

When God Cannot Endure Our Worship – *Isaiah 1:10-20*

Introduction – The worship of Yahweh was in full flower in the days of Isaiah. The people loved religion, their feasts and sacrifices, and knowing they were God's people. But to the Lord, it was nothing but "noise, noise, noise." Not because God is a Grinch. Rather, because God hated the hypocrisy – and always will. Worship is unacceptable unless it flows out of hearts of repentance and faith; and God knows our hearts. And so, there are times we must repent of our worship.

Sodom and Gomorrah (v10) – In verse 9, Isaiah concluded his first charge by saying that were it not for the mercy of God, Judah would end up with the guilt and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, bywords for a people filled with outward rebellion to God's laws, brazen perversion and immorality (Gen 19), as well as pride and unmerciful conduct (Ezek 16:49). What they were involved in was every bit as offensive to the Lord as what had gone on in those two cities. Now, he openly calls them "*rulers of Sodom*," and "*people of Gomorrah*." The rulers are addressed first, as representatives; but the people are also quickly included in the condemnation. Wicked rulers, wicked laws, or wicked examples are no excuse for one's own wickedness. The imperatives "*hear*" and "*give ear*," as we will see, mean far more than simply listening (James 1:22).

Exasperation: I Hate Your Worship (v11-15) – They worshipped at the Temple, they worshipped in the appropriate city, they followed all the ceremonies dictated in Leviticus - they were the people of God! How could He say that about them? God replies, painstakingly noting the burnt offerings of rams, cattle, bulls, lambs and goats which they presented to Him (v11), the incense, the keeping of New Moons, Sabbaths, and appointed feasts (vv12-13) – all commanded by God – but saying, "*My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them*" (v14). He is sick of it all (1 Sam 15:22, Jer 6:20, Amos 5:21-24). He makes clear, "*I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting*" (v13), and finally, "*Your hands are full of blood*" (v15).

There is a way to enter into worship, following all of the ritual as though you could manipulate God by your formalism, by your so-called sincerity, or by your vibrant sentiment. It is all putrid to God if there is iniquity, if there is blood on your hands, if there is an unrepentant heart.

Blood on Your Hands – He is not referring to the blood from the sacrifices, but of deeds of violence (2 Chron 24:21, Matt 23:34f). If we are commanded to *defend the fatherless* (v17) the violence of legally protected baby-killing in our land condemns this nation. This is the "big E" on the chart of any so-called social justice. But murder begins in the heart and we are guilty of such when we hate our brother, when we lash out with hateful words, angry outbursts, cutting comments, character assassination and backstabbing (Matt 5:21-24). To these unrepentant hearts God would say, "stay home, keep your blood-stained tithe, I don't want to hear your tongues blabbing some worship tune, I will not hear your prayers."

A booming religion, even in the name of the God of Abraham, even in the name of Jesus, does not necessarily mean nearness to God. God does not care how worshipful you feel; worship is not about you. And such feelings do not necessitate that the worshipper's heart is near God (Isaiah 29:13, Matt 15:8-9).

The Fulfillment of This Unendurable Worship (Rev 11:8) – Isaiah said God called Israel "*Sodom*" in his day. But there was another generation where such condemnation found fulfillment, as John points out in his Revelation. Remember, the disciples had shown Jesus the temple, "*how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations*" (Luke 21:5ff, Matt 24). Jesus was unimpressed; God could not endure their worship any longer. And in that generation, the end of such worship came – forever.

Invitation: Wash Yourself (vv16-18) – Mercifully, God issues an invitation, a way out. He did so to that generation as He does to every generation, to every nation, and to every sinner. But before anyone decides to wash they have to agree they are dirty. And then there is the question, "but how can I wash myself?" David would cry out in Psalm 51, "*Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow*" (Psalm 51:7-12). This is the cry of repentance, of turning from sin and turning to God. The New Testament calls this attitude "*the baptism of repentance*" (Acts 2:38, 13:24) and the "*washing of regeneration*" (Tit 3:5). And this is the gift of God (Eph 2:8-9). And so, by faith, sinners receive what God offers in verse 18, white for red, clean for dirty, life for death.

Having a change, a repentance of heart, always shows itself in the way in which we now live. The evil is put away and we begin the good work of learning to do good. When the community does this, biblical justice is restored, the oppressor is "straightened," the fatherless and widow (the weakest and most vulnerable) are protected and provided for.

Eat or Be Eaten (vv19-20) – These are the only two options. Either walk humbly with God and receive the blessings of the land, or disobey, disbelieve, refuse to give ear, and be devoured by the very violence and wickedness you espouse. This is a message to nations, our nation. It is a message to individuals, to every heart. What is that one "precious" you are determined to hold on to? That is your point of decision. You can obey and eat, or you can disobey and be eaten.

Repentant Worshipers – What does the Father seek? Those who worship Him "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:23). He will look on him "*who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My Word*" (Isaiah 66:2b). And He will delight in that worship.