

Sermon Series: When Life Get's Hard

To be used with: Session Two

Sermon Title Possibilities: Empty Worship?, How Justice Connects to Worship

Scripture: Isaiah 1:1-18

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *How God Can Use Me When Others Suffer*. Suffering is all around us. Some of it is preventable. The church is called to pursue justice in the face of this type of suffering. Isaiah 1 tells us that when we are not concerned with justice our worship is empty.

Introduction:

God created marriage. He loves marriage. But there is one particular marriage that we know the Lord hates. That is the wedding of Mr. Iniquity and Ms. Solemn-Assembly. The Lord cannot endure such a union.

This is the description of the people in Isaiah 1. They are hiding behind religiosity and refusing to repent. The picture here is of people who are either turning a blind eye to the suffering of others or who are perpetrating the suffering themselves all the while ramping up their activities of worship.

Can you picture it? The screams from injustice are being drowned out by turning up the volume on our worship songs. That's the scene in Isaiah 1 and God hates such religiosity.

1. God hates disobedient worship (Isaiah 1:1-9)

Isaiah 1 is a scene from a court room where the Lord indicts Israel for their covenant unfaithfulness. In the first nine verses he produces exhibit A, B, and C.

Exhibit A is that the children do not look like their father. They were created to "know" and to "understand" their Father (v3). These are intimate relationship words. They were rescued by God out of Egyptian bondage in order to worship God and continue His mission of spreading His glory to the nations. They were to be reflectors. When the Father sees injustice how does He respond? Is the Father righteous in His actions? The same could not be said of the Israelites.

Exhibit B is that they've rejected their calling. In Isaiah 1:4 the Lord uses 4 nouns to display Israel's privileged position but then he attaches a negative adjective to corrupt it. "Nation, people, offspring, and children" becomes "sinful, heavy with iniquity, evildoers, and corrupt." Those words should be things like holy, light to the nations, healing, providers, gracious refuge, and similar things. A broken world should have found solace in Israel. They should have been able to see a beacon of hope and a picture of the God of the universe. But instead they found a mirror that looked just like them.

Exhibit C is that they stubbornly refused to heed God's warnings. God, in a sense, withdraws his presence from among them and rather than meeting them with favor they

experience the effects of His displeasure. But they did not respond, positively. Rather than realizing that they couldn't go on without His presence they instead turned up the volume on their religiosity. They faked it. They went through the motions. They kept pretending like everything was okay and they never turned to him in repentance.

God isn't okay with that type of worship. He doesn't hear hearts that stubbornly refuse to change and go about as if its business as usual.

2. God hates empty worship (Isaiah 1:10-17)

The image here could be likened to a man who killed his wife and children on Saturday night and then comes to church on Sunday morning, teaches his Sunday school class on 'thou shall not kill'. He goes into the service and appears to passionately worship God, he listens intently to the message, he takes good notes, he goes up front and prays for others. Then he goes home and buries his family without feeling as if anything is wrong with this picture. His hands are filthy and dirty but He is worshipping as if they are clean. His worship is empty just like His heart.

Their hearts on display in verses 12-15. They have no intent to recognize God, no intent to reform, and no intent to revere him. They only want to appear as if they care. Today we call this virtue signaling. Our calls for justice mean very little if we don't actually engage in efforts to make right things which are set wrong. God calls such empty worship a trampling of his courts.

We see the result of this type of worship in verse 15. God isn't going to listen. God cares little about your orthodoxy if your life doesn't match up to what you say you believe. In the face of suffering we must pursue justice or our worship is empty.

3. God loves redeemed worship (Isaiah 1:18-20)

I am thankful that "clean yourself up" isn't all that is in the Bible here. Verse 16 and 17 is a call to repentance and a call to pursue cleansing. But we all know that we can't clean ourselves up. If it were life up to us our worship would always be disobedient and empty, it could never be acceptable to God.

Verse 18 is God reading the verdict. It doesn't seem to fit. They are dirty and filled with blood but they are declared as white as snow. But this cleansing only comes by the Israelites coming to God for refuge. If they continue in their rebellion and their methods of self-atonement they'll never be cleaned. But when they come to God, acknowledge that they've blown it and haven't rightly reflected God, he provides the cleansing that is needed. And this redeemed worship is worship that God loves.

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