

Isa 58:1-12 PRESBYTERY SERMON - 9 MARCH 2010

PRELIMS. I'm not sure what **you** are **expecting** from this innovation **for us** of a sermon at the start of a presbytery. I think it was a practice many years ago in the presbyterian church. I thought I would preach on something **practical** knowing the business of today! We **all agree** that we **must constantly** go back to the **Word!** I believe with all my heart that we need to go back to Word of God.

One big item is **Church Planting!** But we **also** would want to have **Understanding God's Will**, and **Answered Prayers**, and **Guidance**, and **Revival!** Well, in this chapter in God's Word, we have **all these** blessings made to Israel in **promises - conditional to reformation!**

I preached on this chapter to my congregation in Dundee - but when it came to the **application** of it, I **jumped** to another passage of Scripture saying that the application in the chapter is not relevant for us in Dundee! It reminded me of my **1st FP communion** preparing [Isaiah 1] on a **Thursday** the day of **confession of sin!** After many hours, I **abandoned** the whole sermon! I could **not** preach **these sins** to FPs!! So this time, keeping to the **whole chapter**, let me try again!

*God is speaking to His **own covenant people!** *"declare to My people...to the house of Jacob"*[1b]. Very clearly this passage is addressed to God's own people in covenant relationship with Him.

*What has Isaiah to declare to them? *"their transgressions...their sins"*[1]! Not the sins of the nations around them, but **their own** sins!

*An note: Isaiah has to *"Cry aloud"* and *"do not hold back"*[1] I held back and did not declare the whole counsel of God!

*The **problem** was this: Israel did **not think** they had any **major** sins to confess and rectify! They thought their **relationship** with God was in excellent **condition!** They had excellent **grounds** for thinking this! Even God Himself **approved** of their **worship** *"they seek Me daily and delight to know My ways...they delight to draw near to God"*[2] **APP** I wonder do **we all** really **delight** in worshipping God?

*Israel however, were privately **upset** with God! God **did not**

acknowledge their ‘fasting’ “*Why have we **fasted** and You see it **not**? Why have we **humbled** ourselves and You take **no knowledge** of it?*” [3] Israel are **offended**. They expected God would have done **more** for them because they were, in their eyes, truly serving God!

We need to realise that ‘fasting’ here, is used in the wider context of **religious worship!** As our Con of Faith [21:5] & Lar Cat [108] refers to **solemn fastings** as all part of ‘**religious worship of God!**’ Paul was in “*fastings often*” [2 Cor 11:27] and when they made elders the religious service included “*prayer and **fasting** they committed them to the Lord*” [Acts 14:23]. So, when we are talking of fasting here, we are referring to their **form of religious commitment** to God!

*Despite their commitment and their attention to worship, God was **not pleased** with them. They were **pleased with themselves** but God was not pleased. “*Behold in the day of your fast you seek **your own pleasure***” [3c] ‘You may **feel good** about your worship, but I am not!’ says God. They were doing it **for** themselves, not to **God!** They were doing to **clear** their **consciences**, and to feel **better** and **holy!**

APP in applying this, **we** need to realise, that just because **we** may **believe** that our worship is fine, exactly as God requires, there may well be other things which displeases God and withholds a blessing! The Israelites **had no idea** God what was displeasing God - **neither** might **we!** Our claim to ‘**purity of worship**’, may or may not, be fine, but what about the **other things** in God’s Word which He requires of us, and we are **oblivious** to? God had already mentioned to Israel the “*multitude of their sacrifices...vain offerings...solemn assembly...appointed feasts...many prayers*” but God says He has **had enough of them** and He will **not listen!** [1:11-15]!!

Do **we** wonder why some of **our prayers** are **not answered?** “*Fasting like **yours** will **not make your** voice to be **heard on high***” [4b]! We too, brethren, could be **oblivious** to what God finds offensive! We might like Israel go through all the **forms** and **rituals** of **humility** in worship, “*bow down his head like a reed/bulrush*” and **dress** in “*sackcloth and ashes*” in dark suits, etc, and yet for all that God could be **angry** with us - because of what we are **not doing!**

So, **what was it** that God wanted Isaiah to point out to them? This: They **failed** to demonstrate the **compassion** God had shown to them to **others around them!** They needed to shew **mercy** to those who needed help! That is what **this Word of God says!** Look: *“Is this not the fast that **I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover him”** [6,7] APP* When was the last time **you** had a beggar **in your home?** When was the last time you took someone in from the cold and gave him a meal? This **has application** for us **today!**

The NT Church were **so busy** helping the poor widows that they realised they were doing **too much** of it - to the **neglect** of the Word!! The **remedy** was **not**, ‘We must stop this helping the poor’, but *“pick out from among you....whom we will **appoint to this duty**”* [Acts 6:4]!! They did **not neglect helping** the poor.

When the NT Church sent out Paul and Barnabas there was **one thing** they made sure they did **not forget**. Paul tells us *“Only, they asked us to **remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do**”* [Gal 2:10] James *“you have **despised the poor**”*[Jam 2:6 AV] To the Rich Young Ruler *“Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor”*[Luke 18:22]! So, **NT supports** this important principle!!

***I confess I do not like this** - but it is **God’s Word!** We boast about going **Back to the Word!** Here it is! I **believe** that we as a denomination **are faithful** to the **Word**. I do not think God is angry with us about our faithfulness regarding doctrine. I think we have great **theology!** But there is **more** to Xnity than theology!! Hell is full of people with great theology! Xnity is **practical** - and again I say, I personally wish it was all theology and not practice!!

Our problem is that **hardly anyone** is **hearing** what we have to say. We are speaking to our own folk for years. That’s fine and good. But we are under orders to **spread** the Word and to go out into the world with it! We must take a lesson from the Son of God! How did **He get a hearing?** Just what we have here - **Mercy Ministries!** That was

what Jesus did! he gathered crowds through **Mercy Ministries!**

A member of our **Church Planting Committee** was speaking to me on the phone recently. He said that one of the places they were thinking of planting another Church was **Dundee!** How did I feel about that? I said, 'Fine - but he would need to be a highly gifted ten-talented brother!' The **reason** I said that was because of my **experience** in Dundee. In my 25yrs in Dundee, **7 conservative, evangelical** denominations have **closed!** Plus (hosts of C of S **mergers** - 13 in 10yrs!) **But** there has been **several new** churches started. Now, all these new ones have **one thing in common** - which **none** of the conservative churches had! **Mercy Ministries!**

In order for us to Church Plant, I would say we will need to have **some means** of gathering people together **to hear** the gospel. And God, as I understand **Scripture**, is saying, 'My way is by Mercy Ministries - just look at My Word **objectively** not with **tunnel vision!**

Finally - I talked at the beginning about **Understanding God's Will, Answered Prayers, Guidance, Revival!** Well, verses [9-12] tell us about that. If we pay attention to God's Word, then there are these **promises!!**

The first word at the beginning of vv8 and 9 is not 'vaw' which can mean then amongst others things. It is ' 'az' which only means **then** - and it is **emphatic** [Alec Motyer]

"Then light" will ***"break forth"*** [8] and ***"light will arise in the darkness"***[10b]! What is that but **understanding God's will!**

"Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am' "[9] What is that but God **answering!**

"And the Lord will guide you continually"[11] What is that but **guidance** for the way ahead!

"And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt... you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in"[12b]! What is that but Revival and Reformation!!