

## True Worship

2-5-2023

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*Shout out; do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. <sup>2</sup> Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they want God on their side. <sup>3</sup> “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day and oppress all your workers. <sup>4</sup> You fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> 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 them and not to hide yourself from your own kin? <sup>8</sup> Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, “Here I am.” If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup> Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. <sup>13</sup> If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs; <sup>14</sup> then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 58:1-9a).*

### 1. The Best Gift

One of the greatest concerns that Christine and I have when traveling to Korea is buying gifts for family members. When my mother was alive, she

would often tell us not to bring any gifts. She assured us that we were the best gift to her.

## 2. The Best Gift for the Lord

What about God? What is the best gift for God? Exodus 20 tells us exactly what God wants, “**You shall have no other gods before me**” (Exodus 20:3).

The term “before me” is translated to mean “in my presence” The term “other gods” would mean, anything that we might place as a higher position than God. This can mean money, possessions, power, or honor, even relationships with others. Anything that we place before God is another god.

What does the first commandment tell us? In ancient times, people worshiped many gods. The first commandment tells us that the one true God of Israel is to be the God in people’s hearts and lives. God wanted his people to put God as the top priority in their lives. God wanted to have the most important and intimate relationship with Israel.

Why does God ask for this radical commitment? Deuteronomy 7:6 says, “**You are a people holy to the Lord your God, the Lord your God has chosen you out of the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.**”

Israel is the greatest gift for God. There is nothing more important than his people. Moses reminds Israel that they were not chosen because they were a powerful nation but because they were the fewest among the other people. God considered Israel the most important people for God and expected Israel to consider God equally as the best.

As Christians, Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:9, “**You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**” Peter tells the people that God called us to be his people through Christ.

We are grateful for God’s grace to be God’s chosen people. This is why we worship the Lord to give thanks and to remember God’s commandment.

In the Old Testament, there were several important religious rituals to worship the Lord: 1) Fasting and 2) observing Sabbath, 3) Sacrificial ritual, 4) Tithing. Isaiah 58 talks about fasting and observing the Sabbath and what true worship is.

## 3. True Worship

Verse 1 says, “**Shout out; do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.**”

God calls the prophet Isaiah to shout to the nations and tell the people of their rebellion and sins. The people believe they have been faithful to God. They imagine that their fasting and Sabbath have pleased God. Yet, God was not happy with the religious life of the people.

In verse 3, the people complain to the Lord, “**Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?**” The people did their best to keep the law, but God did not seem to pay any attention to them. In response, God tells the people, “**Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day and oppress all your workers.**” The Israelites thought they were faithful in observing the Sabbath and fasting. Yet in God’s eyes, their spiritual disciplines were selfish and superficial to only gain God’s blessings.

In verse 4, God tells people what was wrong with them, “**You fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.**” God points out that their fasts did not change their poor relationship with others. The people did not care about the needs of others and instead exploited their employees and fought with others. The fasting and Sabbath didn’t move God to listen to any of the prayers of the people.

#### **4. True Fasting**

In verses 6 and 7, Isaiah tells Israel what true fasting is. “**Is not this the fast that I choose: to loosen the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup>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 them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?**”

For God, fasting was only part of religious obligations. In the Old Testament, the only fast commanded to the people was during the annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34). The goal of fasting is to focus solely on God and His grace.

The Day of Atonement is Yom Kippur. It is considered the holiest day of the year in Judaism. Yom Kippur is observed each year on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri, the first month of the Jewish calendar. On that day, the high priest performed elaborate rituals to atone for the sins of the people. God tells the people however that he is more concerned about those who are suffering than fasting and sacrifice.

#### **5. Sabbath**

Verses 13 & 14 talk about keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the fourth commandment and was very important to Israel. The Sabbath is a day of rest and showing proper respect to God. The Sabbath is a reminder that Israel belongs to God. On this day, the Israelites refresh themselves

spiritually and physically by providing time to gather and reflect on God through worship without the stresses of daily activities. How important is the Sabbath for each of us?

The prophet Isaiah does not criticize Israel about the Sabbath. But Isaiah says that Israel's observance of the Sabbath is a calculated effort to obtain God's blessings, not a reflection of genuine thanks or devotion to God.

What about us? Church can easily become part of an effort to seem like we are worshiping God. But instead of obligation, our worship is called to be a reflection of our thanks and joy to the Lord.

## 6. Conclusion

Our scripture passage today tells us that true worship is more than fasting, singing, reading Scripture, listening to a sermon, and receiving Communion. Isaiah reminds us that true worship unto the Lord is genuine compassion for the poor, helpless, and oppressed. This is just as or even more important than the religious rituals we do in our faith journeys.

## 7. Application

Isaiah 58 tells us that we can't be true worshippers of the Lord if we neglect the hungry, poor, and those in need. If we love the Lord, we are called to also love our neighbors just as God loves our neighbors.

In Romans 12: 1, Paul says, ***"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship."*** In response to God's mercy through Jesus Christ, Paul suggests us to give ourselves wholly and continuously to God not only on Sundays but also always. That is our worship service.

John Wesley was known to fast weekly on Fridays. One of the reasons Wesley did this was to bring him into solidarity with the poor and those in prison. Wesley visited prisoners, preached once a month in the prison and had members of the Holy Club visited the prison each day to talk, pray and worship with them.

In two weeks, we will start the Season of Lent. During Lent, we practice spiritual disciplines in preparation for Easter. While we all don't have to visit prisons or orphanages, I pray that each of us take this time to pay more attention to those who are in need. I am so grateful to those who participated in the phone tree. While we were away, you contacted those were not able to come to church. During the Lent I hope we continue to contact those who are in nursing homes or rehabilitation facilities. Remember that visiting God's people would be our worship to the Lord. God would be happy with this kind of worship. I pray that God takes joy in our acts of worship unto him and the love that we share with others through our lives. Amen.