

Our Desperate Situation – Isaiah 59:1-15a

Introduction – The great hurdle in sharing the gospel is the fact that the Good News requires there to be Bad News. Salvation isn't necessary for those who aren't sinners. So if you are sharing this Good News of Salvation, what is it you are assuming about the one you are sharing with? That's offensive. Repentance does not come easily to any of us, and it is hardest of all for those who have become accustomed to using religion (along with their "clean", middle-class culture) as a cover for their sin. Praise God that for many, we can only play that game for so long before we find we have to acknowledge our desperate situation.

Separated From God (vv1-2) – When their prayers go unanswered, bouncing off the ceiling it seems, they are tempted to think the problem is with God (i.e. 58:3). But the problem is not that God is incapable, indifferent, or inefficient. The problem is that God is holy and "*your iniquities have separated you from your God;*" (v2). Themes are being repeated here (see Isaiah 1:12-15).

Bloody Hands, Lying Lips (v3) – While it is possible to think about individual applications, the Lord is implicating the whole body politic in the crimes that are taking place. And so the congregation ("you," "your" are all in the plural) that is lifting up their hands in prayer is corporately lifting up bloody hands (as opposed to 1 Tim 2:8). This is why Jesus warns us that a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The Mischief of Sin (vv4-8) – Isaiah, speaking on behalf of the Lord, turns and describes the sinfulness of "their" sins (now in the third-person plural). No one seeks or wants truth or biblical justice; they trust in empty lies, making up new evil in their minds, they bring forth fresh iniquities (v4, James 1:14-15). Viper's eggs eaten are poisonous and broken open bring forth new vipers; so is sin when consumed or multiplied (v5). Sin left undealt with breeds more and more sin. Once a person or a people start down this way, they pick up the pace, running to evil, covering evil works with more evil, shedding innocent blood along the way, leaving a path of wasteful destruction and unable to find peace with God, with others, or ultimately with themselves (vv6-8).

"Who Are They? They are Us" – Paul uses vv7-8, along with a host of other verses from the Scriptures, to prove that we are all under sin, that none are with excuse, that all mouths are stopped, guilty before God (Rom 3:9-20). The purpose of the law was to bring forth knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20). In Ephesians, Paul makes clear that this is our fallen nature (Eph 2:1-3). Calvin, in his Institutes, describes self-knowledge as realizing how great we were before the Fall, and then how great that Fall was and has been. When we learn this, we have learned the first lesson of the Gospel – the very bad news. "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3:23).

"They are Us" Personal and Corporate Repentance (vv9-15a) – As in Isaiah 6, Isaiah now represents "them" in a chorus of repentance (Isaiah 6:5). "*We look for light (in ourselves), but there is darkness!*" (v9). They are a nation of light, but they are walking around like blind men in darkness (v10), moaning and weeping over the consequences of their transgressions – and maybe, just maybe coming to understand how their sins "*testify against us*" (vv11-12). Their outward sins, they realize, really come from their fallen hearts (vv13-14), "*so truth fails*" and in a twisted way, they are afraid to run from the protection of their evil ways (v15a). Have you ever had to count the cost to come clean with your sin and decided it was better to stay in the evil ways? We are tempted to approve of those evil ways (Rom 1:32). "*Sin is evermore a bitter thing, and they who follow it expecting to arrive at the light of joy, are duped and deceived; they shall be plunged into denser and denser darkness, until they arrive at an unending midnight, unbroken by a solitary star*" – Spurgeon.

When the Gospel Light Comes (John 3:19-20) – When the glorious Gospel Light comes, it reveals things about us that are being kept in the darkness – and we are forced to do one of two things. We either run into the dark corners we can find, fleeing the Light, or we stand open before the Light to have who we really are revealed. This is why holiness is such a fearful thing ("Woe is me"). Right worship of God must include reverence and godly fear (Heb 12:28-29). And continual worship of God means that we must continually and honestly deal with our sin (1 John 1:5-7). Corporate repentance, following individual repentance, is required of the people of God as well. Isaiah is now saying, "We....us..." just as Daniel did later in his prayer of repentance (Dan 9:5-8). Learn to pray as covenant heads and covenant representatives of your people and your family.

Repentance and the Burden of Sin Lifted – When God gives the gift of repentance, the gift of making you want to stand in the Light and be dealt with, then you find that the fear and guilt and burden and power of sin is lifted, removed by Another. Of course, that was Paul's point as he finishes his tome on the sinfulness of all men – "*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 3:24). There is a God-given sorrow, a sweet sorrow, over sin, that relieves, that sets right, that leads to life with God and with one another (2 Cor 7:9-11). We must see how bad the Bad News is in order to rejoice in how good the Good News is.