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Winter 2024-25  
The Heart of Worship

**Sermon Title:** No Vain Worship

**To be used with Session 5:** The Lifestyle of Worship

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:11-17

**Connection with the Study:** To complement the study “The Benefits of Worship,” this sermon will lead believers to consider the uselessness of hypocrisy and vanity in worship and reconsider their effort in leading lifestyles of worship. By examining Isaiah’s condemnation of Judah’s empty worship practices, listeners will hear God’s heart against vain worship practices.

Many worshippers find themselves rushing through life and giving God an hour here and there. They are preoccupied with self-satisfaction and the busyness of everyday life. God does not desire our leftovers, but our best, as He has given His best. A life of vain worship leads to empty prayers and empty lives.

**Introduction:** What is a happy marriage? A certain man has been married for years. He has been married for so long, it seems like he’s been married forever. He declares he is happily married, and even talks about how lovely and sweet his wife is, yet he visits her rarely. As he visits her, usually for about an hour and expresses his love while checking his phone for messages. He looks at his watch, minding the time, hoping to make his scheduled lunch meeting and hoping she will conclude her conversation in time for him to do so. If he does well, he will see her in a few weeks, although he claims he has undying love for her. His visits with his wife are merely rituals.

## **1. Redundant ritualism is ridiculous (Isa. 1:12-13).**

God does not desire heartless repetition of religious motions. Isaiah addressed Judah’s wickedness and God’s plan to correct them. They were going through the motions of worship. They assumed that by simply going through the actions of worship, in their case offering sacrifices at the altar, they would be pronounced ceremonially clean before God. This is vanity. No matter how many sacrifices they made, sacrifices are meaningless, unpleasing to God, and vain if the worshipper fails to conform his mindset and lifestyle with God’s standards. Worship is an internal matter of heart and mind, not an external matter of ritual.

Is it possible that we practice vain worship? Today, our rituals of singing, listening to sermons, and other “churchy” things are vain if they are merely motions. No amount of singing without meaning, sermon listening without love toward God, or attending worship services without attending to matters of attitudes and actions can substitute for living a worshipful lifestyle. Vain worship is wasted effort.

## **2. Insincere worship infuriates God (Isa. 1:14-15).**

Empty worship is wasteful. There is no truth in insincere worship. According to verse 14, God hates insincerity in worship. Hate is a strong word. It implies disgust, resentment, and anger, among other things. When Judah worshiped in empty insincerity, God hated it. Such worship is a burden to God, not a blessing to Him.

Even the prayers of the people, because their hearts were not right, were ineffective. When they raised hands in prayer, God refused to acknowledge them and their requests because of their guilty hearts and lives.

We often find our churches filled with those who have not yielded to God before requesting His favor. We find ourselves asking our Father for blessings when our attitudes and actions have not blessed Him or represented Him at all. Instead of confidently coming to our Father cleansed and righteous, we come to Him with guilty hands outstretched expecting His best when we have given Him far from our best.

## **3. Changed hearts bring changed lifestyles (Isa. 1:16-17).**

The people of Judah brought their unrepentant filth before God. How were they to become clean so He might choose to regard their prayers? They were to cleanse themselves. They were guilty of many sins. Quite simply, they were told to stop doing evil. They were not told to go and perform a religious action, but to change.

They were selfish. They had treated themselves well while treating others poorly. Their actions outweighed their religious words. They had to learn to do what is good. They were told to seek justice and to correct those who oppressed others. They were to defend those without defenders: the fatherless and the widows. At a time when the weakest had no advocates, those who were to have represented God had failed. Their lives reflected selfishness, and their religious lives were empty actions of hypocrisy.

We must seek inward holiness instead of trying to only project outward cleanliness. This is called "integrity." When the world looks for God, they look at those who claim to represent Him. We, as Judah needed to do, must adjust our lives to show a lifestyle of worship.

**Conclusion:** As believers, we must continually guard against habitual sin in our lives and place God above all other distractions. This is nothing new in our fallen world. Our fallen nature has been on display since the garden. We tend to be selfish. We tend to be busy. We must, however, remember that God tires of getting our leftovers in life. We cannot give Him leftover time, energy, and effort. That is burdensome to Him. We must choose lifestyles that confirm we are truly grateful for our salvation and place Him first in our everyday lives. If we do not, we will experience hypocritical worship and empty prayers just like the Judeans in Isaiah's day.

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