

## EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

### Message #4

### Isaiah 1:10-31

When Isaiah begins this lengthy section, he begins with a powerful admonition - "Hear the word of the LORD; Give ear to the instruction of our God."

Isaiah says, "I'm not calling you to hear my opinions or views; I am calling you to hear the Word of God." This has always been a big problem with religious leadership and religious people; they really aren't interested in hearing God's Word. But if people would actually go to worship with the idea of hearing the Word of God so they could respond to it, God would do amazing things.

There is a powerful principle set forth in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul which transcends both O.T. and N.T. doctrine - "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Never is this principle more applicable than when you come to a text like this in Isaiah.

This text in Isaiah is, in my opinion, one of the most amazing texts of God's grace in all of the Bible. **This passage shows that no matter how far one has fallen, or how depraved he has been, he may be completely forgiven, but in order to be forgiven he must turn to God for the forgiveness.** The description of Israel in the first part of chapter 1 in Isaiah is depressing and devastating. However, the message presented in the last part of the chapter is amazing and comforting and pure grace.

**GOD JUDICIAALLY AND GRACIOUSLY OFFERS COMPLETE CLEANSING FROM ALL EVIL SIN FOR THOSE WHO TURN FROM THEIR SIN AND TURN TO HIM, BUT DEVASTATING THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO THOSE WHO DON'T.**

Isaiah is a fearless prophet. In fact, one professor said there is nothing in existence that comes close to the courage of Isaiah (Harry Bultema, *Isaiah*, p. 39). There are times when Jeremiah had some moments of doubt and fear, but not Isaiah. **The only time Isaiah had any fear was when he saw God**, but other than that he was a fearless truth communicator. He had no problem looking at the leaders of Israel and saying you are just like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They were dirty, filthy hypocritical leaders and that is exactly what Isaiah told them. You see before one can be right with God he must see himself in his depraved condition. There are five Divine messages that Isaiah gives to God's own people:

**DIVINE MESSAGE #1** – God gives His assessment of His people's worship. **1:10-15**

One would think that when one goes to worship God, there would be a major emphasis on the Word of God. However, there was not at this time that focus in Judah and in the one city that should have had it - Jerusalem. So when **verse 10** begins, it begins with a challenge to hear the Word of God and to pay attention to its instruction. Isaiah compares His own people to those in Sodom and Gomorrah.

This must have been a real social shock to God's people because according to God these religious people were the worst sinners on the earth. Now some of the people could have said to Isaiah, we aren't like Sodom and Gomorrah, for we have the temple and we worship God.

There are basically two realities brought out about their worship:

**(Reality #1) - God does not accept their worship. 1:11-14**

It is very clear when you read these verses that God is very much interested in the attitude of one's heart when one comes to worship Him. What is so interesting about this is that God uses the best thing in Israel, her religion, to establish her guilt.

These people were caught up in sham religion, sham ritual and sham worship. These people "remembered the Sabbath day" just as the fourth commandment said (Exodus 20:8), but they sure weren't holy. These people pretended to be right with God and they went through all kinds of religious liturgy and in all reality they were as evil as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**Fact #1 - God found no pleasure in their animal sacrifices . 1:11**

**Verse 11** informs us they were offering the right kind of animals and the right parts of animals as a sacrifice, even the fat (Leviticus 3:9-10).

**Fact #2 - God found no pleasure in their attendance . 1:12**

**Verse 12** informs us that these people went to the temple all of the time to appear before God and God says you trample Me.

**Fact #3 - God found no pleasure in their worthless offerings . 1:13a**

Their offerings meant nothing to God.

**Fact #4 - God found no pleasure in their special religious days and festivals. 1:13b-14**

God was the One who initially instituted these religious feast days and now He is disgusted with them. The worship here was not worship of piety, but of iniquity. It wasn't only that God didn't like the worship; He "hated" it (v. 14).

Now if you looked at the physical religious activity, you would say, my, these people really love God. It was all a big religious show that to God was evil.

H. A. Ironside said this is a scathing rebuke against any who think they can draw near to God by sacramental observances, religious ritualism or religious exercises. If it is not born of the Spirit of God, it is a filthy offense in the sight of God (*Isaiah*, p. 12). If you are not coming to worship to hear the Word of God so you can respond yourself to it, you are involved in sham religion.

There are people who go to church regularly to partake of communion and other external things, whose spirituality reeks. In fact, it is clearly predicted by the Apostle Paul that as the Church Age nears its conclusion a prevailing feature will be "external sham religion" (II Timothy 3:1-8). People will go to worship having a form of godliness, but do not have the power of it.

According to researcher George Barna, in his book, *The Frog in the Kettle*, there is one Protestant church for every 550 adults. In the United States, 93 percent of homes have Bibles and over 60 percent claim to be religious. Why then don't we see more of a reverence for God and His Word? Why don't people line the streets to get into a church that carefully teaches God's Word? Why do many people go to church with an expectation to hear a band and not hear from God? The answer comes right out of this text - it is "sham worship." This kind of worship makes God sick. It is Laodicean church-type worship, to which God says - "I'll spit it out of my mouth."

Every one of us should wonder how God views us individually when we come to church to worship Him. Is our goal to carefully know God's Word so we may make application to our own lives. I wonder if He sees us as He did the worship in Jerusalem? It is possible to be at every service and go through all the motions of worship and actually be sickening in the sight of God. If our hearts are not after His Word and right with Him, then our worship is not right nor acceptable to Him.

**(Reality #2) - God will not answer their prayers. 1:15**

Not only did God reject their worship, He also rejected their prayers .

It doesn't matter what the dispensation, if one prays and expects God to answer, one must lift up holy hands, not bloody hands (Psalm 24:4-5; I Timothy 2:8). The idea of their hands being covered in blood either means:

- 1) They killed the animals as a sacrifice with their hands, but were not righteous in their hearts.
- 2) They actually were responsible for innocent people dying through their oppressive ways.
- 3) They literally did kill some of God servants, such as Zechariah (II Chronicles 24:20-21).

All were true and then these people would go to the temple expecting to worship God and expected God to answer their prayers.

Here is one time a prayer meeting is absolutely useless. When people are playing a game of "sham religion" - they can pray all they want and God will not move and answer the prayer. There are some people who will never see God answer any prayer because they will not face their own sin.

**DIVINE MESSAGE #2 – God graciously challenges His people to repent and be clean .  
1:16-17**

God never promises forgiveness or blessing until a nation or a person is willing to bow to the authority and truthfulness of the Word of God. If you refuse to see yourself as a depraved sinner in need of cleansing, you cannot ever apply what is written here, nor can you ever be right with God.

The process of being right with God begins with a proper self-judgment that one is a depraved sinner and needs to be washed clean. Keep in mind these challenges are made to His own people and there are dispensational applications we may make:

**(Challenge #1)** - Wash yourselves. **1:16a** - Confess the sin and He will cleanse you - I John 1:9.

How could one expect to become clean when one has just been described as being so dirty?  
By relying upon the grace of God.

**(Challenge #2)** - Remove evil. **1:16b** - Get rid of the evil stuff in your life.

**(Challenge #3)** - Stop doing evil. **1:16c** - Stop pursuing the evil things.

**(Challenge #4)** - Start learning to do good. **1:17** - Start obeying the Word of God.

God wants His people to be people of honesty and integrity in their worship of Him and in their treatment of others. Doing good means to seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan and plead for the widow. Most places never take an interest in their elderly widows and their poor.

**DIVINE MESSAGE #3** – God asks His people to reasonably respond. **1:18-20**

These verses right here answer one of the most important questions of theology that can ever be asked – “Is God willing to graciously forgive His own people if they have been involved in committing the most horrific sin?” F. C. Jennings said, this is “a marvelous work of grace.”

God calls His people to reason with Him. The word “reason” is a forensic term, the type used in a court room setting. **In view of the fact that God has made these terrible charges against His people, and has warned them of the negative judgments which are pending, the only reasonable response is to get clean; get washed.** You do not want to wait until God takes you into His judgment court, because if He does, you are going to lose. God calls people to reason logically about this. Come just as you are in all of your filth and sin, without one plea of anything. **God stands ready to forgive you right now, if you will turn to Him for purity and acknowledge your sin.**

Edward J. Young, the old professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in the mid-1900s, said what is being offered here is the “doctrine of forensic justification.” You need a judicial cleansing and it is available from God. Even though your sins are as scarlet, that is they are deep and dark, they will be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. God is offering complete cleansing to these Sodom and Gomorrah-type sinners. There is cleansing hope for any sinner - from the Sodom and Gomorrah types and to the Rahab harlot types. If you will accept God’s sin verdict and turn to Him, His grace will wash you clean. God promises His people that no matter how depraved they have acted, they still may receive His wonderful blessings.

**(Promise #1)** - If you obey, you will be blessed in your land. **1:19**

If Israel would see herself as a depraved sinner, she could have the blessings of God. This is the exact problem for Israel; she would not accept God’s verdict. When John came to her and said she needed to repent, she hated him and when Jesus came and said she did not have the righteousness she needed to get into the promised land (Matthew 5:20), she killed Jesus Christ.

You can speak to many Jews today about heaven and it doesn't connect, but mention land and you have their attention. By looking at things presently in Israel's land, we would say there seems to be a lack of blessing in the land right now, which means she has never been honest about her sin.

**(Promise #2)** - If you disobey, you will be devoured in your land. **1:20**

God warns that if you do not see yourself as a depraved sinner, He would permit the land to be ravaged by military sword. By tracing what has happened in the history of Israel, we would have to say that the prevailing attitude has been one of disobedience not obedience because most of the time her land has been devoured by some other power.

The point is simple - refuse God's grace to be clean and you will suffer devastating judgment; but if you will turn to God, you will be washed clean.

Even though these land things are for Israel there are principles also for the United States and for individuals. Most countries and most people refuse to see themselves as depraved sinners who need God's help. Most will turn to just about anything to get out of trouble except turn to God:

Some turn to philosophy that says you can think your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to indulgence that says you can party your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to politics that says you can spend your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to science that says you can invent your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to industry that says you can work your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to agriculture that says you can farm your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to communism that says you can rule your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to fascism that says you can bluff your way out of trouble.  
Some turn to militarism that says you can fight your way out of trouble.

God says He is the only way out of sin trouble...Jesus said, "I am the way." If God's people do not turn to His grace and mercy for forgiveness, they will be devoured.

**DIVINE MESSAGE #4** – God gives His assessment of Jerusalem. **1:21-23**

In the days of King David and King Solomon, this city of Jerusalem was devoted to God and He delighted in it and displayed His glory to it. But just 300-400 years later, His assessment was no longer the same. This city was supposed to be the faithful city that worshipped and revered God. This was supposed to be the one place on earth where people could come to hear the precious Word and learn about God. The people still thought Jerusalem was that kind of place, but their view of the city and God's view of the city were two different things.

I believe what was true for Jerusalem when Isaiah lived is also true for the professing church today. There are many churches in which the people think this is a place where we worship God, which in fact have become places just as much a stench to God as Jerusalem was.

There are a series of sin assessments that God makes about worship in Jerusalem:

**(Assessment #1)** - Jerusalem had become a harlot. **1:21a**

Isaiah does not mince words here. He does not just call Jerusalem a fallen woman, he calls her a whore. A fallen woman is one who may fall just once, but a harlot deliberately and continually pursues that which is anti-God. This city was supposed to be, metaphorically speaking, God's faithful wife. This was to be the one city in the world where people could expect to find truth. She has become a harlot. She was filled with things that were not healthy and sound.

Many churches today are on the same path. I believe there are many churches that are whorish in what they are doing. They promote their corrupt, false doctrine contrary to the Word of God. They promote women pastors, gay ministers and heretical doctrines. No longer are most churches known for heralding the truth of God. They are whorish. They'll take your money and give you a pleasurable experience.

**(Assessment #2)** - Jerusalem had become a city of murderers. **1:21b**

When Jesus came to Israel He said they were guilty of murder because they continually used their speech to devour each other and kill each other (Matthew 5:21-22). Life was not sacred in Jerusalem; it was cheap. At one time, Jerusalem had been a great city of life, but now it was one of death. False teaching was killing the spiritual life and there were times when they literally had killed physical life. What is so amazing is that God offered these people forgiveness. Whether one has aborted a baby or verbally killed a brother, there can be complete cleansing, but one must turn to God. Jerusalem refused and it had become a city of murderers.

**(Assessment #3)** - Jerusalem's money is not pure. **1:22a**

The money that was given was not viewed as pure but as polluted. The people took their offerings to the temple and thought they were pure. God says, "I view it differently."

**(Assessment #4)** - Jerusalem's drink is diluted. **1:22b**

Jerusalem was known for its pure wine; it boasted of it. But to God, the purity was gone. God saw their wine and their drink offerings as diluted.

**(Assessment #5)** - Jerusalem's rulers have become rebels. **1:23a**

These are religious people who ritualistically went to worship services and you would think they were the most faithful people in the world. They were all rebels.

**(Assessment #6)** - Jerusalem's rulers have become companion of thieves. **1:23b**

When you move away from true righteousness found in the Word, your companions will become more and more godless.

**(Assessment #7)** - Jerusalem's rulers have become financially corrupt. **1:23c**

These kinds of things were being led by religious leaders who pretended to be spiritual and lead people in the way of truth. They forsake justice and righteousness for money. Notice the language in **verse 23**, it isn't that they just tolerate these things; they "love" these things. Instead of loving the Word of God, they loved bribes. They loved their sin and their sham religion.

**DIVINE MESSAGE #5** – God gives hope to Jerusalem. **1:24-31**

The only hope Isaiah ever presents for any deliverance is God. He is the only hope. Two things you clearly see in the first chapter of Isaiah - the Divine warning of God and the Divine grace of God. Notice the different names used for God in this section - Lord; GOD, Mighty One of Israel. I am totally amazed that God does not promise to knock this city out of existence forever. He would certainly be justified if He did. But look what He says here:

**Promise #1** - God will relieve His adversaries. **1:24b** - God can relieve one from all sin and guilt.

**Promise #2** - God will avenge His foes. **1:24c** - All enemies may be turned over to God.

**Promise #3** - God will remove all corrupt evil. **1:25** - To get rid of evil don't trust you, but God.

**Promise #4** - God will restore His leadership. **1:26a**

The Hiphil stem of the word "restore" means to cause it to return. We believe as Dr. C. I. Scofield observed, that this refers to the time after the Tribulation when God will restore righteous worship to Israel when Jesus Christ establishes His theocratic government (see Scofield Note on Isaiah 1:26).

Notice how God logistically restores things; He puts His judges in office to hand out sentences and His counselors to give insight into God's Word. What people need to get back on track are leaders who may direct people to the Word of God.

**Promise #5** - God will make His city called righteous. **1:26b**

It sure isn't that way today.

**Promise #6** - God will redeem those who repent. **1:27**

If you will acknowledge your evil sin and turn to God to experience His grace, you will be redeemed, saved forever.

**Promise #7** - God will punish those who don't repent. **1:28-31**

But God will not be mocked. If you refuse to acknowledge your sin and transgression, you will be crushed.

You will be like fading oaks, tinder to be burned and there will be no quenching of the fire.

The destiny of Judah and Jerusalem depended completely on the response of God's people to Him and His Word. But as F. C. Jennings said it also gives the history of the whole race (*Studies In Isaiah*, p. 28).

All humanity is sinful and guilty in God's sight. The charges are real and the penalties will be severe. Your only hope is to turn to God. If you will acknowledge you are a sinner and turn to Jesus Christ for your salvation, no matter how deep or dark your sin, you will experience God's grace.