

Isaiah 58

V.1 We are returning back to prophetic times again. It has been over 2,800 years since prophets were common. The confrontation of good and evil will be more in the open than it has been. We need to begin to exercise our boldness a little. The requirement to speak up on spiritual issues helps us to resist our pacifism, and separate from evil doers. Overt/public opposition to evil might be like a weak and unused muscle to us. It might also not be our nature to be confrontational; but times are changing our game. Being bold does not mean that we can foster hate or hate speech either. It is very hard to not see the sinner as our enemy. The sinner is a pawn; who is controlled by evil forces. Sharing and caring for the lost during the time of the harvest requires a lamb-like spirit with a heart compassion. Times are changing. We are being pushed into a battleground. We need more of the lion-spirit to have the boldness to speak boldly in opposition. God tells Isaiah to be very open and public in denouncing the sinful ways of his people. God told him to be like a loud trumpet; like an alarmist...not in discretion. Sometimes we need to be very discreet in approaching others who are in sin. At other times we do need to get in people's face; if the Spirit gives us boldness in love.

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou give him not warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. (Ezekiel 3:17-19)

Once things get serious it is time to organize a rescue effort in earnest. Being in the ministry can be a full-time rescue effort. Men are weak and self-defeating. What we permit is not always a negligible sin.

V.2 During the times of the prophets there were many who wanted to be part of the powerful public movement. They were too close to God's fire to walk in falsehood. Annanias and Saphira were killed for mere dishonesty. During times of war having pretend soldiers are like having spies in the camp. God boils down the army to those who are true to him. Today we have large ecumenical movements that are based on men's convenience. How can men have any conviction as they live dual lives of conflicting values? It is more common for men to hold on to idols than to renounce God. There were idols on every corner in Jerusalem at one time along with God's temple. The devil works on inclusion before he tries to erase monuments of faith. Depression comes from truly living according to something that we do not believe in. We have two natures in constant conflict.

Lukewarm believers believe that they have fire insurance; but they have no desire to save the lost. Believers have both spirit and fleshly components. The contrast between both natures is most-easily seen in the church. We are dispensing God's righteousness and perfection from a dirty and broken vessel. That is why some people have bitterness towards the church. People are tarnished representations of God. We reflect whatever we are focused on. We need to be in God's word daily to stay on track. Hit and miss Bible roulette yields a hot and cold walk. Our inconsistencies can be stark (Jekyll and Hyde) contrasts. Seeing a Christian leader doing something mean or inappropriate can be shocking. It is like the yellow brick road in the Wizard of Oz. One step off of the yellow brick road; and you could be disoriented and out of touch. Things

catch our eye that appeal to our imagination. Present impressions and desires can override our long-term virtues. Mankind has a capacity to live in hypocrisy. Accordingly, we are frequently in desperate need to change. Sometimes we convince ourselves that our good intentions are coming to pass; when (in reality) we are losing ground. We often hold ourselves out to others as something that we are not. Unbelievers just see that our high standards do not seem to be working well for us. Would you buy health supplements from a run-down stranger? Of course not. Do people want more of what we seem to have, or less of it? Our lives need to be a platform for the gospel. Accommodating other interests is a part of being a shepherd. We have to get over any issues we have with being inconvenienced.

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

The opposite side of the issue is that true believers don't have confusion about our brother's weaknesses. We should not hung up on others' imperfections, like religious people and other critics are. Expect failure and disappointment. This is a dirty business. We are not there to take; but only to give what God has given us. Being critical and judgmental will make us miserable. That is not a role that we are cut out for. We don't have complete peace until we can give

away what we have freely received. It is critical that we do all things for God; without being appreciated by men.

If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 9:2)

Human weakness aside; the church has always been a mixed multitude of unbelievers and believers. The question is: "Is this a born-again person who is experiencing another setback in sin; or is this just a poser?"

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. (1 John 2:18-19)

There actually are productive missionaries and others who do have dark sides. How can a man believe he is godly while he actively is pursuing sin? God uses donkeys if necessary to pack the gospel. Being born again is not the same as being dead to self. We are walking contradictions.

The critical difference is the peace factor. Are we able to wallow in sin and just cover our tracks; or are we miserable in sin? We have a conscience and spirit that pulls us towards the good; while we have competing lust that always seeks our own pleasures. We are also not always aware of our own impact on others.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and

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continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:22-24)

The faith has never been about being the man with the least sin. It is about being the most helpful because we are responsive to the Spirits urgings.

VV.3-4: God is the god of our deepest intentions. Do we want to be highly-regarded or appreciated more? Is our life a stage to promote God or ourself? I have experienced a bishop who was so furious with me I wondered if he was going to hit me. I asked a pastor to leave who had been eating sheep for years. He was more concerned about the difficulty of filling the open position. He did not even acknowledge that I chased off a wolf. We can't play games with God. He also won't let us fool ourselves either. He occasionally tests our intentions by not giving us what we want. What is our reaction? Do we get angry when our expectations are not met? How many people have left the church after they felt God did not prevent something bad? Jesus challenged the crowds who followed him by totally offending and confusing them. Then he turned to his closest followers and said things that would make opportunists leave him.

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. (John 6:26)

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. (John 6:52-55)

Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? (John 6:60-67)

Is Jesus all that you have; or do you have a plan-b to bail out if things go south?

Did we expect gratification after trying so hard to do the right thing? Sacrificing is a prime example. We do not sacrifice to produce feelings of sympathy from God. The reformers would purposefully hurt themselves to share in Christ's sufferings. It does not work that way. We do not get to select the sacrifice. Main-line denominations emphasize a value in sacrificing for God. People learn how to modify their life so that the scheduled sacrifice is no real imposition. They also secretly want credit for their sacrifice. In reality God has to select the sacrifice. If our hearts are right; the sacrifice will be a small thing because we are excited about doing the right thing.

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

We weigh out the costs and inconveniences when we choose our own choices. A true sacrifice is something that goes against our self-will and confidences. The religious system in old Israel

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included a people who kept technical aspects of the Law, while bypassing the true objectives. Our appreciation for God's grace on us will impact our relations with our neighbors. Are we fighting for our *fair share*; and getting in people's face? Do we expect perfection in others? Are we intolerant of those who are in our way? What if our enemies were our judges instead of our Bible buddies? In a way they are.

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matthew 12:36-37)

VV.5-12: We need to continue in the word so that we do not substitute men's ideas for God's truth. God is being very clear here. The sacrifice God wants does not necessarily involve pain. It is to make helping others in a need a priority. The positive reinforcement that comes from the Holy Spirit covers the inconveniences. There is a hidden energy God injects into our soul; and a new vibrancy and zeal for life that makes service a blessing not a burden. Go help the helpless; and things will turn around for you... but if you go play church you will go nowhere.

VV.13-14: Reaching out our hand to the helpless is our ultimate healing. How do we react when we do not speak our own words and seeking our own pleasure? Usually we feel put out or short changed.
