

**Looking Good When You Really Aren't
Hypocrisy – It's What We Do
Isaiah 58:1 – 12**

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Hypocrisy – we all hate it, yet we all have done it. At one time or another, all of us have pretended to be someone we aren't in order to impress someone else. We all want to put our best face forward and hide the dirty little secrets that really are a part of us.

In pre-marriage counseling, I always ask if the two intending to get married really know everything about each other. I have always been told, yes. Yet I always find it interesting to be told of a discovery about the other person once they are married and doing life together.

Did you know he/she squeezes the toothpaste from the center! I had no idea he/she was so irresponsible about money! An on and on.

We don't like to admit it, but hypocrisy is a common and deeply embedded trait among us. If the standard to which we aspire is easily achievable, most of us can meet it without pretense. But when the bar is set high, and we know we have not reached it, hypocrisy is an essential survival mechanism. It is a handy practice in order to be accepted and respected in the church community. We feel prodded to present ourselves as living by the truth, when we really aren't. Others, most likely, aren't either. Hypocrisy becomes the tacit norm for community life. It is a necessary evil. It makes us look good within the church. (Attiken 2020, 19-20)

When non-Christians are asked why they reject belief in God, one of the most frequently cited reasons is the hypocrisy of churchgoers: Christians frequently do not live as if what they believe is true. Christianity preaches compassion for the poor and the outcast; Christians are often close-fisted and hardhearted toward the vulnerable in society. Christianity teaches us to love all people, even the most flamboyant of sinners; Christians are often judgmental toward sinners. Christianity preaches forgiveness and turning the other cheek; Christians often carry grudges for years. (Anderson 2021, 281)

Jesus knew what He was getting into when He died on the cross for us. He knew that ever since Genesis 3, true transparency was not only hard to obtain, but impossible to see in most cases. We all want people to see us at our best. Jesus sees us for who we really are. We all have a sin nature.

Jesus openly condemned religious hypocrisy on the part of the professional religious experts in the Temple. The groups included Pharisees, Scribes, Lawyers and Sadducees. In Matthew 23, we discover what His thoughts are on the topic of religious hypocrisy as He calls out the professionals for what they truly are.

Seven times in Matthew 23, Jesus accuses the professionals of being hypocrites. He publicly references that they are:

- Legalists unwilling to perform what they require of others (Matthew 23:2 – 4)
- Publicity hounds (Matthew 23:5)
- Always looking good by doing the right things, acting religious (Matthew 23:5)
- Honor whores (Matthew 23:6 – 11)
- Authors of their own press releases (Matthew 23:12)
- Preventors of salvation (Matthew 23:13)
- In it for the money (Matthew 23:14)
- False teachers (Matthew 23:15)
- Misusers of scripture and ignorant of the truth (Matthew 23:16 – 22)
- Into majoring on minors and ignoring the important provisions of the law (Matthew 23:23 – 24)
- Really crooks and predators on the inside (Matthew 23:25 – 26)
- Spiritually dead (Matthew 23:27 – 28)
- Murderers (Matthew 23:29 – 32)
- On the highway to hell and directing others there as well (Matthew 23:33)
- Apostate serial killers of the prophets and believers (Matthew 23:34 – 36)
- Rejectors of the Messiah (Matthew 23:37 – 38)

This condemnation and concern Jesus has for the hypocritical blindness seen in others facilitated by phony leaders is not a new issue, this is a topic of concern for Isaiah here in chapter 58.

YAHWEH was also concerned with this as well, even in the time of Isaiah. We now come face to face with 7th and 8th century BC hypocrisy. Again, we will find out that comparing our present day to what we see in Isaiah's day, there is not a lot new going on.

As Judah spirals downward into apostasy we must remember, they think all is right between them and YAHWEH. In their view, they are His chosen people; they have the Temple, they have the Torah, they are the only ones among the nations who are following YAHWEH. That is all true, but we have already learned there is an obvious disconnect in Judah between being and doing. The being is supposed to come first. The intent is that the doing falls from being faithful and loyal to YAHWEH. As a natural result of loving (fearing) Him, you will want to follow the law and maintain short ledgers through sacrifice.

Judah has this turned around. They have begun to believe that since they are His chosen people, they can do no wrong.

Even though they believe all is right in the relationship with YAHWEH, they are beginning to ask questions that also are common to those who are following from a distance today.

The first question asked is one I have heard more than once in counseling...“why doesn't God answer my prayers?”

God has something to say about that. So here are the instructions to Isaiah prior to the delivery of His word on that topic.

Isaiah 58:1

“Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their wrongdoing, And to the house of Jacob their sins.” (NASB 2020)

In prophecy, it is never a good thing for the receiver, when the sender of the message, YAHWEH, instructs his messenger to cry loudly and hold nothing back.

Holding nothing back means what Isaiah will be communicating is not politically correct.

There is sin taking place that must be addressed and the command is to “Cry from the throat” [Hebrew] in distinction from whispering out of the lips; speak with loud and earnest tones as one who is sent to a refractory or stupid people, and who will make himself heard.” (Cowles 1869, 471)

Growing up, for me, was an adventure of how much trouble could I get into today. There were those days where I did not test my folks. But then were those days where I believed it was important to do what I was asked not to do and test the waters of just how much I can get away with.

I noticed that the voice level of correction tended to go up in volume as the perceived crime became more serious. Did I listen because it was loud? Not really, but I did hear the warning. For example, I still thought it was important to test what would happen when a fork was stuck into an electric socket. It will blow a fuse by the way. Suffice it to say...I received instruction from a wooden spoon that day, on top of being shocked.

Here, God is making sure that His voice is being heard. What is taking place here is egregious; much worse than my experiments with electricity. The problem being addressed is religious hypocrisy.

The need is clear for YAHWEH, Isaiah is to be loud, he is to be in your face. Isaiah will be calling your house every five minutes to tell you that much more than an auto warranty needs to be dealt with. He is being instructed to wear the people out. Why, because “the people are insensible and stupid. They need something to rouse them to a sense of their guilt. Go and proclaim it so that all may hear. Speak not in whispers; speak not to a part, but speak so earnestly that their attention will be arrested, and so that all shall hear.” (Barnes 1851, 328)

Isaiah 58:1b

“...And declare to My people their wrongdoing, And to the house of Jacob their sins.” (NASB 2020)

Wrongdoing – פְּשָׁעַ (pisa) crime; offence concerning property; wantonness; misdemeanor; wrongdoing...evildoing, the violation of a law or a duty or moral principle...rebellion, refusal to accept some authority or code or convention. (Lexham Press 2017)

Rebellion comes easy enough for us, we are all rebels post Genesis 3. I am a rebel.

I live in an HOA. That was not my first choice but it was the Lord's since He has this thing about teaching me about how much of a rebel I really am. Do I like the deeds, covenants and restrictions placed upon me by the HOA? No. Do I look for ways to rebel against the HOA? I will neither confirm or deny anything in that regard.

Did I rebel at work? Yes, all of the time. I always have had a problem with what I considered to be artificial restrictions on the ability to get work done. I worked in the highly regulated world of insurance. Are there ways to get around the rules and regulations imposed by Departments of Insurance in order to get the job done? I will neither confirm or deny anything etc.

As a rebel, we all also tend to fall into something else, sin.

Sins - חַטָּאת (hatto) – “sin, an act or feeling that transgresses something forbidden or ignores something required by God’s law or character; whether in thought, feeling, speech, or action...” (Lexham Press 2017)

Now we have a hint of what the problem is. There is something they are required to do but they are not doing it, and this is not just a physical action but is something much deeper, getting to what truly motivates them, and it is not obedience to YAHWEH. Us too.

Isaiah 58:2–3

“Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God. ‘Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’ Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And oppress all your workers.” (NASB 2020)

This is not a positive affirming statement to the people of Judah. It is rather tongue in cheek. Recall what YAHWEH said to His people way back in Isaiah 1? There have been no significant lifestyle changes in the interim.

Isaiah 1:11–15

“What are your many sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fattened cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courtyards? Do not go on bringing your worthless offerings, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the proclamation of an assembly— I cannot endure wrongdoing and the festive assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am tired of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you offer many prayers, I will not be listening. Your hands are covered with blood.” (NASB 2020)

The people are still being “zealous in all the outward forms of religion, even making “many prayers” (ch. 1:15), but yet altogether an offence to God. They are not conscious hypocrites—quite the reverse; they are bent on “doing righteousness,” on not forsaking God’s ordinance, on continually “approaching” him; but they are wholly without a proper sense of what religion is—they make it a matter of outward observance, and do not understand that it consists in the devotion of the heart.” (Spence-Jones 1910, 372)

They love to learn about the Lord. They would sit and listen to Torah for hours and enjoyed hearing about what YAHWEH has done for them. They were following the law, for the most part, and praying to Him asking for direction.

They loved being in the Temple and hearing the sounds and experiencing the smells of worship.

In one of His teachings about this identical issue, Jesus provides us a perspective of what it is that is really going on inside. Remember, this is someone who gets it right on the outside.

Luke 6:39–49

“He also told them a parable: “Someone who is blind cannot lead another who is blind, can he? Won’t they both fall into a pit? A disciple is not greater than his teacher, but everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck in your brother’s eye, but fail to see the beam of wood in your own? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck from your eye,’ while you yourself don’t see the beam in your own? You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from brambles. The good person out of the good treasury of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasury produces evil, for his mouth speaks from what fills his heart. **Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do what I tell you?** Everyone who comes to

me and listens to my words and puts them into practice—I will show you what he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep, and laid the foundation on bedrock. When a flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the person who hears and does not put my words into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against that house, it collapsed immediately, and was utterly destroyed!” (NET)

Jesus called it, for those who think that ritual will get you in, it will never work...ever. The people of Judah, just like many in churches throughout the world today...are not interested in obeying Him.

When the Holy Spirit begins to convict us, when the Word of God begins to speak to us, we only think of it in terms of how it applies to others. (Courson 2006, 455)

We have the head knowledge, but the heart knowledge is seriously lacking. It is simply an academic exercise for us. This is one of the dangers of expositional teaching. As we sit under the teaching, we obtain more head knowledge of the word. We try hard to bring in the application to also make it an encounter with truth and allow the Holy Spirit to also make it a heart knowledge event as well.

But not everyone does that.

The questions showing up though in verse 3 are the type of questions that reflects a disconnect exists. As a Sophomore in Bible School, the guy across the hall from me in the dorm, came to know Christ as His Savior. He had gone through Junior High and High School playing the game. He was getting A's in all of his Bible classes, and the survey classes were not that easy to get an A in. You would have 100 questions on an exam and because the grade was curved, if you missed 3 questions, you might be looking at a low B or even a C. Here is the thing, he had the head knowledge, but not the heart knowledge.

He knew all about the rapture of the church, and one Saturday morning event, the Holy Spirit really, conspired to make him believe that the rapture had occurred, and he had been left behind while living in the dorm of a Bible school. Suddenly, he knew he was alone, completely alone since his family were also all believers, but he was not.

There were more than a few curious stares as he lowered himself out the window from the second floor and then laughs all around at the story he made up. But that evening, he told his roommate he needed Jesus, and he has lived for him ever since. But it makes me wonder, how many students never get it?

I have met Seminary graduates who have no idea who Jesus Christ really is, but they can tell you what this or that dead German said.

Here in verse 3, we see self-righteousness on full display and a real wonder at why prayers are not being answered.

Isaiah 58:3

“Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice? Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And oppress all your workers.” (NASB 2020)

Judah had a worldview disconnect taking place. The culture of Judah had one view, but YAHWEH had one that was entirely different.

It is entirely possible to be zealous for the Lord and busy about His work, and miss the entire need for a relationship with Jesus Christ. We hear many who are looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ, but there is a reason why more and more do not want to discuss or even consider a pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

There is a serious world view disconnect taking place and per recent worldview surveys, getting worse. For example, 3 out of 4 millennials believe that all religions are equal.

George Barna's research report released in October 2021 gives us the reality we live in.

The overarching conclusion of the research was that most Americans have not been seduced into fully embracing any of those particular competing worldview as much as they have simply taken bits and pieces from each of the alternative life philosophies and woven them together into a customized blend of beliefs and behaviors. That resulting worldview is known as Syncretism. The Inventory estimated that while only 6 percent of adults possess the biblical worldview, an overwhelming 88 percent are characterized by Syncretism. (Barna 2021, 54)

What we see is that like today, "there is then a terrible irony in these people's asking God to work his righteous justice in their lives (cf. Mal. 2:17) or in longing for his nearness. If he should answer their request, it would not be a pleasant experience (Isa. 33:14; cf. Mal. 3:2). Christians who speak glowingly of the return of Christ might profit from thinking along these same lines. Are we really ready for his return?" (Oswalt 1998, 496)

Isaiah's contemporaries had fooled themselves into thinking what it truly meant to be followers of YAHWEH. They had a false conception of truth, and this resulted in a worldview that had more to do with bringing in aspects of the surrounding cultures, like magic or idolatry, than true YAHWEH worship.

This shows up in what the prophets say to them and to us.

Malachi 2:17–3:4

"You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. You have wearied him by saying that all who do evil are good in the LORD's sight, and he is pleased with them. You have wearied him by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD. Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past." (NLT)

It appears that Judah has a different type of relationship with YAHWEH, not one based on loyalty to Him and obedience to His word. Because we do this stuff, the ritual, and we show up regularly and act like we enjoy this, then God, it is your responsibility to produce the goods. We fast, we "humble" ourselves with the show, and you must show up in the manner and way in which we want you to. This sounds a lot like taking idolatry and mixing it into a worldview. Syncretism, just like today.

We turn back to Malachi to catch this conversation.

Malachi 3:13–14

"You have said terrible things about me," says the LORD. "But you say, 'What do you mean? What have we said against you?' You have said, 'What's the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the LORD of Heaven's Armies that we are sorry for our sins?'" (NLT)

My religious behavior, my endless hours of Bible study and prayer are not being done because I love Him, I want to obey Him, and I want to be like Him. No, I want to do those things that I think will manipulate Him into doing what I want. That is not Biblical faith. That is paganism. If I think that, then I am no better than an idol worshipper.

What ancient idol worshippers believed was that the objects they made were inhabited by their gods. This is why they performed ceremonies to “open the mouth” of the statue. The mouth (and nostrils) had to be ritually opened for the spirit of the deity to move in and occupy, a notion inspired by the idea that one needs to breathe to live. The idol first had to be animated with the very real spiritual presence of the deity. Once that was done, the entity was localized for worship and bargaining. (Heiser 2015, 35-36)

In his conversations with believers who were steeped in pagan culture, Paul absolutely knew about this manipulation idea, and he knew it was a possibility to still show up in those in the church at Corinth.

Therefore he said to the church in Corinth.

2 Corinthians 13:5–9

“Put yourselves to the test to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize regarding yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless, indeed, you fail the test! And I hope that you will realize that we have not failed the test! Now we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong, not so that we may appear to have passed the test, but so that you may do what is right even if we may appear to have failed the test. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the sake of the truth. For we rejoice whenever we are weak, but you are strong. And we pray for this: that you may become fully qualified.” (NET)

About fasting, the Torah only mandates one fast day, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29). Over the years various special fasts were indeed undertaken by the people and with the right reasons in mind...to humble themselves before the Lord (Psalms 35:13). But “The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NET)

We have the capability of turning anything the Lord has for us that is good when used with the right motivations and twisting it around into something else entirely.

Because of our fallen nature the people of Judah began to think that it is “the pursuance of the form that will produce the result. That is what has happened here, as is apparent in these questions. But repentance is not for the purpose of getting God to do anything; it is an expression of the conviction that my ways are wrong and God’s ways are right, whether he does anything for me or not.” (Oswalt 1998, 497)

Judah felt that God was not being fair. They did their part, His turn now. God exposes the truth.

Isaiah 58:3b–5

“...Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast for contention and strife, and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you have done today to make your voice heard on high! Is it a fast like this that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it for bowing one’s head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?” (NASB 2020)

The idea behind fasting is to humble yourself before the Lord. A survey in 1987 found that there were two major reasons for fasting. The two main concerns in their fasting were lost souls and finding the will of God. Sixteen percent more ministers fasted to find the will of God than for lost souls. Twenty percent more lay persons fasted for lost souls than to find the will of God. A total of 223 said they received the answers or results intended. Two hundred twenty-seven continued their work while they fasted. Most of them read their Bibles and prayed during a fast. Almost all drank water or other liquids while fasting. Ninety-seven percent felt closer to the Lord during or following a fast. Seventy-six percent were more mentally alert. Sixteen percent had experienced visions. (Chatham 1987, 80)

Notice that the survey did not reveal any fast today being done as a type of bargaining chip with God.

Fasting is not an end in itself; it is a means by which we can worship the Lord and submit ourselves in humility to Him. We don't make God love us any more than He already does if we fast, or if we fast longer. (Townes 1996, 17)

Unfortunately, that was not what the people of Judah thought. God points out that while they are fasting, they were not spending time with the Lord, but instead continued to meet their own needs even to the point that they continued to misuse those who worked for them and oppress them.

It was almost like the view that if I am fasting, I am going to make everyone around me as miserable as I am because after all, I am fasting and more spiritual than you ever thought about being.

When we fast, that is not how we are to do this. Jesus gave us instructions on this, because of the tendency we have to make it about us and not about Him.

Matthew 6:16–18

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (ESV)

And there is that word again...hypocrite. Notice what was going on in Acts. “While they were **serving the Lord and fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, “Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:2–3, NASB 2020)

Fasting which “ends in quarreling and strife” and “striking each other with wicked fists” means that all they want is to get their own way, even when they are wrong. Thus, their fasting ends in quarreling and fighting and they never get through to God. Because of their strife He does not answer their prayers. (Horton 2000, 419)

That does not sound like serving the Lord, seeking His face, humbling yourself or putting Him first above food by spending the time normally spent in meal preparation and consumption in prayer instead.

Isaiah 58:5

“Is it a fast like this that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?” (NASB 2020)

A couple of important points before commenting on this, first, the law did not require bowing heads properly and second, sackcloth and ashes are not commanded.

When Jesus made His comments about fasting, it is obviously that just like in Judah 700 years before, it had turned into theater.

How Not to Fast Fasting Checklist

I am fasting and everyone around me is going to know I am:

- Ash heap to sit on.
- Burlap bags to wear.
- Extra ash to pour over my head and mark my face so everyone knows.
- Dour sour looks so it is obvious I am fasting.
- Make sure you make loud and constant pronouncements about the fact you are fasting; tell you neighbor even if they are not believers.
- Treat everyone around you like dirt. They need to know you are fasting after all.
- Make sure you get all this done before the weekend.

YAHWEH asks a pointed question...you call this a fast? “God challenges the people to consider whether their fasting is genuine fasting. The demonstrative pronoun this refers to their outward ritual fasting just described. The verb call may be rendered “consider” or “regard.” The noun day refers to both the time and all the activities related to fasting, so it may be rendered “fasting.”” (Ogden and Sterk 2011, 1634)

Because of the self-deception the people are suffering from, He must tell them what kind of fast He would honor. Their vision of what constitutes a fast diametrically opposed to what He considers to be a fast.

There is a real question too as to whether He is defining actions here that need to take place while fasting, the purpose of the fast, or actions instead of fasting that are needed. I think that what is being shown here is fasting without a heart change is worthless. A heart change is needed and here is what that looks like.

Isaiah 58:6–7

“Is this not the fast that I choose: To release the bonds of wickedness, To undo the ropes of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke? Is it not to break your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” (NASB 2020)

Fasting, at its core, is not about abstinence from food. Judah had instead turned it into magic. We do this to make God bend to our will. No, that is not the purpose at all, that is idolatry. Rather than fasting that way, God would prefer to see the tangible results of repentance showing up in the life of the nation.

True repentance would result in Judah not oppressing their servants but releasing them instead just as the law provides for. Being kind to those who were truly helpless. “If they mean business, the way is one of loosening bonds of wickedness that exploit others, one of freeing others they have taken advantage of. In verse 9, it is a way of removing the yoke they placed on those under their power. This will involve repentance in regard to using their fingers to point out those they are wronging, ie. falsely treating with their gestures and tongues. (Rosscup 2008, 1140)

Stop your gossiping. Stop the things that reveal the wickedness and the evil in your hearts. Demonstrate your faith in Me by your conduct. Start being honest in your dealings. Be truthful in what you say. Instead of seeing you in sackcloth and covered with ashes, I’d like to see you clean on the inside. (McGee 1997, 328)

Of course, none of us have this problem today do we? Actually, it has gotten worse over the centuries. The Holy Spirit is asking us this question...“do we really understand what it is Jesus wants us to be doing in these last days?”

The people of Judah had been compromising for years and had reached the point in their worship that it was no longer genuine, but oriented more towards, “what’s in it for me?” They had combined elements of idolatry and spiritism with their worship of YAHWEH and had something that did not look like the Torah at all. Even though they did this. They thought they were doing the right thing and they wanted to know why their prayers were not being answered and why their fasting seemed to be hitting deaf ears. They misunderstood God. They misunderstood His law. They did not have an appropriate worldview. Moses wrote about this day.

Deuteronomy 10:16–22

“So then, from now on be obedient to the LORD and stop being stubborn. The LORD your God is supreme over all gods and over all powers. He is great and mighty, and he is to be feared. **He does not show partiality, and he does not accept bribes.** He makes sure that orphans and widows are treated fairly; he loves the foreigners who live with our people, and gives them food and clothes. So then, show love for those foreigners, because you were once foreigners in Egypt. Obey the LORD your God and worship only him. Be faithful to him and make your promises in his name alone. Praise him—he is your God, and you have seen with your own eyes the great and astounding things that he has done for you.

When your ancestors went to Egypt, there were only seventy of them. But now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.” (GNB)

Did the nation understand “he does not accept bribes?” Here in Isaiah, we are learning the answer to that is...no. Do we understand that point as well? There is nothing we can do to make God love us more than He already does. The problem for Judah was compromise and that is our issue as well.

Compromise has a way of blinding our eyes, and we get used to the situation in which we find ourselves, comparing our own lives with the lives of others—until we rediscover the Word of God. This is what happens to us when we experience true revival. Our eyes are opened, and we are undone. We are far more sinful than we realized. Far more worldly. Far more compromised. Far more polluted. Far more disobedient and dishonest and disloyal. That also means that God is far more displeased with us than we understood. We thought we were so strong, so secure, so special. Now we realize we are hanging by a thread. The Word of God speaks to us afresh. (Brown 2021, 31)

Isaiah 1:18

“Come now, and let us debate your case,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They shall become as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be like wool.” (NASB 2020)

Repentance is the requirement, and the result of true repentance is to have a heart for God. “God told His people that He didn’t want their so-called worship—they were just going through a form. They were just “playing church.” He told them that they might think they were having fun, but it was going to become a burden to them because they would become weary trying to keep up a front before the world.

God said to them, “Come clean. Demonstrate in your lives that you have reality.” (McGee 1997, 328)

YAHWEH wants His people to see answered prayer. He wants them to experience all it is He has for them. He wants that for us today as well.

What are the naturally occurring outcomes of a life that is in relationship and obedience?

Isaiah 58:8–11

“Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will spring up quickly; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry for help, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, And if you offer yourself to the hungry And satisfy the need of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom will become like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” (NASB 2020)

Getting the fast done right has results. “The Lord will respond in blessing! He will give, first, a fresh beginning, like a new dawn. Secondly, personal restoration, the healing of wounds and disabilities from the past: healing (’ārûkâ) is used of new flesh growing over a wound (Jer. 30:17) and of ‘repair work’ (Neh. 4:12). Thirdly, he will give security with righteousness as a protective advance guard and glory as a rearguard (52:12). The Lord provides righteousness (53:11; 54:17) and the believer wears it as an armour (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:7). The glory of the LORD is the personal presence of the Lord in all his glory, his presence in every place (6:3); here, his guardianship of his own. Fourthly, a free mutuality of relationship with the LORD: unfettered prayer, prompt response. The Lord (9a) is emphatic, ‘the Lord himself’, his personal attention to our cry. And he will say: the construction here (a coordinate verb) suggests ‘at once he will say’: Here am I: literally ‘Behold me’, the response of a waiting, obedient servant (Gen. 22:1, 11; 1 Sam. 3:4). Answered prayer is not like the sending of a food parcel; it is like a home visit by the doctor. (Motyer 1999, 409)

When worship as in prayer is a part of a whole life that is right with God, God can assure blessings. These tokens of His own compassion come in various expressions, showing that one cannot outgive Him. (Rosscup 2008, 1141)

Again, what do we see naturally occurring?

- Healing spiritually
- All who are round us will “know” who we serve because we will be enabled to live righteously.
- The protection of God over us
- Answered prayer

He does though restate what some of the requirements are for the people of Judah.

Isaiah 58:9b–10

“...If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, And if you offer yourself to the hungry And satisfy the need of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom will become like midday.” (NASB 2020)

For Judah, action is required. Yes, forgiveness is from the Lord, but changing our mind, repenting of our sin, also means action because of.

Stop focusing on self. Removing oppression occurs when the view of those being scorned in the past changes. In other words, stop the slander, defamation, mockery and contempt.

As the attitude changes, then behavior towards those previously scorned changes as well. The world changes and you seek to ensure they are fed, and their needs are met. “God says that if it comes to a choice, he would much rather that we “pour out our souls” in ministry to those whose “souls” really are “afflicted” by the crushing forces of life than that we engage in an ecstasy of self-congratulation over how severe we are on ourselves for the (supposed) love of God. Thus the movement of thought here is profound: from removal of the acts of oppression to removal of the attitudes on which oppression depends to a sacrifice of oneself for the sake of those who have been oppressed.” (Oswalt 1998, 506)

Isaiah 58:11–12

“And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.” (NASB 2020)

As we change and have an effective time of prayer with the Lord, then we find the “satisfaction of his desire in God’s will even in dry places; strength adequate even to his body; saturation with God’s provision, as a watered garden; and supply that does not fail, as from a spring that keeps flowing.” (Rosscup 2008, 1142)

And it begins with a change of mind.

Romans 10:8–10

“But what does it say? “The message is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart.” This is the message about faith that we are proclaiming: If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with his heart and is justified, and declares with his mouth and is saved.” (ISV)

His salvation is indeed near and available to all who accept it.

Salvation is a Gift

- Admit you are a sinner.
- Believe in your heart that Jesus died for your sins, was buried and He rose from the dead three days later.
- Call on the name of the Lord.

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