

“God Expects” - Isaiah 58:1-12

Ask - “What does it mean to ‘go through the motions’?”

Background - The final portion of Isaiah’s prophecy looks forward to the exiles who return from Babylon to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple after 70 years of captivity. Unfortunately, they too would practice many of the same sinful behaviors as the Israelites living in Isaiah’s day.

“Self-Righteousness” - Isaiah 58:1-4

(v1) What did God instruct Isaiah to do in this verse? How do you think such preaching would be received? Discuss.

(v2) What false pretenses do the people of Israel demonstrate as they pursue God? What does the Bible say about such piety (see Luke 18:9-14)?

(v3-4) What were the people asking of God? What motivated them to fast? Was it an expression of true repentance and seeking the LORD?

ISAIAH WAS INSTRUCTED TO BOLDLY CALL OUT ISRAEL FOR THEIR SIN. THEY WERE FILLED WITH SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND FASTED TO DISPLAY THEIR RELIGIOUS PIETY RATHER THAN IN TRUE BROKENNESS OVER SIN AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS.

“Empty Fasting” - Isaiah 58:5-7

(v5) What types of behaviors were the people observing during their fast? Are such acts of humility wrong? Why then was God displeased?

(v6) What other things was God looking for from the people? How does our treatment of others reflect on and impact our religious practices? Discuss.

(v7) How are faith and works connected? Can you have one without the other? How does this verse compare with Matthew 25:34-40?

THE PEOPLE WERE ACTING AS THOUGH THEY WERE LIVING IN HUMBLE OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S COMMANDS WHEN, IN FACT, THEY WERE NEGLECTING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.

“A Call to Repent” - Isaiah 58:8-12

(v8-9a) How will things change and improve for the people of Israel if they repent of their self-righteousness and demonstrate true compassion to others? Discuss.

(v9b-11) What are the 2 “if” statements made by God? What are the 7 “then” statements that God says will happen?

(v12) What will these people be able to do? What specifically will they be restoring and rebuilding?

IF THE PEOPLE WOULD REPENT AND TURN TO THE LORD GOD WOULD BLESS THEM IN A MULTITUDE OF WAYS. THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO REBUILD THAT WHICH HAD BEEN BROKEN DOWN.

Application - God expects our faith to be accompanied by works as proof of authenticity. Rituals such as fasting become meaningless if they are done apart from love and compassion for our fellow man. We are commanded to love God and to love one another. One without the other is unacceptable. In what ways can we as modern Christians identify with the pious attitudes of these Old Testament Jews?