

Rescue The Perishing – Is 58:1-12

Love the moves; The message; M.A.D stands for Make A Difference

This is the start of our **Local Outreach Conference**

Something we’ve been looking forward to for some time now, and something we want to do periodically, just like our Global Outreach Conference

And the purpose is the same – to inform you and encourage you

Inform you of God’s heart in this matter – his heart toward those who are perishing . . .

And encourage you to rise up and be used by God, to rebuild and restore their lives

To flesh that out, we’ll be looking at 3 main passages over the next few weeks, where God

lays out *his* expectations, and *our* responsibility, for local outreach

The first of which is Is 58:1-12; So if you haven’t already, turn there w/ me (**Intro**)

- Isaiah is prophesying around 710 BC here . . .

And God, speaking through him, is in the middle of assuring his people, that though they would encounter much hardship and persecution in the days ahead . . .

There’s hope of restoration; But *only* if they will turn fr their sin, and start living right

The principles for which apply just as much to us, as it did to them

B/c we too face hardship and persecution, and we too are God’s people

- With that in mind then, God says to Isaiah in v1 . . .

“Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. 3 [And then the people say] ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ [And then God responds] Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. 4 Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 ‘Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?’

[People of God that we are, there are certain things God expects of us when it comes to those who are perishing; The first, is to . . .

Walk your talk (v1-2)

How many times have we seen this theme in Scripture?

In v1-2 God’s like – “Isaiah, I know it doesn’t look like it, but the people are sinning, and you need to tell them”

“I know, I know – *they seek me daily* [v2] *and delight to know my ways* . . .

And *they ask of me righteous judgments* – they *ask* me to intervene on their behalf . . .

And even *delight to draw near to me*”

But they do it *as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God*

As *if* they want to abide by my guidance and help

As if they *do* what they’re told, and actually *walk* their talk

But they don’t; They’re living a lie; It’s a great big hypocritical facade”

- You could be the most knowledgeable Bible scholar in the Quad Cities, winning every game of Bible trivia you’ve ever played . . .

And the go-to person for tough questions and impressive answers

But if you’re not living it out, what good is it for those who are perishing?

That’s one of the reasons God expects every single one of us to *walk* our talk – so that those who are perishing can benefit

Don’t just go through the *motions* of reading your Bible, or prayer, or church attendance – but actually follow through and *apply* what you’re learning

Learn and seek God’s will not just to *know* more things, but to *do* more things

To be more *like* him

To actually *have* the mind of Christ, instead of just *knowing* the mind of Christ

I like how **John Milton** said it back in 1644; Speaking of education; He said . . .

“The end then of learning is to . . . know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, [and] to be like him.” (*Of Education*, John Milton)

Discipleship is not about knowledge for knowledge sake, but knowledge for love’s sake

Knowledge for life’s sake; Knowledge for the sake of those who are perishing *****

[Re-cap from brackets at start of point 1]

Second, is to . . .

Put others first (v3-4)

In v3, the people say – ‘*Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?*’

“Why is it God, that our acts of devotion have gone unnoticed?”

“What gives? We’re doing the right things”

And God answers in v3b – *Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure*

At the very time you’re supposed to be focusing on me, and my ways, and my heart . . .

You’re thinking about yourself; You’re pursuing your own business

Even in the midst of your fast to seek *me*, it’s all about *you*!

That’s why you’re not being heard or noticed

What’s more, you *oppress all your workers* (3b) – you put yourself first

Fighting, and arguing, and hurting each other to be top dog

Once again, at the very time you’re *supposed* to be showing your devotion to me God says, and wanting to live *my* way

And then you have the gall to ask why I don’t notice?

Let me tell you something – *Fasting like yours this day* [4b; acts of devotion like that] *will not make your voice to be heard on high.*

- Counter intuitive as it may seem, putting yourself first in life, is counter-productive; It’s self-defeating

B/c God doesn’t even take *notice* of your requests; Let alone respond to them

That's not to say he doesn't know what's going on, or that he doesn't care
He just doesn't answer b/c you've turned your back on him
Which Isaiah clarifies a few verses later in chapter 59, where he says in v1-2 . . .
Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Which means, how you treat others determines to a large degree, how God treats you
Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.
If you want the ear of God, if you want the attention of the Almighty – give your ear to others; put them first; Especially those who are perishing

Third, the third thing God expects of us when it comes to those who are perishing, is to . .

Go all out (v5)

Walk your talk, put others first, and go all out in doing so

After exposing the error of their fast in v3-4, God then says in v5 – *Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself?*

IOW is that the act of devotion I want from you – a day of not eating?

Is that the extent of your humility? Is *that* the life to which I've called you?

Is it [for a person] to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Is it just convenient *forms* of worship that I seek – no more significant than a reed that bends in the wind?

Is it just outward displays of piety like sackcloth and ashes, apart from inward feelings of devotion – empty rituals that cost little and mean less?

Will you call that a fast God asks – a legitimate expression of your devotion?

And a day acceptable to the LORD?

I hope not; God wants a life and life-*style* of devotion – not a series of convenient moments here and there

Not a Sunday check-off and a Wednesday drop-off, but a pattern and practice of going all out, b/c you're all in

Especially as it relates to those in need; Go all out

- That brings us to the main point of this passage in v6, where God says . . .

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is not this the act of devotion I expect of you – to counter the effects of sin, fight injustice, and . . .

Rescue the perishing (v6)

It is; That's the reason God wants you to walk your talk, put others first, and go all out in your devotion to him – it's to rescue the perishing

That's the reason he wants us, as a *church*, to walk our talk, put others first, and go all out – so that both individually *and* corporately, we can rescue the perishing

Those in the throes and bondage of sin and wickedness

Those enslaved by the deceit of Satan or the oppression of his minions

Those bound by the confines of our world – the confines of poverty, or sickness, or homelessness, or helplessness, or loneliness

Those bruised and broken by the vagaries of life, or the evil of man

Whatever the case, people all around us are perishing – perishing physically, perishing emotionally, and perishing spiritually

And according to this text, it's incumbent upon us to rescue them

- I ran across the story of Fanny J. Crosby recently, and found that this is something she experienced firsthand

She was a famous hymn writer in the late 1800's . . .

And while speaking to a group in Cincinnati one evening, she had an overwhelming sense that someone in the crowd needed to be *rescued*; so she verbalized it

Afterwards, a teenage boy approached her, told her he was the one, and she had the privilege of leading him to the Lord on the spot

As a result, later that night all she could think about was “rescue the perishing”

So before she went to bed, she penned **these words** . . .

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave

Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen, tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save

The next day, she showed them to her friend, Howard Doane, who put them to music, and the famous hymn *Rescue the Perishing* was born *****

But that's not it; Years later, she was speaking to another group of people at a YMCA in Massachusetts, and told this exact story of how she wrote the hymn

And once again, a man approached her after the service

But this time he was older and said, “Miss Crosby, I just want you to know that I'm the boy you led to the Lord that night, 35 years ago; and I can't thank you enough.”

Fanny later described it as one of the most gratifying experiences of her entire life, and it served as a prelude to her second “career”

Where at the age of 60, she began working in the rescue missions of Lower Manhattan several days a week

And eventually chose to *live* in the ghetto, despite the fact that she was *blind* – all so she could rescue more of the perishing

It's the fast of God's choice; The act of devotion he wants; To rescue the perishing and . .

Share your life (v7)

That's v7, where God continues, still referring to the act of devotion he expects, saying . .

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

I don't know about you, but I'm haunted by the personal, singular nature of that verse

Share *your* bread; And bring the homeless poor into *your* house . . .

And when *you* see the naked, cover him; And don't hide yourself from your own flesh

Yes, God is speaking to us *corporately* as his people, but there's a singular aspect here that's unavoidable

Does that mean that every single one of us has to be involved in every single outreach opportunity? Not at all; That would be impossible
But it's pretty hard to get around your responsibility to *somehow* be involved in *something*
Whether it's being an advocate for those whose voice is rarely heard . . .
Or listening to those who need to be – doing nothing is not an option

Far from hiding yourself from those in need . . .
Or insulating yourself from uncomfortable situations . . .
God's expectation is for you to get involved with them, and share your life
Including your food, your home, your clothes, and your presence – look at the verse (7)

- Now, that doesn't mean you should throw caution to the wind, and invite every homeless person you see, to live in your basement
Sometimes that's the *worst* possible thing you could do for them
Sometimes that actually *enables* them to continue in the very attitudes and activities from which you're trying to rescue them

There are risks, and costs, and hassles, and headaches, and things to be considered – for both you *and* the person you want to help
Which means ignorant naïveté and lone ranger-ism is not an option
The better informed you are, the better you'll be able to meet their needs without enabling their desires
The better you'll be able to *rescue* the perishing, without contributing to their death

None of that however, should prevent you from sharing your life – b/c God expects it, and they need it
Money won't rescue people; Programs won't do it; And buildings certainly won't cut it
They need *you*; They need *us*
They need someone to show them the love of God, *first*-hand

- And when you do, you'll not only be heard by them , but you'll be heard by God
Then you'll be noticed; *Then* v8 . . .
Shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. 11 And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. 12 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

Bottom line? Rescue the perishing and you'll . . .

Reap the benefits (v8-12)

Benefits like – hope, healing, influence, protection, restoration, guidance, satisfaction, strength, provision, purpose, and value; They're all there
Some of the most amazing promises and blessings in all the Bible

But they don't come by *hoarding* your life – hanging on to as many of those benefits as you possibly can; as many as you already enjoy
They come, by giving *away* what you already have; By *giving of yourself*

So that the more you give – the more hope you impart, the more healing you bring, the more guidance u offer, the more provision you provide to those who are perishing . . .
The more you give, the more you get; And the more you get, the more you should give
So that truly, God's mercies are *new* every morning
God's gifts, God's provisions, God's blessings – are fresh every dawn
Why? B/c you gave them away the day before!

That's God's economy; *That's* God's way; *That's* what he expects *****
So that as you walk your talk, put others first, go all out, rescue the perishing, and share your life – you'll also reap the benefits
B/c where God leads, he never fails to provide; You watch

Pray – God, help us; Change our attitudes toward those who need our help
Find us more/more willing to get involved in their lives, just as you got involved in ours
Find us more and more willing to give up our lives for them, just as you did for us
To rescue us when we were perishing (**The Lord's Table**)

- As we go to The Lord's Table, examine your life in light of this passage
And if Jesus is your Lord and Savior – join us
You don't have to be a member, just a believer

But if he's not – if you haven't trusted him to rescue you from perishing . . .
If you don't believe by faith that he has saved you from your sin – let the bread and the cup pass, and consider why
B/c if you eat and drink without considering your worthiness to participate . . .
The Bible says you'll be guilty of showing disrespect and irreverence toward God . . .
And risk bringing judgment on yourself

Better to give your life to Christ; Better to surrender your way of living to his
Better to exchange your sinfulness for his righteousness
Which you can do right now in the quietness of your heart, right where you sit
Tell him you *believe* that he died to rescue you from perishing
Ask him to forgive you of your sins; And *commit* to live for him the rest of your life
And then, when the time comes, join us in eating and drinking

- At the last supper Jesus said – *This is my body, which is for you.*
IOW this broken bread is symbolic of his rescue, to spare *us* from perishing
Eat it in remembrance of that

And then he said – *This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*
Meaning, this cup and what it contains, is symbolic of the promise of salvation, the new covenant, that Christ's blood bought and guaranteed
Do this, as often as you drink it [he said], *in remembrance of me*
Let's stand and worship the God who rescues