

THE REAL REASON FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS ISA 1:10-18
24th SUN AFTER PENT/REFORMATION OCT 30, 2016

- ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!
- ¹¹ "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.
- ¹² "When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you this trampling of my courts?
- ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
- ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.
- ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.
- ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,
¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.
- ¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

When a country is a democracy or republic in which
the government leaders depend on those governed do
to put them in power and keep them in power,
it is obvious who came up with this idea of government:
the people themselves.

When a country has a monarch or dictator leading it
who gets and keeps power by what he himself does
so that the people are dependent on he does for them,
It is obvious where this form of government comes from:
that person who is the ruler.

Forms of religion are similar.

When people believe that being blessed and saved
depends on their own choices and behavior,
it is obvious where these beliefs came from: human ideas.

But when people believe that every blessing now & forever
depends on what God himself decides and does
it is obvious that the origin of this religious belief
is none other than God himself.

For one reason or another, in government is gravitational pull
for government by the people to slide into dictatorships
unless there is continued vigilance or periodic revolution.
With religion it is the other way around. Is constant tendency
for religion focused on what God does for us
to slip into religion focused on what we must do for God
in order to have the blessings we need
unless there is constant vigilance or periodic reformation.
This is why Isaiah is telling Israel their worship has gone wrong
and they need to listen again to what God is telling them.
And when Jesus comes a few centuries later
he has to correct the Pharisees in the same way
And yet a few centuries later Luther discovers that
the church has again slid into the same ditch
And so this is why we must continue with constant vigilance
to keep hearing about the message of the Reformation
about the real reason for righteousness.

WE NEED TO RESPOND TO WHAT GOD DOES WITH FAITH
WE NEED TO KEEP HEARING GOD'S WORD
WE NEED TO BE CLEANSED BY GOD'S GRACE

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This past week, firemen visited our preschool.

A while ago, there was an open house at fire station.

One thing the firemen do is have children try on
their fireproof clothing and helmets.

This is not because children themselves need to do this
in order to keep themselves safe from fire

But so that they will recognize what is happening
when someone comes to them dressed like this
and allow themselves to be saved instead of
hiding in fear from such strange looking characters.

God does the same thing. He gives us things to do

so that we recognize what he is doing for us.

It may seem strange Isaiah tells Israel God hates their worship.

God himself told them what to do in worship,
sacrificing best as reminder it all comes from God
and shedding blood of animals like lambs
which point toward how we are saved by Jesus.

God himself required them to worship only in temple courts
to remind them to worship only one particular God.

God himself told them to observe Sabbath & to assemble
at other appointed times for festivals as reminders
of what he had done for them on those dates.

But now he says: I have had my fill of the fat offerings

you act like you are feeding me
and I am tired of you showing up and tromping in my house
and the smell of your sacrifices and incense stinks
and I am tired of sitting as host of your festivals

Because you are like wedding crashers. You are not here
to celebrate what I have done and our loving relationship
but because you think doing this will get what you want.

So, he says, when you lift your hands in prayer, God looks away

because your hands are bloody, not just from sacrifices,
but from the guilt of how you treat other people.

So he says, there needs to be a change

in your hearts, in your behavior and in society.

You need to be washed and made clean on the inside.

Remove evil by not doing it any more.

Learn to do what is good and right.

If you want to accomplish something good with your own works,

help other people who are needy
as a response to what God does for you.

The problem was not in what they were doing but lack of faith,
Letter to Hebrews says

without faith it is impossible to please God.

Faith leads us to respond by doing what God says to do
because we trust his wisdom, love, power & promises.

Without faith we may do the same kinds of things
but the motivation is always trust in what we ourselves do
to accomplish what we do not yet have
or to get God to do something for us.

Luther saw this in his day when

it was believed that priests consecrating Holy Communion
made more forgiveness by making more of Jesus' blood.
And when people thought their pilgrimages, prayers,
and paying for indulgences helped get them
or even other people into heaven quicker.

Our reason for remembering this is to help us watch out
for the same kinds of things today
when our first reaction when we think about
our going to heaven or about someone who has died
is about how good of a person we have been
or even how much we have gone to church
rather than what Jesus has done and promised
which is the reason we do what we do.

How can we keep from slipping into this?

WE NEED TO KEEP HEARING GOD'S WORD

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom!

Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

In verse before this, people look at disasters that happened
and say if God had not left survivors they would have been
completely destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Isaiah says you already are like Sodom and Gomorrah,
first the leaders, then the people who follow them.

because trusting in one's own works and goodness
to save and earn blessings

rather than trusting only in God's works and goodness
is the worst form of idolatry. It is making ourselves God.

But also like even Sodom and Gomorrah,

God has sent his messengers with his word.

Over and over in O.T. the people of Israel were not destroyed
for only one reason: God had given his word of promise.

So Isaiah says this is the remedy: Hear the word of the Lord.
Listen to it and believe it.

This is main thing that should have been happening in worship.

All their sacrifices and assemblies were pictures
to remind them of what God had done for them,
saving them from death and providing for them,
and to point forward to what God promised to do for them,
providing ultimate sacrifice which opens way for them
to come into temple of God's presence in heaven
and celebrate the feast that is forever.

We no longer have bloody sacrifices in worship
because God has now kept his word
and gives us forgiveness and everything we need
in his word, the Bible.

So in our worship today, the most important thing is not
our praises and prayers and offerings
but that they are a response of faith to his word.
We come to hear his word of forgiveness and believe it.
We hear again and again not just his word of law
so we remember to do it
but especially his Gospel & remember to believe it.
We receive Holy Communion where the main thing
is Jesus' own words: Given and shed for you
for the forgiveness of sins.

We keep hearing and believing God's word
because God's word alone tells us these things.
No human would ever have guessed it
because everything depends on God and what he does.

WE NEED TO BE CLEANSED BY GOD'S GRACE

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

After what Isaiah has just said, these are amazing words.
They are as amazing as something with a deep red stain
being made white again,
white as snow or wool which are white by their very nature.
This is the promise that God will give us new nature,
restoring what has been lost by his ruined creation.
Why would Isaiah suddenly say this? No reason is given
except God's own word of gracious promise.

The writer to the Hebrews explains with a quote from Psalm 40,
which is similar to what Isaiah has been saying here.

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,

but a body have you prepared for me;

⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,

as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’ ”

⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure
in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings”

(these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added,

“Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first
in order to establish the second.

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering
of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb. 10:4-10)

How will we be made so clean? By Jesus’ perfect obedience
and his sinless sacrifice in our place.

How can we stand in God’s presence?

By Jesus’ body being the place God lives on earth.

How can we get together with God?

By Jesus’ coming at the appointed time.

How can we keep from being a boring burden to God?

By Jesus’ carrying the burden of our sins for us.

How can we be confident God will hear our prayers?

Because of Jesus’ bloody hands lifted up on the cross.

How can we be washed clean? By baptism in Jesus’ name.

How can we learn what is right?

By seeing what Jesus does for us.

How can we help others? By sharing what Jesus gives us.

Our plans for spiritual life include doing much in worship

and doing what is right and helpful for others

but we remember again the message of the Reformation

that the real reason for righteousness

is what God is constantly doing for us.

WE NEED TO RESPOND TO WHAT GOD DOES WITH FAITH

without which all our worship is worthless

so WE NEED TO KEEP HEARING GOD’S WORD

about all he has done and will do for us.

because WE NEED TO BE CLEANSED BY GOD’S GRACE

which is a free gift bought for us by Jesus.