

WORSHIP, JUSTICE & SODOM

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is the poet prophet and God called him to rebuke the people of God and bring them back to repentance.

God was going to allow the Assyrians to conquer His people because they had rebelled against Him, forgotten Him, and began to worship other gods. (as was often the story over their history)

They experienced a long period of blessing and had abandoned God. The prosperity was ending at God's hand, but this was not simply punishment.

The judgement was going to be used by God to purify them, bring them to repentance, so that they could be blessed. You will see this refrain over and over in Isaiah.

THREE NOTES TO KEEP IN MIND:

1. In Hebrew literature, just as in Genesis, themes get repeated. They do not think or write like Greeks (and us). Things do not move in a linear progression from one thought to the next. Instead, it moves in circles. The same ideas get presented over and over, with more depth and detail each time. When you get used to it, this is a powerful way to drive a point home!
2. Isaiah is an amazing poet writer. It is important that you take the time to appreciate the way he puts words together. You will miss a lot of the emotional impact when you rush through it looking for "the point" and missing the beauty of the words.
3. Pay attention to whether or not Isaiah is quoting God, or making commentary on what God is saying. This will help you a lot in your comprehension of the text.

JUDGMENT GIVEN

READ Isaiah 1:1-3

This is like saying, "The dog and the cat listen to me but nobody else does."

READ Isaiah 1:4-8

Isaiah makes commentary on the above prophecy...

He points out that they are stubborn, willful people that are refusing to respond to God's correction despite the fact that they are choosing more pain and suffering.

WE ARE SODOM AND GOMORRAH

READ Isaiah 1:9-10

This is a shocking comparison! Isaiah is likening the people of Sodom and Gomorrah to the current generation of God's people. He is saying that the only thing that separates them from Sodom is that God didn't leave any survivors in Sodom.

Isaiah then sarcastically calls them "rulers of Sodom" and the "people of Gomorrah".

If you don't remember the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, it was a city filled with violent sexual deviancy, rape, incest, and homosexuality. Their sinfulness had become so brazen and openly accepted that God wiped them out down the last person with fire from the sky.

These are the people that Isaiah compares Israel to.

OUR WORSHIP IS AN OFFENSE

READ Isaiah 1:11-17

They are coming to God in worship, in the ways that He gave them to do so, and it disgusts Him. They are trying to use their forms of worship without actually worshiping God. They have missed the point entirely and neglected true worship.

WHY? NEGLECTING THE POOR, LOST, AND BROKEN

And now we get the reasons for the rebuke and the reasons why God is rejecting their worship, and you may not expect what they are.

VERSE 17 – "cease to do evil, learn to do good"

- Seek justice
- Correct oppression
- Bring justice to the fatherless
- Plead the widow's cause

They were worshiping by the book, according to all the right principles, with all the right music, in all the right ways, according to SCRIPTURE, and God was disgusted by it all because they had neglected the poor, the marginalized, the lost and the broken.

WHY IS GOD SO UPSET OVER THIS?

Social Justice was a central part of God's covenant with His people. The end of Exodus chapter 22 God lays out very specific rules about taking care of the poor and marginalized people of society. And it comes with a serious threat of judgment if they do not.

This is only intensified under the New Covenant that we are now under when Jesus talks about this in **Matthew 25:31-40**

Tim Keller sums this up by saying, “God binds up His heart so closely with suffering people that He interprets any move against them as a move against Him.”

He is so compassionate towards broken people that to serve one of them, is to serve Jesus Himself.

If Jesus Christ were to knock on your door and ask for a place to stay, you would open your doors wide to Him. You would let Him sleep in your bed, eat your food, spend your money, etc. This is the heart that we are to have towards lost, broken, marginalized people in our society.

In this way, poverty is the Church’s problem. Abortion is the Church’s problem. Racism is the Church’s problem. Child Abuse is the Church’s problem. Societal problems are not the society’s problem, they are problems that Jesus expects the Church to handle.

Let’s not deceive ourselves. Broken people are not always angels in disguise. They are often challenging and annoying. They take advantage of your kindness. Abuse your generosity. Test your boundaries and quite often your help does not in the end cause them to change in any lasting way. Many, many times you do not see any return for your investment.

SO, we’re just going to have to get over that and act like Jesus.

PLAYING CHURCH?

So there is an unbreakable connection between serving our neighbor, and worshiping God. If we serve our neighbor in a way that does not put the glory of Jesus up as the ultimate goal, then our efforts might be noble but eternally misguided. If social justice is not about the Ultimate Justice Giver, then we are spinning our wheels.

But that isn’t our problem, KCC. Not even close. We don’t get to sit around, sitting on our hands worrying that we will feed the poor and neglect the gospel because we aren’t feeding the poor.

The other side of this worship to justice relationship is that when we worship God and neglect justice then we are an offense to Him.

To take Jesus’ words in Matthew 25, it’s like slamming the door in Jesus’ face as He asks for help and then going to church to worship Him.

If we neglect justice, or just count it as a lesser priority that we will get to when we have more people, and then come in here on Sunday morning with outstretched hands, and bow our knees in prayer, then we are just playing church and “our incense is an abomination to Him”.

It is for this that Isaiah compares us to the violent sexual deviants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

THE GOOD NEWS

This is a lot of rebuking all at once, but there's good news. Very. Good news.

READ Isaiah 1:18-20

Isaiah draws a picture with words. He describes clothing that is stained with crimson stains. Blood in the wool. Stains that cannot be removed.

But somehow the scarlet is turned white as snow. The crimson is turned to pure wool.

There would come a day when our Great Prophet Jesus would bleed pure crimson and scarlet. He would be carried like a Lamb to the slaughter. He lived a homeless life without money. He would die as a marginalized criminal when He was not guilty of any crime or sin. He was spotless in every way, yet He was willingly stained with the blood of our sin.

Not only has Jesus died for our lack of concern for justice, but Jesus has come inside of us, His royal priesthood, and it is His heart beating in us.

If we will repent, and press into His heart for the broken then we will not only minister to Christ but Christ will bless us.

From my commentary on Isaiah by Barry Webb, he sums up these last verses like this:

“at the very point when judgement is expected, grace intervenes. The divine Judge *reasons* with the accused, and makes an offer which is truly amazing in its generosity: nothing less than total pardon! What they had wrongly tried to achieve by cultic manipulation is now offered to them freely, on the one condition that they cease their rebellion. The alternative is certain destruction: they can “eat the good from the land” or they can “be eaten” by the sword. The choice is theirs. **The LORD is gracious, but he is not to be trifled with.**

Forgiveness had always been possible if only the people would repent. But grace is always hard for rebels to understand: their view of God is too small.”