

Cure for a Heart Far from Him

Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 29:1-14

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Our text this morning is Isaiah 29:1-14,

1 "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! Add year to year; Let feasts come around. 2 Yet I will distress Ariel; There shall be heaviness and sorrow, And it shall be to Me as Ariel. 3 I will encamp against you all around, I will lay siege against you with a mound, And I will raise siegeworks against you. 4 You shall be brought down, You shall speak out of the ground; Your speech shall be low, out of the dust; Your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground; And your speech shall whisper out of the dust. 5 "Moreover the multitude of your foes Shall be like fine dust, And the multitude of the terrible ones Like chaff that passes away; Yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly. 6 You will be punished by the Lord of hosts With thunder and earthquake and great noise, With storm and tempest And the flame of devouring fire. 7 The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel, Even all who fight against her and her fortress, And distress her, Shall be as a dream of a night vision. 8 It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams, And look - he eats; But he awakes, and his soul is still empty; Or as when a thirsty man dreams, And look - he drinks; But he awakes, and indeed he is faint, And his soul still craves: So the multitude of all the nations shall be, Who fight against Mount Zion." 9 Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. 10 For the Lord has poured out on you The spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers. 11 The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." 12 Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am not literate." 13 Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, 14 Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For

the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."

Let's pray.

Lord Father, we pray that you would remove the blindness from us and remove any pride that lurks in our hearts. Lord, that you would clothe us in the humility of Christ. Lord, that we would come knowing our need for a Savior and our need to be cleansed daily, hourly, by your word. Lord, may you cleanse us through your word, through the preaching of your word this morning and may you bless it to our ears and to our hearts. We pray this in your Son's name. Amen.

We're continuing to work our way through Isaiah and here finding ourselves in the midst of the second woe beginning in chapter 28. The first woe was against Judah and that woe is all about their spiritual drunkenness. It was like they were inebriated. Their speech was slurred, they were staggering and they can't think right and they don't get what's going on in the room and Isaiah in that first woe, provides the cure. There is a sure foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the second woe that we encounter here which is very clearly directed to Jerusalem itself, we find this woe explained and what we find in the second woe is that there are a number of dangers: there is the danger of repetitive and dead religion; there is the danger of being insensible to the word of God; there is the danger of having your heart far from him. And in this woe, the Prophet Isaiah gives two cures for these problems and the first cure is the judgment of God because God does use his wrath in order to clean out his garden. Also, he provides us as the greatest cure of all and that is the resurrection and we'll find out how he explains that.

Now, this also is a great section to help you think through how to interpret the Bible particularly how to think through interpreting the Old and the New Testament because what Isaiah says here is quoted in three places in the New Testament. Isaiah says, "This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far from me." The Lord Jesus Christ quotes this in Matthew 15 and it's also recorded in Mark 7 so we have really the answer to what this is all about because Jesus tells you what he's talking about. The Apostle Paul also does the same thing and he interprets a phrase, explains it, the phrase that we find in verse 14 that God will destroy the wisdom of the wise. How is he going to do that? Well, he's going to do that through the resurrection of his Son. So you find both the poison, the disease and you also find the cure here in this passage of Scripture.

Now, this passage also exposes what is a great danger to us and that is it's the danger of your heart, your heart not being inclined toward God. This passage is for two kinds of people: those who are hardened against God and their lives are so disconnected from their words that it really makes it clear that they are unbelievers but it's also a great passage for true believers who really desire for there to be a closing gap between their words and their lives. This is the heart of the believer, "Oh Lord, make me like you. Lord, close that gap." You know when you're not saved, there's a really big gap. Your flattering yourself, you think you are such special material, you think you are so hot and so wise and your

speech reveals it. But then you become a Christian and then you realize that God has better things for you than you and he puts you on a course to close that gap over time between what you say and who you really are. What a blessing it is that God does this for his children. He progressively makes them more and more real and it's all right here in this passage of Scripture.

Now you can see the outline that's before you. The first section, verses 1-4, speaks of the way that God is going to humble Jerusalem by taking her down. This is one way that God deals with this problem. Secondly, this remarkable disclosure in verses 5-8 how God raises up his enemies and then he tears them down. Oh, how unfair that is and yet it is what God does. Thirdly, you see the reasons for the judgment and it's because they were dead to the word of God first of all, and their hearts and their words were divided. Finally, the cure in verse 14. So that's where we're going right now.

Let's begin in verse 1 where we see that Jerusalem is going to be humbled all the way down to the dust. He says, "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!" He is talking about Jerusalem and this is the second of the six woes. The first one focused on spiritual drunkenness and now the second woe is about heartless perfunctory religion that has no real genuine love toward God in it at all, where the words of your mouth are disconnected from your heart. Why these woes? Well, I think that there are two things. One thing, we know from the context that Isaiah is condemning Judah's plan to go into an alliance with Egypt to protect herself from Assyria. It is about the dangers of alliances and why do you make alliances anyway with the world? Because of your heart. They want more than God. They don't trust God to protect them so they try to cobble around themselves all kinds of worldly protections for their lives. This really, I think, is a parable for the church and it's also a parable for our own lives. We get in a tight spot and we want to make a covenant with the world; we want to be acceptable to the world; we want to have the success of the world; we want to make a covenant with worldly things so that we can achieve our objectives and so we compromise. It has a lot of different manifestations all the way from the way you handle your money to the way that you handle your wife. You're not satisfied with your wife, so you go to the Internet for satisfaction. You trust in the world. You want something that God hasn't given you so you go out to another source and it actually ends up destroying you and your whole family. There are so many ways that we trust in the world. We rest our hopes on psychology and drugs and food and we think that's going to save us. It's not going to save us at all. Only God can save.

So this is the content of the woe. He actually explains why the woe because you, "Add year to year; Let feasts come around." The woes are focused on these dead routines: the performance of the sacrifices year after year; collecting the offerings; having your males appear three times a year like the ceremonial law required. Often it is true of the church today and even your own life, the demise of the church is known by just doing the same right thing but yet their hearts are not in it at all. It's a very contemporary problem. Matthew Henry said it like this, "Hypocrites may be found in a constant track of devout exercises and treading around in them and with these, they may flatter themselves but can never please God nor make their peace with him," because their hearts are really not in it.

So you have these festivals that they were participating in and they were deprived of their meaning. They were just endless routines. They were trusting in their routines.

Isaiah has already spoken about this in chapter 1:11, he says, "'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?' Says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?'" Then he says, "Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me." He says, "Your hands are full of blood. You're fake. Stop acting like you're worshiping me. I would rather you not do it." And so Isaiah has already been dealing with this. They were doing what God wanted them to do but they were doing it without any love for him in their hearts. I know that every Christian who hears this is saying, "Oh Lord, help me. Help me to love you more. Help me to close that gap even further." Like even maybe this morning there could be progress in closing the gap from routine to real hearts.

This problem continued on, Jeremiah speaks of it in 7:4 where the people are coming in and they're saying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." In other words, they're just talking about what you do in the temple and Jeremiah says, "Stop doing that. God is going to come and destroy you for that." God destroys nations and churches and individuals based on their worship, whether it's true worship or not true worship.

He says in verse 2 that he's going to bring distress and heaviness. He says, "Yet I will distress Ariel." That's a very important word to see, "distress." He is not here for claiming that he's going to wipe them out. "There shall be heaviness and sorrow, And it shall be to Me as Ariel." Now, my view of this and I think this is probably an open debate, is that he's not going to destroy them with Sennacherib completely or Nebuchadnezzar completely but in 70 A.D. he is going to destroy them completely.

Then he says that they will be surrounded. It speaks about the way that he's going to come and destroy them, verse 3, "I will encamp against you all around, I will lay siege against you with a mound, And I will raise siegeworks against you." So there is tremendous pressure of an impending battle that he's speaking of here and whether it's Sennacherib or Nebuchadnezzar or Titus in 70 A.D., the Lord is the one that is doing it. He is the one who is bringing this about. God is laying the siegeworks himself. God is the one who is doing the attack himself. We often think that when we're attacked, it's them. Think again. It's God. And that is what he's done here. The Lord Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem and he used many of the same words here. They were high, they were mighty, they were going through their religious routines and they were confident but what would happen to them? They'll be turned into mumbling. They'll be like a medium just mumbles, "Blah blah blah blah. Mumble mumble mumble." But a disheartening and reduced kind of mumbling. His disciplines are going to come and they're going to moderate the pride of those who have a fake religion and he's going to make them mumblers. Yeah, there was a day when they spoke so proudly and here they're going to be ghostlike.

Okay, these first verses here, I want to bring you five applications just from these first four verses. Number 1: you can go through the motions for a while but it will come to an end. God will bring it to an end. I think that you can say that God wages war against those who just go through the motions and he may let them walk in falsehood for a long time but at some point, it will come to an end.

Here's a second application: the continuation of religious activities will not soften God's judgment against the church or against an individual. Keeping up the game, you know, helping the machine to keep rolling heartlessly will not cause God's judgment to be withheld. You can continue in your worship, your fellowship, your prayer, your biblical practices. These are no protection against the displeasure of God and the wrath of God. I think we get an insight to the whole doctrine of sin from this and that is how sin is not nullified by external observances. Sin is not atoned for by going to church. Sin is not atoned for by praying a prayer. Sin is not atoned for by singing a song. It just shows you how sin works and how religion doesn't work. It doesn't work for you.

Number 3: there is a parallel text here in John 4:24 where the Lord Jesus Christ says that he's looking for worshipers who will "worship him in spirit and in truth." God is seeking worshipers. So when you read these first four verses, just recognize God is seeking worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth and you know who you are. You ask, "Oh Lord, am I seeking you in truth? Is it real?"

Number 4: tradition doesn't have to be dead. Your routines don't have to be dead. There are things that God has commanded that we do and we should do them. In other words, it would be wrong to conclude, "Well, dead traditional religion is bad therefore all tradition is bad." No, no, no, that's not what he's saying at all. He's saying heartless tradition is bad. But God has given the church the things I just mentioned: the prayers, the singing, the preaching. All these things are things that God has commanded. We should do those things. We shouldn't stop doing them. The Apostle Paul said to Timothy, he says, "The law is good if one uses it lawfully." Well, tradition is good if one uses it lawfully. There is much that is said about the traditions that have been laid down and how they should be followed. One theologian said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." So you can follow traditions with your whole heart and the blessings will flow. It will be so good for you to sing; it will be so good for you to read the Bible; it will be so helpful to you to pray. This is the tradition of a living faith but the dead faith of the living is traditionalism where you're just going through the motions.

Finally, the fifth application for these first four verses: God pierces the hearts of his people. He's willing to wound his people in order to heal them. Just like medical procedures wound the body first in order for it to heal, so God's judgment comes and it wounds, it humbles, but it heals at the same time. That's the beautiful thing about the sword of the Spirit. When it pierces you, when it pierces your conscience and shows you what's there, you do bleed but there is healing in the blade of the word of God as it comes out. God is so kind that way. He wounds us in order to heal us. It's the same way in child discipline as it is in God's discipline toward us.

Number 2, the second item here, the second section in this section, verses 5-8: the enemies of God will be brought down. Verse 5, "Moreover the multitude of your foes Shall be like fine dust, And the multitude of the terrible ones Like chaff that passes away; Yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly." When you hear that would "suddenly," it's hard not to think of that night when 185,000 of Sennacherib's army just fell dead miraculously on the battlefield. What an astonishing thing. Is that what he's talking about? I think that that battlefield scene which is probably the most astonishing moment in all military history, that this prophecy is for that but it's not only for that. This falling in battle that is recorded in 1 Kings 18 is a prefiguring of the final judgment but it's also prefigured by what happened in 70 A.D. So God gives us these images. He tells you what it is going to be like. Would you rather know what it's going to be like or not? God gives warning and here this is the warning, he is going to come and he's going to make them into fine dust. He's going to make the enemies of the people of God into fine dust.

Here in verse 6 you see there are six events of nature that are mentioned. Do you see them? 1. Thunder. 2. Earthquake. 3. Great noise. 4. Storm. 5. Tempest. 6. Flame of devouring fire. You know, God takes control over nature. He's in the thunder, he's in the earthquake, he's in the noise, he's in the storm and God is in the flame of devouring fire. God is doing this. God does judge nations. People don't like it, the idea that God judges. People don't want you to tell them that you can't do this or that.

We were at the abortion clinic yesterday and many of the conversations ended up devolving down to this: "You can't tell me what to do with my body. You can't tell me to do anything." That's a direct quote. "You can't tell me to do anything." Now, in the day that we live in, men really bristle when you try to tell them what to do but in the society that we live in, if you try to tell a woman what to do, it's even worse. Do you know why? It's the spirit of Eve at work in the world today. The rebellion that we've all tasted and we've all experienced is there. But here God is coming to punish. He does tell people what to do so that they can find hope and joy in this world in salvation. But he also does bring judgment.

Verse 7, he says that these nations, these people who are fighting against Ariel, against Jerusalem, he says, "The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel, Even all who fight against her and her fortress, And distress her, Shall be as a dream of a night vision." So it's like these enemies of the people of God, they think they are victorious. They think they are winning. They really do. They have the majority. They have the big voice in the world. They have the highest traffic on the Internet. They have the money. They have the weaponry. They think they've got it going and God says, "No, you're just dreaming." It's like they're going to awake from a dream and they are going to realize that it wasn't real, that it was all a paper army and there was really no strength to it at all.

He gives another illustration in verse 8. He continues the idea of dreaming but he speaks of a hungry man who dreams. "It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams, And look - he eats; But he awakes, and his soul is still empty; Or as when a thirsty man dreams, And look - he drinks; But he awakes, and indeed he is faint, And his soul still craves: So the

multitude of all the nations shall be, Who fight against Mount Zion." They think they are victorious. You know, the enemies of God think they've got it going. They don't. This is one thing you always need to recognize, when you are with an enemy of God, you need to remember this: it may appear to them and maybe even to you that they are victorious but it's a dream. They are in dreamland and you are not. You're living in your Father's world. They are living in their father's world. You know, the Bible says that "he who destroys the church of God, him I will destroy," the Apostle Paul said that. If you try to destroy the church, God will destroy you. That's the way it's going to be. Maybe that's why God has taken down every great civilization as they've risen up and railed against God. He takes them down, another one comes up and he takes it down, another one comes up and he takes it down. This is what God does.

But they're dreaming that they will be victorious and they will be successful but the dream always ends. The perceived success is only an illusion because God is Almighty. This is the false sense of accomplishment of the wicked. If it's for Assyria, if it's for Babylon, if it's for Rome, if it's for the great nations of the world, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes to gather his church, the victory is always short lived. You know, God is not mocked. Ezekiel 35 profiles this story of the Edomites and God says, "Blood will pursue you." God let the Edomites go for hundreds of years and then finally their blood caught up with them and that is how it will be. In Revelation 13:10, we read the same thing, "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." So God wakes up those who are in dreamland. There will be a wake-up. Believe it.

I'm going to give you three applications from verses 5-8. Number 1: God raises up enemies of the church for a purpose and he will destroy them whom he has raised up. Now, if your worldview teaches you that the rise of the enemies of God is the worst possible thing that can happen to you, then you'll always be fearful. I'm going to say that again. I tried to write it down carefully. If your worldview teaches you that the rise of the enemies of God is the worst possible thing that can happen, then you'll always be fearful. You'll always see the threat and not the thread of God's historical narrative that has continued to run for all of history and will continue to run all the way to the end of history.

Point 2: Every unbeliever lives in dreamland. The confidence that they have, just realize when you're with them, they are dreaming. Try to wake them up from the dream. Try to urge them out. Poke them. Talk to them. Needle them. Wake them up from the dream. You know, sometimes you have children and some of them are harder to wake up than others. It's like that for people. Is there somebody who is just so hard to wake up? Keep trying to wake them up. They live in dreamland.

Point 3: The devil is under God's control. He raises up enemies and he takes them down. In John 12, we read that the rulers of this world are cast out. We also know to resist the devil and he will flee from you. He is not omnipotent. The devil is not omnipotent at all. The devil is under God's control. They won't achieve their objectives even though they might appear to be victorious. They are going to go away empty and they are brought

down to desolation. We often miscalculate two things: we miscalculate the danger but we also miscalculate the cure and both of those are here in this passage.

Then also in your outline, you'll see the reasons for this judgment. They are spelled out really plainly in verses 9-13 and I'll just summarize them under two headings. I'll take them one by one. The reason that judgment is coming is because they are dead to the word of God. They are dead to the word of God. This is a great danger. We often miscalculate the danger there is in being dead to the word of God. I say that to all of us: if you're dead to the word of God, you need to recognize the danger that there is in that. Then he's also speaking about the heart and the words and how they become divided. That's in verse 13. So first of all, you see this picture of deadness to the word of God and there is all this illustrative language. Verse 9, "Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink." They are intoxicated. People have certain perceptions about themselves. You know, most people feel that they are very enlightened, they are stable, they are rational, they are reasonable, they are compassionate and we have ways of telling ourselves lies about who we are when we really are spiritually drunk. The unbeliever is spiritually drunk and Isaiah is revealing what had happened to the spiritual leaders in Judah. They were intoxicated but not with wine, it was a spiritual intoxication. There is such a thing as being inebriated before the word of God, not getting it, not seeing what it means, not understanding what's happening when you read the word of God.

Now, God has not given us a simple book. He's given us a book that on the one hand is very difficult and on the other hand, it's incredibly simple. It's both at the same time. It's miraculous in that sense. But here even with this great simplicity and beauty, even when the smallest child can understand so much of the beauty of the word of God, at the same time, there is a malady, there is an inebriation where you just don't get it.

Then he moves from being intoxicated to being asleep, verse 10. "For the Lord has poured out on you," this is something that God did, "The spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers." He's saying that it's the leaders that are asleep. Notice he mentions the names of the prophets and the heads, or the seers. The ones who are supposed to speak truth and clarity, they are asleep. You know, it's always such a tragedy when the shepherds are asleep because that's when the flock gets ravaged but that's what was happening here. Shepherds who are asleep. They are dead to what's happening around them. Their eyes are closed. They have blinders on. They don't really understand what is facing the people. They are not sensible to the wolves. They are asleep and the wolves will just come right in and get them. It's just such a tragic picture of shepherds being asleep. It's one of the greatest dangers of this congregation, is if your shepherds are asleep and they don't see what's going on.

We also see that they are unwilling. I'm still not sure exactly how to explain verses 11 and 12. Let me try a little bit here. "The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, 'Read this, please.' And he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.'" Look at verse 11 very carefully. The whole

vision has become to you, those words, "has become to you." Let's just camp on that for a second. In other words, over a process of time as the days were passing, the vision has become to you. This is progressive desanctification. This is sanctification in reverse where there was some level of understanding but then it disappears and this is a literate person and he says he can't open it. He can't open the seal of the book. He's looking at the seal and he says, "I can't open it." Then in verse 12 there is a similar scene. Again, I'm so struck by the scenes in Isaiah. Here's another scene. There's an illiterate person sitting there, Joe Illiterate is sitting there, and the book is delivered to him and everybody knows he's illiterate and the person brings it and says, "Read this." He says, "I'm not literate." The illiterate person says he can't read it and he can't read it because God has shut his eyes. We learned that in a previous verse. God did this. He made them so that they could not see. They are not able to understand because there is none who understands, there is none who sees and God has blinded their eyes.

Here are some applications to these verses here, verses 9-12. Number 1: The presence of the truth is no guarantee for the love of the truth. Truth, truth all around. Truth in this book. Truth in that book. But it's not opened up. They had the scrolls but they didn't love the scrolls. It's one thing to have the Bible and it's another thing to read it and love it. It's another thing to open it and enjoy it and be benefited by it and be corrected by it. It's one thing to have the truth at your fingertips and it's entirely another thing to love that truth that is in your fingers.

Second application: God promises to open it if we desire. James says that "if any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." The wisdom is there. Matthew Henry said that, "The Bible is a sealed book to every man learned or unlearned until he begins to study it with a simple heart and a teachable spirit that he may thence learn the truth and the will of God." How does that happen? How in the world can anyone understand what God has said in his word? You must be born again. Only God can do that. Only God can open your eyes to it. People read the Bible and they do not understand it because their hearts haven't been changed. They have not been born again. It's the worst thing that can happen to you, not to be able to hear the voice of God. All you hear is your own voice and the voices of the culture but your only hope is that God would somehow open the eyes. We're so dependent upon him. There is an intentionality in denying the truth. I don't want to leave that out of the discussion. The deceivers are also deceived but they believe a lie, they buy the lie and it becomes reality and they do suppress the truth in unrighteousness. It's both. Those whose eyes God has shut, they also suppress the truth and they are unmoved by the word of God. They are unaffected. They are unalarmed. They are unchanged.

Then I think we find ourselves in the last two verses which is really, I think, the capstone of it all and there we learn two really important things. The first arises out of the word "therefore" in verse 13. "Therefore the Lord said: 'Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.'" Now here in the midst of this woe, right at the very end, we learn what the heart of the matter is, the heart of the problem. Verse 14, we find the cure. Verse 13 is the problem. Isaiah is identifying the disconnect between a person's outward appearance and what's actually going on in his

heart. It's a heart condition. That is the malady. Where honor towards God comes from the mouth but not from the heart.

I think that as a church we can look at this from two different perspectives. If you're a Christian, if your heart does love the Lord Jesus Christ, then it's such a good opportunity to say, "Lord, close that gap between my lips. Keep closing that gap, Lord. Inflammate my heart more. Oh Lord, help me to feed my heart so that it's inflamed even more so that the rivers of living water are flowing." You know, the rivers of the Lord are deep and nobody ever gets to the bottom of it. For the Christian, it just should be an encouragement to be less about what you say and more of your heart, your genuineness before God. It's the person who says, "Lord, give me greater real urgency toward you and love toward you and let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight because they are not disconnected from who I really am."

So a believer can understand this but also Isaiah is speaking of an unbeliever, of a hardened unbeliever whose life is progressively moving. His heart is moving in this direction and his words are moving in this direction. This is the mark of an unbeliever where there is a clear understanding within that person's heart that what they say is not what they do and they remain hardened in it and they continue progressively in that direction. So this verse here can expose what it means to be an unbeliever to say one thing with your mouth, to sing the songs, to go to the preaching, to read the Bible, to have your devotions, to get up in the morning and have family worship and do all those things. To have your children memorize the catechism and your heart is not in it. You're just doing time and your heart is not moved. I've had times when my heart wasn't moved and every one of those times should be an impetus to either say, "Oh Lord, save my soul," or, "Oh Lord, draw me near. Oh Lord, I want my heart to be moved by you. Make my heart move." It's one of those two.

So that's one thing that Isaiah is doing. He is also exposing how we fear men and the result of that fear. We set aside the commandment of God. We fear the rejection of man and so we accept man's traditions and we follow man's traditions. People would rather live by a set of rules than by their hearts longing for God. It's a lot easier. "Just tell me what to do. This is his law. Five things: Bam, Bam, Bam, Bam, Bam." Everything is beautiful. Christianity is not that way at all. Christianity is about your heart and the result of a heart seeking the Lord is that he produces works. The unbeliever starts with the works and never gets to his faith. The believer starts with his faith and it works outward to his works. That's why James says, "Faith without works is dead." Christianity always works from the inside out. It does cast a vision but you never can really get there right unless it begins in the heart.

It does say here that the people do draw near, "Inasmuch as these people draw near." In other words, they draw near to religion, they draw near to outward religion. They want to get a religion. They want to get a framework, you know, some way to understand how to get through this world, a community. There is a niche for everybody out there. You can find all kinds of things. If you just want to wade through life, almost any organization can give it to you but these people draw near but it says "they draw near with their mouths

and honor with their lips but they have removed their hearts far from him." There are lots of examples of this in the Scriptures. Saul making a sacrifice when Samuel didn't show up; Nadab and Abihu; the Pharisee in Luke 18 who stood up in the marketplace and he prayed and he said, "I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like those extortioners." He just wanted to be seen. The Lord Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 5 as well. You have Ananias and Sapphira; go to Pilgrim's Progress and there's a character there who exemplifies this. Do you know his name? Talkative. He has a lot of talk but his life is completely different compared to his talk.

It's the religion of the lips. You can say all the right things. You know, this is particularly dangerous to children who grow up in Christian homes because they can say all the right things. They know how to answer the questions. They get sound doctrine and they can spout it out to you really, really well. You know, it's remarkable to me, I've done lots of baptism interviews and all kinds of things like that but you can interview people and they can give you all the right answers and you find out after a little while and they realize they really weren't believers. They had all the answers and they could tell you the gospel. We've had interns from the NC FIC come and they could tell you the gospel as good as anybody but it hadn't touched their heart. They had it in their mind, which it should be in their mind. They had it straight and it should be straight. But they did not love the gospel even though they could talk about it as good as the most seasoned of them.

Now, he also says that something else happens to this kind of person. He says, "And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men." Now, notice the word "fear." Their fear toward me is taught by the commandment of men. The term that he uses, it really expresses the idea of fear, a pretty tuned-up version of fear. It's translated 188 times as fear, 78 times as afraid, terrible 23 times, 6 times as a terrible thing, dreadful 5 times. In other words, it's a pretty heavy hitter word. You are afraid of something and what you do is because of the fear of man, that's it. Your fear toward God really is informed by the commandments of men, what men want you to do rather than what God wants you to do. Here's another way to ask the question to get to the meaning: what do you awe? They were in awe of what man did to enhance his worship. They were in awe of that and they perfected a man-made religion. They respected the commandments of a man-made religion and instead of seeking the Lord, they did just what men told them to do rather than what God had told them and they perpetuated what men said rather than what God said.

That's why Jesus quotes this in Matthew 15 because Jesus is going after the Pharisees because they are going after him on the matter of tradition. In Matthew 15, Jesus is speaking about the difference between the traditions of men that have crept into the Jewish religion and the traditions that were actually ordained by God. It's a very dramatic scene. The Lord Jesus and his disciples had just come off a storm on the sea. Peter has walked on water and he said, "Lord, save me," and the wind ceases and then he's healing everyone in the area and then the scribes and the Pharisees, they come to him from Jerusalem and they say to him, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders for they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?" Well, there wasn't anything in the law about washing your hands before you ate. They manufactured this. They did

something cool and new, something more fascinating than God, that you would have to wash your hands before you eat. And the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you saying, These people draw near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me and in vain they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Then he called the multitudes to himself and he said, "Hear and understand, it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man but what comes out of the mouth. This defiles the man." And then he calls them blind leaders and blind guides.

Well, the Lord Jesus Christ here is telling them that they cannot add to the commandments of God for their worship but men were respecting the commandments of men which in this case, had to do with washing their hands before they ate and they made it a religious ceremony. "If you just wash your hands, you'll be clean. If you just do this and that and this and that, you'll be clean." That's the whole idea. The Lord Jesus Christ is attacking the traditions of man and the worship of God. I think it's obvious to most of us that we live in a day where lots of inventions of man have been entered into the church. We want to do almost everything but what God has commanded us to do in worship and we want to add all kinds of things to it. "You know, the reading of the word of God is not interesting enough so let's show some video clips. Let's do a play. Let's do this or that." These things are not prescribed by God for worship. God gave the church just a few things to do: to read the word, to pray, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to preach, to fellowship, to baptize. That's what God gave the church to do. I guess my prayer is that if you come back here in 15 years, we're still going to be praying and preaching and reading and fellowshiping. That's what God gave the church to do. We're not going to invent a new religion that's hipper and better so that people can be attracted to it.

So Jesus says, "Why do you transgress the law of God for the sake of your tradition?" Now, when you get to the gospel of Mark, Jesus is quoted here but then the Lord Jesus gives an example that they set aside the commandment of God for the sake of their tradition. The commandment of God that they have set aside is: honor your father and mother. And the Pharisees had convinced the people to dedicate all their money to God so that their parents didn't have support. The elders said as long as you give your money to God, then you don't need to take care of your parents when actually Paul said to Timothy, "If anyone doesn't provide for his own, especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." God says, honor your father and mother and what Jesus is saying is that you've set aside the commandment of God to honor your father and mother for the sake of your tradition and that's exactly what we do. He says, "Well did Isaiah prophesy." Now, Jesus is not revoking traditions. The people of God are commanded to hold fast to traditions. That's one application here. Jesus is not revoking traditions. He is revoking the dead heart in the midst of the tradition and the heart that wants to replace the commandments of God with his own inventions.

The people of God are commanded to hold fast the traditions, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." So it's good to keep the traditions. We don't throw the traditions out and go and do our own thing that's more interesting to us. The problem isn't there.

The problem is with our hearts. In fact, the Apostle Paul also says in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, he actually commands to "withdraw from those who do not follow the traditions that were taught," those who want to go and do their own thing. You know, traditions are handed down. Some of them are biblical traditions that the church should follow and some of them are not. Think about your own traditions in your home: praying at meals, tucking in your children at night, family worship, things like that. These words here of Isaiah should just help us to consider all of those kinds of things that we do and to ask ourselves to what degree is our heart bent toward the love of God in all of our traditions. That is the critical matter here.

Application. When I pray, is my heart praying or am I just mouthing words? You know, the wonderful thing about prayer is that when prayer is real, there is help from heaven because all prayers fall short. Like Romans 8 says that "there are groanings too deep for words that are communicated by the Lord Jesus." There is help for the inadequate prayer. I think it should also cause us to ask: is it obligation that's driving us in our church or is it opportunity that we're drawn with? Is it obligation that we're driven by or is it opportunity that we're drawn with? This is kind of a difficult subject in a lot of ways. Here is a question for you who have grown up in a Christian home: if your parents just happened to disappear for a while, would you want to go and sing and pray and fellowship and hear preaching? Would you want to? Or would you want something else? Now, it was right for your parents during your childhood to bring you. It was the right thing. It was obedience to God that they brought you but now what? Now you're an adult. You're in your teens now and you're nearly grown up but where are you at now? Do you desire the worship or is it just dead to you? If it's dead, cry out to God that he would save you. Cry out that he would give you a heart within you to love him because you can't love him without him coming and changing your heart. Cry out to him and be saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and say, "Lord, pour out your living water. Give me your living bread. Oh Lord, help me. Oh Lord, I want to believe. Help me to believe."

It works also for people who are Christians. Most of the time, what you get out of the worship of God, what you get out of the word of God when you read individually, when you come and hear preaching, what you get out of it is largely dependent on the measure of your desire. How is your desire? Is your heart desiring it? And if you come with a large measure of desire, you'll have a large measure of filling. If you bring a teaspoon then you'll probably get it filled. If you bring a cup, you'll probably get it filled. You bring a 55 gallon drum and you'll probably get it filled. But it has to do with your heart. The openness of the desires of your heart, how do you inflame those desires? How do you grow a heart toward God? Well, we know how that is grown. It is grown in the secret places. It is grown by filling your mind up with the knowledge of his will. You want to increase your capacity, you can increase your capacity as a Christian, but that capacity is dependent upon your heart and so we're in this passage about your heart and the question I want to ask is: if you have a teaspoon, could you bring a cup next week? If you have a cup, could you bring a gallon tomorrow? If you have a gallon, could we become a church full of 55 gallon drum people coming in and getting the waters of life? The waters are deep in the kingdom of God.

Now, we come to the second great principle that's here in this passage and it is the cure in verse 14. You see the problem in verse 13: it's the heart that is disconnected from the words, the heart that has very little desire. That's such a danger. Do you realize what a danger it is when you have little desire? Do you understand what that can mean? And so there is this very sobering thing that is being said here. Calculate your desire. Check your heart. Ask yourself: what is the condition of my heart? And then verse 14, this is the cure, God will do a wonder. "Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder." Then he says something that just kind of sounds weird, it sounds like it's not consistent. How wonderful is that? He says, "The wonder is this, for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish." That's wonderful? It's wonderful to destroy the wisdom of wise men? To wipe wisdom out? How could that be wonderful? "And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden." So there is no prudence? There's no wisdom? This is the good thing that you are going to do, God? You're going to wipe out the wisdom of the wise? Is that what's good? Yeah, it is good. It is good. It is a marvelous work.

So wise man will perish and the understanding of prudent men will be hidden and that's a good thing. How does that happen? Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1 and find verse 18 and you'll find how it could be that the wisdom of the wise would be destroyed and it be such a good thing. 1 Corinthians 1:18. We're going to read several verses here. You know, we've spent most of our time here in the malady, the disease of the heart turned away from God. Now the cure is right here in verse 14. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written," and now he quotes Isaiah 29:14, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Verse 20, "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Here he's saying that God is going to replace the wisdom of this world with the wisdom of God. This is the cure for the heart that is turned away where your own wisdom gets destroyed by the cross of Jesus Christ. Verse 25, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"

This is the cure, it's the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's the cross of Christ. It's the cross of Christ that shows you your foolishness and your stupidity and you replace that

stupidity with the wisdom of God and who is that wisdom? It's Jesus Christ himself. And what is he doing? He's ruling on his throne. He died and he rose again and he sits next to his Father on his throne dispensing his wisdom to people. This is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Now, there is no tighter grip than the grip of false religion. There is nothing more impossible to get loose of than a heart that is disconnected from God. There is nothing, nothing more difficult to deal with than that because the Bible says that you are dead in your transgressions and your sins. Nothing can save you. You cannot save yourself. All you can do is cry out that God would save you through the work that he did on the cross. No arguments apart from the gospel can cause the heart to turn and the gospel is that Jesus Christ died and rose again and whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. The power of sin will be broken. And so when you're caught in this impossible treadmill of religion, your only hope is the cross of Jesus Christ and the power. That's it. There is no other way out of the treadmill and that dull repetition of a fake life is to believe in Jesus Christ and cry out to him and say, "Lord Jesus, save me from my sins." God exerted his power through the cross and he saves sinners.

So here we have in Isaiah, we have the problem that is presented: a heart far from him, and the cure: the power of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue those who could not rescue themselves but God gave them a voice to say, "Save me," and he saved them.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your remarkable disclosure of your will across the centuries, how you spoke in times past through the prophets and now you speak through your Son Jesus that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life. O Lord, thank you for the cross. Thank you for the victory that took the failures of this world and folded them into your victory. Amen.