

A Gracious Call to Sincerity

Psalm 50:1-23

Halifax: 1 January 2006

Introduction:

Whenever a new year comes round,

- we often pause to consider how we are getting on.
- Businesses often do inventory, end of the year reports come out, and evaluations are made...

Today, I want you to consider a question of the greatest importance...

- How are you getting on with God?
- or to put it another way,
 - What does the living God think of you?

I introduce this question to you today as the theme of our forthcoming sermon series in Matthew 15 and 16.

- We will be considering the assessments that Jesus makes of several groups of persons:
 - empty traditionalists
 - believing gentiles
 - the needy multitudes
 - and deceptive leaders.
- We will use Psalm 50 as our theme Psalm for this series.
 - Over the next few weeks, we will be singing from this Psalm in co-ordination with our series in Matthew.
 - And so today, I want to preach to you from this Psalm.

I. In verses 1-6, God presents Himself to you as the great Judge...

- **the One whose evaluation is ultimate.**
 - **Though you may have a million people evaluate you, His is the only evaluation that really matters.**
- A. Everything in these verses is designed to awaken you to the reality that He is Your final Judge.
1. It is something that every human being too readily forgets!

- a. Forgetting His judgement is the way we foolishly attempt to comfort ourselves!
 - We put it out of our minds that He is constantly assessing us.
 - We pretend that He does not see and does not care what we do.
- b. Whole religions are built around such pretences...
 - One brand of religion claims that God is too high to judge individual human beings...
 - Another brand says that He is too soft to judge us...
 - And yet another denies Him altogether and worships man so that the only judgement we have to worry about is that of other human beings who can do nothing more than kill our bodies.

TRANS> But know for certain that such pretences do not change the fact that God will indeed judge us.

2. Regardless of what you may think about His judgement, there is still no question so important to ask yourself as the question,
 - “What does God think of me?”
 - a. Nothing has more weighty consequences than this!
 - If you forget Him, you will torn to pieces with none to deliver at the end,
 - as God says in verse 22....
 - But if truly live before Him,
 - you will know His salvation for all eternity, as promised in v. 23.
 - b. Your whole destiny can be reduced to this one thing...
 - “What does the living God think of me?”
 - This is not a question to ignore.

B. So look how God here makes vivid the reality of His judgement.

1. See how He begins by presenting His divine majesty as our Judge under three names.
 - a. He calls Himself El, Elohem, Yahweh...
 - 1) 1a means “the mighty One,” or “the Almighty.”
 - He is the very source of all power and might in heaven and earth.
 - There is no king that reigns and no devil that roams apart from His sustaining power.

- There is no limitation to His might, there is nothing He cannot do that He chooses to do.
- 2) Myhla, the second name, means simply “God.”
- By this name, He is shown to be the One who alone is to be worshipped, who alone has no rival.
 - He is God and there is no other.
- 3) hwhy, the third name, speaks of Him as the “self-existing one.”
- He is the source of all things created...
 - He alone is uncreated.
 - He sustains all things...
 - He alone is self-sustaining.
 - This is also His covenant name by which He was known to Israel by which He promises to sustain them forever.
- b. It is this One: la Myhla hwhy , who is presented as Judge!
- Do not be so foolish as to suppose that He has no right to judge us!
 - The judges of our land have foolishly chosen to exclude Him from their judgements.
 - They have set themselves up as gods to challenge His divine prerogative.
 - God will expose their folly to all!
 - But you are every bit as foolish in as much as you exclude or ignore His judgement in your life.
 - Wisdom receives His instruction from His Word and conforms to His ways.
 - It cares not what anyone else thinks, for He is God.

TRANS> Thus He demonstrates His divine majesty under three divine names as the One whose sole prerogative it is to judge.

2. Next, see how He demonstrates His universal dominion and authority
- that He has authority over all things in Heaven and on earth.
- a. He does this by calling heaven and earth to appear before Him.
- 1) So in verse 1,

- He is said to call the earth from rising to the setting of the Sun!
 - The idea is that nothing is excluded.
 - His judgements are to be presented to every creature—wherever the Sun has it circuit.
- 1) And in verse 4,
- He is said to call the heavens to witness His judgement...
 - This is probably a reference to the angels and all the other inhabitants of the spirit world.
- a. His calling of these shows that He has authority over them all.
- The implication here is that His judgements are final and reach to everyone!
 - You cannot suppose that they will not reach you,
 - nor can you suppose that you will be able to appeal to some other court!
 - Once God has spoken, there is no further appeal.
1. Further, see how the Lord demonstrates the terror of His judgements.
- a. In verse 3, He is presented as breaking the silence with a terrible display of devouring fire and a great tempest all around Him!
- We are reminded of His appearance on Mount Sinai when the Law was given,
 - and the many occasions in Israel’s history when He broke His silence to display His judgements against them...
 - as in the days of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity...
 - And even more at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD
- b. By speaking of “not remaining silent,”
- God is makes it clear that His judgement has not yet been fully revealed.
 - It is a warning to not suppose His approval before you have heard His verdict and seen the devouring fire and the tempest.
 - And by speaking of consuming fire and tempest,
 - He wishes to put fear in our hearts that we might see the danger we are in.
 - He wants us to know that His judgement is not something that can be averted or ameliorated by any created thing.

- The only way it can be altered is by His own will.
2. Further, see how He presents the seat of His judgement as Zion.
- In verse 2, He says,
 - “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth.”
 - a. This shows that Zion is the place from which God’s judgements proceed.
 - While God is revealed to all nations through the things that He has made, His special Word-revelation came only from Zion.
 - It is from here that both the written Word and the living Word, come forth...
 - This is why the prophets always show the nations in the gospel age coming to Zion to be taught of God.
 - The revelation that was given from Zion is the only Word revelation given for the whole world.
 - It is from here that God speaks to the entire earth through His Son.
 - True gospel preachers publish no law, no judgement, and no gospel but that which came out of Zion.
 - It is in God’s mercies to Zion that the nations find salvation,
 - And it is by the One man Jesus Christ according to what He spoke on earth that all the nations will be judged.
 - b. This should teach everyone not to suppose that God has more than one standard of judgement!
 - He has revealed Himself to the nations in His dealings with Israel.
 - We cannot take some other law and play it off against God’s law from Zion.
 - We learn of His judgements by looking at His revelation to Zion.
 - The whole earth is called to come and witness what He has done in Israel,
 - and especially how He sent Jesus for their salvation and then how He visited Jerusalem with judgement for rejecting Jesus.
 - So it will be done at the last day to all nations when the gospel has been published to every land.
 - Those who have repented and believed this gospel will be saved,
 - Those who have not believed will be damned.

TRANS> Thus you see in verse 1-6 how God presents Himself as Judge.

B. God wants all of you to know that His judgements are real.

1. He invites the whole world to come and behold His judgements upon His people...
 - He does this in mercy that we might become His true disciples—
 - not merely in name or in outward form, but in truth.
2. Notice that the focus of His judgement in this Psalm is not His judgement upon the nations,
 - a. but His judgement upon His covenant people.
 - He has called the nations of the earth to witness this judgement, but He is not judging those nations here.
 - 1) He is appealing to “My saints—those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice”
 - That is, those who profess to trust Him for salvation.
 - 2) In verse 7, He tenderly appeals to them as “My people” when He says,
 - “Hear O My people, and I will speak.”
 - Then He calls Himself their God.
 - b. This revelation of His judgement is not meant to be a revelation of His final judgement...
 - It is rather a lesson for all those who would profess His name.
 - It is a warning that you must not content yourselves with an empty profession!
 - In this Psalm, He is urging those in every age who have made an empty profession to repent!
 - It is a gracious call to sincerity!
 - It is a warning not to dabble with God by playing religion,
 - but to realise that He is a living Judge before whom we must all appear.

TRANS> And so in the remainder of the Psalm,

- He is shown reasoning with His people about what they are before Him...
 - In vs. 7-15, He reasons with you about your worship before Him...

- And in 16-21, He reasons with you about your life before Him.
- Let us come with appropriate self-examination to consider what He says to us in each of these sections.

II. First, consider how He reasons with you in verse 7-15 about your worship before Him.

A. He addresses here the problem of worship that is merely formal...

- That is, worship that only involves going through the formalities as if that were enough!

1. In verse 8, He says,

- “I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offering which are continually before me.”

a. The problem is not that there was no outward form of worship.

- To put it in our modern context,
 - there is a gathering of the church,
 - there is the celebration of the Lord’s Supper,
 - there is the ministry of the word.
- For them, there were plenty of sacrifices being offered...
 - He is making it clear that the problem is not with a lack of outward ceremony.

b. God is not here concerning Himself with the outward form of worship, but with the heart of the worshipper...

- It is not that the outward form doesn’t matter...
 - There are many times when He does address the outward form—
 - In fact, all the generations following the rebellion of Jeroboam which involved a perversion of God’s appointed worship are judged on their conformity or lack of conformity with that perverted worship.
 - The point is not that God is unconcerned about the form,
 - but that here He is dealing with something deeper—
 - something more subtle and deceptive that snares many of His worshippers...
 - something more destructive to the whole purpose of worship...

2. He is exposing the kind of worship which supposes that, if the form is there, God should be satisfied!

a. Hear what He says in verses 9-13

- v. 9-13: "I will not take a bull from your house, *Nor* goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *And* the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats?"

b. In effect, God is saying,

- Do not think that I have called you to worship and make offerings to Me because I need something from you.
- This is that ridiculous attitude that you have when you feel that because you have worshipped,
 - God is somehow indebted to you...
 - That you have done something for Him to obligate Him to bless you and to favour you.
 - When you do that, you completely miss the whole purpose of the ceremonies of worship!

B. The whole purpose of worship is to meet with your God in the way that is fitting.

1. What I mean is,

- in a way that is appropriate when you consider
 - who God is (the great Creator, Judge and Redeemer)
 - and who you are (a helpless, fallen, human being)...
- If you come before Him in a way that denies who He is or who you are, then you are coming in a way that is not fitting and appropriate...
 - You are coming in a lying way.

TRANS> And so the Lord tells you that though you come to worship and bring all the outward things He has appointed,

2. There are two things you must bring if your worship is to be acceptable:

- The first is praise; the second is faith.
- Lets look at these:

a. First, you must bring "praise"

- This is brought out in verse 14 where it says:

- “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.”
- 1) The word “thanksgiving” is the translation of the Hebrew word “yadaw.”
 - a) This word properly means “to confess.”
 - It has to do with speaking the truth about something...
 - When it is used of ourselves, it usually has to do with telling the truth about our sins...
 - When it is used of God, it usually has to do with telling the truth about His perfections and glorious works!
 - This is nothing else but praise!
 - We praise Him for His beauty and glory...
 - and we praise Him for His goodness to us.
 - b) You cannot properly worship God as a poor creature unless you come with such praise!
 1. If you are not caused to marvel at His superior excellence and majesty, there can only be one reason for it...
 - You have not really thought on Him at all!
 - You have come before Him in form, but you have not truly met Him and truly interacted with Him in truth!
 - You have only gone through the motions...
 2. Likewise, if you come before Him in form and you have no gratitude for all that He has done for you and others,
 - You have not come before Him in truth but only in pretence...
 - How could it be that you who have received your life and all your possessions and your food and even the heat that warms your body could come knowingly before Him without thanksgiving?
 - If there is no gratitude, it is a sham...
 - You have not come before Him but in form because you have not dealt with Him in truth.
- 2) It is added here that you must come paying your vows to Him...
 - a) This refers in particular to thanksgiving for His saving mercies.
 - In the ancient times, the people would promise to God particular worship in response to answered prayer.
 - Jacob did this at Bethel when He promised to give a tenth of all that He had to worship God if God would bring Him back safely as He had promised.

- God did, and Jacob kept his vow.
- a) You do not rightly come before God as a sinner who has been delivered from the eternal wrath of God without thanksgiving for so great a deliverance!
 - Of course, I do not mean that we never come wrongly before God!
 - That is the very thing that is being addressed here!
 - But you are not worshipping the Lord in truth when you come without heart-felt gratitude for His saving mercies!
 - You are only going through a dead formality.

TRANS> So then, praise is an essential requirement of all true worship.

- a. The second requirement is faith.
 - 1) This is brought out in verse 15 where the Lord says to us:
 - “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me.”
 - 2) As human beings, we are totally dependent on God for everything—absolutely everything.
 - This does not mean that we must name off all the things we need from Him,
 - but it does mean that we are not rightly appearing before Him unless we come with the recognition that we need His mercies.
 - A proud man is a man who cannot meet with God in truth.
 - He is a man who denies the very fundamental reality that He has nothing but what God is pleased to give Him.
 - To come before the Lord without some sense of that dependence is to come before Him in pretence.

TRANS> But we are not only dependent on Him as creatures,

- but much more as fallen sinners!
- 3) No sinner (and we are all sinners) can truly meet His God without crying out to Him for His promised mercy.
 - If you are one who dares to come before God, yet who has never called upon Him for salvation,
 - I can assure you that you have never really come before Him.

- If you are not trusting in His Son whom He sent from heaven to take away your sins,
 - You are not worshipping God but some idol.
 - The God of heaven cannot be approached by sinners without a Saviour.
 - You must stand before Him in a posture of faith or you are not really standing before Him at all.

- b. And interestingly enough, where there is this faith that calls upon God for deliverance,
 - 1) There is also the praise and thanksgiving that results from such deliverance...
 - As He says, “I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me.”
 - And so it comes around full circle...
 - We come praising Him and calling upon Him,
 - And this gives us yet another occasion to praise Him again!

 - 2) Do not pretend that you have worshipped if your worship is devoid of praise and faith.
 - Ceremonies themselves are not worship.
 - To offer ceremonies without true praise and faith is to offer to God a shell without the kernel... the husk without the corn.
 - The ceremonies are nothing more than vehicles to carry to God our gratitude and faith...
 - If the ceremonies are offered to God without the gratitude and faith, they are like an empty delivery truck.
 - God will not accept it.
 - It doesn't matter how big and fine the delivery truck is...
 - If it is empty, it has missed its purpose.

TRANS> And so you see how God reasons with you about the worship you bring to Him as the living God.

I. Next, He reasons with you about daily living that denies Him.

- **This He does in verses 16-21.**

A. He challenges you with the emptiness of a claim that you belong to Him while you continue to live in open rebellion against Him.

1. In verse 16, He says to the wicked:
 - “What right do you have to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in Your mouth, seeing you hate my instruction and cast My words behind You?”
 - a. Here is a person, to put it in New Testament terms,
 - who claims to be a disciple of Jesus Christ...
 - He professes the Lord Jesus with his mouth—has taken God’s covenant in his mouth.
 - He has been baptised and talks of himself as a Christian, and presents himself to others as one of God’s people.
 - He speaks of God’s commandments, declaring His statutes...
 - Perhaps he speaks of how God is to be worshipped...
 - Perhaps he speaks with horror about adultery or gay marriage...
 - Perhaps he speaks about the corruption of our society
 - b. But this one is wicked...
 - He is one who openly rebels against God’s commandments!
 - He is said to have cast away God’s words behind him!
 - Yet, how can this be when God is chiding him for declaring His statutes?
 - How is he said to declare them if he has cast them away?
 - It is in this—
 - He declares them to others but does not obey them himself.
 - He has a lot to say about the evil around him, but he does not repent of the evil in his own life.
 - c. Such persons are ever to be found in the church...
 - Indeed, there is not a one of us that is entirely free of this dreaded wickedness...
 - But those of genuine repentance are continually addressing their own sins and refusing to settle down in them...
 - They are at war with them and not at peace as the fellow addressed here is.
2. God speaks of particular sins,
 - all of which (interestingly enough) were common to the Pharisees who were always ready to charge others with sin...
 - a. In verse 18, he charges the hypocrite with stealing—

- The Pharisees were said to rob widows houses and their own parents by refusing to support them under the pretence of religion.
- b. He accuses them of adultery—
- Jesus said that they were an adulterous generation, though they had many evasions with their loopholes about divorce.
 - It is the way of the hypocritical adulterer to always say that what he is doing is not really adultery—
- c. The Lord accuses them of sins of the tongue...
- Speaking lies to deceive the unwary—think of the vows the Pharisees made in bad faith...
 - Speaking against their own brother and slandering him, even as the Lord Jesus was slandered in order to get rid of Him!
 - Wicked hypocrites find great delight in accusing others.
- B. Surely, if you are living in rebellion against God’s clear commandments, you are not truly Christ’s disciple despite all your pretences.
1. You are living under the deception that because God has not judged you for these deeds,
- He either does not see them or does not care about them.
- a. In verse 21, it says,
- “These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.”
- b. In this Psalm, the Lord assures you that He **does** see and He **does** care.
- You can either hear His word now and believe Him,
 - or you can go on in your deception.
 - But you cannot change the facts.
 - Just because He has not judged you for your deeds does not mean He is indifferent about them.
2. Let me ask you a searching question:
- a. Do you say things in your heart and do things that you would not dare to say or do before the eyes of another human being?
- What does this say about you?
 - It says that you are much more concerned about what other people think of you than you are about what God thinks of you!

- Isn't that true?
 - Is there any other way to interpret it?
 - God hears what you speak in your heart and He sees what you do in secret...
 - So how it is that you are not ashamed to do before Him what you are ashamed to do before others?
- b. Now I realise that there is a difficulty here—
- How can you possibly keep up the same standard in your thought life that you keep up before men?
 - Your wicked thoughts rise before your wicked actions, do they not?
 - Well of course they do, but the hypocrisy about which I speak has to do with when you are prepared to indulge those wicked thoughts or even to bring them into actions because others do not see!
 - This is to fear man more than God—
 - It is to deny God as God and pretend that He is not a judge who sees all that you do!
- c. This is the very thing that your gracious Lord is warning you about in this passage!
- He is here presenting Himself to you as a living judge who does see and who does act.
 - His very reason for presenting Himself in this way is entirely gracious...
 - It is that you might meet Him as He is now before it is too late to repent!
 - He wants you to receive His judgement now while there is opportunity to repent!
 - Do not wait until it is too late!
 - The Day of Judgement will come when you will come to Him as He is,
 - but He calls you to come right now—this very day—and begin to live in His sight—
 - to live before Him in the truth of who He is!

Conclusion:

See how He graciously pleads with you in verses 22-23!

1. First, there is the awful warning of verse 22!

- v. 22: Now consider this you who forget God, lest I tear you to pieces and there be none to deliver.
- a. God is telling you this so that you will not forget Him!
 - You who forget Him when you worship—who go through the outward ceremonies of worship without true gratitude and faith...
 - And you who forget Him when you cast His commandments away as if they do not apply to you...
 - It is not a little thing to forget Him while pretending to serve Him!
 - b. He tells you to consider what you are doing lest He come and tear you to pieces!
 - You will not be able to continue in your hypocrisy forever!
 - And once the day of judgement comes, it will be too late.
 - He will deal with you according to your sins.
 - You will be torn to pieces and there will be none to deliver.
 - c. I think those words, “none to deliver” are some of the worst I have ever heard!
 - They speak of the eternity of God’s judgement...
 - There is no one to comfort, no one to reverse things, all hope will be gone.
 - But your gracious Lord says, “Consider this now!”
 - “Consider it before it is too late.”
 - “Consider it while there is One to deliver!”
 - “Consider it while there is One to save!”
2. And in verse 23, He graciously presents Himself as that One who will save.
 - a. He says that He will save the one who puts away his hypocrisy...
 - 1) the hypocrisy He spoke about in worship so that you become one who offers praise—
 - one who comes before your Lord with true gratitude and faith rather than one who simply performs ceremonies...
 - 2) the hypocrisy He spoke about in daily living so that you become one who truly repents of your sin God—
 - Here he calls it, “the one who orders his conduct aright”
 - One whose life is ordered by His God before whom He lives.
 - 3) In both cases (with worship as well as conduct) you are simply called to live honestly before the face of your God who is a holy judge...

- b. If you do that, the Lord says, “I will show you the salvation of God.”
- 1) Note well that this living honestly before God does not mean that you don’t need to be saved.
 - It is not that you save yourself when you live honestly before God...
 - It is that **He** saves you!
 - 2) And I would venture to say that you cannot be saved until there is this honesty before God...
 - So long as you are serving an idol who does not see and judge,
 - so long as you are playing games and pretending that God is not God...
 - You have no need to call upon the Saviour in earnest.
 - But once you see Him as the living Judge who knows you and see in all your ways,
 - then you are compelled to come to Him for mercy...
 - And then you will know His salvation...
 - Then you will know the promise of verse 15:
 - “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me.”