

## Isaiah 1:10-20

<sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: <sup>11</sup> "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. <sup>12</sup> "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup> Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. <sup>18</sup> "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. <sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; <sup>20</sup> But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

The subject for today's text is simple. It is Unacceptable Worship.

We are going to approach it a little backwards.

One of the biggest dangers to a Christian is for him to think of himself as being one thing, yet he is really something else. We think of our actions **one way**, but they are really **something else**. We think of **God's reaction** to what we do as one thing, when it is really something else. Self deception is one of the greatest dangers we face. Especially because the better we are at it, the less we know we are doing it.

What we will see this morning are people who have deceived themselves and they think they are deceiving God. But Isaiah delivers to them a message that tells these worshippers that their worship isn't fooling God. It isn't working. All of their effort isn't fooling God.

As we look at our text this morning we really need to be asking the question- is this me? Is this me? Am I deceiving myself in my worship to God? God is never fooled. But **am I fooling myself?**

Often our greatest points of growth begin at the points of our greatest discovery of wickedness. Sometimes God must bring the truth to our attention in a way

that it burns right through all of our illusions about ourselves. Sometimes we have to see our similarity to Sodom and Gomorrah until we begin being fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let's look at what activities these people are doing to convince themselves and God that they are sincere.

First, in verse 11 they had **a multitude of sacrifices to God**. What does this mean? The text goes on to tell us that those sacrifices consist of offerings of rams, cattle, or lambs or goats. It also involves incense and meetings. And prayer.

Now wait a minute we might say. This is the same stuff that God **commanded them** to do. We could spend the rest of our time here this morning proving that this is exactly what **God said to** do in the Jewish worship of God.

Look at this.

These people were taking of their hard earned wealth and sacrificing it to God. Sheep and goats and cattle were their currency. It would be like us offering one of our cars to God. This wasn't a small thing. They would be able to look at their contributions to God and say, look. That wasn't too shabby. I gave that at great cost to myself. That must mean I really love God.

And look too at their circumstance. These people were doing all this at the right place. It isn't like the Samaritans who had come up with a replacement location to offer these sacrifices. No, these people were offering these sacrifices in a prescribed location. They were going by the book.

So these people were offering the right sacrifices in the right way at the right place at a great cost to themselves.

These people were praying to the right God. They were meeting together, not to worship Buddha or some Hindu god. No, they were coming together to worship Jehovah. They had His name right. They had some solid doctrine. They got many of the technical points right.

What does this look like in our world? What would our modern day equivalent look like? Well we could picture this audience of Isaiah's as a **solid church member**. This person might teach Sunday school and fight for good doctrine. They might abhor **some forms** of wickedness. They might tithe and give sacrificial gifts for good causes. Their hearts may go out for certain causes. They may have great concern that their lives conform to **certain technicalities** demanded in scripture. Maybe they only listen to Christian music and watch Christian shows. In other words, on **the outside that people observe**, they seem to have everything correct. That is likely how these worshippers looked.

But look what God says about them.

First God says this.

<sup>11</sup> **"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?"**

We can picture the audience responding by saying, what do you mean. This is what you told us to do. What do you mean “to what purpose?” “To please You is the purpose.”

But clearly these sacrifices are not **fulfilling** that purpose. In fact, the sacrifices **fulfill no purpose** except to stir up God’s anger. How cutting this remark is. It would be similar to God saying to us, “what do you hope to gain by this?” Why do you bother to read my word or pray or attend worship? What do you hope to accomplish? Clearly what is implied here is that these people have **something seriously wrong** with them. It isn’t that God is hard to please for the person who is sincere and honest in their worship of Him. When a person comes before God in the reality of who they are, calling upon God for His mercy, they are greeted with grace. So the problem here is not that God is so hard to please. The problem is with the worshipers. **They are duplicitous.** They are **pretending.** They think that God is blind to the havoc they have created the rest of the week. They think somehow that an act of worship will fool God, it will buy Him off. Could God be saying this to us this morning? Jon, to what purpose are you preaching? People, to what purpose are you gathering, and giving your tithe, and fellowshiping together? We must be sure that we know why we are doing what we are doing. We need to be sure we are not doing it in a double minded state where we are trying to gain the advantages of two kingdoms. We need to know that our worship of God is sincere, not duplicitous.

God says more

**"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. <sup>12</sup> "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?**

**<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*. <sup>15</sup> 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.**

The gist of what God is saying is, I have had enough of your so called worship of me. Verse 12 gives us the idea that these worshippers are actually giving more than God actually requires of them. God says “Who has required this from your hand?” He either doesn’t want this because of **how** it is being offered, or God is telling them that He didn’t **even ask** for some of the stuff they are giving. And it won’t work. It won’t buy God off.

There is something to note here. You can never commit an act of worship that will undo a sin. You never **do good to get rid of evil.** The Catholic church made a lot of money with that concept, but the idea does not come from God. Basically,

when we start going down that path, God is going to ask, who asked for that garbage? Who required that from you? Because it wasn't me.

How does God regard this false, insincere, duplicitous so called worship?

He says to them

You are trampling my courts. Your presence is not only **not welcome**, it has a **defiling and profaning influence**.

What you bring to give me is an abomination. It disgusts me.

I can't even endure them. They sicken me to the point I cannot put up with them.

I hate your meetings. The stuff you do in my honor is just trouble to me. It doesn't give me anything good. There is not even a shred of something I enjoy or appreciate in them. In fact, just watching this charade wears me out. It makes me tired. That is how Isaiah describes God's attitude.

Then God goes on through the prophet. He starts to talk about their prayers.

**<sup>15</sup> 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.**

Look at this. We cannot assure a person that if they pray to God, God will hear them. There is not a formula that says that if a person prays it will gain an audience with God. Sometimes people's prayers to God are nothing but a deception. God is never fooled. But we can be assured that if we will submit ourselves to God's terms, He will hear us.

David tells us this:

**Psalm 145:18-20**

**<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.**

**<sup>19</sup> He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. <sup>20</sup> The LORD preserves all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy.**

We can never think that **the amount** of our prayer or **the volume** of our prayer or even **the fervency** of our prayer will fool God into thinking that we are something that we are not. We must come before God recognizing the truth of **who He is** and the truth of **who we are**. God will hear us when we call upon Him in the truth. He will hear us when we recognize our place before Him, when we have the proper fearful respect of who He is. We do not have to be good people to come before God and be heard. And that is a good thing or we would **never** be heard. But we do have to be real. We need to be true. And we do have to be submissive to Him as Lord. Then we will be heard.

And the opposite is true as well

**Micah 3:4**

**<sup>4</sup> Then they will cry to the LORD, But He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, Because they have been evil in their deeds.**

When we pray while committed to keeping our wickedness but hoping to fool

God, God will not hear us. And no amount of praying in that state will ever move God to act in our favor.

Notice at the end of verse 15 what it says-

**Your hands are full of blood.**

Here is the problem. God is about to point out what the real sin is that the people are committing. Remember in verse 10 where Isaiah says

**<sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:**

Why did God compare Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah? Normally when most of us think of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah we associate it with homosexuality. And without a doubt that sin was part of their undoing. But that is not a sin that is emphasized in the book of Isaiah regarding the people of Judah. No doubt this sin existed since it seems to have existed in every major population sample. But I don't think that is the point. I think to get the point we need to look at Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 16:1-2**

**<sup>1</sup> Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations,**

Here we see that a prophet is addressing the same people that Isaiah was addressing. The prophet goes into great detail about how Jerusalem acted as an unfaithful wife, even to the point of paying her lovers. Yet what Ezekiel was mostly talking about was idolatry more than adultery.

I find it very interesting that when God wants to make the point about how He feels about the sin of idolatry, He puts it in terms of a different sin. Most people don't really have a very strong repulsion factor for idolatry. We see it as a sin. And we know it is bad. But we don't feel much about it.

So God converts it into something that affects us very differently. He describes it as something similar to sexual infidelity. Suddenly we get what it is that God is saying. We are able to suddenly understand how God takes it when people commit idolatry.

Sexual infidelity is always a big deal in scripture. There is nowhere in scripture where God's word rebukes a man for seeing it as a big deal. He is never rebuked for feeling strongly about it. I suspect the same is true for women, although the culture was a bit different back then. God uses marital infidelity as one of the few tools He can use to get us to understand just how big of a deal idolatry is to him. He describes it in a way that we can more than just understand it. We can actually feel it. We can know a tiny portion of the degree that God actually feels sinned against by those who bow to another god whether material or as an ideal. For you married people, how would you feel if your spouse were to sneak off with someone else? You know that feeling? We need to apply that awareness to

every time we are tempted to **look to the world** to give us what only God can give us. We need to understand that God feels something akin to that whenever his people become enthralled with another thing they think will give them joy or peace or contentment or love or hope. We are all guilty of evoking that in God. But then Ezekiel talks about the sin of Sodom.

### **Ezekiel 16:46-50**

**<sup>46</sup> Your elder sister is Samaria, who dwells with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who dwells to the south of you, is Sodom and her daughters. <sup>47</sup> You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways. <sup>48</sup> As I live," says the Lord GOD, "neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. <sup>49</sup> Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. <sup>50</sup> And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.**

Notice that Jerusalem didn't do exactly what Sodom did. But what they did was worse. Now what did Sodom do?

**<sup>49</sup> Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.**

Now this does not mean that they were not also judged for the sin of homosexuality. But this gives us another insight into the problem at Sodom. The people had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness. Essentially these people had prosperity. They were not struggling to exist on a day to day basis. They had their cupboards full. They had everything they needed.

But what happened to the poor and needy? They starved. Sodom had blood on their hands. Sodom was like Judea. Except somehow Judea was worse. Brad was very accurate in his assessment that Judea was being judged based on how they were living and regarding their fellow Jews. This was the way that their sin displayed itself. This is what God prescribes as a remedy to their sin.

One of the commentators remarked that a person cannot break one of the first four commands without it spilling over into the last 6. The only way that we will treat our fellow humans correctly is if we have the proper regard of God.

**<sup>16</sup> "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,**

What Isaiah is describing here is a change of mind that results in a change of behavior. These people need to turn around. Now they cannot get rid of their sins. But they can receive the forgiveness of sins that God offers. They cannot

clean themselves, but they can receive the cleanness that God offers. In that way they can make themselves clean.

What these people need to do is to confess their sins as sins and, by God's power, turn from them. Instead of trying to fool God, they need to come clean with God. Instead of trying to add God's blessing onto their sinful lifestyle, they must repent of their sinful lifestyle.

This is what hypocritical religion always needs to do. External conformity to a code is never enough. We must have it in our hearts. This change has to infect us from beginning to end.

Then Isaiah says the following. After putting off the old, we must put on the new.

<sup>17</sup> **Learn to do good;**

Look at this. This word for learn is a word for training. What God commands will not come naturally. It is something that will come point by point, step by step, lesson by lesson. It is a series of instructions. These folks are told, just like us, that we must be in the training process of choosing and doing the good instead of what we are naturally inclined toward.

To the degree that we are one of the hypocritical worshippers of God, the worshipper that is **more concerned about how we look to ourselves and others** than how **we really are in the core of our hearts**, we need to take up a different training program. We need to train to do **the right things for the right reasons**. But at this point we learn what it was that God was so angry about. We learn the sins that these people were guilty of. And this is very helpful for us because we can learn what really gets God upset. We see what really offends Him. This is how these Judeans are to learn to do good instead of what they are currently doing.

**Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.**

This is what God is angry about. People are being exploited. People are being used for the selfish purposes of other people. The same people who are showing up for worship are exploiting people on a regular basis. And they don't see how that is a problem. They don't get that they are doing the things that their God hates while showing up to worship Him. Ultimately what they display is that they **really only care about themselves**, but they want **God to get with the program**. They want God to bless their wickedness.

Look at the sins.

**Seek Justice.** What this means is that they were **not seeking justice**. They were actually counting on injustice. They didn't want what was right in God's eyes for those who are weak. What they wanted was what was in their best interest by taking advantage of the weak.

Justice is a good thing. We should always fight for the justice of those who are deprived of justice. When a person is robbed of justice because of their body

shape or their intelligence or their skin color, we should stand in the gap as we can. We should want our neighbors to be treated the way we want to be treated.

**Rebuke the oppressor.** What God is telling these people is to place themselves between the oppressor and the oppressed. He is telling them to be the ones to stop what was going on. Be the one who says that this will not happen on my watch. This will not happen to the people who are around me.

This is courageous. This is a person who will stand up to evil even when it costs everything. And that is exactly what God requires of them. This is not optional.

This is not only for the exceptional follower. This is what all of them are to do.

I remember walking down a hallway at Garrett with Ruth and a professor many years ago. The professor began belittling a person with little intelligence. I joined in. I don't remember what Ruth said but she took up for that person. And I was instantly convicted. We need to rebuke the oppressor. We need to seek justice. But it is terribly easy to do what will most benefit ourselves instead. That is what these Judeans were doing.

**Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.**

Now, what is it about the fatherless and widow that gets God's attention? Why are they so often the focal point of God's focus? Well, let's think about this.

When you remove a father, what does the family lose? Well in their culture what was lost was protection and provision. What does that mean? The fatherless and the widow were the most vulnerable. They were the most open to exploitation.

In other words, the only thing that would protect them from a person's worst inclinations was the spirituality of that person. The widows and orphans would prove the character of the neighbors. If widows and orphans were protected and provided for, it was because people had a fear of God or a love for God. If they were exploited, it was because people were acting as if there would be no repercussions for exploiting the powerless. They would suffer from the selfishness of the neighbors. How you deal with those who have no power and status is always the litmus test for your spirituality. How we treat our own children often reveals more about us than we care to see. Jesus said as much when He said that whatever you have done to the least of these you have done unto me.

It is the job of the faithful to protect the widows and orphans, or anyone who happens to lack power at any given time.

Sometimes I think the instincts of some of our liberal friends may actually be better than we give them credit for. Protecting other humans is truly a Godly trait. How we go about it may be worth consideration, but Christians should protect the powerless and try to obtain justice on their behalf.

Now that the sin has been exposed, God calls for a meeting.



**<sup>18</sup> "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. <sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; <sup>20</sup> But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

We see here that God's primary motive is not to punish. He offers a way out. He wants to appeal to the reasoning of those who are exploiting others, those who are sinning so badly against Him

Let us reason together. That is what God wants for us no matter what state we are in. He wants us to listen to reason. He wants us to hear Him. He wants us to adapt to what He says so He does not need to discipline us or punish us.

Let me ask you who are parents. Did you ever enjoy spanking your kids? Did you ever think, man I wish I could spank that kid today? No. We would rather that they would listen to reason. The fact is that kids often don't. So we need to do whatever we must to guide their behavior. God would prefer that we reason with Him. He would prefer that we receive His total and absolute forgiveness for our sins. He would prefer that we would choose to put on His snow white righteousness. He wants us to willingly submit to His Lordship. He is offering all of us this offer today. Respond to His call. Submit to Him willingly. Confess your sin willingly. You will receive good from His hands. You will eat the good of the land. You will experience the best life He has for you. You will be truly blessed. Or don't.

**<sup>20</sup> But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

Please don't choose this path. No matter who you are, do not choose the path of rebelling against God. It will not go well. It can only lead to destruction. No matter what you are tempted with this morning, don't choose this path.

Remember this is God speaking. The mouth of the Lord has spoken this fate.

I thought it would be fitting to close with something that Christ has said that is very similar. We see who God responds to and who He doesn't.

**Luke 18:9-14**

**<sup>9</sup> Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' <sup>13</sup> And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified**

***rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**