

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #86

Isaiah 58:1-14

Those who have been around TCBC for any length of time know that we stress doctrine and we stress a careful understanding of the Word of God. We believe that sound doctrine produces sound lives. Often you will hear someone say, deep doctrine is not important, we just want practical application. What these people don't realize is that without deep doctrine, you cannot have proper practical application.

However, **Isaiah 58** says it is possible to know some doctrine and not actually apply it. **Isaiah 58 is a chapter that deals with the great matter of religious ritual versus real righteousness .** **Isaiah 58 is written to a religious people who were practicing religious rituals, but their hearts were not right with God.** They were not admitting sin and they were not repenting of sin; they were just going through their religious motions.

We come now to the final nine chapters of the book of Isaiah. In these chapters, God reveals that because of Israel's rebellion, He will have to be the One who will bring peace and prosperity to Israel. If Israel is ever going to be restored, it will be God's doing. Now the point of this section is this:

ISRAEL NEEDS TO BE LOUDLY TOLD THAT SHE HAS SINNED AGAINST GOD; AND NO MATTER HOW RELIGIOUS SHE THINKS SHE IS, OR HOW MUCH RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY SHE HAS, SHE DOES NOT HAVE A REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS .

Israel put on a good religious show for people. Just like many people do. There are millions and millions of people going to churches today. These people will go through religious motions and participate in all kinds of religious things. However, that does not mean that those same people have a real righteousness that pleases God and will be blessed by God. That is very clear from this passage.

REVELATORY POINT #1 – Israel needs to be loudly told that she has transgressed and has greatly sinned against God. **58:1**

There are two nouns that show up in this verse that describe the sins of people. One is “transgression” (paysha) which refers to all of those times one has broken away and rebelled against God and His Word (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 695), and the other is “sins” (chatah) which refers to the many times we have missed the mark and sinned against the righteousness of God so that we are culpable (*Ibid.*, p. 271). Neither of these words imply a little slipup; they describe intentional rebellious sin.

What Isaiah says here is, blast forth the truth of My people's sin as loud as a trumpet blast. Loudly announce to My people that you transgressed and sinned against God. Unless you are willing to admit this reality, you will go nowhere in your relationship with God.

As John Calvin said, when you are dealing with religious hypocrisy, what you need are “thunderbolts” of heavenly words (*Isaiah*, pp. 223-224). One can go to worship services and be a total hypocrite. These people do not need to be coddled with soft loving tones, they need sharp straight-shot truth that they need to do serious, honest business with God.

You would think that Israel would naturally do this right now. You would think that Israel would get down on her knees and acknowledge her rebellion and sin and rejection of God’s Son. You would think she would confess her sin, and cry out to God for His mercy. You would think that she would realize that she is in a political mess. Even though she is in a small portion of her land, she is not free. She is under the judgment of God because of her sin. God says, cry out loudly that this nation is in sin.

Some of the most difficult people on this earth to get to admit that they are depraved sinners are religious people who go to church. Some rely on the fact they have always grown up in the church, but that will not save anyone. What every person needs to be loudly told is that you are a sinner and you personally need Jesus Christ to be your Savior.

REVELATORY POINT #2 – Israel needs to understand that all her religious actions do not cause God to do anything. **58:2-3**

Now when you read the things in these verses, you would initially think, this is great. These people really love God. They are faithfully involved in religious action. Most would say, look at all the religious stuff they do. There are seven religious actions that these people were outwardly doing:

(Religious Action #1) - Outwardly Israel seeks God day by day. **58:2a**

Every day these people either went to a synagogue or to the Temple. Every day they sought God. This would appear to be a spiritual awakening. Day after day these people had their devotions. They didn’t just pick up a Bible and read the Daily Bread; they actually would go to the Temple or synagogue every day.

(Religious Action #2) - Outwardly Israel delights in knowing God’s ways. **58:2b**

These people seemed to delight in knowing God’s Word. The Hebrew word “know” is one that means these people wanted to have knowledge to the point where they were very intelligent in understanding the Word and wisdom of God (*Ibid.*, p. 205). These people delighted in studying and learning things.

(Religious Action #3) - Outwardly Israel appears to have done righteous things. **58:2c**

These people appeared to do righteous things. They were involved in all kinds of works which appeared to be right.

(Religious Action #4) - Outwardly Israel participates in the ordinances. **58:2d**

They remembered and participated in their feasts and festivals. These were very religious people.

(Religious Action #5) - Outwardly Israel prays and asks God for decisions. **58:2e**

They actually had prayer meetings and would ask God to do things. They appeared to be real spiritual people of prayer.

(Religious Action #6) - Outwardly Israel seems to delight in the nearness of God. **58:2f**

These people loved their place of worship and they loved to go to a place where they could be near God. They apparently told others how close they were to God. They felt close to God when they went to their place of worship.

(Religious Action #7) - Outwardly Israel fasts before God. **58:3**

There was only one fast day required by the law, but these people even added more fasts. Israel delighted in doing the external religious stuff. As **verse 3** says, she finds her own “desire” in all of this religious action.

But the problem is God doesn't accept any of this. God does not accept any form of worship that is out to please us. God is looking for worship that pleases Him.

What this proves is that it is possible to be involved in all kinds of religious things and have a heart that is not right with God. Let me ask you some personal questions. When was the last time you personally got down on your knees and cried out to God and prayed and talked to God out of your heart? When was the last time you got down on your knees before God because you wanted to really walk through a day close with Him? When was the last time you spent quality time with God alone making sure your heart was truly connected to your worship?

REVELATORY POINT #3 – Israel needs to understand why God refuses to bless Israel.
58:4-7

God wanted His own people to carefully understand why their religious activity didn't mean anything. **The basic message God tells them is this: Your religious rituals are not for the right reasons.** In these verses, God tells Israel why He doesn't answer their prayers. God tells them why He does not accept their worship. There are three reasons:

(Reason #1) - The reason for your fast is not so I can hear you, but so you can do wicked things. **58:4**

Apparently the motive for this fast was they wanted God to allow them to strike down some enemy and take what they had. In other words, **they were not fasting in order to be right with God, they were fasting for what they thought they could get God to do.**

I knew of a person who used to sin and then confess the sin. The reason this person confessed the sin is because he wanted a clean slate so he could sin again. He was not motivated to confess the sin because he was broken and contrite and because he was sick of not walking close with God, he just wanted the slate clean so he could do what he wanted to do.

(Reason #2) - The reason for your fast is because this is what you have chosen to do, not because I told you to do it. **58:5**

God says, My fasts are so that you would bow your heads and hearts and humble yourself before Me. My fast days were so that you could do personal business with Me. God said, I never told you to fast because of your own lustful desires, and I do not accept your religious motions.

(Reason #3) - The reason for your fast is not acceptable to Me. **58:6-7**

God says, if you really want to fast in a way that moves Me, you get alone with Me and cry out to loosen the bonds of wickedness in your life. Your fasts are not designed to get yourself right with Me so that you can function according to My Word and will. You are not fasting so you will recognize your own wickedness and so you could stop oppressing others and help the poor.

Every year this country calls for a national day of prayer. Some of the leaders who propagate this concept are not at all interested in dealing with their own sin. I am not sure that a national day of prayer means much of anything to God. I don't think it is even acceptable to God.

REVELATORY POINT #4 – Israel needs to know that when she faces her own sin, God will give her His blessings. **58:8-12**

There are twelve amazing blessings promised to Israel if she would truly do business with God. Although these are national promises to Israel, there are great individual applications we may make as well if we will do honest business with God:

(Blessing #1) - Israel's light will break out like the dawn. **58:8a**

When you do honest business with God, you begin to shine out like a light.

(Blessing #2) - Israel will recover speedily. **58:8b**

God takes one who does honest business with Him from a sin-sickened state and quickly causes them to recover. It is amazing how fast the sin, the guilt, and the burdens are lifted.

(Blessing #3) - Israel's righteousness will go before them. **58:8c**

The testimony of one who does serious business with God goes forward. People realize this is the righteous nation of God or this is a righteous man or woman of God.

(Blessing #4) - God will guard them. **58:8d**

God guards His people who deal with their sin before Him. He watches out for them.

(Blessing #5) - God will answer them. **58:9a**

One of the wonderful blessings of being right with God is that He will answer your prayers.

(Blessing #6) - God will reveal Himself to them. **58:9b**

If God's people will remove the sin, and the pointing their fingers at others, and remove the speaking wickedness, God says you will call out to Me and I will say, "Here I am."

God will allow people right with Him to see wonderful things.

(Blessing #7) - God will remove Israel's darkness and gloom. **58:10**

God literally can light up a nation and light up a life. However, He demands that His people walk right before Him. They must change course.

(Blessing #8) - God will continually guide Israel. **58:11a**

It is a wonderful blessing to truly be led of God, and God will truly lead those who do honest business with Him in dealing with sin.

(Blessing #9) - God will continually satisfy Israel. **58:11b**

Not one of God's children will ever be satisfied in life walking in sin. It is possible for one to walk through this sin-scorched world and be totally fulfilled and satisfied.

(Blessing #10) - God will continually strengthen Israel. **58:11c**

Sin will zap your strength. It is like your bones will go dry. Keep in mind that these were very religious people, but they had a dead and dry spirituality. Turn to the Lord and life vibrancy will return to you.

(Blessing #11) - God will continually water Israel. **58:11d**

God will shower those who turn to Him with His blessings.

(Blessing #12) - God will rebuild the ruins. **58:12**

God delights in literally taking broken-down ruined lives and transforming them. He will one day physically do this in Israel with cities, and He will also do this with your life.

No matter how much of a mess you have made your life, God is able to rebuild it and make it one that blossoms for Him.

REVELATORY POINT #5 – Israel needs to know that if she will honor God on His day of worship rather than honoring herself, God will delight in her and raise her up. **58:13-14**

God says if you will make your worship real and honorable to Me, I will do great things for you. Now look carefully at the ingredients of what makes worship acceptable to God:

(Ingredient #1) - Honorable worship is not focused on one's own pleasure . **58:13a**

(Ingredient #2) - Honorable worship focuses on the holiness of God. **58:13b**

(Ingredient #3) - Honorable worship focuses on honoring God, not self. **58:13c**

(Ingredient #4) - Honorable worship wants God's Word not your own word. **58:13d**

God says if you will face your sin and purpose to worship Me in a right way, then:

Result #1 - You will delight in the Lord.

Result #2 - You will be lifted up by God.

Result #3 - You will be fed by God.