
Ready for Revival

Isaiah 58

Overview

Text: Isaiah 58

Topic: What acceptable worship to the LORD is

Theme: Worship that is acceptable to the LORD is genuine.

Target: Testing the reality of our passion by examining the quality of our practice. The objective in submitting to the Isa.58 test, is to get so real with God that we will never be surprised by His summary of our worship. Real with God means pursuing love and mercy for the downtrodden.

Big Idea: Our love for God is real when our love for others is genuine.

Structure:

1. Inauthentic Worship (Vv.1-7)
 - a. Worship that is inauthentic (Vv.1-5)
 - i. Traits of inauthentic worship (Vv.1-3a)
 1. Said to be sin (V.1)
 2. Covered by religious zeal (Vv.2-3a)
 - ii. Tendencies of inauthentic worship (Vv.3b-5)
 - b. Worship that is authentic (Vv.6-7)
 - i. Removes cruelty (v.6)
 - ii. Gives charity (v.7)
2. Authentic Worship (Vv.8-14)
 - 1) Trust the Great Physician
 - 2) Liberate the oppressed
 - 3) Care for the poor

Introduction

We have talked about revival for four straight weeks now. We have seen that God can come down upon His people with surprising, arresting, renewing mercies. We have looked at Isa.64, Ps.126 and Ps.85 in order to make this clear. We then shifted from what God can do to what we must do. In this section last week we noticed from Joel 2 that a lifestyle of repentance is vital for God's people to enjoy God's blessings. We saw that we must come back to God with a whole heart and turn from a lifestyle of half-hearted loyalty. This is where life is found. This is where God draws near.

Yet these messages have been leading us up to today's message. They have pointed us to and prepared us for this closing word on biblical revival. The point of this message must be heard lest we adopt an incomplete and inaccurate view of revival.

Up to this point all that we've said could be viewed in a limited way; you know, "Rending the Heavens" and coming down upon me, "Restoring the Fortunes" of my family, reviving the joy of our fellowship, rending the hearts of Clearcreek Chapel. These are ways of viewing revival in a narrow and inadequate way. Today, we will broaden our view to encompass what we must embrace lest the very hope for revival backfires and ushers in a self-absorbed religion giving rise to pride which begs for the opposition of God (cf. 1Pet. 5:5).

Revival thrives in an atmosphere of humility. In Isaiah 57:14-16 we find the type of person to whom God draws near with renewing mercies. "And it shall be said, Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way. For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: " I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite".

The message for today, found in Isaiah 58, will take us to the breaking point. It will lead us away from ourselves, away from comfort, away from familiarity and move us toward people whom we normally would not associate with. It will rupture the borders of Clearcreek Chapel. It will change the way we view ministry. It will change the way we view the abundant life. Isa.58 will take us by the hand and lead us into ministries and lifestyles which would not naturally be chosen. But if we are people who hunger for the fullness of God, if we are people whose desire is to walk obediently with our Savior, then Isa.58 will be a refreshing breeze lifting up and taking away self-absorption, pride, and a lust for personal safety and comfort. Isaiah 58 is the air revival breathes. Let's turn our attention to this chapter as we complete our series on biblical revival.

(read the Isaiah 58)

Orientation

In this chapter we find God's people sensing that something is wrong. In v. three we see that they are perplexed over why God does not respond to their fasting. They are following through with certain religious disciplines and yet they do not find God's blessings. What they are failing to notice is that the problem is not with God nor is it with the disciplines. The problem is with their own souls. What we see in this chapter is God's people performing fasts and observing the Sabbath and yet not enjoying the blessings of God. We soon realize that these ways of worship called fasts and Sabbath observances were not genuine. They looked good, in other words, on the outside. But on the inside they were different. They were hypocritical. They were involved in inauthentic worship.

What we will notice in this text is first God's reproof for inauthentic worship seen in vv.1-7. We then will listen to a remedy for inauthentic worship. God's style is not merely to reprove. He exposes sin so that His people will long for a prescription for the hellish sickness of hypocrisy. We will see both as we look at this text.

A Reproof for Inauthentic Worship (Vv.1-7)

In vv.1-7 the prophet, being sent to reprove inauthentic worshippers, loudly declares the difference between inauthentic worship and authentic worship. The Lord longs to be gracious to His people (cf. Isa.30:18). He sends His prophets and preachers to "remove every obstruction from my people's way" so that God will dwell "with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit" so that "the spirit of the lowly will be revived" (cf. 57:14-16). Here we have the removing of the obstruction of inauthentic worship.

Worship that is inauthentic (Vv.1-5)

Now the prophet begins by making clear what inauthentic worship looks like. Worship that is inauthentic replaces religious zeal for virtuous living. It looks lively and religious and Godward but inside the story is different. We can see traits of inauthentic worship by noticing vv.1-3a.

Traits of inauthentic worship (Vv.1-3a)

Said to be rebellion (V.1)

In v.1 inauthentic worship is said to be rebellion. God sends the prophet to loudly declare that what they are involved in is sin. They believe that their hearts are concealed from God's notice. And their sin, so they think, can be covered by religious fervor.

Notice with me in vv.2-3 how they attempt to cover their hypocrisy.

Covered by religious zeal (Vv.2-3a)

In vv.2-3, God peels back 5 layers of appearance to uncover the sin of inauthentic worship. These layers are remarkable; for they look so much like what you and I would consider authentic worship. Look at the veneer over their sin.

- ? Seeking God daily
- ? Delighting to know His ways
- ? Praying
- ? Delighting in the nearness of God
- ? Fasting and humbling oneself

Just in and of itself, this list is attractive. Isn't this the type of worship we long for here at the Chapel? Don't we aim at a type of passion and fervor for God that would look similar to this list? So what's wrong with it? Why would God send a prophet to "cry aloud" and "declare" this to be rebellion?

Tendencies of inauthentic worship (Vv.3b-5)

The sin now becomes known as we look at vv.3b-5. Inauthentic worship tends to manifest itself in concern over a couple of areas.

Concern over personal schedule

First we notice that it is concerned over personal schedule. In this chapter we see people who have money. They have people working for them. They are pursuing their own business and pleasure. They are fasting (and in v.13 observing the Sabbath) but they are not allowing this service to God to disrupt their personal agendas. The text says that they are seeking their own pleasure.

These people, so to speak, come to church and express great zeal for God while all along are concerned over their own personal plans. Maintaining personal schedules without any interruptions is the sense we get from the last part of v.3 (as well as v.13).

God's people, here in this text, will not permit anything to interrupt their own business. They have their concerns. They have their lists of what needs to be done. They have scheduled their events and prioritized their activities. Nothing, even genuine worship to the Lord, is to disrupt this schedule. But this is not all.

The pursuit of their own business exhibits in selfishness, insensitivity, thoughtlessness, irritability and even fist fighting. Look back at the text, v.3-4. Here we see what is really going on under the veneer of “seeking the Lord”. Their employees are mistreated. The people involved in inauthentic worship tend to quarrel and grumble. They even want to punch people in the nose when they do not get their own way. Self-absorbed, self-centered, self-worship are going on under the cloak of the religious fervor found in v.2.

Concern over proper gesture

Inauthentic worship is not only concerned with personal schedules, it also is concerned over proper gestures as we see in v.5. Their fasting was a mere show. They had the right appearance as noted in phrases like “to bow down his head like a reed” and “to spread sackcloth and ashes under him”. They knew how to look in a fast. They knew what gestures were appropriate for worship. Bowing the head, folding the hands, raising the hands, clapping, genuflecting, performance of outward signs of repentance; all these things were merely a concern for the form of worship (i.e. proper gestures); not the essence of worship. Without interruptions, without sensitivity and with irritability these people were involved in inauthentic worship.

The traits and tendencies of inauthentic worship have been looked at. They are listed so that the reader will get a sense of what’s going on. To contrast inauthentic worship so to make the picture crystal clear, the Lord talks now about what authentic worship looks like.

Worship that is authentic (Vv.6-7)

Worship that is authentic does not replace religious zeal for virtuous living. Rather, it aims at removing cruelty and giving charity.

Removes cruelty (v.6)

People involved in authentic worship do not have a disconnect between Sunday morning worship and Monday morning relationships. Instead of desiring their own private, self-centered pleasure, they desire to help alleviate oppression. “To loose the bonds, to undo the straps, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke”; these are ways of describing the agenda or aim of those who are genuine worshippers. They cannot stand on the sidelines and watch cruelty. They pursue justice. They long for

liberation and freedom for those who are under injustice. Enjoying God without caring for the oppressed is unthinkable.

Gives charity (v.7)

This righteous living also expresses itself in giving love in tangible ways to those who are poor and downtrodden. We can see this in v.7. “Sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house and seeing the naked and covering him and not hiding yourself from our own flesh” are ways of describing what Isaiah says is part of authentic worship. His point seems clear. The authenticity of Sunday morning praise is tested by how we interact with the poor. Ethical, moral, relational realities are a big concern with the Lord. When God’s people cover over their harshness and anger and indifference and irritability and self indulgence with their “passionate worship” the sin outlined in this text is occurring.

Transition

If our ministry is a cloak for our harshness we need to hear and heed this rebuke. He is exposing this sin through this text to bring us to a place of repentance. What He does next is most stunning. In vv.8-14 we have the remedy for inauthentic worship.

A Remedy for Inauthentic Worship (Vv.8-14)

Trust the Great Physician

This section changes pattern. Now the Lord uses an “If” “Then” construction to communicate something life-producing for those who find themselves in the sin of inauthentic worship. He lists conditions of grace. “If you do this then I will do that” is the sense. Now please pay close attention to what is being communicated. These conditions are not to be viewed as a job description but rather as a doctor’s prescription. The Lord does not place grace before His people and then say, “You must earn it. You must strive to become the “employee of the Month”. NO! The only ones who will try to barter with God are legalists. We do not negotiate for blessings with God! Rather He is telling His people, “I will heal you” (cf. 57:18,19). But the way to healing is trust; trust the doctor. He, in effect, is saying “I will give you a remedy or a prescription to follow by faith. Obey everything you hear me say. Trust my counsel. Trust that the lifestyle I map out for you is good,

pleasing and perfect. Follow through with this regimen and you will be overwhelmingly blessed”.

Our Great Physician is about to speak. In order to repent of inauthentic worship, the first thing we must do is trust the Great Physician. If we will listen closely to the promises and trust and obey his prescription in vv.8-14, look at what we can expect to happen.

? Darkness will become light (vv.8,10)

What is the “darkness” factor in our lives? How much “gloom” hangs over our view of life, our families, our Flocks, our work, our future? Could it be that the Lord is allowing a degree of darkness to becloud us because we are not embracing the lifestyle He commands?

? Healing shall spring up (vv.8,11)

The sense in v.8 can be likened to a plant that is drooping and needs revived. We water it and it springs up. It becomes upright and looks vital. Could it be that part of the reason for weak bones and sore shoulders, back aches and low levels of vitality is owing to the fact that we are not generally pointed in the right direction? 1Cor.11 tells us that God’s people can become sick and even die due to the fact that they are not obeying.

? God will be in front, behind and in the midst (vv.8,9,11)

What a promise here! Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, the Lord will be in front guiding the way. He will be behind so that no sneak attacks will overtake his people. And lastly He will be ever so close. When we cry to the Lord He will say “Here I am”. When I looked at this phrase in a good commentary, I noticed that the sense is one of a roll call. When we are troubled and cry out “God”, he says “Here”.

? God will satisfy our souls in scorched places (v.11)

Here at CC, we understand that the only real, deep and abiding satisfaction we can experience is in the Lord. He is our only true and great joy; the overflowing fountain of living water. This promise is telling us that if we will trust the Lord and obey His prescription, we will experience this type satisfaction even in times of great difficulty. Times do not have to be good in order to be content when one is satisfied in God.

? Become a watered garden whose spring does not fail (v.11)

And not only so, but look at v.11. What an enticing promise this is. Becoming a watered garden in a scorched place is most attractive. But then the Lord goes on to say that this life-giving water turns in to a spring. And this spring will never fail. He is telling us that should we obey by faith the “if” clauses in this chapter, we can expect to always have the ability to serve; to give to those who are “thirsty”.

? Become a “repairer of the breach” (v.12)

I wonder what you are thinking when you hear the word “breach”. What’s broken in your life? What needs to be repaired? Marriages, relationships with children and parents, co-workers and those with whom we attend school; are any of these relationships needing repair? Could it be that restoration is found in following through with the remedy we are about to listen to?

? Ride on the heights of the earth (v.14)

And Lastly, another promise held out for the obedient is seen in v.14. Oh, the delight of experiencing what the Apostle Paul said “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”. Riding on the heights of the earth and not having our faith defeated and destroyed by sufferings is a precious promise held out for those who will obey by faith.

These are but a sample of the revival-like blessings God’s people can expect if they will listen to and obey by faith the lifestyle God desires for His church. And what is this lifestyle to which He is summoning us?

Liberate the oppressed

The first part of the remedy or the prescription for the previously spoken about healing can be summarized as “Liberate the oppressed”. We are to unshackle those who are in bondage due to their personal sin or due to being sinned against. This section in Isa.58 mirrors the first few vv. “Take the yoke from your midst” likely points back to the last part of v.3 and how they were oppressing their employees. The sense here is to stop oppressing people. Stop quarreling with people. Stop being harsh with people. Liberate people by not trying to dominate them. But this is not all I think the text is saying. I do believe we are to look out over

Springboro and Franklin and Dayton and West Carrollton to see injustice. And then move out with faith and love to overtake injustice by the gospel. Do you know of injustice going on? Can you stop it personally? If not, can you notify the governing authorities as seen in Rom.13? Can you write to your congressman? Can you write an editorial? Can you do a “Walk for Life”? Can you participate in a demonstration that is lawful? What can we do to alleviate oppression?

Another oppression is seen in addictions. As a church, we recognize that we have problems of drunkenness and addictions which are quite near to where we live. And so, we’ve started a new ministry at the Chapel called “Clearcreek Chapel’s Employee Assistance Program”. It is designed to provide help for employees and their family members who are coping with addictions such as drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc. Perhaps this message has come at this time in our lives together as a church to urge us to be involved in our new Addictions Ministry.

I’m not hear today to recruit anyone. I do not have specific answers today. I did not bring a list of applications for you to take and participate in. I’m simply asking all of us to listen to the text and see where the Lord may point us as a Chapel and us individually. Come and let us quest together for new ministries and new directions for the Chapel as a result of Isa.58.

Care for the poor

The second part of the remedy or the prescription for the promised fresh mercies can be summarized as “Care for the poor” If we are gloomy and don’t sense the closeness of God; if we are dissatisfied in our unpromising situations and our bones ache; if we are confused and do not have anything to give to people then perhaps a main reason for this is we have failed to care for the poor. We live in a nation of material prosperity. Advertisement tells us that our happiness depends upon our consumption (not our giving). The problems of hunger and poverty are not limited to a third world country. These problems are a reality in certain areas of Springboro and Franklin and inner city Dayton. We who follow Christ are said to be “Christ-like”. And what was He like? (See Matt.25:31-46)

We do have places of ministry for those who desire to care for the poor. *The Gospel Mission* in Dayton is a ministry we support as a church. Their scope of ministry encompasses clothing the scanty

dressed and feeding the hungry. They work hard at educating the homeless in the doctrines of the faith. Perhaps the Lord has brought this text to us this day to urge some of us into a supportive role of the Gospel Mission.

Maybe this message has come now to urge us all to think about how we can support Kenny and Amy's new ministry called *Open Arms Children's Home*. That we will give sacrificially to this end and that we will team up to help the boys coming into the home might be a goal for many in the Chapel.

Maybe we all need to hear a message like this to awake to the fact that there are needy people right in front of our noses. And we are called by the Sovereign Lord to minister to them.

To enjoy all the blessings listed in Isa.58 we need to trust the Great Physician that he knows what He is talking about. Then by faith we need to obey the two basic commands of "Liberate the oppressed" and "Care for the poor". This lifestyle corresponds with passionate corporate worship. This is the lifestyle which springs from zealous praise on Sunday. This is the overflow of authentic worship.

Conclusion

So let's bring our time together to a close by reminding us of the essence of the message.

What this passage is telling us today is that we are not real on Sunday if we are not real on Monday. Fasting and Sabbath adherence are no substitute for love and mercy. We cannot expect God's outpouring upon our lives today if we're not concerned with alleviating misery tomorrow. And so, as a church and individually let us answer these questions.

- Do I cloak harshness and anger with my religious activities?
- In light of Isaiah 58, what changes do I need to make so that I will love the poor? Who will help me? When will I start?
- Will I trust the Great Physician and obey His remedy in order to enjoy His revival-like promises?