

# What Would God Say about Your Worship?

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Our text for this evening is Psalm 50 and I invite you to turn to Psalm 50. We will read it as the opening to our time together in God's word this evening. Psalm 50, just letting God, as it were, have the very first word in our time together here this evening. Psalm 50,

1 A Psalm of Asaph. The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. 2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth. 3 May our God come and not keep silence; Fire devours before Him, And it is very tempestuous around Him. 4 He summons the heavens above, And the earth, to judge His people: 5 "Gather My godly ones to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." 6 And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge. Selah. 7 "Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. 8 I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, And your burnt offerings are continually before Me. 9 I shall take no young bull out of your house Nor male goats out of your folds. 10 For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. 12 If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains. 13 Shall I eat the flesh of bulls Or drink the blood of male goats? 14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving And pay your vows to the Most High; 15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me." 16 But to the wicked God says, "What right have you to tell of My statutes And to take My covenant in your mouth? 17 For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you. 18 When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate with adulterers. 19 You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue frames deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. 21 These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes. 22 Now consider this, you who forget God, Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver. 23 He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God."

We have a Psalm here this evening that raises a very penetrating question, the question is: what does God think about your worship? And God here in this Psalm, as it were, gathers together the nation of Israel before him, gathers his people before him and delivers a searing indictment against them for their false approach to worship. In part, they were people who went through the right motions, who offered the prescribed sacrifices but God says, "I don't accept that. You're doing it all wrong, even though you're going through the motions that I have prescribed." Then he addresses them in the wickedness of their lives, the hypocrisy of their lives and says, "Why do you even claim my name," as it were, "if this is the way that you are going to live?" Basically in Psalm 50 you have God calling the people who claim to know him to task for their unacceptable worship.

And there is something very foundational about God that underlies this entire Psalm. Oh, it's not expressly, explicitly stated in the language of the text, but there is something fundamental about God that shapes the way appropriate worship is to be given to him. First of all, God is a personal God, he is a living God, and along with that, God is a holy God. That has application, that has meaning, not just for the people of Israel some 3,000 years ago when this Psalm was written, this goes to the very heart of the way that you think about the Christian life, it goes to the very center of who you are and what you do, and it has direct and immediate application for us when we gather together as the people of God to go through worship together in a formal way, gathered together as the people of God.

We must understand that it is not acceptable to God, it is not enough for us to simply show up, go through the motions without our hearts being engaged. Why would you think that when you are dead inside and indifferent to God that you could come and render worship to him that he accepts? In like manner, why would a man think that he could claim to know a holy God, that he could claim to be born again by that holy God, and yet to live in sin that is in direct opposition and violation to the very character and holiness of the God that he claims to know? Jesus said that at the end of time his words to many will be, when they say, "Lord, Lord, did we not do all these things? Did we not know you?" And he will say, "I never knew you. Depart from me," what? "You who practice lawlessness. Your life is characterized by habitual disobedience to my law and to my word. What makes you think that you have a relationship with me that would somehow now bring you into heaven?" That's going to be very prominent in the final day. So here we come to Psalm 50. God is addressing people for their unacceptable worship and he is convicting his people of their guilt.

Now, let's just step back for a moment, figuratively speaking, I'm not going to make the geographic removal of myself from the pulpit as I sometimes do. Let's just step back for a moment and think about this simple principle that Scripture is not always going to make us feel comfortable. In that way, a biblical ministry, a systematic study of God's word takes us away from the realm of seeker-sensitive ministry that seeks to make people comfortable, to make them laugh, to make them feel at home, and to soften the edges of life for them. Scripture is not like that, true Scripture is not like that. This is not a text that you would preach to people in order to make them feel good because the text by its nature is confrontational. It addresses hearts that have gone cold, lives that have drifted

into disobedience and it's God speaking to his people this way. It helps us to see that for those of us who truly love the word of God, those of us that are gathered together tonight, I know you love God's word, that's why you're here – watch this – you say to yourself, you settle in your heart, deep as a conviction in your heart, "Lord, I want not only the comfort of your word, I want that, I need that. Life is hard, I need the comfort of your word but, Lord, I also embrace it when your word comes to me and convicts me. I embrace not only the comfort of your word, I embrace the conviction of it. Lord, I place myself under your authority, I place myself under a living holy God and I realize that that will require a response from me. Sometimes when I fall short, your word will need to confront me. Lord, I embrace that. I accept that. I want that."

Why? Why would you embrace something that is going to make you recognize that you fall short? Make you uncomfortable? Confront you with a need to change? Why would you embrace that? Well, if I can tie Sunday to Tuesday, in part you embrace that because your goal, your orientation toward life is utterly framed by Matthew 6:33, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Well, when you recognize that you're still even as a Christian a sinner who falls short of the glory of God, you're going to realize that seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness means that there will be an element of conviction that is brought on your life and you say in advance, "I embrace that." You say ahead of time, "I want that. Why? Because I want to know this true and holy God. I want to worship him acceptably. I want to be found pleasing in his sight. I deny myself. I take up my cross and I follow him." That's it and that's the only true spirit of a true disciple. Those who want to place conditions on their following of Christ have never understood his Lordship to begin with and so as we come to Psalm 50, we come with teachable hearts, willing and even ready and desiring God's word to convict us so that he might shape us more into the image of the people that he would have us to be. That's where you're at, right? That's what you want. That's why you're here. So let's get into it. That'll be good.

So what happens in this Psalm? Well, first off, if you're going to take notes tonight as I encourage you to do, first of all, what happens in this Psalm is that God summons the witnesses as he brings charges against his people. He summons the witnesses and the witnesses are no mere human, a panel of human jurors, he's calling all of creation to give witness to the righteousness of what he is about to say.

Look at verse 1,

1 The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken,

The Psalm opens with three different names for God, kind of highlighting the majesty of the moment that is at stake here as God is about to speak.

And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

So God here, the Psalmist is saying that what God is doing in this Psalm is he is calling all of creation to bear witness and to act as a witness to the legal process that he is about

to take his people through. He is calling all of creation, all of the world from the rising of the sun to its setting, we would say from east to west. God in majestic glory says, "I call creation to bear witness to the way that I am about to deal with people."

And his seat of judgment is Zion, a poetic name for Jerusalem. Look at verse 2,

2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth.

God, as we've said many times, manifested his presence in Jerusalem in a particularly glorious way: first with the tabernacle with David, then with the temple in the days of Solomon. God's presence was uniquely manifested from Jerusalem and so it's as if from the center of his throne, from the center of his presence, God is shining forth in order to declare this judgment.

And what do you see as you go to verse 3? Let's look at verse 3 together.

3 May our God come and not keep silence; Fire devours before Him, And it is very tempestuous around Him.

So you see, again, we find in this text a passage of Scripture that is not designed to soothe sinful men. This is designed to provoke in men a fear of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It is by the fear of God that you keep away from evil and the Bible does not hide the glory of God, it puts it on full display in a way that is designed to sober us up; to make us treat him with with serious reverence, with a sense of awe, with a sense of respect, deference and worship, bowing down in humility before him. You see, we just need to abandon the effete, effeminate God that has been laid before us by modern churches and modern evangelicals and, even worse, liberal churches that just say that God is someone just like us only even more grandfatherly in his approach. Well, what you think about God should be subjected to a verse like verse 3 here. God is coming in judgment. God is coming in righteousness and when he does that, do you know what happens? The earth trembles. The earth smokes because he is so vast and powerful and holy. So knowing that this Psalm is leading us into an account of God judging his people, here's what we take from that: God's judgment is a time of power; it is a time of fear as shown by and as manifested by the dangerous forces that accompany it when it is described in Scripture. Fire devours before him. It is very tempestuous around him.

Go on in verse 4, he summons the heavens above and he summons the earth. Now, right at that point, you just stop of a moment, especially in light of some of the earlier Psalms that were talking about God as a universal King in the two or three recent Psalms that we've looked at. So let's step back for a moment. In verse 1 he had summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Judgment is coming, verse 3. Now in verse 4, he summons the heavens above and the earth. Now, as you're just following this, if you're just reading this for the first time, your anticipation might be, "Oh, God is now going to judge the heavens and the earth for their sin and rebellion against him." But that's not the purpose of this summoning at all. It's something much different. It's something that strikes fear because look at how it goes,

4 He summons the heavens above, And the earth, to judge His people:

He's gathering together universal witness not to judge the heavens and the earth, but as in the passage that Andrew read for us earlier, judgment begins at the house of God and so he is calling them together not to judge them but to act as witnesses to his judgment of his own people. Wow. This is not what you expected and all of a sudden perhaps the people of God as they are reading this, starting out, "Oh, the heavens and earth are being called together," we start to feel a little bit of sense of false security and all of a sudden the text turns the tables and says, "This is about you today," as God calls his people.

And you see that, again, in verse 5,

5 "Gather My godly ones to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

In other words, "The people of Israel, gather them together because I am about to act in judgment on them. I am about to declare judgment on them." And as you see by what follows in the rest of the Psalm, it's not to congratulate them on their godliness as you might think if you just read verse 5, "Gather My godly ones to Me," it's more the sense of, "Gather my people together, those who are in covenant with Me by sacrifice, those who belong to the nation."

And in verse 6, what happens when the witnesses gather together? When heaven and earth gather together? There is a witness that resounds throughout the universe.

6 And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge.

The most majestic gathering of a witness possible in creation, as it were, kind of personifying heaven and earth and they come together in their majestic creation and their singular undivided testimony is, "God is righteousness as he gives his judgment." Notice the "Selah" there at verse 6. Stop and let that sink in as you contemplate the scene. All of creation is gathered together. God has assembled his people before them and he is about to judge them.

This is no trifling matter. This is no easy-believism that's going on here. This is the most sober, this is the most serious possible time to imagine that God is now holding his people to account for the nature of the worship that they render to him and it's not a matter that this is going to be something trivial. You know, you don't call heaven and earth to bear as witnesses if you're just going to be playing around. Apparently what God is about to address here is something that he gives highest priority to; something that is of the utmost consequence to God and therefore it's of the utmost consequence to his people.

So there with the "Selah" at the end of verse 6, we step back and we say we have been ushered into a divine courtroom where something serious is about to take place. If you've ever been in a decent courtroom, when I used to practice law it was always a sobering

thing to go into a US Federal Court where you've got a two story room and high wooden panels and there is just this august presence that says there is authority resident here; there is a weight of a Constitutional process that is in play here and the judge has been appointed by the President and affirmed by the Senate and this is an august serious matter when you step into a courtroom just by the very design and the way that the courtroom is designed is designed to impress upon you the sobriety of what's taking place here. There is law and authority representative of all the people being put on display. Well, you take that and multiply it by infinity, multiply it not by a human judge appointed by other humans but by God over all creation, with witnesses not in a stand or in a jury box but all of creation bearing witness. You get this sense of something very profound is taking place here, communicating to us the high value, the high importance that God places on the way that his people respond to him. Judgment starts at the house of God.

So that's the scene. Well, what does God have to say to his people? He's acting as the Judge, he is delivering the sentence here. There is no higher court than God. What does God have to say to his people? What would God say about your worship here this evening from that majestic place of complete authority? Well, point 2 here tonight: he rebukes formality. He rebukes formality. In other words, he rebukes an external ritualistic approach to religion that does not have the heart engaged in it. If ever there were a passage that committed people that think Roman Catholicism and all of its rituals and rites are something that is pleasing to God, this is a passage that they need to see and repent in response to. He rebukes formality.

Now, just a little bit of reminder here. Back in the books of Moses, we read about how God redeemed Israel to be his own nation, and especially in the book of Exodus. God saw his people after they had been in slavery for 400 years, he delivered them by his mighty powerful hand, brought them through the Red Sea, and established them in the land to be his people; to be a people that were a holy nation unto him. They existed as a nation, they existed in this land because a personal, living, powerful, holy God had redeemed them to be a theocratic nation responding to him, devoted to serving him, devoted to worship him. You know what that means, among many other things, it means that God had the absolute prerogative to address their religious life. He had the absolute prerogative as the God who had redeemed them, said, "I redeemed you, brought you into covenant. I laid out for you in the law of Moses what this was to be like and now I am calling you to account in response to my word and in response to my redemptive acts in your history."

And what does he say to them? Verse 7, he says,

7 "Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you;  
I am God, your God.

So he speaks to them and he's addressing them and you can't help, if you take seriously the text, if you take seriously the holiness of God, the awesome features of his judgment, you can't help but shrink under the sound of this text to, as it were, picture yourself speaking kind of metaphorically now, kind of standing before him trembling and quaking in your boots. All of creation is gathered together. God says, "I want you to act as

witnesses. I speak to my people. I am your God and I am about to address you." Wow! Is that ever majestic? Is it ever terrifying? The Bible says in Hebrews, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

So now God is speaking to his people and there is nothing but silence on their part. This is not an exchange of ideas here. God is delivering his pronouncements and what does he say to them? Well, you remember, before I turn to verse 8, you remember it's just basic Bible content, that God after he had delivered them from Egypt, he established a series of sacrifices for them to follow which you can read about in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, and given them different sacrifices for different times of the year and different times of life, those sacrifices designed ultimately to teach them that they needed a blood atonement in order to approach their God. Now, as you go on through Psalm 50, God is acknowledging that the people were presenting the sacrifices.

Now look at verse 8 with me here. He says,

8 "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.

He acknowledges, he says, "You're doing the sacrifices that are laid out." Now, we might ask, we might step back and say, "Well then, what's the problem here? Why is all of the universe called to give witness and why is God coming down on his people like this if they're doing the sacrifices that God required from them?" When you ask that question, all of a sudden you are opening the curtains and entering into what the whole point of this was supposed to be. You are entering into the whole way that God views worship; the whole way that God views the way his people are to respond to him. If – watch this, we're just taking the text a little bit, one step at a time – if the external practice of the sacrifices was in place and if that was the goal of worship, then there wouldn't be any reason for God to be torqued off at them, would there? If that was the point, if it was just about external sacrifice and they were doing it, what could possibly be the problem?

Well, God goes on and lays out for them exactly what the problem is and here is what the nature of the rebuke is. I'll say this and then we'll follow it through in the text. God rebukes them because they had lost, they had neglected the inner spirit of the sacrifices. He clarifies something important for them in this text that follows. Beloved, watch this and when you see this laid out for you, it's just so obvious. One of the things that I've come to love about the Psalms is that they just lay things out in a way that is just so obvious, so undeniable that leads you compellingly to the conclusion that this is the way that it must be, and that's what you see going on here. God is about to clarify something important for them. Watch this or listen to this. You can watch and listen, either way is fine by me. God does not need these sacrifices for their own sake. He doesn't need the sacrifices because of something that is lacking in him. This is what he's going on to say. God does not have a lack in his inner being that requires him to need these animal sacrifices. God doesn't need, those sacrifices don't contribute anything to the being or the perfection of God. He is perfect within his own being. He has no need of anything and so

the sacrifices that he called his people to give were not because he needed them. He was just fine before the book of Leviticus was ever revealed.

Now you see in verses 9 through 11, 9 through 12, he's going to lay this out and make it obvious. Verse 9, we'll read through verse 11.

9 "I shall take no young bull out of your house Nor male goats out of your folds. 10 For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine.

Look, remembering what we've seen in the past couple of Psalms, God is King. God owns the world which means that he owns everything that is within it. He owns everything in the universe – watch this in the context of this Psalm – because he owns everything including the world, that means that as a subset of that, he owns all of the beasts and all of the birds that exist anywhere in creation. They belong to him by right of ownership, by right of creation. It's his.

Now, what does that mean in the context of the sacrifices that his people were offering to him? He says, "Don't you get it? Don't you see that it could not possibly be that I need those sacrifices because I've already got all the animals that there are. In fact, when you offer a sacrifice to me, you're only offering something that previously belonged to me to begin with and so I don't need this to fill a void in me." They should not think, like some of the pagan gods and some of the pagan worshipers of those gods thought, they should not think that God needed this sacrifice so that he could be well-fed and content. What God is saying here is, he says, "My people, let me explain something to you. If I needed an animal, I would just go get one. They're all over the place. They're fully at my disposal and it's my prerogative to take one whenever I want. Therefore don't think that your sacrifices are giving something to me that I don't already have. I don't need this for myself," he says.

Then he expands on the absurdity of their misguided notion that somehow they were doing this in order to contribute something to God. Verse 12 he says,

12 "If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains. 13 Shall I eat the flesh of bulls Or drink the blood of male goats?"

He says, "Look, people," he says, "if I did have a need, which I don't, but if I did have a need, I wouldn't tell you about it, I would just go satisfy it out of my own resources. I would take care of it myself. I am the Creator," he says, "I don't need the creature to meet my needs."

And when you think about these sacrifices and the slaughtering of the animals, verse 13, "Shall I eat the flesh of bulls Or drink the blood of male goats?" He says, "You guys, your whole mindset on this is so mixed up. It is so wrong. It is so distorted. Would a God who is spirit eat flesh to sustain himself? What are you thinking? What do you think the



purpose of these sacrifices are? You act like you're doing me a favor by going through the external ritual. It does nothing for me. It doesn't give me anything that I don't already have."

So here in Psalm 50, you see that the people of God had missed the entire point of worship. They were content with the outward form of bringing a dumb animal to a living God and they thought once they had done that, they had discharged their duty just as many people in our world who have any bent toward religion think that if they just go to church once on Sunday and punch the card and kneel when they're supposed to kneel and stand up when they're supposed to stand up, that somehow that satisfies the character and righteousness of God. "I did my duty. I went through the external form." And Psalm 50 is a penetrating rebuke and more than a rebuke, a repudiation of that entire mindset.

I can remember as a young teenager long before I was a Christian, one time in particular where I had been out with friends and had done some naughty things, whatever it was at the time, and waking up saying, "I need to go to church tomorrow to make up for what I did last night." Oh, is that painful and distasteful to remember, and yet that's the mindset of those who think that somehow the works of their hands can make them acceptable to God; that somehow God is impressed with that. Look, God does not need that ritual. That's not the point at all. And, you know, you have to be honest enough as a pastor to realize that even as some gather together on a Sunday morning, that there are some coming with that silly mindset in their minds even in a church like ours. Well, not so with you, beloved. Not so with you, not to think that somehow some external manner could satisfy the demands of God. That was never the point of the sacrifices and it's not the point of the people of God gathering together in the New Testament era either.

Here's the thing, beloved: God in his grace and in his glory doesn't simply rebuke them, he tells them what it is that he wants as we go on in verses 14 and 15. He lays out exactly what those sacrifices were supposed to produce in them; what the spirit of the sacrifice was was the whole point. The sacrifices were a means to a spiritual end to a spiritual God from a spiritual people.

Look at verses 14 and 15. "Okay, God, you say it's really not about the sacrifice, per se, it's not just about the external slaughtering of the animal, what is it then that you want? You say we're doing the external things, why are you dissatisfied with us?" Verse 14,

14 "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving And pay your vows to the Most High; 15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

This changes everything. This reorients the whole spirit of the whole Old Testament system of sacrifice and at the same time informs us about what New Testament worship should look like today. What is it that God requires in worship? He requires a personal heart response. To expand on that: God requires, God demands, the only acceptable worship to God is that which is presented with a thankful and trusting spirit in worship. That's what gives meaning to the outer act. If the heart is not engaged, nothing else on the

outside matters. Do you understand that? Do you realize that it is meaningless, that it is worse than meaningless to think that you can just go through the motions and be congratulated by men if your heart is not engaged in it? This is a New Testament principle, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "in everything give thanks for this is the will of God for you." One of the reasons that God condemns the ungodly, Romans 1, "they refuse to honor Him or give thanks."

You see, what God requires in worship is for you to approach him realizing that you are on the receiving end of undeserved benefits from him, and that you would come to him with a heart of sincere gratitude that says, "Lord, I thank you for what you have done. I thank you for who you are. I'm so grateful for the goodness and kindness that you have shown to me and so as I gather together with the people of God for worship, in the Old Testament times as I offer this sacrifice, God, I do it out of a heart that is overflowing with thanksgiving in my heart to you." God says, "That's what I require. Absent that, it is unacceptable." And it's not simply thanksgiving, look at verse 14, "pay your vows." There is this element of sincere commitment that lives in light of the commitments that you've made before God. And in verse 15, there is this element of trust, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

So what is acceptable worship in the sight of God? What is it that God is looking for from your heart this evening as you sit here tonight? Is there a spirit of gratitude in your heart? A fundamental disposition of your mind that says, "God, I realize that I am here as an unworthy sinner. I realize that I can approach you only through my Lord Jesus Christ. Suffered on the cross, buried in a grave, rose again in order to carry my sins away, and that through a self-sacrifice of Christ, I'm able to come before you not in my merit but in his righteousness alone, I approach you. And God, as I recognize that, I'm thankful. I am thankful that you have shown mercy to me, an undeserving sinner. And God, I am here, I am trusting you. I set aside my anxiety. I set aside my fear of the future. I set aside my wonderment of what's going to happen in the future of our country. I set all of that aside, Lord, in order to tell you that I trust you. And even in the midst of the hard time that I'm going through, I call upon your name because I believe that you bless your people when they call upon you in trouble." God says, "That's acceptable worship to me, a thankful, trusting heart." With that, the spirit of the sacrifices is joined to the outward sacrifice, that's a sweet aroma to God. "Hm, ah, that smells good." But it's not because of the animal, it's because the heart of the one who is presenting it.

So, beloved, let's say this and for you young people, I especially would speak to you here this evening as you start to calculate things, I realize there are so many benefits for you having grown up in a Christian family under the leadership of Christian parents who have brought you to church week after week after week and bring you on Tuesday nights week after week after week. I don't know if you realize this but that is something that you should profoundly thank God for, that your parents are like that. But, not but but as we recognize that blessing, there's a temptation for you. There is an enticement to evil for you even in the midst of that blessing, that your heart would turn and twist it into something wrong where it just becomes something that you're doing going through the motions saying, "Oh well, this is just what we do as a family and I just go along," and

you never really engage your mind or engage your heart in it, and you can start to get conditioned to think that that's okay. Well, for you as a young person, for the rest of us as somewhat older people, more mature perhaps, we all need to realize that as we come together to gather in a place of worship like this, that we cannot come with cold and distant hearts and just say, "I'm here and I'm just going through the motions and that's all that it takes." Well, no. No. No, that's really messed up. Those of us that have been redeemed by the blood of Christ that know that we're on the receiving end of amazing grace, we should never allow that calcified attitude develop in our hearts; that our hearts would turn to stone and we'd be cold and indifferent. We need to be mindful of keeping our hearts warm before Christ and saying, "I'm never going to let the river of my gratitude to Christ run dry because there is just an unending source of blessing that give me an unending source of reasons for gratitude." So as you sit here tonight as you young people think through what your whole nature of life is, you should never accept a cold heart toward God.

So what would God say about your heart of worship here tonight? What is it that's marking and animating your thoughts and your inner man as we go through his word? Is there gratitude? Is there warmth? Is there trust? That's what God requires. And let me just say it one more time because it bears repeating and also it's here in my notes so I want to say it: there is no security for your soul in external ritual. There is no security for your soul in going through the motions, whether it be the rites of the Catholic Church or even sitting with the people of God where the Gospel of Christ is truly preached. Nothing external like that provides security for your soul. You need to have a heart that is thankful, that is trusting, that is resting consciously, gladly, completely in our Lord Jesus Christ. Only then is your soul secure. Friends, don't rest in the outward act alone.

Now, as we go on, as we continue in this Psalm, God has rejected his people for their formalism, their external approach to worship, as we go into the rest of Psalm 50, we're going to see him bringing a second and even more serious charge. He rebukes them for their hypocrisy, that's point 3. He rebukes their hypocrisy. Remember we said in this first section that God is a living God and therefore it requires a living heart-filled response to avoid the sin of formalism. Well, now we come and we recognize that God is a holy God and that means that there should be a holy response to him in worship.

In the Old Testament when God delivered his people from Egypt, he told them that they were going to be a holy nation to him, Exodus 19:6, and he said also in Leviticus 19:2, he said, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." That's a passage that's repeated in the New Testament as well. So if we're going to think rightly about worship, rightly about responding to this God, then we have to factor in at the center the fact that God is holy and therefore we must come to him with a spirit of holiness, a spirit of repentance and turning away from sin if we have any thought that that's going to be acceptable to him. By the time that this Psalm was written, a substantial element of the professing people of God had turned into sin.

Listen to verses 16 and 17. Look at them there with me. Verse 16,

16 But to the wicked God says, "What right have you to tell of My statutes  
And to take My covenant in your mouth? 17 For you hate discipline, And  
you cast My words behind you.

These people were marked by rank hypocrisy. In one sense, they would name the name of God, they would hide under his word, but it was meaningless to them. They spoke of faith but they actually hated God's instruction and would have nothing to do with obedience and that was shown by their sinful lives.

Look at verses 18 to 20. God explains to them more fully what he means as he calls them wicked in front of the presence of heaven and earth acting as witnesses, speaking to his people saying, "You wicked people." He explains what he means in verse 18,

18 "When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate  
with adulterers. 19 You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue  
frames deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother; You slander  
your own mother's son.

He said, "You are in league with thieves and adulterers and you're a lying, slanderous person, even against your own family is how you act." God is convicting them of violating the Ten Commandments: you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not bear false witness. He says, "You are deceitful, adulterous, lying people and you think that you are giving acceptable worship to me. You think that I accept that."

It's exactly what he says in verse 21. He says,

21 "These things you have done and I kept silence

I haven't done anything about it up until now. He says,

You thought that I was just like you

You mistook – watch this, this is such a common spiritual mistake; there are countless souls that will suffer throughout eternity in hell because they made this fundamental mistake as they were living their lives of sin – because they did not experience immediate consequences, that they did not immediately experience God's rebuke and they had a measure of prosperity as they pursued their life of sin, they thought that there would never be any consequences. They thought that God was pleased with them. Their way was right in their own eyes and they thought that God was on their side and God says, "You misread the whole situation. You had it all wrong. You see, just because I didn't act immediately you took that for my approval or my acceptance. No, you mistook my patience for approval, my longsuffering nature as though I would never convict you of these things. Well, now the gig is up. Now judgment time has arrived and you are called to account for your sinful lives which my word had been testifying against you for a long long time."

Beloved, mark it with this, especially in light of the miserable state of so many Christian churches today who have nothing to do with rebuking sin, calling people to repentance, or calling them to submit to the Lordship of Christ: God is a holy God and it is a grave mistake to think that you can be right with God and live a life of sin; to think that because you prayed a prayer 30 years ago, that your soul is safe and secure in Jesus. No. It does not work that way. True, we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. True, Christ wipes away all of our sins. But you must understand something: that when Christ saves a man and when Christ justifies a man and declares him righteous in the presence of God based on the righteousness and blood of Christ, when Christ does that and justifies a man, he simultaneously and without exception also regenerates that man and makes him new so that that man lives out a new nature, lives out in a life that is oriented toward holiness. And a life that is content to live with sin has never been born again which means he's never been justified in the first place, which means he is on a disastrous road to perdition. God says, "Don't insult me coming to me thinking that you're worshiping when your life is arrayed like that."

Now, the tangent that I want to go back to. I am getting really really fed up with something that I see going on more and more, particularly as people try to justify the so-called LGBT movement. It is the increasing pattern of major news organizations to take it upon themselves to explain why the traditional biblical teaching on homosexuality and matters of marriage and sexuality is not what the Bible actually teaches and so you have these secular writers who presume to teach from the Bible in a way that justifies the modern approach to the grossest of sins. That is a fearsome place for those writers to be and the word that they need to hear is found especially in verses 16 and 17 and I wish this would get into their hands because someone needs to speak up on behalf of the word of God that they are twisting and distorting in order to advance a modern political movement. To the wicked God says, "What right do you have to tell of My statutes?" What makes an unsaved journalist who has no involvement with the things of God, the people of God, and no love for the Lord Jesus Christ, what makes him think that he can appropriate God's word, explain it in order to justify a pre-existing conclusion that he's already come to? That is an awful place for a man to be. It is a great sin for an unsaved person to try to use the Bible to advance their agenda. They have no business doing that. It is not their book. Why would you take the words of God into your mouth when you cast them behind you and mock the exclusivity of Christ? Beloved, as you see things like that, just come back to Psalm 50 for perspective. Well, that's the end of that tangent.

God brings this indictment to a close and ultimately what you see here as this Psalm concludes in Psalm 50:22-23, this Psalm closes with a warning and with a promise from God and this is the whole point: God has done this and yet he does it for the spiritual good of those who hear. If you've been convicted by anything that you've heard here tonight, understand that God has convicted you in order to bring you to a place to invite you once more to his blessing.

In verse 22, he says,

22 "Now consider this, you who forget God

He says, "Consider what's been said and change, repent. Come to me in true worship or," he warns them and this is God speaking, "do that

Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be no one to deliver you."

God has graciously convicted them and shown them the folly of their thinking and the folly of their lives and said, "It's time to repent and come into this true worship of gratitude and trust that I call my people to. And if you do, I will bless you. If you reject it, I'll tear you to pieces."

And yet it ends with a promise of blessing. Notice just one last thing on that warning, that there is no hope of deliverance if a man hardens his heart against this instruction from God. "I'll tear you to pieces and there will be no one to deliver you." Wow. Should we fear God and yet this Psalm ends on a promise of blessing and notice that it's a call to thanksgiving again, a call to a life response to God. He says,

23 "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God."

He says, "Just respond to this and I'll bless you. Turn away from your formal religion. Turn away from your hypocrisy of life. Come to me with a thankful, trusting heart and I will pour out on you the blessings of full salvation." Once again we're brought to the same conclusion that I've said so many times from this pulpit and, Lord willing if he gives me breath, I'm going to continue to say things like this again and again and again until every person that steps into this room is converted by the power of the Spirit of God to the glory of Jesus Christ. When this is laid out with such clarity before you, when the invitation from Christ is so free, so gracious, "Come to me. I'll save you. I'll show you my salvation." Why would you turn away? Why would you harden your heart again and turn away and say, "No, that's not for me. I'm not listening." Why would you do that? Why would you do that? On what principle of righteousness or even your own self-interest would you harden your heart again to the call of Christ on your soul? Charles Spurgeon says about this closing verse and I quote, "He who submits his whole way to divine guidance and is careful to honor God in his life brings an offering which the Lord accepts through his dear Son and such a one shall be made experimentally to know the Lord's salvation."

For the many of you, the majority of you that are here and you are thankful, you are walking in the Spirit of God, you're here out of a thankful trusting heart, look at this final verse and see the promise. God says, "I'll show you the salvation of God." He will complete what he has begun in you. As certainly as he'll judge the wicked, so certainly he will bless his people and fulfill beyond all that we could ask or think the fullness of his promises to those who love Christ.

Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

*Father, help us to take these words to heart. Work in us that we would respond to you with a settled sense of thanksgiving and of trust. If these words have come and convicted someone going through the motions or someone, Father, living a double life of sin, we've seen that in our own midst, Lord, it grieves us to think that there might be more. Father, may your words against formalism and hypocrisy from Psalm 50 convict such a one that he would be broken under the weight of sin and that he would turn fully to Christ for salvation. Bless us as we go, Father, as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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