcised in the Old Covenant and there is no change at all in that in the New Covenant. New Testament worship is exactly the same.

This doesn't mean that obedience is the only issue that makes worship pleasing to God because there is much that does involve the use of the emotions and true expressions of the mind and the heart and there is a responsiveness that is right in worship. It's right and it's good to respond emotionally. That's not the point that Isaiah is making. He's making one point but you have Psalm 100, "Serve the Lord with gladness." You have, "Make a joyful shout to the Lord all you lands." There is the fear that is spoken of in 2 Kings and Psalm 5, "But as for me, I will come into your house in the multitude of your mercies. In fear of you, I will worship toward your holy temple." There is the rejoicing in Deuteronomy 26; there is the bowing of the head in Genesis 24; there is the confessing of sins in Nehemiah 9:3; there is the tearing of one's robe and shaving one's head in Job 1; there is the bringing of firstfruits in Deuteronomy 26; there is the singing and the music and the beauty of it in 2 Chronicles 29; there is the washing and the anointing of one's self in 2 Samuel 12. All of these things have to do with emotion. They have to do with who you are because we're not just mind, we are emotion. Now, emotion is driven by the mind.

So this is not to say that we should exorcise all emotion out of our worship. That would be just as equally wrong. What is love from the heart? It includes an emotion but it also adds to it a genuine desire to obey.

Number three: God has explained the manifestations of his disposition toward fake worship and he now moves to the remedies. We see, thirdly, how an offensive people can be repentant, verse 16, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil." This is the hope that there is for all of us who have found ourselves disconnecting our worship on the Sabbath with our lives. This can happen to Christians. Yes, it can. So, the hope is that God comes to us and he calls us again, he says, "Wash yourselves." That's the solution. The solution isn't to commit suicide, it's to turn to him. It's not hopeless at all.

He says, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, Says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool." So, these are the remedies here that are spoken of. I'm going to break these down into two categories of remedies: first of all is the whole matter of

cleansing and repentance and putting away. These are for sins of commission. And then the second are: sins of omission; the things that you need to learn how to do better in your life. These are the remedies that he's bringing to us here.

We'll start with the cleansing, the repentance. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean." These are sins of commission. This suggests that you are turning to God in repentance and you're purging yourself of evil. You're putting away evil. He says, "Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil." These are things that you know that you're doing that are evil. Cease, put them aside. It's not just passive. It's certainly not just a feeling, it's actually naming things that need to be put away. So, when we're coming together for worship we should be thinking not how's the worship going to be for me today but we should be primarily thinking what evil needs to be put away from my life, what should I put off. You have this formula in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, where you're putting on and putting off something. This is the Christian life; you're always doing that your whole life long. You're always putting off the vestiges of sin and corruption that is in your life and you never stop from that. You're putting off and you're putting on. You're putting on the new things, killing the old man and nourishing the new man to life.

How possible is it for us to turn to God? It's almost impossible to turn to God. That's why Paul said in Romans 3, "There is none righteous, no not one." There is none who understands. There are none who seek after God. How can you possibly turn? You can only turn if God helps you, if he gives you a heart to turn. We are so dependent. We are so corrupt. We cannot do it on our own. We can't put off or put on without him. We are so child-like in that sense that we need him so much. We even need him to just even show us what needs to be put off and put on because we are so dumb, we are so dull.

One of the lessons of my life now that I'm getting pretty old is this: how stupid am I? How is it that I can't see things? How is it like in the first decade of my Christian life I didn't even see really big glaring things? I didn't even know they were there. How stupid was I? And then in the next decade of my Christian life I look back at things there and I think how stupid was I? I didn't even know that was wrong. I didn't even see it in myself. Maybe I knew it was wrong but I couldn't see it. And in the third and now in the fourth decade of my Christian life, I still feel the same way. How stupid am I? How hopeless I am. I need his help because "there is none righteous, no not one." And we need the mercies of God to help us to turn. That's why Isaiah 55:6 we read, "Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

He can say "wash yourselves and make yourselves clean" because he will abundantly pardon. He does call for repentance and it's a genuine call. I mean, he is really meaning, "Come and be cleansed. I will cleanse you. I will wash you. I will pardon you." He says, "I will abundantly pardon you." Abundantly. Not partially, abundantly.

So this always involves putting off and putting on, this remedy of the problem. You see this first part and these sins of commission, this cleansing of putting on and putting off and then he says, “Learn to do good.” These are the sins of omission; the things that you’re not doing. Maybe you’ve just admitted them because there are always sins of omission with us. So he says, “Learn to do good.” Now, there are things that you are not doing that you should do. Do you agree with that? Can we at least begin with that proposition? There are things in every person’s life in this church, in my life, in Deborah’s life, in Claudia’s life, there are things we are not doing. There are sins of omission and you are no different than I am. This is what he’s addressing here: your sins of omission.

We have to first of all look at the very first word in verse 17, please look at it. The first word in verse 17 “learn.” “Learn to do good.” This implies the need for instruction and a progressive direction. You’re learning. You know, when you’re a child, you’re always learning these marvelous, amazing things. Well, you never quit learning but it’s a process. “When I was child I spoke as a child, I thought as a child,” and you learn to be an adult. That’s the idea here that this is progressive sanctification. You’re learning how. There are specific ways that we need to learn how to do good. I’m just assuming that for all of us. All of us fall short of the glory of God.

Part of the repair that God brings to Judah and he’s bringing to us as a church, is to challenge us in what you need to learn to do good that you’re not doing now. This should be part of our worship. Our worship shouldn’t just be, while it should absolutely include how happy I am in Jesus Christ and his mercy toward me, that must be part of your worship but it can’t just end there. It has to ask: what are my sins of omission? That’s the right way to be in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you have a church and you’re not asking that question, you have to question how faithful that time of worship is before God. It’s appropriate to call people to learn something new and better and different.

So, you have this lifetime of learning to do what is good. This is progressive sanctification. This is such a glorious thing and just saying what I just said, my mind is flooding with many illustrations from my own family life where I’ve seen my children progress and my wife. I wish they’d see as much progress as I see in them but I’m seeing them learn and progress and it’s a beautiful thing to see. That’s what this is: learn. “Learn to do good.” I’m just assuming that we all have things to learn here in this church. Then he lists five of them and I’ll just read them very quickly: seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Those are the things.

When you think about learning to do good in all those areas because I think when he says “learn to do good” it’s a broad category under which there are many relationships and situations that exist. So, he’s calling us to learn to do good in particular ways and particular kinds of circumstances and when you think about doing good, think about the way that God has ordered the world. There is the whole matter of the civil government and the civil realm. There is the matter of the family and there is the matter of the church. Learn to do good in the midst of all these different categories of your life because God

has placed you in all of these areas. And what he says here applies across the board to all the different relationships that you're in.

He begins with seek justice. Seek justice. When you hear that what you think of is political activism or something like that. You're thinking only in the civil realm. Isaiah is not just speaking of justice in the civil realm, he's talking about the biblical understanding of justice which means that you judge something properly. You're thinking rightly about something. That's what justice is. Injustice is thinking wrongly about something. And that means that justice applies to every relationship in your life. You know, this is why the prophet Malachi said, "He is showing you, O man, what the Lord requires of you. But to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." That affects every relationship in your life. Justice applies not just to pleading the cause of someone who might need justice. It includes that but it's broader than that. So don't just isolate it as social justice unless you want to say that every relationship is part of your social justice program. It's looking at something in the right way. Are you thinking rightly? Are you just as a worker? Are you just as a father bringing discipline? Are you just as a child? Are you thinking rightly about these things? Do you weigh things out properly and see them as they really are? Injustice is seeing things wrong and doing the wrong thing as a result of it.

So, this is really a challenge to think about every relationship that you have: is it just? As a father? As a child? As a worker? As a church member? As a member of the state? Are you thinking rightly about these things? And are you doing the right thing with it?

You're aware, some time ago we had a public rebuke against one of the men who had stolen from a church and the big question before those who were involved in that is: what is just? The answer to the question is: God's voice is always the most just voice in the room. Always. It's always the most merciful. It's always the most just. So, in trying to deal with that very difficult situation justly, we had to go to the Word of God and say how does God think about things like this and then how do we learn how to think the same way that he does about it?

Some people said, "Well, the amount is so large that he should just pay back what he stole." And then we looked at Scripture and Scripture actually says if you steal and are caught, there is a certain restitution. If you repent, it's less so in God's economy, it matters if you repent, if you come forward. In the Bible, there is a deterrent placed for theft and what we realized as we were discussing this was that the idea that he would just pay back what he stole, what it does is make a culture in a church, in a society, where it doesn't really matter if you steal. It's like giving an interest free loan if you get caught. If you get caught, you might as well steal because it's just going to be like an interest free loan if they catch you. Is that the kind of culture you want to build in the world? That was the question. But when you read the laws of restitution in Exodus 22, it actually gives a deterrent, a graduated deterrent depending on different circumstances and different kinds of things that are stolen.

So, how do you think about justice? When you're disciplining your children? When you're dealing with difficult matters where you're not thinking rightly about things? And how do you learn how to think justly? This is our only hope, it is our only hope: God's voice is always the most merciful, the most loving voice, the most just, the most compassionate voice. But you have people today who say that 2/3 of this book, the Old Testament, is the mean and angry God and the New Testament is the happy, nice God. That is not true.

He's appealing to justice and then "rebuke the oppressor." The language here has to do with a glaring, unfavorable, almost violent appearance, to rebuke the oppressor. Sort of be aggressive about it. Something most people don't like to think of themselves as doing but this is what this is about. There are various ways of oppression that exist. The first oppressor that you should rebuke is yourself. There are many forms of oppression. In chapter 3 of Isaiah, we learn that children are their oppressors. Children become oppressors in Isaiah. So you rebuke children who are trying to be oppressors. Most children want to run the world, they want to run the house. Have you ever heard of a child-driven home? Where children become oppressors? They need to be rebuked.

"Rebuke the oppressor." You can be an oppressor as a father. You can be an oppressor as an employer. Your wife can oppress you. You can oppress your wife. These are various levels of oppression that exist. So, when you think of oppression, don't just think globally, think locally. Like really locally, all the way down to your own heart.

There are many ways you can rebuke the oppressor. In the civil realm, you can write, you can go to city council meetings, there are all kinds of things that you can do to rebuke oppressors. We could go on and on. You can go to your brother. You know, Jesus said "if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother and then bring your gift." This has to do with the whole matter of relationships where there might be oppression involved.

Then he says "defend the fatherless." How do you defend the fatherless? There are many ways you can defend the fatherless. How about becoming a real father? How about that? That might be one of the most pivotal ways for you to defend the fatherless. There are lots of families where the father has pretty much checked out. He's the biological father but he's not a real father, not the kind that God has defined. Just at the end of this week, Dan and I and some others are going to go to a city and we're going to do over a dozen expositions of fatherhood passages so fathers understand what it means to be fathers. It matters what a father is. It matters when you create fatherlessness. Making divorce difficult defends fatherlessness. Exalting marriage defends fatherlessness. Doing what Job did by inviting the fatherless to his table defends the fatherlessness. There are so many ways that you defend the fatherless.

We live in a fatherless world. Over 20 million children in America right now are living in single parent homes. 90% of runaways come from fatherless homes. 63% of all youth suicides come from fatherless homes. 85% of kids with behavior problems come from

fatherless homes. 80% of anger problems come from fatherless homes. 71% of high school drop-outs come from fatherless homes. 85% of the children in correctional facilities come from fatherless homes. Poverty is the most visible result of fatherlessness and how do you deal with fatherlessness in your society? It starts with being a father but it includes many, many more things. It includes keeping your marriage a place of happiness and a place of holiness; a place of washing with the water of the Word; a place of mercy; a place of living with your spouse in an understanding way. Fatherlessness is dealt with in different ways.

Then “plead for the widow.” How do you plead for the widow? Who do you plead to? Do you plead to the government to take care of the widow? You should plead for the people who are responsible to take care of the widow and the people who are responsible to take care of the widow is the church and the family not the government. In the Old Testament there were tithes, the poor tithe was given for widows and orphans. Giving so that there is proper capacity in churches. I’ve met with churches where they don’t collect money they just kind of move it around a little bit. My advocacy is: collect money. Collect as much as you can so that you have as much flexibility to deal with issues that come up, real needs in people’s lives. We put people in assisted living situations. Part of pleading for the widow is to plead for their children to keep them with them and take care of them personally.

Point 4: how a repenting people can be transformed. Verse 18, “Come now, and let us reason together, Says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” This is the heart of a gospel centered worship. This is a worship that includes repentance. You were as red as crimson and you shall be as white as snow is the power of the gospel for true worshippers who can be cleansed.

Second to the last, 5. how a transformed people will be blessed. Verse 19, “If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land.” What this means is that when there is true worship among the people of God, then there is blessing and abundance. God destroys and he blesses nations on the basis of their worship. It really matters how you worship. You know, this is so reminiscent of Deuteronomy 28, “If you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God and observe carefully all of his commandments which I command you today that the Lord your God will set you high above the nations of the earth.” And then he says, “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.” Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out. That’s the blessing of a true worshipping people. It matters how you worship. You will be blessed.

One thing I don’t want us to miss from this passage is that the welfare of a nation does not primarily depend on Presidents and Senators, it depends on the worship of God. And the welfare of a nation depends on whether there is false worship or true worship. That’s why God says that if it had not been for a very small remnant, we would become like

Sodom and have been made like Gomorrah because the greatest leverage point in this nation is the preservation and the blessing of the church of Jesus Christ. The preservation of the true worship of God is the basis for the preservation of the United States of America. I hope you understand that. It's exactly what Isaiah is saying here. It was true for Judah and it's true for the United States of America. If you think you can lobby your way into righteousness, if you think you can get the capital gains tax just right, if you think that you can get these laws that are more conservative, less Marxist, if you think that's going to save your nation, you just need to perish that thought. What will save this nation is a people who worship in spirit and in truth and who believe in a true gospel, who do not disconnect their faith from their practice.

Finally, how a disobedient nation will be destroyed. Verse 20, "But if you refuse and rebel," refuse what? Refuse the obedience that makes worship real, "You shall be devoured by the sword; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

There you have it. What you have here so far in Isaiah 1 is that you have a wounded and broken people who have been disciplined so many times and they won't turn. There is actually nowhere you can strike them again because the whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint, from the sole of the foot to the top of the head. They can't even receive any more discipline and they don't even respond to it. That's what you have and you have Proverbs 29:1, "He who is often rebuked hardens his neck. Suddenly he'll be destroyed without remedy."

But that's not the end of the story for the people of God. There is a call to repentance and what we find is that there can be a worship with a circumcised heart. There can be a worship with a true sacrificial lamb. There can be a merciful and a faithful high priest. There can be a temple and a lamp and clothing and robes of righteousness. This hinges on how your relationships and how your life operates during the week and that's why Jesus said, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then bring your gift."

There is hope for worshippers like that, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." So, we are a people who gather every Sunday to worship God and it can be such a delight to God, it can be such a sweetness. It can be true worship, honest worship, not fake at all. It can be the kind of worship that you long for but it doesn't happen in a vacuum and it's not even dependent on the moment that you're in worship. It depends on a true circumcised heart that desires to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind. That is the basis of all true worship.

I pray God gives us such delightful, happy worship together. Yes, such emotional worship together. Yes, such thoughtful worship. Yes, such obedient worship as we gather together. And that our times together would just spur us on to even more obedience, more progress, more dealing with sins of omission, more dealing with our sins of commission, that we would be a holy people as lights in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. This is the worship that God delights in.

Let's pray.

O Lord, we thank you that you have made it so that our sins as scarlet could be as white as snow. O Lord, we thank you for your mercies toward your people that you continue to cry out to your people, that you continue to speak to your people, that you're so merciful to speak so many times and to speak so clearly as you have today. O Lord, I pray that you would give us such sweet worship before you, that you would help us to live in a way that we would delight you as we are together. Amen.