

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Nate Hilgenkamp
Series: Gifts
October 2, 2022

The Cost of Thoughtless Gifts

Isaiah 1:1-20

¹The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

A Rebellious Nation

²Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth!

For the LORD has spoken:

**“I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.**

**³The ox knows its master,
the donkey its owner’s manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.”**

**⁴Woe to the sinful nation,
a people whose guilt is great,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.**

**⁵Why should you be beaten anymore?
Why do you persist in rebellion?**

**Your whole head is injured,
your whole heart afflicted.**

**⁶From the sole of your foot to the top of your head
there is no soundness—
only wounds and welts
and open sores,
not cleansed or bandaged
or soothed with olive oil.**

**⁷Your country is desolate,
your cities burned with fire;
your fields are being stripped by foreigners
right before you,
laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.**

⁸Daughter Zion is left

like a shelter in a vineyard,
like a hut in a cucumber field,
like a city under siege.
9 Unless the LORD Almighty
had left us some survivors,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.
10 Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom;
listen to the instruction of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
11 “The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?” says the LORD.
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
12 When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?
13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
Your incense is detestable to me.
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—
I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.
14 Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals
I hate with all my being.
They have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
15 When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I hide my eyes from you;
even when you offer many prayers,
I am not listening.
Your hands are full of blood!
16 Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong.
17 Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.^[a]
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow.
18 “Come now, let us settle the matter,”
says the LORD.
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.

**19 If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the good things of the land;
20 but if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword.”
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

Well last time that I preached, I told you that I have been to 27 of the 32 major league baseball stadiums and I just wanted to update you that I have now been to 28. (applause) Thank you, there we go! Because a couple weekends ago I got to go to Boston to visit some of my closest friends who live there. I went to college with them, so my wife and I got to go to a game with them at Fenway Park and I'm telling you, it was like one of the best nights of my life. Like it was! Like I'm sitting there with my best friends in the world eating a Fenway frank and I'm like, 'This is the life. It doesn't get any better than this.' Except it did! Because in the middle of the fifth inning, my wife and I are having a great time and they turn on the music and we start dancing and all of a sudden, we are on the screen dancing. Like I look up, I'm at Fenway Park on the screen and I'm like 'This is the highlight of my life.' For some of you this would have been your worst nightmare, but for me this was a dream come true. And what happened was, I could show you the video, I have it, but I think some of you couldn't take me seriously for the next 30 minutes if I did.

What happened was, is that they showed us and then they cut to someone else, then they showed us again and then they cut to someone else and then they showed us again and I didn't even realize it was a dance-off. Like I had no idea I was competing against anybody. Then it says, "The New Balance Dance-Off Winner." So, I have never won a dance-off in my life and never will again. But what happened was someone from the Red Sox came and found me and they gave me this gift from New Balance. It was this card that said, "Congratulations! You have won one free pair of shoes up to \$200." Like, let's go! That's awesome! I'm like, 'I love the Red Sox! I'm moving to Boston! This is amazing!' Then we came home and I gave the gift to my wife because she's honestly the better dancer. If you've seen the video, you realize she's really the one who won it. I was just kind of taller and bigger than everyone else. I gave it to her, and she picked out the shoes that she wanted, and she typed in the coupon code and hit submit and when she hit submit it said, "This coupon code has already been used." I went from 'I love the Red Sox' to 'I can't stand the Red Sox'. I don't want to accuse anybody of anything, but I'm going to because my guess is someone from the Red Sox is getting some free New Balance shoes because this thing has been used by somebody. They need a better thing in place to make sure they're not just handing out fake useless gifts because this thing that was supposed to be a gift to me turned out to be a tremendous frustration towards them. And here's the thing, I've reached out to New Balance, and I've reached out to the Red Sox. I emailed hello@redsox.org and I've heard nothing! I'm so mad at them because they gave me a meaningless gift. That's what we're going to talk about today. Meaningless gifts. Meaningless gifts.

I'm afraid that there's some people here in this room that you've been doing these things and you think they've been gifts to God, but in reality, God's going, 'Woah woah woah, I don't want that. In fact, that right there, that is not a gift to Me. That is a burden on Me. That's not a gift, that's a burden and I'm sick of it actually. I'm sick of it. It's meaningless.' And I know that that is harsh

word, but it's not my words. It's what we're going to see in the text today. It's what God is saying to His people. I'm afraid we've got people here who you've been trying to impress God, but in your attempts to impress God, you have potentially frustrated God. This is what the text is going to talk about. We're going to be in Isaiah chapter one this morning. If you have your Bibles open them up or turn them to Isaiah chapter one. We're going to be in Isaiah chapter one for a couple of reasons. One, we are in between two sermon series, we just finished up a sermon series called 'More Than Conquerors' where we preached verse by verse through Romans chapter 8. Next week we're going into a brand-new sermon series called 'The Good Life.' We're excited about this sermon series because we want to explain what the good life is. The good life is not what the world says it is, it's what the Word says it is. These are two very different explanations of the good life. We want everyone at Harris Creek, we want everyone in Waco, to experience life to the full. So don't miss out on the next few weeks as we talk about what the good life is. But this week JP just said, "Hey Nate, teach the body what God is teaching you." And I said, "Okay great." I've just been reading Isaiah chapter one because I've been asked to write for the Bible Reading Plan on Isaiah 1 where we're going to be going through Isaiah in the next couple of weeks as a church on the biblereadingplan.org.

As I was reading Isaiah chapter one, man it just hit me differently. I think it's because I had just gotten back from Boston because if you've ever been to Boston before, I had never been, I was surprised at how many churches were there. Like there were actually churches kind all over the place and they're like big, beautiful churches. Churches that have been there for centuries and they're kind of all over the place. Here's the thing, most of them are no longer churches. Should say many of them are no longer churches. Many of them are community centers. The church where Paul Revere hung up the lantern is now essentially a museum where you just pay to go in. How do you think I felt as I was there? Man, I was actually invigorated. I was excited about it all because I was like, man, if you're following Jesus here, like it matters. Like if you are a part of a Bible-believing church in Boston, there is no social benefit to it. Like if you've got a bumper sticker of your church on the back of your car nobody is impressed. In fact, it's the exact opposite. So, my guess is that if you're following Jesus in the Northeast, it means you're following Jesus because there is no social benefit to it. The problem is here it's kind of the opposite. There is tremendous social benefit to being a part of a church here and here is where Waco is scary, I think that a lost person in a place like Boston is closer to being saved than a lost person here in Waco, because here lost people don't know they are lost. They go to church occasionally, they pray sometimes, they believe in the big guy upstairs, but they don't know Jesus. What they've learned is a religious routine, but they don't have a relationship with God. This is what Isaiah 1 is going to talk about today. It's written to a very different context from ours, but I think it has a word for our context as well. Isaiah 1 was written to a group of people who kind of wanted God, but who really wanted the world, and it was not going well for them. Just some more set up on Isaiah.

Isaiah was written by the prophet Isaiah. A prophet is someone who received a word from God. That's really what it means, and Isaiah was written in the Old Testament, which in some ways is very different than the New Testament because the Old Testament is everything before Jesus. Since Jesus hadn't yet come as the perfect sacrifice for sins, God had asked for sacrifices of animals to atone for sins. But he also asked for a bunch of other things to distinguish the followers from the nations around them. He asked them to do certain things like attend certain feasts/assemblies, make burnt offerings, and maintain the Sabbath. All of these things were to

make sure they looked different from the rest of the world so that they stayed connected to God. The problem was that they were prone to not do these things and they fell away and strayed from God, which caused conflict, division, and pain. In fact, the people of God had been divided into two nations: the nation of Israel in the North and the nation of Judea in the South. They had fallen away, and their nations were about to crumble. They are experiencing a broken life and God's heart is broken for them.

This is what He says in Isaiah chapter 1. To that setting, He says this in verse 1: **“The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzizah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, ‘Here me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner’s manager, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and wells and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with olive oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire, your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. Daughter Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city under siege. Unless the LORD Almighty had left us survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”** So, Isaiah begins his book by essentially saying ‘It’s not supposed to be this way, the people of God have turned their backs on God while **the ox knows its master and the donkey knows its owner’s manager**. The people of God do not know their God and since they turned their backs on Him, all they have experienced since then is pain. Because when you do not live according to God’s design, you do not get to experience human flourishing because sin will never lead to human flourishing, it will only lead to human floundering. And this is what the people of God are experiencing. As they have rebelled against God, their life has been led to ruin. It was true of them, it’s true of us. It’s the first thing we learn in this passage. Point number one:

1. Your rebellion leads to ruin.

Sometimes it is God inflicting punishment on you in your sin. Sometimes it’s just naturally a result of living in sin. You’re living differently from how life is meant to be lived. You’re living differently from the good life. So, what sin did they commit? What was the problem here? Well, the problem actually started with a king named Jeroboam. It all flowed from him. He was the first king of the divided nation of Israel. Once Israel and Judah were divided, he was the king over Israel and everything. All their sin flowed from him. What he did at the time he was in charge, was say, ‘Well Jerusalem is really out of the way for the people to go worship God there.’ That’s where the temple was where the people went to worship God. He’s just like ‘Man it’s just too much for them to go there, it’s just too difficult. So, what he did was he set up two different altars, two different temples, two different places of worship, two different gods that were in more centrally located areas and he said, ‘People, go worship these gods, these gods will

be easier to worship. They are easier to get to and they're not going to ask that much of you, they're not going to talk back to you.' So, the people started doing that. They went to these false places of worship because they were easier. King after king after king did the same thing. They encouraged the people to worship these false gods because these false gods were easier to worship.

Now it's easy to look back on that and think they are so uneducated. Like they worship these manmade false gods. But we make the same mistake generation after generation after generation. We too worship false gods because they are easier and more comfortable to worship, but our gods just look a little bit differently now. We worship the god of food. We worship the god of alcohol. We worship the god of self-image. We worship the god of sex. We worship the god of entertainment. We worship all these different gods because we want to. Our flesh wants to, and it's easier to worship them. It just leads to more painful results. It's easier to worship the god of entertainment than the God of the Bible. It will just make your life more difficult. Here's what I mean by worship, what I mean by worship is anything you can't stop thinking about. Anything you spend a lot of your money on, you probably worship that thing. Anything you can't stop doing and don't want to stop doing, you probably worship that thing. And one of the hardest parts about ministry is watching someone ruin their life because they are worshipping something different than God.

I could tell you a bunch of stories but the one that comes to mind is someone who truly just loved drinking and enjoyed getting drunk. He came to me and said "Man, what do I do?" And I was like, "Man you need to find new friends. Your friends lead you down the same path time after time. You need to get in a life group here and find guys who know, and love Jesus. You need to stop going to parties. I know you want to be there but if you're going to be there, then you're going to fall into that sin." He said, "I just don't think I can do that and don't really want to do that." A week or two later I get a call and he's in the hospital and he's passed out and he's getting his stomach pumped. It is so hard when you're in ministry to watch someone live in rebellion because you know its going to lead them to ruin. How much harder is it of God to watch me and to watch you ruin our lives as we live in rebellion? I mean that's the seat he lives in all the time. Even with me specifically, I am sure there are times in my life where He's going, "Nate, you don't have to live so selfishly. Not everything has to be about you and your money and your comfort and your safety. In fact, I've told you don't live that way it's only going to lead you towards ruin. You don't have to do that." Which is what God sounds like here. He says in verse 5, "**Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole hear afflicted.**" Why do you keep doing this? It doesn't have to be this way. You're like a dog returning to its vomit. You keep beating your head against a brick wall and it's not going well for you.

This is what Isaiah is actually speaking into at this time because the king at the time of him writing this was actually king Ahaz. King Ahaz was not following the Lord and when things got harder for him, he actually got more and more unfaithful. And it says this about him in 2 Chronicles 28:22 (NIV) "**In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord.**" And this can happen. Your rebellion can lead to ruin which leads into more rebellion. For him what it looked like was his army lost to the army of Damascus so he started worshipping the god of Damascus. Thinking that the god of Damascus would bring him victory,

but it only brought him more pain and more losses in the future. This is what we do as well. We live in sin which causes pain. In that pain we pursue sin thinking it will be a relief, but it only leads to more pain and more destruction. It looks like this. You get into a lot of credit card debt and what you end up doing is you spend more not less thinking that it will be a relief from your pain. Or you're tired of being single and you end up going to your ex's Instagram page more not less thinking it will bring you relief, but it doesn't. Or your marriage is difficult, and you go to alcohol more not less. You see we run to the very thing causing our pain thinking it will free us from pain, but it only creates more pain, more ruin, and more destruction. This is why God says in verse 6, **"From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—"** Man I read that text this week and I'm like, "That describes the culture we are living in." Does it not?

There are so many people around us that are just not well. Something is off in us. We are not right. There is no soundness. Even as we are looking at this right now, you might be thinking, 'Man that's me.' Something just feels off. Like maybe for you, all you want to do is sleep but you can't sleep because you're lying down at night thinking of all your anxious thoughts. Something is not right in you. Or maybe you realized you don't like anyone at your job, and you didn't like anyone at your previous job and you're like maybe something is off in me. Or you're absolutely exhausted. You want to stop working so hard, but you just keep working late day after day after day. Something is off. Maybe you're short-tempered with your kids or with your spouse and you're like something is off with me, there's no soundness. This is what the passage is speaking to and it's because we learned how to pursue things that cannot provide peace and we are giving our life to things that ultimately just want to take our life. What God is saying is 'why do you persist in this rebellion?' It's not going well for you. Which is point number one: Rebellion leads to ruin.

Now let's look at the next passage starting in verse 10. These are my favorite verses of this scripture. When I read it, I was like 'I want to preach this passage because I needed these verses.' These verses ministered to me. This is what He says in verse 10, **"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals, I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you, even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!"**

So, to put this in context, these people were absolutely worshipping false gods. But while they were doing that, they were still trying to do the right thing for Yahweh the God of their ancestors. They were still trying to obey the rules that they've always obeyed and do the things that they've always done. God steps in and says 'I'm tired of it. I'm sick of this whole thing.' But what's interesting, is the list that he lists out, they are things he asked them to do. He's already asked them to do all these things in the Old Testament. Like he's asked them to make burnt offerings. He's asked them to make sacrifices. He's asked them to have assemblies, to have

feasts, to have meetings together. He's asked them to do these things. I mean just one example, in Numbers chapter 29. This is earlier in scripture he asks them to do this: **"On the 8th day hold a closing special assembly and do no regular work"** (Numbers 29:35 NIV). But then its weird, Isaiah 1:13 he says **"...I cannot bear your worthless assemblies."** It's like God is confused. One minute He says you need to have an assembly, and the next he says I cannot bear your assembly. But he's not confused. It's because he's not ultimately after the assembly. He's not ultimately after the sacrifices or the burnt offerings or the meetings or the feasts. What He is ultimately after is your heart. He's the same God in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament. This is what the Old Testament says in Psalm 51:16-17 (NIV) **"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise"**. 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV) **"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing and from now on you will be at war."** What we need to understand is point number two:

2. Your heartless actions aren't accepted.

This is what He's after. I'm two years older than my brother and I just remember a long time ago, this might have been two decades ago potentially, my brother had a birthday party. He invited a lot of his friends over and at one point in the party they started opening up gifts and he went from one gift to the next. Then he opened up this one gift and as he opened it, it was a Lego set, which he loved Legos, which was great. But once he had unwrapped the whole thing, it looked like it had been chewed on by a dog. Like it was used. And then he opened up the box and they had put the Legos like back in the little packaging, but they hadn't closed up the packaging to everything just fell out like right in front of him. And it was incredibly awkward. Almost two decades ago and it's like seared in my brain and it's not like it's one of those situations where it was all they could afford. It was one of those situations where five minutes before the birthday party, they realized their kid was going to a birthday party and they just grabbed the nearest thing to them and wrapped it up and brought it. Here's the thing, it would have been far better if they brought nothing. No one would have remembered that. Instead, 20 years later I'm remembering it because it was so uncomfortable. How embarrassing and even insulting it was because it was a thoughtless gift. There was no heart in it. Now imagine if this was true. I want to make this clear, this is not true. I did not do this. But imagine, it's my wife and I's anniversary and I'm at work and I'm like 'Oh my gosh it's our anniversary! I should probably do something for my wife.' So, I go online and I'm like 'Man I've seen her go to Sonic before, maybe I should just get her a Sonic gift card.' So, I buy her a gift card, send it through email and say, 'Happy Anniversary!' Like if I did that, it would not go over very well. Why? Because it's not thoughtful. My heart is not in it. That wouldn't be romantic at all. This is what God's saying in this passage. He's saying you're doing things for me, but your heart is not in it. And if your heart is not in it, I don't want it. Its not a gift to me, it's a burden to me. And here's what it might look like in your life.

Maybe it looks like you spend time reading the word, but you're reading the word to make yourself feel better for reading the word. You're not trying to hear from God and your heart is not in it. Or maybe you're giving money to the church but its only money that you wouldn't realize it's gone. You just kind of did it to make yourself feel good and your heart is not in it. Or

maybe whenever you come to church, and we sing a song you don't like and you just kind of stand there and wait for the next song because you don't like to sing that song and your heart is not in it. In fact, I remember a time I was at a men's ministry event, not at this church, and I was at the event, and we were singing a song about how Jesus was alive, and the entire room was just dead. And I was looking around like man does anyone actually believe this? Like what's going on? But the interesting thing was that the room was packed. The place was packed. And it's because the church had provided breakfast, so people showed up. But in that moment, I was like I never ever want to show up to church for the breakfast tacos. Like I want to show up to worship Jesus. That's what I want my life to be about. But life is a funny thing man.

I had this Sunday circled on the calendar for a long time and it's for a different reason than you might think. Because this Sunday, I grew up in Minnesota, my team is the Minnesota Vikings, I love the Vikings. And this Sunday they are playing in London which means they are playing right now. And in fact, the game probably finished while I'm preaching, which is so hard for me because my plan this Sunday was to kind of sit up there with you guys and watch JP preach meanwhile, I'm kind of watching the game. Like that was my plan for this Sunday. Of course, God would have me preach on this Sunday. Like of course. Does anyone know if they won? Like a thumbs up? This is a test! You failed! You've been on your phone man! Hey, I actually appreciate that, I do, I do. But here's the thing. Like gut-level honest, like truly, even last night I was like I can't believe I can't watch the game because I'll be preaching. And it was like man what do you want more? DO you want to watch the Vikings, or do you want to worship the God who saved your life? Like what's got your heart? And there are times where we go through this routine, and we've got one foot in and one foot out and God's going 'Man you're not fooling me. I know I don't have your heart. I know Baylor football has your heart. I know your finances have your heart. I know your comfort has your heart.' And that's just what he would tell me. I don't know what he would tell you. But I do know he tells us this in verse 13, **“Stop bringing meaningless offerings.”** That word meaningless can be translated as vain or empty. He's saying stop bringing offerings with no heart behind it. Stop bringing empty offerings. But that word can also be translated as stop bringing deceitful offerings. Your actions say one thing, but your heart says another. Stop trying to deceive me because both of us know that this whole thing is kind of a charade between me and you. And if you're a non-Christian here or if you're a non-Christian watching online, you've probably seen this from Christians before. You've seen Christians say one thing, say they believe one thing and live differently. And if you've seen that, you've probably said something like 'If that's what Christianity is, I want no part of it.' What I hope you hear is that's what God is saying here. He's saying man I want no part of this when people say they love me, but they don't actually. I don't want any part of that. Here's what that might look like.

On Friday night if you were drunk and you have every intention of getting drunk next Friday night, but you came to church this Sunday to make God happy, you're not fooling Him. Or if you come to church and give some money to the church and then you go out to eat and you are just rude to your server. And you go to your kids' sports game, and you are just yelling at the refs because you love being in a position of authority and you love abusing that position of authority, man you're not fooling Him. Or if you've got a Bible verse in your Instagram bio but you're watching the shows that everyone else is watching and you're dating a guy who does not love Jesus and he's pulling you away from Jesus. God's not going 'You know, she's got John 3:16 in

her bio.' You're not fooling Him. He's going, 'I know you don't love me with all of your heart soul mind and strength. Why are we playing this game? You're not fooling me.' Now I also want to make this abundantly clear, abundantly clear. All of us have sinned, all of us are covered in sin and all of us have fallen short of the glory of God, myself included. All of us have sinned. But here's how you know this might be you. If your life is not marked by repentance its likely marked by rebellion. If your life is not marked by repentance, it is likely marked by rebellion. If you do not frequently get before the Lord and you're humbled before Him. If you get before the Lord and you're not grateful for Him. If you're not serious before the Lord you have a serious problem. You do. I want to communicate this as best as I possibly can. You have a serious problem. It's not my word. It's what the Word says. Sometimes I read the Message as an accompaniment to the scripture I am reading because sometimes it brings clarity to the text, specifically in the Old Testament. And I think it brings clarity here in verses 14 and 15. This is what it says in the Message, but it really says the exact same thing in ESV NIV. It says this, **"I'm sick of your religion, religion, religion, while you go right on sinning. When you put on your next prayer performance, I'll be looking the other way. No matter how long or loud or often you pray, I'll not be listening"** Isaiah 1:14-15 (The Message).

Isn't that interesting. I've always heard that God listens to every prayer. Here it says that God is ignoring some prayer. Why is that? We need to know the type of prayer that God ignores. He does not ignore their prayer because of their sin. He does not ignore their prayer because they are saying the wrong words. He's ignoring their prayer because their prayer is a performance. They don't actually mean it. And I think what God is saying here is that if you're not going to take me seriously, why should I take you seriously? If you're not going to take me seriously, why should I take you seriously? This is the second thing we can learn from this text: Your heartless actions aren't accepted. So, what do we do now? Like what do we do with this? Well, I'm just glad the text isn't over. Let's keep reading. Verse 16: **"Wash and make yourselves clean."** That's not an encouraging start. I've tried that before. I've done my best. I've worked my hardest and I still sin and still fall short. What am I supposed to do? **"Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong."** This is Isaiah 1:17, we partner with a ministry called Isaiah 1:17, a fantastic ministry based on this verse. **"Learn to do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the cause of the widow."** Verse 18 **"Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land, but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken"** (Isaiah 1:16-20 NIV).

Here's what you need to know about the Lord. There are times when He will speak harshly with you in order to speak kindly to you. There will be times where He will speak strongly to you to wake you up from your sleepy stupor just to say, 'Hey come here, come now, let us settle the matter.' That wording, that phrasing is a wording of judgement. What he's saying is let us settle the dispute between me and you. He is saying all the facts are clear. You are guilty as charged and yet if you come to me and I'll declare you innocent forever, which is point number three. The third thing we can learn from this passage is that:

3. Your forgiveness is final.

If you're in Christ no one else can make a charge against you. Because if you know God you know the judge of all judges and if he's declared you innocent you are innocent forever. Charles Spurgeon, he was a pastor and he said this about this about this passage. He imagined God saying it this way, "Though your sins be scarlet, I meet you on that ground. You need not try to diminish the extent of your sin or seek to make it appear less than it really is. Though whatever you say it is, it is all that and probably far more. Your deepest sense of your sinfulness does not even come up to the truth concerning your real condition. Your sins are scarlet and crimson. It seems as though you have put on the imperial robe of sin and made yourself a monarch of the realm of evil. But even so come now unto me. No season can be better is you wait till you're better you will never come at all. Come now. The bowels of Jehovah yearn for you. For I desire to make you white as snow." See even if you're covered in sin, cloaked in sin. Even if your life has been one of deceit. God's response is 'Come here. Come now. And guess what, I know what you've done. I know where you've been. I know what you've smoked. I know who you've slept with. I know how many people you've slept with. I know what you watch. I know what you ate. I know what you drank. I know all of it and far more, I know the things that no one else knows and even yet I want you.' How badly does He want you? Let me tell you how badly He wants you. So, here's in Isaiah chapter 1 He does not actually tell us how God takes our crimson stain and makes us white as snow. Because Isaiah chapter 1 was written 700 years before Jesus and now 2000 years after Jesus we understand how God takes our crimson and makes it white as snow. What's interesting is Isaiah chapter 53. One of my favorite things about Isaiah is Isaiah chapter 53. Someone was recently asking me why I trust the Bible. One of the many reasons I trust the Bible is because of Isaiah chapter 53. 700 years before Jesus, Isaiah would tell us how God take our crimson stain and makes it white as snow. This is how badly God wants you. Isaiah 53:3-5 **"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely, He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."** That's 700 years before Jesus was crucified.

Friends you are cleansed because Jesus paid for your pretending. He was put to death because of your deceit. He was harmed because of your half-heartedness, and He was crucified because of this whole religious charade that you're in. Why is that? Why did he do that? Because His heart yearns for you. Friend, He doesn't want your stuff. He doesn't ultimately want your church attendance. He doesn't ultimately want your money. He doesn't even ultimately want your singing. What he ultimately wants is your heart because friend, you have His heart. Which is why he is so offended by a false love because He has shown you what a true love is. He gave His life for you. He's so offended. When we read these words and hear these words that He is crushed for our iniquities and the punishment that brought us peace was on Him. He's offended when we hear that and move on like it doesn't matter and like it doesn't affect our life. That's an offense to Him because the only right response upon hearing that he gave His life is for us to give Him our life. And when we do that, He leads us to the good life. This is actually what Isaiah says in verse 19, **"If you are willing and obedient," and you come to Me, "you will eat the good things of the land."** He's out for you good.

So, in summary, point number one: your rebellion leads to ruin, point number two: your heartless actions aren't accepted and point number three: your forgiveness is final.

You know when we went to Fenway two weekends ago, I went like all in on the whole Red Sox thing. Like when we got there before the game even started, I went to the gift shop, and I bought the most expensive hat I've ever bought in my life. Like I would never do that normally, but I was like if we're going to be here, I have to go all in. So, I got the hat and then anytime the Red Sox got a hit I was cheering. Anytime they scored I was standing up with everyone else and clapping and screaming. I looked like a Red Sox fan, and they won, and it was really really fun. But here's the honest truth, if they would have lost, I would not have cared. I wouldn't have thought twice about it because I'm not a real fan. I mean in the two weeks since; I haven't watched another Red Sox game. I haven't even checked their score and I think I can name one person on the Red Sox. I think JD Martinez is a real person. Like I think he's on their team. That's all I know about the Red Sox because I'm not a real fan. For the three hours that I was there, man I really looked like it because it was fun to be a part of it. I'm afraid that that's how some of us have learned to live our life. We like to go to church and like to put on our Christian hat and act like we are a part of the team, but then we go, and we leave and don't care or think about what was preached. We like to read the Bible to make us feel like we are a Christian but then we read the Bible and don't actually live the Bible. We've learned to talk in a way that makes us sound like we are Christian. We tell a bunch of people 'Hey I'm praying for you, I'm praying for you, yeah I'll pray for that.' But you and God, both know you don't actually spend time in prayer. Here's what I want you to know, you've been found out. You've been found out. Not by me, but by God who sees it all. He sees your actions and He sees your heart and says something is not matching up here. Here's the good news, you can put an end to your pretending today. Because if that's you, God's message to you is not 'Get out of my sight. His message to you is 'Come home. Come home to me. You can stop this game. You can really know me because I want to really love you and I want to restore you and I want to forgive you and I want to wrap you up in my arms and shower you with my love.' So, if that's you, man I hope that for the rest of your life you stop hoping that the people around you think that you are a Christian. My fear is that one day you get to Heaven and hear the words 'Depart from me because you never knew me.' If that's you, you know your heart doesn't beat for Jesus, you know He's not your supreme passion. The good news is you can come home to Him today. No time is better. If you wait till, you're better you'll never come at all. Come home. Jesus is waiting on you.

Let's pray together. God the only right response from me in this passage is for me to repent of myself and my own sin. The times when I placed other things above you in my heart. Things that aren't as good as you, things like sports and money and fun and comfort. I can sometimes make those things my god and I have learned those make a horrible god. I'm confident that there's many people in this room today who have learned the same things and are worshipping a false god and its only led them to pain and suffering and ruin. The good news is we've got a good God who wants to dust us up and make us soft and pick us up and clean us off. You desire to take our crimson stain and crimson sin and make us white as snow. And as you're sitting there in your seat, watching online or sitting in the lobby, man, just spend some time in repentance to God. Where have you fallen short? Maybe use those three songs that we sang at the beginning. Your heart wasn't in it, you were already ready to leave. Maybe you know you read scripture and it's not because you love God, you're just doing it out of routine. What is it for you? Spend some

time talking to God repenting. Where is God not on the throne in your life? Father, would you crush those idols. Would we see them for what they are. They're worthless, they have no power, but in you is all worth, all value, all power and would you change our heart and make it yearn for you? May our desire every single day of our life be to worship you because you are the only one worthy of our worship. May our worship be true, may it be pure, and may it always forever be unto you and you alone because you are the one who is worthy of it because you sent your one and only son Jesus Christ to die for us. But you didn't stay dead. You rose three days later so that we could live forever. So, praise God that Jesus is alive and He's with us and He is for us. And God we just want to worship you now. Its in Jesus name we pray, amen.