

3/10/24 Christ Fellowship

What God Doesn't Want – Isaiah 1:10-20

Have you ever been given a thoughtless gift? Has anybody ever given you a birthday present that they obviously put no effort into? Maybe you got one of those calendars that you get when you open an account at the bank or maybe your four-year-old princess got a roll of duct tape from her uncle or something. You know what I mean? Isn't that awful? Or maybe you give somebody a nice gift and then the next time you see them, they re-gift it back to you? Have you ever had something like that happen?

Wouldn't you rather just not get a gift from them at all? Yea, just skip it, Uncle Bob. I don't need or even want your opened package of underwear that's not my size and stuck in a Walmart bag with a used bow on it. I don't want bath beads for my birthday that still have a card inside that says, "*Merry Christmas Angela.*" That's just rude and thoughtless and worse than not giving anything at all. Don't you agree?

Or maybe you went to a lot of time and trouble to find just the right gift for somebody. Maybe you made something by hand and worked really hard on it and then realized that they didn't like it or just weren't grateful for it. That's an awful feeling. My mom always said she didn't want anything for Christmas or her birthday from us kids but she just wanted a hand-made card and I believe her. So, for Mother's Day one year, I made her a card. I spent some time on it and while it wasn't fancy and didn't really cost me any money, I made it just for her and do you know what? I went to her house later and she had that goofy little card framed and sitting on her bookshelf. That made me feel great! I believe she liked it and that made me feel good.

Now, when it comes to God, doesn't He just give the best gifts ever? **James 1:17** says, "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.*" Somebody tell me what gift God has given you that was just perfect for you. Maybe you have been given a great spouse or He has healed you from some disease or maybe you just want to thank Him for giving His Son Jesus.

For me, I think some of the greatest gifts God has ever given me are the people, places and especially things that He has *taken away from me*. You know what I mean. Don't you? Thank you, Lord! Now, sometimes when somebody gives you a really nice or really expensive gift, you might feel like you need to get them something really nice so as not to be embarrassed or look like a cheap skate.

But when it comes to giving God gifts, it is the ultimate situation of “*what to give the guy who has everything*” because God literally already owns everything. So, what gifts might we give to God? What can we give God that would really please Him? What about our worship? How about giving tithes and offerings to His church or giving to the food pantry or ministering to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated? Those are gifts that please God. Did you know that when we meet on Sunday nights or Wednesday nights for Bible study or even just get together as a church for a meal and fellowship that God is pleased with that and considers that a gift to Him? That’s a win-win situation right there!

Now, how would you feel if God said that your gifts were detestable to Him? What would you think if God told you that He hates it when we get together? Or if God said He is weary of our prayers? You would know that something is horribly wrong, wouldn’t you? What could possibly make God feel that way toward the gifts that we are giving Him?

Turn to the Old Testament book of Isaiah and we will find out what made God say those very things. We are continuing our study of what our church should look like and this passage is as relevant to us today as the Sunday newspaper. Today we get a word from Isaiah. The book of Isaiah is in between the books of Song of Songs and Jeremiah.

Isaiah wrote and prophesied about the same time as Amos and to mostly the same people. You would think that with those two preaching at them that Israel would have had a great revival but they were stiff-necked and hard-hearted and so God allowed what those two and many others prophesied to come true. The nation of Israel, God’s chosen people, were allowed to be conquered and all but a remnant destroyed.

This passage could very well be addressed to the people of the United States and today I want you to see if this passage in Isaiah is addressed to you or your church. Let’s read **Isaiah 1:10-20**.

*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.*

*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.

Has anybody ever called you a really despicable name or said something about you that was just really hurtful? It hurts the worst when there is truth behind it, doesn't it? God doesn't beat around the bush in this passage and starts off comparing the nation of Israel and its rulers to Sodom and Gomorrah. Do you see that in **verse 10**?

In **Isaiah 1:4** the prophet mourns the state of His people. *“Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, 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.”*

This is exactly opposite of that for which Israel had been created by God. In **Deuteronomy 7:6** it is said of Israel: *“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”*

The nation of Israel was chosen by God as an instrument to bring about the Messiah. Through Israel God would one day proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bring healing and redemption to the nations; to the entire world. Here in chapter one of Isaiah, they are disgusting to God. (Chris Surber)

What happened? I thought God wanted sacrifices in the Old Testament. I thought God wanted them to go to the temple and celebrate certain festivals and yet here He says He is disgusted by it. What's the problem?

I heard about a man who made free use of Christian vocabulary. He talked about the blessing of the Almighty and the Christian confessions which would become the pillars of the new government. He assumed the earnestness of a man weighed down by historic responsibility. He handed out pious stories to the press, especially to the church papers. He showed his tattered Bible and declared that he drew the strength for his great work from it as scores of pious people welcomed him as a man sent from God. Indeed, Adolf Hitler was a master of outward religiosity--with no inward reality! (Today in the Word, June 3, 1989.)

That was the problem with Israel and that is the problem with too many people and even churches today. We have outward religion and no inward reality and we wonder why people don't want to come to church anymore. We come to church because that is what respectable people do. We don't have to do it every Sunday but we hit it a lick and a smile and call that good. When we do come to church, we give a few bucks and it always helps if at least one person sees it so maybe they will tell somebody else they saw us give.

We sing along with the songs while inside we are critiquing the few misspells and the times when the words don't match the music. We sure hope nobody prays too terribly long because that can sure get boring and Heaven forbid somebody go down for prayer after the sermon because that could make us late to Dos Chiles. We don't mind volunteering to pray for or even give to a mission opportunity but for us to go is out of the question. That's crazy talk.

Have I hit any nerves yet? There was a rather pompous deacon at a big church in the city who had volunteered to teach a young boy's Sunday School class. In the middle of class, he furrowed his brow and squinted his upturned eyes and said, "*Why do people call me a Christian?*" After a moment's pause, one youngster said, "***Maybe it's because they don't know you.***"

Now, just like last week, the purpose of this message is not to shame you or get you to do more or give more. In fact, it's just the opposite. God doesn't need your gifts. This church doesn't need your gifts. If you can't give or volunteer or worship or pay a tithe with a grateful heart to the Creator of the universe Who gives us grace and mercy and love and forgiveness every day, then maybe you should just hang on to that gift.

My friend David said in **Psalm 51**, "*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*" Even before that he knew the value of proper sacrifice. In **2 Samuel 24**, a man offered to give King David everything he needed to make a sacrifice but David said, "*I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.*"

So, what is it that God wants of us and why should we care? Well, the good news is that God tells us what He wants and it has nothing to do with giving more or doing more. In fact, it may mean doing less. Look at **verse 16**. *Wash and make yourselves clean.*

*Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong. 17 Learn to do right*

I have told you before that my uncle gave me some similar advice when I was making bad decisions as a young man. He simply said, "**STOP IT!**" While that may sound simplistic, for me, it was a wake-up call. I realized I knew what was right and wrong but I was making excuses for doing the right thing with the wrong motives. I was doing the wrong thing even if it was just internally.

Maybe you have a bad attitude or maybe you are proud. Maybe you are so humble and generous that you are proud of your humility and generosity. Seriously, pride is sneaky. If Satan can't get you to be proud of who you are and what you have done, then he will make you proud of your humility. **Proverbs 16:5** says, *“Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.”*

That was Israel's worst sin in Isaiah's day. They were wealthy enough to bring sacrifices and give offerings and they were proud of that ability and it overshadowed their love and gratefulness to God to the point that God said, *“Just stop it!”*

Do you sincerely want to please God? If you do, it is because you see God for Who He really is and you see yourself for who you really are. You see that God is all-powerful and it is only by His grace, mercy, patience and forgiveness that we can do anything or that we have anything. That is the attitude in which we give gifts that truly please God and the kind of gifts for which we are rewarded.

He continues in **verse 17** by saying, *“seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”*

Do you know what that means? It means to minister to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated just like this church has been called to do. It means maybe you basically adopt a person or a family from the community who consistently needs help. Maybe you adopt somebody on the inmate list. Maybe you grab a few things for our food pantry when you go shopping. Maybe God has called you to visit Wise County Jail.

The good news is that there is hope and help even if you have seen yourself in this passage. If God has revealed to you that you are proud or that you have a bad attitude or that you have put God less than first even though you may attend church faithfully, there is good news.

Look at **verse 18**. *“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.”*

God doesn't want or need your money, your stuff, or your time. Get out of that mindset. What God wants is your obedience and when you are obedient, God wants to bless you. Then when you see that God has blessed you, you will want to be generous with

your time, talent and treasure. That's how that works and it works well. In fact, it works better than we could ever ask or imagine.

What God really wants from you is a relationship and we have a relationship through His son Jesus. **Romans 3:23** says that we are all sinners and **Romans 6:23** says that what we deserve for that sin is eternal death which is eternal separation from God. But **John 3:16** says that God provided a way by sending His only Son to die on the cross and pay the debt of sin that we could never pay and all we have to do is believe. Now, that belief will then manifest itself in a changed life; a life that looks like Jesus and is obedient to Him.

God wants a relationship with you today and wants to bless your obedience. I would love to pray with you right now about anything that is on your mind. Come on right now as the music plays.