

True Worship, Isaiah 1- Nigeria

It would be better if you didn't go to church, it would be better if you weren't playing the hypocrite. God hates hypocrisy. When you think of Jesus Christ in His ministry, when He was walking the earth, when He pronounces His woes meaning these people will be filled with sorrow and destruction, He says 'woe to the hypocrites'. God hates hypocrisy. They were calling themselves Israel, but God was calling them Sodom and Gomorrah because He saw them for who they were. The picture of a hypocrite is someone who puts on a mask and looks different than what they actually are, but God always sees who you really are. The God who controls all things, He knows exactly who you are. You can sing with great zeal, you can give all you have, but without faith it is impossible to please God. Without recognizing to believe Him means you have to obey Him. Here's how He describes when He looks at the worship of Israel, "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample my courts? bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me." Remember, they were commanded to do these things and He said it was an abomination to Him. He calls homosexuality an abomination. An abomination is a very serious term in God's Word and to worship falsely is an abomination. It makes Him want to vomit He says in another place. Don't think that just because you say you are worshipping God that this is pleasing to God. They said they were pleasing God and God said it was like homosexuality to Him. He goes on and says, "The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies." This is a key phrase to understand. "I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting." God looks at a church that will not deal with sin, which allows the sin to fester in the church and He looks at the worship of that congregation and says it's an abomination. If you don't deal with sin in your congregation, if you can endure what God can't endure, then don't think He is pleased with your worship. Instead, think of your worship as something that makes God want to vomit. God is serious about worshipping Him and it's important and necessary for that worship to be pleasing to Him, that we worship Him in Spirit and in truth. If we are saying we love God, but we don't want to obey His commandments, we don't want to deal with sin we see, we don't want to consider Christ Lord of all, it doesn't matter how much you declare Him as your Savior, He finds it an abomination. God cares about righteousness, He sent His Son to produce a righteous people. When we don't are about being a righteous people, we should expect a destruction like Sodom and Gomorrah to proceed. Verse 14, "Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them." Is that how God looks at your worship? The Israelites would not listen to Him. Judah had said this but none of them would hear and the northern kingdom of Israel stopped being a nation 2,500 years ago, they are now called the Jews because the other ten tribes are gone. God does not change, He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The things that pleased Him 2,500 years ago, the things that He says He hates, the things He says weary Me, the things that He says trouble Me, they are still the things that bother Him, and trouble Him, and He hates. I want to make sure we get the picture of verse 15, "When you spread out your hands," when you hold up your hands praising the Lord, when you praise God, God says "I will hide My eyes from you." When you, with great zeal, bow down and "make many prayers, I will not hear." If you do not deal with sin, God will not hear your prayers. If you hate your brother so much that you will not deal with his sin, God will not hear your prayers. When this becomes the pattern of a nation, God destroys them. When it becomes the pattern of a church, God destroys them. "Even though you make

many prayers, I will not hear them, your hands are full of blood.” Different denominations have different ideas about raising hands, but most people don’t have an understanding of the basic reason to raise hands. The reason you raise hands before God is to say your hands have no sin in them, I have repented of my sin, examine me God and see if I have repented of my sin. God says if you haven’t, He looks at your hands raised up in worship to Him and He says your hands are filled with blood, He looks at them as if you are a murdered. God is serious about worship of Him. He’s not sitting in heaven wishing people would praise Him, praising God is a response to knowing who He is. The knowing who He is, and knowing He is Lord, the knowing that He is the One who commands us, that’s the inspiration for the praise, that’s what is required for the praise to be pleasing to God. So remember, this is Isaiah writing to Judah and he’s begging them, ‘do what you need to do to not be destroyed’. I’m saying the same thing, read Deuteronomy 28, understand why God sends a sword in among a people. Don’t be blind to it. If God is your Father, does your Father want to bless you or curse you? If the child is in open disobedience, the father doesn’t want to bless him to encourage greater disobedience, instead he punishes him to constrain his sin. That’s what God does with His people. Last night we talked about how Nebuchadnezzar, this great ruler, understood all things were under God’s control so we would know that God rules in the affairs of men. God is sending the sword into your community for those that are true Christians here, He’s not doing it because He hates you, He’s doing it because He loves you and a loving father turns his children from sin. I’m definitely not saying this, accusing the people that were killed, because God’s doing it to your community, God sometimes even takes out the righteous so they don’t have to suffer with everyone else. When we see a community filled with violence, the answer is never, ‘why are these people being violent against us?’ the answer has to be, ‘why is God sending chastisement to us?’ So I want to say the same thing to you that Isaiah said to Israel, wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, turn from your sin before it’s too late. You know the revelation of God; you have the Word of God. When’s the last time, on your own, that you opened it and asked what God would have you do to? Do you treat Him as your Lord? If you’re not willing to do that, the best thing to do is say He’s not your Lord. God hates hypocrisy. The best thing is to deal with your sin now, don’t make God strike you again and again. Continuing in verse 16, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.” As a Christian, you have to be killing sin in your own life. If you’re not dealing with sin in your life, expect the chastisement of God, expect poverty to come upon you, expect disease to come upon you, expect to flee before your enemies. Those are all things promised in Deuteronomy 28. Are you putting evil away from among you? It goes on, “Cease to do evil.” Be active, stop sinning! Deuteronomy 28 says He will bless those who obey the law and curse those who ignore it. Jesus Christ says who goes to hell at the end of the sermon on the mount? Those who practice lawlessness. The people who go to hell are the people who say God doesn’t get to tell me what to do. How do you testify that God gets to tell you what to do? You cease to do evil. Deal with your iniquity, the promises in Deuteronomy 28 or one many will put a thousand to flight. You don’t need to worry about Boko Haram, you don’t need to worry about the Fulani. If you are obeying God and dealing with your sin and walking in righteousness, if you are studying the Word and asking how to apply it in your life, it will just take one of you to drive off the Fulani. This is how you solve the problem with the violence in your society. Before you can understand that you have to accept that God controls all things. Do you believe when Jesus Christ was in the boat, when the storm came up when He was asleep, and they wake Him up and He says, ‘Be still’ and the wind and waves stopped like that? DO you believe

that's the same God today? The apostles said He controlled the wind and the waves and they fell down before Him. That meant that everything was under the control of God. Ask yourself, what does God think when I worship Him? Is it pleasing to Him because I walk by faith and not by sight? I want to give you a simple definition of living by faith and not by sight. It's by believing that obedience to God solves all the other problems. That's what's required for us to live by faith, it's not to say it looks like it's going to work. If you say, how can we get guns to fight off the Fulani? If you say you walk by faith, you say, how do I repent to stop the Fulani? He continues in verse 17, "Learn to do good." God's law is about how you love your neighbor as it says in Romans 13, it's not just about what not to do, it's about what to do. It says things like open your hands wide to the poor, but Isaiah is going to give very specific examples of how you be good to be pleasing to God. The first is "seek justice". If you allow people to be taken advantage of, repent! Micah 6:8, what's the basic duty of man? Do justly. It also goes on to say to love mercy and walk humbly before Him, but the basic thing we are to do is be just. Are you just in your actions? Do you try to cheat and deceive or are you fair in your dealings? Do you want sin to be punished as it declares it should be punished or are you just going to close your eyes to that sin? After all it was done by a pastor or chief or someone important. If you don't do justly by being equitable to all, then you're not being just. If you want to stop the Fulani, be just in your dealings, don't allow bribes to be taken, don't ever give a bribe, be just. By sight you say, 'how does that possibly stop the Fulani attacks?' if you see by faith you say, 'because that's how God stops the chastisement.' Who is sovereign? God or man? If God is sovereign, obedience to God is what's necessary. Isaiah goes on and again, I am saying the same things to you, trying to give you the same warning, "Rebuke the oppressor." When you see someone strong taking advantage of someone weak, what do you do about it? Do you just close your eyes to it? I know there's a big scandal in Nigeria about professors taking advantage of students. The people who knew about it and did nothing, that's why the Fulani attacked. That's what it looks like to not rebuke the oppressor, that's what oppression looks like. When you allow judges to take bribes and the society doesn't rise up and say that's not acceptable, you're letting the powerful oppress the weak. Why would you not expect the judgement of God? He says, I care for the poor. If you won't protect the poor, why should you expect God to protect you? If you don't care for the weak, why would you expect God to care for you? If you are the child of God, why would you not expect to feel His rod? If a father had two children and one stole from another and he did nothing, he knew about it and did nothing, he'd be a horrible father. God's not a horrible Father, He's the perfect Father, He will do something if one group is oppressing another. In various things that I've done in Nigeria, I've seen a great deal of oppression, a great deal of the strong taking advantage of the weak. You want to solve the problems with violence in Nigeria? Stop the oppression of the people God says He will protect. Don't think you can say you're not your brother's keeper, that's what Cain said. God says if you are faithful, you are your brother's keeper. That's what it means to love your neighbor. It doesn't mean giving them a hug, it means when they need help you help them. When they are oppressed you don't close your eyes to it or when you are oppressed, expect God to close His eyes. God says He will not show mercy to those who do not show mercy. Then he gets particular, "Defend the fatherless." What do you do for those who are the most vulnerable? That's what God says, he looks at the church and says, 'what do they do for those who don't have fathers?' Do you defend the fatherless? Do you "plead for the widow"? God says in other places if you don't care about the widow or the fatherless, He will cause more to be fatherless and more to be widows, He will send in a sword. What do you do about the

fatherless, about the widows? Then Isaiah gives them the Word of the Lord, he gives them the opportunity to repent. "Come now, let us reason together." Think about what's happening in your community, reason it through, why are these things happening? I come here once a year, I don't have the answer to those questions, but I think you do. You know where the sins are here, you know what you need to deal with, don't ignore sin that's around you, don't ignore sin that is in you or don't complain about the Fulani. The promise of God is, "though your sins are like scarlet", even though He looks at your hand and sees they are filled with blood, even though He knows every time you didn't defend the fatherless, He knows every time you cheated someone or were biased and gave one-person favor over another, "even though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow". Israel, the northern kingdom, had a calf in Dan and in Bethel, they had committed idolatry in the name of Jehovah and Isaiah says to them, 'Even though for decades, for centuries you have called yourself the people of God, your sins can be white as snow, they can all be forgiven, but it requires something. "Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool". Sins can be forgiven but it says if you are willing and obedient. Are you willing and obedient to God? This is what true faith looks like, the lawless get cast into the pit of fire. This is not works based righteousness; this is somebody who has a heart of flesh. That means they desire to know what God has commanded. God says he will write the law on their hearts, that's what it means to have a heart of flesh, what it means to be born again, to be adopted into the household of God. All of them are equivalent to being obedient. Do you want to hear from God? If you don't, expect violence to continue. It can't be that you want to come and hear the Word and then look in a mirror to see where the problems are, but then walk away and do nothing, it's worthless. It can't just be that you're willing to hear the Word of God, it has to be that your desire is to obey it. It's not about obeying it perfectly, a changed heart doesn't mean we don't sin anymore, but it means instead of rejoicing in doing evil, we mourn when we sin. That's a sign of being willing and obedient. Just like in Deuteronomy 28, God says this is how you get prosperity. People want to say prosperity is by believing in God, prosperity comes from believing God's ways are good and then putting them into practice. Saying you won't do things the way the world says to do them, doing them the way God says to do them. Especially you young people here tonight, at a certain point in your life, when you're 15-25, and God grants repentance later, but you are leaving your parents' home and you are choosing the life you want to take. This is how you choose whether you will be prosperous, whether you will have a joyful life or misery and suffering. That misery and suffering might have a lot of money associated with it, there are many wealthy people that are miserable, but if you desire true prosperity which God defines as the kingdom of heaven, which is righteousness, peace, and joy, then when you choose your path choose the one that is in line with God's law. That's where peace is, that's where joy is, it's not chasing after that young lady or young man, no one has found joy in the bottle of whiskey, no one has found joy in marijuana, that's not where joy is. Joy is in obeying God. Paul could have stones thrown at him and he can be content because he said he was obeying God. Trust that just the way God sends the Fulani, God also sends joy and peace. "If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land. If you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword." Violence comes on the people who say they are of God, death and destruction comes on the people who say they are of God when they honor Him with their lips but their heart is far from Him. This is how you stop the violence in the community, those who call themselves of God humble themselves and say, 'not my way Lord, but Your way.' That's the most fundamental aspect of humility to say, 'God, You know what's right, I don't.' If you do that, God will give

you prosperity, God will end the violence. The Fulani are from the hand of God, what are you going to do about it? Let me pray. Oh Lord God, I do pray that You convict the hearts of the people here. I pray that You open their understanding. Lord, don't harden their hearts, don't cause them not to see, don't cause them not to hear. Instead Lord, open their eyes so they see the sin that they need to repent of, open their eyes so they can see the things that have You displeased with them. Give them the strength and courage to repent. Give them the strength and courage to stand firm when those around them knock them, when they disparage them. Let them stand forth as an example of boldness, to boldly walk in Your law and in Your ways Lord. Raise up a Joshua, raise up people who will stand in the gap, people who will stand in righteousness, people that will stand in faith, people that will heal this land. May it start here. Amen.