

True and False Repentance

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 58:1-7

Preached On: Sunday, November 4, 2012

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I'd like to invite you to look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 58. This chapter, I believe, we have a very clear distinction made between true repentance and a false repentance. We all know that wherever there is the true there is the false. Wherever there is the wheat there are tares. Wherever there is the original, there is an imitation and I pray that as we hear this message today, myself included, that our cry would be unto the Lord by his Spirit that we be granted what is a true biblical repentance, that which is produced by the Spirit of God alone and not just an imitation which at best would be remorse. A lot of people have remorse for their sin. They have regrets for their particular path or lifestyle and yet we dare not confuse remorse or regret with repentance.

Here in Isaiah 58, in verse 1, we read,

Isa 58:1-14 KJV - 1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. 3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall

answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; 10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: 11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. 13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: 14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

So here we see a very solemn charge, commission, that is given to the prophet Isaiah to reprove these people who professed a certain form of worship outwardly and yet in their hearts were nothing but hypocrites. That's what the theme of verse 1 is, "Cry aloud and spare not." That's preaching. That is declaring God's word exactly as he has set it forth. He says, "lift up thy voice like a trumpet." The sound of the trumpet must be clear. It must be plain. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "If the sound of the trumpet is uncertain, how then will the people that hear it know whether you're charging or whether you're retreating?" It's very important that the message be clear and such is the charge that is given to any that the Lord raises up.

This matter of preaching the Gospel is a very solemn matter. I trust week in and week out that you never take it for granted that regardless of the number of years that the Lord has allowed me to preach and certainly that's all it is, it's by his permission, that you never think, "Well Ken, he's got it down and we just come in here and wait to hear whatever he has to say." If that's your thought, we're all in trouble. I trust that when you come, it is to hear a word from the Lord and I pray that whatever I say be of the Lord because I know how much this flesh is attached to what I say. It's like when you offer a drink of water to somebody. You just want to taste the water, you don't want to taste the cup. If there's a metallic taste or a clay sort of taste, then all of a sudden you think, "Well, the water is tainted." No, the problem is with the cup and the same with preaching the Gospel. There is no problem with the Gospel. It is clear, it is plain, it is the pure water of life that I have to declare unto you but I pray that the vessel not taint that water or taint it as far as your receiving it. These are all very important matters.

But here, this particular word is intended to admonish and to warn those who may have an outward profession. In other words, they profess the Lord with their mouth and yet their heart is far from him. These matters of the Gospel are heart matters and whenever the Lord by his Spirit calls a sinner, he deals in his heart and it is not necessarily an

outward profession or showing and expressing of that work. It leaks out on you, there is no question, but the goal of one who is under the Spirit's work in conviction is never to impress people around him. On the contrary, it's a matter of that sinner being brought low and bowing before the Lord and crying unto him. It's as if there were no other sinner in the world but you that the Lord is dealing with and drawing to himself. That's a true work of repentance versus one that is just of outward show.

That's really what verse 2 is about. This is not a commendation because when you read it in verse 2, you think, "Well, that sounds pretty good." But it begins with the word "yet" so you have to connect it with verse 1. Here is the charge, "show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Well, you say, "What was that transgression? What was that sin?" It was honoring the Lord with their lips and yet the heart was far from him. In other words, they were in a lost state "yet," so if you were to look at it just from the outward, "they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways." On the outward, that's what they profess, "as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God." In other words, the Lord is saying, "If you were to look at this from above as any man might, you would say well, what's wrong? Everything appears to be fine." "They ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." In other words, daily this activity of worship is going on much like we are today. The church door is open at 10 o'clock. We come in. We sit down. We go through our time of worship and then we leave. We carry our Bibles. You see people on Monday and they ask you, "What did you do Sunday?" "I went to worship." "Okay, tell me a little bit about your church. Do you attend regularly?" "Yeah, we do regularly. Tuesday night, Wednesday night, when we meet, come and go."

All of these things have an appearance of righteousness and yet the attitude of the heart you can see in verse 3, "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?" In other words, the Lord was bringing this nation through hard times. When we talk about a nation, we talk about individuals and it's in those troubled times, it's in the trials that the Lord brings upon a nation or even a congregation that we see the true nature of the heart, those who are the Lord's and those who aren't. Part of the religious ordinances in verse 2 that they speak of there were the fastings. They were the keepings of the Sabbath. They were the new moons. They were all that pertained to the laws that the Lord had established. And so outwardly the people were going through the motions much as people today might go through the motions of having regular devotions. I can't tell you how many people I run into that talk to me about their quiet time in the morning and how they have to read a certain portion of Scripture otherwise if they don't, their day doesn't start right and God might not bless and accountability. I recently had an associate that wouldn't ride with anybody in the car going from business to business because that was her time to call up her accountability partner and talk about how things were going so it was between the 2 of them. You know, people are religious and all about us but when things don't go right, isn't this how they begin to reason: "Well, what's the purpose then of even praying? Or reading Scripture?" People get disgusted with their God because they assume, "If I do these things, then he's going to do this for me." It's a tit for tat, butter for fat like we used to say, alright?

"Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" This was the attitude of these in Isaiah's generation that the Lord is exposing. Again, matters of the heart and the conclusion is, "Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labours." In other words, they aren't getting the type of result out of their fasting that they had hoped for and the reason was because they weren't fasting for the glory of God and coming aside because that was the purpose of the fasting was, to reflect upon what those sacrifices meant; how they were a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ and the rest that was in him.

But they found it to be a waste of time and so the Lord points that out in verse 4, "Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high." Again, the Lord here is exposing the true attitude of their heart and, you know, it's the spirit of antichrist. Any time that we pretend to go through the motions with regard to worship and I don't care whether it's reading the Bible or whether it is supposedly what we call praying. If our attitude is, "We have afflicted our souls in vain," or, "We've come to this place of worship but in our everyday lives things aren't going the way that we expect them to, then I just won't worship." I can't tell you how many people I talk to that will tell you that they have too many problems going on to be able to come to worship. Well, I'll tell you what, that's the time to come. That's the time when we need by God's grace to be drawn aside and to be brought low at Christ's feet and to be taught of him. Not to think, well, like negotiating with God, "I'll come but I expect this in return."

There are a lot of people that that's the way they view worship. That's the way they view anything with regard to devotion unto the Lord but such is a false way and the Lord points it out there in verse 4, "ye fast for strife and debate." In other words, in works religion, it comes down to, "Well, if you did a little bit more fasting or if you had just a little bit more faith, maybe you would be getting the same results I do." That's how works religion reasons. "Well, I'm blessed so let me tell you how I do it." All of these things stir up debate and promote or show the actual covetousness that is in men's hearts.

In verse 3 where it says, "Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact your labours." In other words, you want mercy because you expect that from God for having done something for him and yet you turn around and exact of others, regardless of their situation, they could be the poorest of the poor but you still exact of them labours. In other words, that was the way to get people to pay their debts. "Alright, if you can't pay it then I'm going to make you pay to the furthest farthing." So you can see how their attitude was. They expected mercy from God just for going through a few motions and yet in their dealings with men and those that owe them, they exacted nothing but labor and justice. There was the hypocrisy and so it is that the Lord points out their error.

In verse 5, then the Lord makes this distinction and here we have the difference between false repentance because that's the whole idea of fasting is that there is a repentance that is being manifested through that fasting. But the Lord here asks the true question, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen?" In other words, is this the way that the Lord himself has purposed that sinners should approach unto him? If the Lord would deal with us as we

deal with others, could there be any that stand? Just as you exact justice of others, you say of that other, "I'm going to get you." Is that how you want the Lord to deal with you and how you approach unto him? On the one hand, we cry out for mercy and grace and then on the other, we hold people to account.

So we're told here that this is not the fast that God has chosen and it is the exact opposite of what it is to afflict the soul, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen?" the Lord said, "a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?" There are many portions of Scripture that denounce mere outward performances when it comes to worship and yet how much of it is a part of men and women's every day lives as far as religion is concerned, works religion. All night prayer sessions. Extra days where people, you know, they have worked all day but they are still required to come and to spend long hours in fasting and praying, so-called. This is part of works religion today but there is nothing new. It has been that way down through the years and what the Lord is saying here is that sort of mortification of the body, those outward performances of the flesh still do not deal with the real issue which is your sin. Remember, up in verse 1, this is the clear message, "show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." You know, just because we don't do as other congregations around us that keep calling for these times of fasting and praying and outward performances and what Paul called bodily exercise that profits little: standing and sitting and bowing and doing all these things. The one thing that none of that ever is able to help is our sin. We are sinners still. It's just a bunch of lost sinners going through the motions.

So we're told here that it's not enough "to spread sackcloth and ashes under you." You could do it. I could call a fast this week and say, "I want everybody to wear their poorest clothes and come in and put ashes on your face and let's all humble ourselves before the Lord," but that does nothing but give an outward appearance but unto the Lord it's an abomination because that's all it is: it's an outward show of humility. That's why the Lord says in verse 5, "wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?" Paul's preachers make it sound like it's acceptable to the Lord but do you realize that there is only one acceptable day to the Lord? That the Lord has ever considered? And that's the day that his Son shed his blood on Calvary and dealt with the sin question, the sin problem, the sin issue of his people. It was there in Christ's humiliation. It was there in his humbling himself and being obedient unto death, the death of the cross, that all for whom he died were once for all redeemed and justified forever. Therefore if it's a matter of coming aside for worship as we do even now, we know that it's only for one reason, that he paid the debt. That he did the work as our substitute. He afflicted his soul and by the travail of his soul, the Father has seen that and he is satisfied. That's our only hope and certainly that is why the Lord here denounces this sort of fasting.

Verse 6, again, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" So verse 5 tells us what it is not, that's false profession. It's false worship. It's false religion. It's false repentance. But now verse 6, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" And what is it? "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" I don't know about you but I see the whole Gospel in that one verse

and it's not me breaking the bands of wickedness but it is the Lord himself breaking those bands of wickedness. It is not me being able to relieve myself from the heavy burdens of my sin but the Lord delivering me by his work, through the work that he came to accomplish, and "to let the oppressed go free." That begins with me. Even as I have been freed. That word means "justified; acquitted; declared righteous before God by the blood and righteousness of Christ alone." How he has dealt with me is how I will deal with others. If I've been an object of his mercy, then God help me to be merciful to others like me. If I have been acquitted of my sin, my sin not being imputed unto me, then God help me not to impute other sins to them. You see, we're quick just like these hypocrites to ask God for mercy, "Be gracious." And yet in our attitude toward somebody when we're wronged or when they cross our path or do something against us, what do we do? We're like a raging bear, "I'm going to get you. I'm going to call my lawyer. You're going to pay to the furthest farthing." Whoa. Wait a minute. Is not that the disputing that he talks about there in verse 4, the strife, the smiting with the fist of wickedness?

You see, the Lord makes a difference if we've truly been taught of him and he has brought us to be laid low at Christ's feet. Whenever we see another fall, it's going to be difficult for us to kick them when they're down or say they get what they deserve. That sort of thought and expression, dear friends, is evil and it's in the heart of every one of us here. When you look around and you think, "I'm going to get that person. I want to make them pay," and all the while, coming to worship and opening our hymn books and singing songs of deliverance and praise to God for having delivered us and yet walking back out that door and holding grudges and dealing with others that we feel have wronged us and our thoughts are, "I want to apply the last letter of the law against them." And if we've been discharged from our debt, and what a great debt it is and I know this requires wisdom. I have people ask me all the time, "So should we just roll over and play dead? How are we to handle this?" I would say prayerfully considering your own self. Is not that what Paul said, "If you see even a brother overtaken in a fall, you that are spiritual, go and restore such a one." But to what? "Be careful lest you yourself be taken in the same temptation and fall." These are things that are matters of the heart wherein we need the Lord's wisdom.

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness." Has the Lord loosed your bands of wickedness? "To undo the heavy burdens." What could be a heavier burden than the debt of our sin and if the Lord has so undone that burden, we should not in any way impose on others then what the Lord has delivered us from. "Let the oppressed go free." The Lord said, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord." So that doesn't mean even in that that we have an attitude of, "Ah-ha, you wait. The Lord will get you. I'm not going to get you but the Lord will." Even that sort of thinking is from a depraved heart. "And that ye break every yoke?" You know, you think about how many people today are burdened down with anger and they don't want to let go. Somebody has wronged them at some point and in their minds they are not going to die until that thing is made right. The Lord says that you break every yoke. The one person that it is affected is you, not that other person and so such is the way of the Lord.

If you look over in Matthew 11, this is how the Lord so teaches his people and as the Lord is pleased to deal with us in mercy, shall we not be merciful? As he has been pleased to deal with us in grace, shall we not be gracious? This is not a message of works but of the fruit of grace, the fruits of righteousness or the fruit of righteousness, better put, that righteousness which the Lord himself has established and earned and God has imputed to the account of his people. Knowing how he has delivered me, shall I not in return deal graciously with others? But this is not something that is by nature in us. Ours is to seek justice. It is to seek revenge. And yet the Lord says here in Matthew 11, beginning in verse 25, "At that time Jesus answered and said," and here he's facing a nation of people who oppose him, that stand against him. But he says in verse 25, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." That's an important thing to think about when you've got people dealing contrary to you and against you. Think of the contradiction of sinners which our Lord had against him and yet he thanked his Father that it was so and that if these were acting the way they were, it was because to that point, he had hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, from those that thought themselves wise and prudent but has revealed them unto babes. In other words, the only reason there's a difference between you and them is because God has been pleased to reveal in you his grace whereas he has left them to their darkness.

But he said, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." If you have any standing before God, any righteous state, true righteous state before him, it's not in you. It's not in me. It's in that work that the Lord Jesus Christ alone accomplished. And it was God who purposed it to be so and that's why he says in verse 28, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That's why when I read this "to loose the bands of wickedness and to undo the heavy burdens," if I'm the Lord's that's what he did for me. He paid the debt. He satisfied a holy God and has called me to himself that I rest in him. Then he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Rather than going after people that you feel have oppressed you and done you wrong and adding burden to their burden, the Lord says simply, "Come unto me. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

That's the outworking of that that we see here in Isaiah 58, verse 7, where the Lord has granted that true repentance to come to Christ, to lay down every effort to try to work out this salvation ourselves and to rest in him alone. It produces the kind of peace and the kind of rest of that he alone gives and that's what we see in verse 7, "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" From your own brethren. You know, turn a deaf ear. I truly believe that every encounter that we have in this life, God has purposed. Do you believe that? Every encounter. I don't care whether it's a person that comes up and curses you to your face, the Lord purposed it. And if we could have that attitude and bow even in that and know that he wouldn't have cursed had the Lord not put that person in my path to do so. It's like

Shimei cursing David as he was walking out of Jerusalem, being chased out by his own son and one of David's servants wanted to go over and lop off his head and David said, "No, let him alone. It is the Lord."

Now, that takes the grace of God to be able to do that and yet that's what I see here. "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?" Didn't the Lord himself love his enemies and when he was cursed, cursed not but blessed? When it says he loved his enemies, remember those even given him of the Father for whom he laid down his life, while we were still enemies, Christ died. So that means you and me if the Lord has paid our debt. I was that enemy of whom he did not exact justice but he bore that justice himself. I was the needy one. He is the bread of life. He is that bread that was given to me, the hungry one. I was that poor one that was cast out of the house and he clothed me with his righteousness. And I was that naked one. Were it not for his garment of righteousness with which he has clothed me, I would still be naked. I would be lost. But he has done that for me. He has not hid himself from his own flesh. In other words, he became a man and endured the cross and paid the debt so that he might save and deliver such sinners as I am.

When you think about that, honestly do we really have a problem in this world understanding what the Lord has been pleased to do for this poor sinner? May he always grant me and you the grace to deal graciously in this world because I've often said, "This is the lesson, now comes the test in this life." May the Lord so grant us that spirit of repentance to never confide in our flesh or rest on our laurels as if we're anything but only constantly continue to look to him and him alone.