

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear! But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you so that He does not hear!" (Isaiah 59:1-2)

In last week's lesson on Isaiah 58, you'll remember, God told Isaiah to "cry out loudly and raise his voice like a trumpet, and not to hold back what He wanted His people, the house of Jacob, to hear"--and it concerned basically His displeasure with their system of worship! While they "claimed to be seeking the Lord daily, and delighting in His ways, and fasting routinely, God saw that they were just "going through the motions, with their religiosity, and their appearance of righteousness was merely pretense"! And totally unacceptable! This was particularly evident by the way they practiced their fasting!

Isaiah writes that when they fasted, they "only tried to please themselves...and appear spiritual, and to manipulate God"! They even ended up quarreling and fighting with each other when they fasted, probably (we speculated), over who did the most, or the best fasting, among other things)! When, Isaiah notes, it should have resulted in them humbling themselves before the Lord, and "loosening the bonds of wickedness, and being broken, and penitent over their sins"! (Wiersbe writes that true fasting leads to humility before God, and ministry to others!)

Jesus would later state (in Matthew 6:16-18) that "whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed (for their piety!) by men...", and that (if that's the case) "they have their reward in full"! "When you fast," He said, "anoint your head with oil and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who sees what is done in secret..."!

We couldn't help but see the connection in this chapter with what Isaiah wrote in chapter 1, where He said that God likened His people to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and that He "had enough of their burnt offerings and sacrifices...and that their incense was an abomination to Him ...and that He hated their new moon festivals...and had become weary of their appointed feasts..." and on and on! God was clearly not pleased with His peoples' worship practices!

But like the turnaround we often see in Isaiah's writing, Isaiah says here that "when (and if) His people would (only!) learn to practice fasting the proper way, "the light would break out like the dawn," and then the Lord would answer them when they "cried out" to Him in prayer!

We then saw how Isaiah turned in his commentary from fasting to feasting, making a contrast between the "humiliation" which was to be associated with fasting, and the joy and delight that marked the sabbath! The sabbath which MacArthur describes as "a day when repentant people walking in fellowship with the Lord experience satisfaction of the soul"! And Motyer's observation that "the Lord is more interested (whether fasting or feasting!) with our enjoyment of His blessings through obedience than in self-imposing

deprivations...and that the heart of true religion is to conform with what God has ordained"!

And so, our lesson ended on a positive note of "delighting" in the Lord, as encouraged in Psalm 37:4-5, and the promise that If we, in fact, do "delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts"!

And that set the scene for our lesson last night on Isaiah 59--where Neilson notes how Isaiah first "dives deeper into the iniquities of the people that separate them from God, but then rises high into a vision of God's answer to those iniquities"!

The chapter begins with that great verse containing a universal truth that applies to all men--even to our day! "Behold the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you that He does not hear!"

And then, beginning with verse 3, Isaiah uses strong words and picturesque language to focus on the true depravity--and the debilitating effects--of their iniquities, with the Passion version noting, among other things, how "their hands are stained with blood and their fingers are dripping with the guilt of sin! Lies spill from their lips and their tongue mutters treachery! No one seeks true justice, and no one pleads his case with honesty...They conceive trouble and give birth to sin! They hatch harmful plots, like snake's eggs, and spin their lies like a spider spins its web...Their feet eagerly run after evil; they are swift to shed innocent blood...and they know nothing of the way of peace...! Wow! (It's sad enough that the people commit evil deeds themselves, but it's even sadder when they delight in poisoning and ensnaring others with their evil habits," MacArthur notes!)

Then, beginning in verse 9, Isaiah recognizes the dilemma of the people seeking unsuccessfully to escape their depraved condition in their own strength and therefore takes it upon himself to speak for the nation and the people, by acknowledging, and confessing, their sin before God! The Passion version notes Isaiah declaring that, "For this reason, justice is far from us and righteousness doesn't reach us. We hope for light, but sadly, there is only darkness! We are like the blind groping along a wall; we stumble around in broad daylight like it was night, like the walking dead...For our many rebellious deeds are stacked high before You! We are aware of our sins...and our evil deeds all too well...We have rebelled and forsaken our God...Justice is driven away and righteousness stands on the sidelines, for truth has stumbled in the public square...! And those who turn from evil become the next victim!" Wow!

Then Isaiah records in verses 16-18 (speaking prophetically!) that "when God saw Israel's tragic condition and the absence of anyone to intervene on their behalf... He was greatly appalled, and armed Himself (figuratively speaking!) for their deliverance, and for taking vengeance on the enemies who would seek His destruction, while in the process (MacArthur notes) executing decisive judgment against all the rebellious

nations ("coastlands"), as well as the wicked Israelites"! And then, "taking it upon Himself to change Israel's condition," through the intervention of His Suffering Servant!

And so, verse 19 says, that "they (the nations!) will (in a day yet to come!) fear the name of the Lord...and His glory from the rising of the sun, for He will come like a rushing stream which the wind of the Lord drives (and, in verse 20, the Lord declares) a Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob"!

And then, in verse 21, God reaffirms His covenant promise with Israel!

"This is My covenant with them," says the Lord; "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouths of your offspring's offspring," says the Lord, from now and forever!" ("This unalterable promise to the nation is the basis for Paul's reassurance, in Romans 11:26-27, of the future salvation of Israel," notes MacArthur!)

Shalom!

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