

God Doesn't Want Your Money

Isaiah 1:10-20

November 8, 2009

Every Sunday she sat in the pew. She rarely missed a worship service. With a somewhat dramatic flair – so everyone could see – she would place her offering envelope in the plate as it passed each week. She was also one of the bitterest persons I have ever known. She was ugly to people in the church, blaming in her relationships, and bitter about her past. I would feel confident in saying, “God didn’t want her money.”

Isaiah gives a word of warning to us when we fail to integrate faith and life.

The passage this morning begins with the Lord speaking to the people and He calls them Sodom and Gomorrah. You may recall these two towns from Genesis. They were destroyed by God in the days of Abraham because of their immorality and unrighteousness. In calling the people of Israel Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord is calling the people hypocrites. He is calling them out on the fact that though they are in worship, they are living as the faithless. They are engaging in religious rituals including the making of sacrifices and giving of tithes and offerings while they live as those who do not love the Lord. God didn’t want their money either.

I like the observation made by Dave Ramsey in one of the videos we watched. He observed that some Christians put money in the offering plate with the attitude, “I’m going to help God out.” Not only is this an arrogant way to think, but it is spiritually ignorant. The Lord God already owns it all. Psalm 50 reminds us of the Lord’s bounty:

I do not need the bulls from your barns
or the goats from your pens.
For all the animals of the forest are mine,
and I own the cattle on a thousand hills.
If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for all the world is mine and everything in it.

God doesn’t need the Israelites gifts, nor does He need ours. Please notice that I keep using the word *need*. God does not need anything from us. But...He does desire something from you and from me. God wants your worship and your devotion. He wants an intimate relationship with you, not hollow flattery and meaningless gifts. A gift can be significant in its value, but meaningless to God because of the motivation behind it being given.

Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts;
the incense of your offerings disgusts me!
As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath
and your special days for fasting—

they are all sinful and false. (Isa 1:13)

It is clear from the way God addresses the people that He is happiest with us when our faith and our practices – both inside and outside the church – reflect one another. For example, worship divorced from the practice of our faith misses the mark. Christianity is a lifestyle of discipleship, not a religion of empty piety. We are all sinners in need of grace; and, none of us are made righteous by occupying a chair in worship.

God wants true worship from us. You and I worship the God revealed through Jesus Christ. To Him we bring our brokenness and our need for forgiveness. We leave worship with hope, grace and the power of God's Spirit that enables us to act out our faith.

The true worship of God requires an open heart and a willing spirit. True worship means we put ourselves and our own needs aside and focus our thanks and praise on the One who saves our souls.

It's true that we always have a time of offering in worship. However, we don't bring gifts in order to buy grace, prove our faith, boast about our level of financial giving or even just to support the church's budget. We offer our prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness as an act of devotion – as an expression of appreciation – as an act of worship. You and I do not bring sacrifices of bulls and lambs to the church. Our sacrifice comes in the form of a monetary offering. Christ sacrificed for us, and in our worship we sacrifice to Him.

You may think the Finance Committee and the Administrative Council may cringe at the title of this sermon. But the truth of the matter is that both are more concerned with the spiritual health of every person in this congregation, not your level of financial giving. Why? Because they know that spiritually healthy people – people who have an intimate personal relationship with Jesus – want to worship the Lord. They know that when you and I love the Lord Jesus Christ with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, we will worship Him with all that we have and all that we are.

Isaiah wasn't just speaking the Lord's word to the people of his day, but He speaks to us today as well. Listen to the end of the passage again:

"Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow.
Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.
If you will only obey me, you will have plenty to eat.
But if you turn away and refuse to listen,
you will be devoured by the sword of your enemies.
I, the Lord, have spoken!" (Isa 1:18-20)

This week, you will receive in the mail information about how you can offer to God your time, your talent, and the financial resources God has blessed you with as your act of sacrificial worship. Pray about it, and respond at a level that reflects your appreciation for the salvation you have received from the One who loves you and wants to spend eternity with you.