

Finding Your Way Back (Part 1) – Is 33:13-16

Is 33:13-16; I want to talk to you about finding your way back – back to God

A situation in which every single one of us finds ourselves from time to time

We turn our back on God, maybe for a short time, maybe for a lifetime – and need help getting back, getting right

And the reasons vary; Maybe you need to find your way back from a time of extended *rebellion* in your life, that you know is wrong but don't want to stop

Or maybe you're completely *broken* over your sin, but don't know what to do

Or maybe you're so deep in sin you can't even *imagine* there's a way back

Or maybe you've just become complacent in your walk, and need to renew your *love* for the Lord

Whatever the case, if you need to get right when you've been wrong; If you need to find your way back, or *know* of someone who does – this message is for you

➤ B/c that's exactly the situation the Israelites were in; They were at the bottom of the barrel with nowhere to turn

The Assyrians were still at their doorstep threatening to attack

The help the Israelites had sought from the Egyptians, failed to bear fruit

Sennacherib, the leader of the Assyrians, had refused to be bought off himself

And the Israelites had nowhere to turn – except the Lord

And the Lord in his amazing grace, *received* them, and told them *how* they could find their way back (**Template**)

It's a classic example that God indeed hears and receives genuine foxhole prayers

Look at v13-16; God is speaking, and says . . .

[13] Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might. [14] The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: "Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" [15] He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil, [16] he will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him; his water will be sure.

We'll cover v16 next week, but for now, the first thing you need to do to find your way back from sin or complacency, is . . .

Reconsider God's work (v13a)

God says in v13 – *Hear, you who are far off, what I have done*

As in consider, and reconsider, you who are *far* from me, you who have turned your back on me – the things I've done; That's the first step . . .

Toward repentance and finding your way back to God – reconsider his work

Like the beauty and intricacy of his work in nature; And his work in days of old, to select, protect, and deliver a people for his own possession

And his work on the cross that we might be forgiven of our sins

And his work at Pentecost to send his Spirit and start the church

And don't forget about his work in your heart to awaken your soul; And in your life to lead and to guide

If you need to find your way back to God, reconsider his work

➤ It's like an author named James Bradley, who wrote the book *Flyboys* a few years ago – a little known account of 6 POW's in the hands of the Japanese during WWII

But in order to do so, he had to go back and reconsider the work of *others* – especially the work of court recorders from 1946 . . .

Detailing the heinous war crimes that had been committed on an island near Iwo Jima

The result of which, is a written account of things that should never be forgotten

And that's exactly what God offers us; A written account of his work (Bible), in addition to an amazing display of grace (the cross) . . .

That serves as a constant beacon to find our way back; Reconsider God's work

Acknowledge God's power (v13b)

In v13b, God says – *you who are near, acknowledge my might*

You who are near meaning those within earshot, or eyesight, or *any* sort of proximity to see God's might; Which according to the Bible, is everyone

Everyone is near *enough* to see God's power displayed, b/c it's all around us

Including his power to rend the heavens; And calm the seas; And change situations; Alter circumstances; Do miracles; Raise the dead; And change people's lives

If you need to find your way back to God after wandering in the desert – acknowledge the might of his power

➤ Including his power to discipline you, woo you, wow you, or make your life miserable until you turn; That's what he did with the *disciples* . . .

When Jesus came to them walking on the water in the midst of a storm

He first *wowed* them with his power to walk on water

Then made their lives miserable with *fear* of his power

Then *wooed* them with his power – by offering Peter the opportunity to step out of the boat himself; And then wowed them again when he calmed the storm

At which point they found their way back from their momentary doubt and skepticism, and *worshipped him* it says in Mt 14:33

And you can too; You too can find *your* way back from doubt or skepticism, if you simply acknowledge God's power, to do whatever he wants

Observe God's effect (v14a)

If you want to find your way back to the One who saved you and keeps you, observe his effect on those around you – especially those in sin; Look at v14a

The sinners in Zion [that's Jerusalem, the place of God's presence] *are afraid; trembling has seized the godless*

Have you ever noticed that those in sin, those who are backslidden – are *miserable* unless their indulging? Have you noticed that? It's true

They're fearful, miserable, and sheepish

Not only b/c of their shame, but b/c the Spirit who dwells *within* them is miserable

And he won't sit idly by and let it continue without a fight

Is that you? If so, sooner or later your sin will lead to fear/trembling just like the Israelites Especially when you realize that you're a sinner in the hands of an angry God

That's the effect God has on those who continue in sin – they're seized by fear

And if you haven't yet come to that point – one of the best things you can do is observe those who have; Those who are broken, shattered, and shaking in their boots
It's no fun, and no good; And a clear warning to find your way back before you're in the same boat; Observe God's effect; 4th, is to . . .

Fear God's wrath (v14b)

In order to even *start* finding your way back to him, or have any impulse to do so whatsoever – you need to fear God's wrath

That's what the Israelites of old did in v14b, shown by the fact that they asked 2 very pertinent questions – *Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire?* . . .
And, *“Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?”*

The first I think, is a reference to the searing holiness of God's presence, that cannot and will not tolerate sin or impurity
B/c several times in the Scriptures, you find the exact same phrase referring to God

Like in **Deut 9:3** where Moses is assuring the Israelites about their enemies when they cross the Jordan river, saying . . .
Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the Lord your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you.
God is the consuming fire, and destruction accompanies him for those in rebellion

And if you're thinking, “Oh Pastor Rob; That's the God of the *OT*; The God of the NT is a God of love”; At which point I'd show you **Heb 12:28-29**
Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

So when the rebellious Israelites asked – *“Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire?”* They were asking . . .*****
“Who can be in the awesome presence of holy God, and live? Especially given our sin?
And the answer, is nobody; Not even for a moment
Which makes the work and grace of Christ on our behalf, all the more significant

➤ But the 2nd question I think, has to do with the punishment of hell – the expression of God's wrath for all eternity; *“Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?”*
Which sounds a lot like Rev 14:11, that says – *the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever?* The burning is everlasting

And Isaiah *himself* alludes to a *burning place* in ch30 – a place that *has long been prepared* (33); And right after this in chapter 34 . . .
He talks about a future judgment in the form of *burning pitch and sulfur*, that *shall not be quenched* night and day, and whose *smoke shall go up forever* (v9-10)

So the 2nd question I think, refers to the wrath of God expressed in the judgment and punishment of hell
While the 1st question refers to the sin-crushing holiness of his presence
Either way, it's something to fear; And a major impetus to find your way *back*, or find him in the first place

And then last, is to . . .

Live God's way (v15)

If you want to find your way back to God, from sin and rebellion – live his way
B/c that's exactly what God summarizes in v15

Who's going to dwell in my presence?

He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil
That's the person who abides in me and I in him God says

Not that your salvation is *based* on your works; But the life you live and the works you *do*, should *reflect* your salvation
IOW as a follower of Christ, dwelling in his presence – he in you and you in him – your *sanctification* should reflect your *justification*
Your process of becoming more and more *righteous* like Christ, should increasingly reflect the righteousness of Christ you've already been *given*
Which God articulates here with 5 admonitions

The 1st of which, is to . . .

• **Clean up your act**

If you're going to find your way back to God, you need to live God's way
And if you're going to live his way, you need to clean up your act; You need to live in a manner consistent with his character and holiness; Including your speech
Who can be in God's presence? *He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly* (15)

IOW stop doing what's wrong, and start doing what's right – both
Stop sinning, and start practicing righteousness

And while you're at it, clean up your mouth as well – speak *uprightly*
Talk in a way that glorifies the God who spoke uprightly to you
Speak in a way that builds others up; Speak in a way that leaves people thinking God-*honoring* thoughts instead of God-awful ones; Use good words instead of bad ones
Swearing is just the effort of a weak mind to express itself anyway; Or a means of drawing undue attention to yourself; Don't go there
And if you have, find your way back by cleaning up your act

• **Hate sinful gain**

As in despise *the gain of oppressions* (15); Like taking advantage of people or using them in order to get ahead or make a buck
Slavery would be one of the more heinous examples; It's the gain of oppression
And it continues all over the world – from sweat shops, to forced labor camps, to sex trafficking; It's the gain of oppression

As is employing someone or managing them, but not really caring about them; That too is sinful gain; Or using threats to intimidate someone
Or putting social or political pressure on someone, in order to get an edge or put them down; It could be spreading rumors on social media . . .
It could be airing someone's dirty laundry; It could be telling a joke at someone's expense

Whatever the case, it's sinful gain, the gain of oppression

And if you're going to find your way back and live God's way – you ought to hate it

3rd is to . . .

- **Refuse to play favorites**

As in, shake your *hands*, *lest they hold a bribe* (15)

Bribes are offered or asked for, as a means of showing favorites

Like when a judge is bribed to favor one party over the other; Or a sports official is bribed to favor a certain team; Or a politician to favor certain constituents

Whether they come in the form of money or not, bribes are a means of influencing people to show favorites, and we ought to avoid it like the plague

Treat people fairly and refuse to play the game

- **Condone no violence**

Or as God says it, stop your *ears from hearing of bloodshed* (15) – the wrongful harm of another person; Refuse to condone it by even listening to it

Whether it's listening to their plans, or hearing of their fights

If you do, if you listen to them unopposed – you give them the satisfaction of *glorifying* their deeds, and the impression that *you're* okay with it

Which happens most often when we watch graphic, gratuitous violence – whether in movies, or in a cage

Gratuitous, in that it's bloodshed just for the sake of bloodshed – b/c it sells

And graphic, b/c it satisfies some primal bloodlust, with no redeeming value

It's a huge portion of the movie industry

And when we buy, when we *listen* – we not only support it and condone it, but tend to imitate it as well; And God says it's no way to live – at least not his way

Condone no violence, not even by hearing it; And then last . . .

- **Entertain no sin**

If you're going to live God's way and find your way back – entertain no sin; As in, shut your *eyes from looking on evil* (15)

It's one of the reasons I hate browsing through movies – whether online or in a store

B/c so many of the jacket covers are so evil; Not to mention the movies themselves

They're either demonic, grotesque, or fear-inducing

Very little of which I've ever watched, and hate to this day; And hope you do too

B/c it's not God-glorifying or God-honoring to feast your eyes on such things, and entertain such evil; Nor is it good for your soul, or part of God's way of living

Better to *shut* your eyes, even literally, and find your way back by *feel* if you have to
With a heightened sensitivity to God's Spirit, and a desire for all that's good

5 ways to live God's way, and find your way back (**Summary**)

5 ways to bear fruit in keeping with the repentance you first expressed, and the forgiveness you first received