

Isaiah 1: 10-20

Repentance Driven Worship

Although the Babylonians loomed as a threat over Judah and Jerusalem, Isaiah saw cities on fire not due to military conquest, but because of sin.

Isaiah saw the nation covered with evil from head to toe. The hearts of God's people were sick with wickedness while they observed holy days and rituals with pomp and ceremony.

In the first half of this reading the Lord describes his displeasure with the actions of his people, for their sacrifices add nothing to God and do nothing for God. Their worship is only noise... it is hollow worship... it is not what God wants... the people's lack of confession and repentance makes their worship intolerable to God... their prayers are not being matched with godly lives. Truly, the people's relationship with God has been blocked by their unrepentant sin.

Verse fifteen reveals the heart of the issue. "WHEN YOU SPREAD OUT YOUR HANDS IN PRAYER, I WILL HIDE MY EYES FROM YOU; EVEN IF YOU OFFER PRAYERS, I WILL NOT LISTEN."

What the Lord does require is found in verses sixteen and seventeen. We are to cleanse our hearts and clean up our lives. We are to change our behaviours by adopting a new way of thinking. We are to change our priorities to seek first the Kingdom of God. We are to truly repent rather than offering weak words of confession.

2.

Repentance is not simply the removal of evil deeds. It includes going into the past to clean up the root causes of those sins. True repentance aims to make things right, and that makes our worship beautiful to God.

The final verses of this reading evolve into a call for compassion, hope, and grace. Our sins which are like blood stained scarlet can be made white as snow. We can be made clean through repentance, willingness, obedience, and the grace of God. Isaiah's prophecy reveals a God who loves mercy rather than sacrifice and who, in his mercy, will forgive the sins of those who truly repent.

God is willing and eager to fill us with salvation, but if our head is turned away from God and our mouth is closed in stubbornness, we cannot drink it in.

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16

By Faith

Based on a sermon by Steven J. Cole.

According to these verses our faith, and our faith in action, does come with a few qualifiers:

-We can only work within the boundaries of our existing physical reality. We cannot bring things into existence from a void. We can only discover the nature of the Universe.

-God is separate and distinct from his creation. There is food for thought here. Creation is holy in the sense that was created. Creation is sacred in the sense that Creation is worthy of veneration or reverence, but Creation is not sacred because it is not devoted exclusively to one service or use. Like I said, food for thought.

-The Earth is a resource that we have been given to manage. We are to prudently tend it, cultivate it, use it, reshape it, and conserve it with the certainty that God holds each of us accountable for how we treat this world. Our time on this planet is not the race of our lives but simply our turn to run in a relay in which we have received the baton from those who have preceded us. We will pass the baton on to those who follow us.

The faith that I will now speak of is an enduring faith. Not the faith that is like the seed sown on stony ground that quickly withers when trials hit. Nor the faith that lands on thorny ground and lasts a bit longer but is eventually strangled by temptations. I am referring to

faith that, because of good ground and perseverance, brings forth fruit to maturity.

Faith is the means of realizing spiritual reality, of gaining God's approval, and of understanding the origin of all that is.

This faith is a foundation of our relationship with God. It is based on trust. We trust that what we share with God will not be used in a way that damages us. This faith, this trust, is based on truth... no lies or deceptions to erode our trust and cause distance in our relationship with God.

This faith is expressed in love. I am speaking of the love that seeks a greater good in another person. What you say to another person might be truthful, but if it does not build the other person in the way of Christ, it is not done in love. (On the other hand, to deceive another under the guise of love is to deny truth.)

So how does all of this relate to Hebrews chapter eleven?

Faith or trust in God is at the foundation of our relationship with God. If you doubt the truth of God's word, you cannot trust God. We understand that some of the things God says are not easy to accept. God does confront our lack of belief and sin, but we are always related to in love. So in our faith we can always be confident of what we hope to become, even though we may not see it at this time. Faith makes the future present and the unseen visible. As long as possibilities still exist faith is able to be present. Good works come from faith and are also proof of genuine belief.

Such faith is down to earth... it is practical. It has sustained the people of God for thousands of years and through every sort of difficulty.

Luke 12: 32-40

Watchfulness

We expect the Gospels, especially Luke, to reassure us that we find security in Jesus Christ. Luke reaches out to people of every class and background with messages of forgiveness and salvation.

The passage begins with a delightful statement: "DO NOT BE AFRAID, LITTLE FLOCK, FOR YOUR FATHER HAS BEEN PLEASED TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM."

These words illustrate God's desire and intention for humans to flourish by using the life experiences of Jesus as roots for their own lives, and to do so without fear of what we cannot see, what we do not know, what we cannot control, and what others may think of us... without fear of making ourselves vulnerable to ourselves and to others.

Jesus says, "Stop being afraid."

Jesus also says, "Deposit your treasure into the bank of the Holy Spirit." Treasures such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control.

When we share these treasures of God's Kingdom without expecting anything in return we participate in the Kingdom and receive even more from God. More love, more joy, more peace, more patience, more kindness, more generosity, more faithfulness, more self-control... more treasure. More of the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

2.

Jesus' message is to stop being afraid, invest in the heavenly treasure of God's Kingdom, and be ready for Christ to return.

In other words, doing nothing while waiting for divine instruction is not going to cut it. To eat, drink, and be merry because tomorrow we are forgiven is the wrong attitude. Some people adopt the philosophy of "God likes to forgive. I like to sin. Really, the world is arranged admirably well." That thinking fails to pass judgement. Or how about, "Jesus is coming back soon. Look busy." Looking busy is not enough. We are to be active participants in God's kingdom.

In this passage, the focus is not so much on the end times as on the end ways. The message is to be ready so that you will avoid punishment but to be ready so that you will receive blessing. Rather than being on continual high alert for Jesus' coming, focus on things of God while developing your peripheral vision in order to be happily surprised when that time comes. For the light of Jesus shines through the glass in both directions... inward as well as outward.

Stop being afraid.

Know that your treasure is the Kingdom of God.

Be prepared for his coming.

Then look in the window and see who Jesus sees.