



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-19-2015 @ 0900

"A Sin-Sick Heart and Mind"

Isaiah 1:4-6

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the "heart of worship", and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:4-6

"You are doomed, you sinful nation, you corrupt and evil people! Your sins drag you down! You have rejected the Lord, the Holy God of Israel, and have turned your backs on Him. Why do you keep on rebelling? Do you want to be punished even more? Israel, your head is already covered with wounds, and your heart and mind are sick. From head to foot there is not a healthy spot on your body. You are covered with bruises and sores and open wounds. Your wounds have not been cleaned or bandaged. No medicine has been put on them!"

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Were you ever humming a "catchy" tune over and over, 'til it was stuck in your head, when you suddenly realized the lyrics said things you'd never accept, let alone believe?
- Have you ever caught yourself rooting for the villains in movies, or enjoying their cunning wits, even though their speech and actions directly contradict all guidance from God's Word?
- How many forms of "entertainment" can you name that glorify destructive people and disastrous events that leave chaos and death behind them?

"DOOM" gets our attention! Facing crisis gets adrenaline pumping, and adds spice to life that often feels "dull" or boring. So we like to inject a little "spice" into existence. But that spice can be costly. If it cloaks compromise of faith and morality, it can put our eternity in peril. Yet, it is amazing how much we fear the title of "religious fanatic". In fact, many modern "believers" fear that "label" so much they'll tolerate all sorts of sin in daily life. To avoid it, they decide to "go along to get along". In today's passage, Isaiah announces God's reaction to spiritual/moral compromise. Unless we confront the threats to spiritual life and moral integrity, and model those values authentically, we become part of the problem. But that "different life" may demand we "come out from among the crowd", and be *separate*...even labeled as "one of those". That can feel lonely, but "straddling the fence" practically guarantees us a "case of saddle sores", and leaves us with a sin-sick heart and mind. Soon we no longer view sin as "spiritual dis-ease" or "moral malady"; personal "preferences and idiosyncrasies" aren't all *that* bad, and before you know it, right is "wrong", "out of touch", and "hateful", while wrong has become "right", "relevant", and "enlightened". The people of Isaiah's day still have their Temple, still offer their sacrifices as prescribed, but their hearts have grown cold, and their minds have been polluted by pride, and filled with error. As this condition persists, God's "place" in the personal and social order gets lower and lower priority. We still affirm "belief in God", but our words and actions indicate "divine disconnect". God, grant us the Grace of Genuine Insight and Real Repentance! Heal us of the blindness to sinful compromise that would turn our hearts from You. Remedy the deafness that renders us unable to hear Your Word of Truth, leaving our minds darkened by error. Draw us to You with new awareness of Your Presence, and the depth of Your Love for us. Empower us to move from "part-time practice" to "all-in allegiance", so we stay strong in the Grace You love to share. Lord, enable us to see truly where our ultimate loyalty must lie, and live that loyalty in total commitment.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-18-2015 @ 0900

“Are You a ‘Kinda-Sorta’ Child of God?”

Isaiah 1:1-3

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that’s of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I’ll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You’re looking into my heart.
I’m coming back to the “heart of worship”, and it’s all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I’m sorry, Lord, for the thing I’ve made it, when it’s all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:1-3

This book contains the messages about Judah and Jerusalem, which God revealed to Isaiah, son of Amoz, during the time when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah. The Lord said, “Earth and sky, listen to what I am saying! The children I brought up have rebelled against Me. Cattle know who owns them, and donkeys know where their master feeds them. But that is more than My people Israel know. They don’t understand at all!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever “gone to church” and simply gone through the motions of devotion, without a “spirit of worship”, “attitude of gratitude”, or any sense of the “Presence of God”?
- When in “need”, have you ever gone to several “secular sources” first, and only “prayed about it” when they were no help?
- As you faced “issues”, would you go right to God, or call on several friends you could phone, text, or e-mail first? In “medical conditions”, did you turn to God or get a “second opinion”?

Tough Love stings! Through the Prophet Isaiah, God pulls no punches! In today’s passage, the Lord lays out a pretty dismal state of affairs. (How would it make you feel if you knew God thought a cow or donkey was smarter than you, or knew more about “faith” and “trust” than you? Do you really know who your “Master” is? Do you really know the “Source” of all your provisions?) If God sent Word to us today, as He did to Israel through Isaiah, what would He say? Would he accuse of us of *rebell*ing against him? Is our worship of God “focused” and “heart-felt” as it should be? Today many attend church out of a superficial sense of grudging obligation rather than an intensive yearning for the true Presence of the Living God. We need to reawaken our sense of wonder in worship, and retune our attitude of gratitude. If we seldom ever converse with God during the week, we need not wonder why it’s hard for us to focus very well in a worship service, or pray with effect in time of crisis. We may not enjoy being compared to cattle or donkeys, but God certainly knows how to sound a “wake-up” call! Even animals we might call “dumb” know where to find their help...in those to whom they belong. Yet we who call ourselves “reasonable”, “smart”, or “intelligent” seem utterly unable to “crack this code”! We “discuss” God, and faith in His Power, offering “outreach” to others we encourage to believe in Him, and then live and act as “wild creatures”, forgetting all our assertions of “faith”. God, grant us the Grace of Simple Openness. Keep us close to You, attentive to Your Word, attuned to Your Will. In sickness or health, in confusion or certitude, in loneliness or accompanied, in hunger or fullness, help us stay aware of Your Presence, and turn our focus to You, who love us most, and will meet or exceed our every need! Draw us out of the “kinda-sorta” level of devotion. Make us more truly and fully Yours in heart, soul, mind, and strength. As You have gone “all-out” for us, may we stay ready to go “all-in” with You, for You, and through You in lives of fervent faith, earnest hope, and devoted love.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-20-2015 @ 0900

"Do Your Sins Drag You Down?"

Isaiah 1:4-6

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the "heart of worship", and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:4-6

"You are doomed, you sinful nation, you corrupt and evil people! Your sins drag you down! You have rejected the Lord, the Holy God of Israel, and have turned your backs on him. Why do you keep on rebelling? Do you want to be punished even more? Israel, your head is already covered with wounds, and your heart and mind are sick. From head to foot there is not a healthy spot on your body. You are covered with bruises and sores and open wounds. Your wounds have not been cleaned or bandaged. No medicine has been put on them."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever had a real problem looking at something or someone with a pure heart due to all of the evil images they "triggered" within your heart and mind?
- Have you ever realized that most of your "trust issues" with others arise from your "knowledge" of the way you would respond "if the shoe was on the other foot"?
- Do you ever detect spiritual "bruises and sores" or moral "wounds" that have resulted from "flawed choices" you'd gotten used to making in earlier stages of your life?

Sinner, repent! God could not make it much simpler. In our heart of hearts, we know we need to "turn life around", but old programming dies hard. It's much easier to *talk* about putting off the old and putting on the new, but *doing* it is another matter...especially if the old has gotten comfortable, and the new feels strange and awkward. Many of the sins that plague our lives have very deep roots and are often associated with those we call friends or places we consider favorite haunts. Even though these are the very things we know are dragging us down we still have a serious problem letting them go. How many times have you said, "but it isn't all *that* bad", "I wasn't *really* lying", "It wasn't actually stealing; I only walked off with a few office supplies no one will miss anyway", "It's not gossip as long as I'm telling the truth", and the list could go on and on. Hear the Lord's warning here as He speaks to His people about their broken relationship with Him. "You are doomed, you sinful nation, you corrupt and evil people! Your sins drag you down!" God lays it on the line; unless we turn from sin, and embrace the Grace of Repentance, the evil that plagues us will drag us down to ruin! The Scripture admits there is "pleasure" in sin, but it only lasts a short time, while its destructive effects endure eternally if there is no "change of heart". This transitory "pleasure" makes sin so attractive to us because we live in such a "pleasure-oriented" culture. ("As long as it makes me feel good now, I'm OK with it." How many times have you been "the life of the party", knowing you were going to pay for it the next day? "Little steps" like this draw us to the "slippery slope of disaster"! We need to make our "course corrections" while they are still simple, and easy to adjust. God, grant us the Grace of True Repentance and Righteous Fortitude. Where sin's siren song tempts us to "take the easy and pleasant way", draw us to You with Love's Word of Truth. Teach us the secret of Life: only in You do we find our heart's rest...only in You do we discover direction and lasting meaning...only in You do we achieve spiritual health and moral wholeness. Turn us from sin's "path to death" by leading us to the Gates of Wisdom and Peace, so we enter gladly into the Realm in which we are all "royalty"!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-21-2015 @ 0900

“What in the World is Going On?”

Isaiah 1:7-9

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the “heart of worship”, and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:7-9

“Your country has been devastated, and your cities have been burned to the ground. While you look on, foreigners take over your land and bring everything to ruin! Jerusalem alone is left, a city under siege – as defenseless as a guard's hut in a vineyard, or a shed in a cucumber field. If the Lord Almighty had not let some of the people survive, Jerusalem would have been totally destroyed, just as Sodom and Gomorrah were!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever looked around your neighborhood, city, state, or nation, wondering, “What has happened here?” because old conventions and customs are gone, and ruin threatens it all?
- Have you ever felt fear and powerlessness as you watched all you loved and worked for start to “slip away”, despite your best efforts to “stem the tide” and save what you could?
- In such “troubled times”, where are you in relation to “the Lord Almighty”? Is God a “vague hope of rescue”, or “the One Who Is” all you could ever ask or need?

God bless the “good old days”! As we “look back through rose-colored glasses”, it seems that things were so much saner and safer. (Forget the depressions, wars, and diseases that took lives by the tens of millions! Do you ever find yourself watching old television shows, or movies, and wishing things could be like that again?) It's easy to view what is happening in our neighborhoods, cities, states, and countries with a sickening sense that things are only going to get worse. Others wonder what in the world has gone wrong. They remember when children used to be able to play outside all day, with no fear of ever being bothered, molested, or murdered. They remember when church doors were never locked; people could go in and pray whenever they had a need. It's certainly different now! Through Isaiah, the Lord reveals rampant sin as the cause of such turmoil, and lays out its ultimate result: “Your country has been devastated, and your cities have been burned to the ground!” Today, many of our cities are filled with blocks of abandoned, burnt-out hulks. One may wonder who these people were, or how they came to such desperate, angry straits as to willingly destroy their own cities. How does this happen? How do societies degenerate to such levels? The Lord lays it out clearly: “tolerating sin” is the key to disaster! As the prophet Isaiah observed in his day, it starts small, and then we tolerate a little more, and a little more, until all we hold dear is in jeopardy. Sin is the enemy of peace, security, and happiness. The more sinners get, the more satisfaction they demand, until they have eradicated all of life's blessings. Sinners begin by convincing themselves their desire is something good, enjoyable, and basically innocent. God, grant us the Grace of Good Insight! Awaken in us the ability to judge the illusions of sin for the “empty show” they are. Empower us to discern Your Way, and then fill us with the fortitude needed to walk it with integrity. Teach us to be “builders of Your Holy City”, people of faith who work with hope to establish realms of love, justice, and peace. Guide us with Your Wisdom, and guard us with Your Fidelity. Let us embody Your vision of a noble, truly free society, in which we glorify You and share vibrant life with one another.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-22-2015 @ 0900

“Could God Be ‘Fed Up’ With Your Worship?”

Isaiah 1:10-12

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that’s of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I’ll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You’re looking into my heart.
I’m coming back to the “heart of worship”, and it’s all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I’m sorry, Lord, for the thing I’ve made it, when it’s all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:10-12

“Jerusalem, your rulers and your people are like those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Listen to what the Lord is saying to you. Pay attention to what our God is teaching you. He says, ‘Do you think I want all these sacrifices you keep offering to Me? I have had more than enough of the sheep you burn as sacrifices, and of the fat of your fine animals; I am tired of the blood of bulls and sheep and goats! Who asked you to bring me all this when you come to worship Me? Who asked you to do all this tramping around in My Temple?’”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever truly wondered *why* you go to church, why you sing songs, why you pray or why sit through sermon after sermon? How well could you explain your reasons?
- Other than the place in the bulletin or program which indicates “Praise and Worship”, how does your life praise and worship God?
- In the course of “praise and worship”, how do you actually “encounter God”? How do you go beyond mere emotional impact to experience “Transcendent Presence” in Love and Truth?

Solomon got it: God deserves the best we’ve got. He set up a Temple that was one of the “wonders of his age.” He and his successors raised “praise and worship” to a fine art in the “Holy City” of old Jerusalem. They knew how to put on some awe-inspiring “worship events”. They knew how to organize mass choirs and orchestras, and come out in all their “holy finery” for the sacred festivals. There’s just one problem: “Divine Disconnect”. The ritual they employ does NOT reflect the true state of their hearts and minds, or the lives they are living outside the Temple grounds. So, God is utterly disgusted with their “show of worship”, and compares them most unfavorably to the “sin cities” of Sodom and Gomorrah, infamous throughout their known world for sins of oppression of the poor, abuse of strangers, and debauchery. If God looked at their worship in this light, how might He look at ours today? What was so terribly wrong with their worship? It had no heart! What was missing in the midst of all the religious pomp and ceremony? It was mere “show”, devoid of actual devotion, and thoroughly polluted by self-centered pride and self-willed vanity. What about us? If touching God changes hearts and sanctifies lives completely, when was the last time we actually “touched God”? What “appropriate sacrifice” have we brought into His Presence to present upon his altar? Have we forgiven those who have sinned against us, and hurt us, or are we still “picking and choosing” who we will forgive? Do we love the people of this world with the completely unselfish love that God has for us, or are we still “picking and choosing” who we will love? Have we completely turned our backs on all of the “sin of this world”, or do we still dabble in a little here and there? God, grant us the Grace of Honest In-sight! Help us shed serious light on the state of our worship, and thus detect the state of our hearts and souls. Enable us to live in union with You, loving others unselfishly, serving them generously, and walking humbly and justly in Your Presence wherever we are. You have gone “all-out” to make us Your “holy people”, empower us to go “all-in” as faith-full “sin-bustin’ Lord-praisers”!