

Blow the trumpet, Isaiah. Sound the alarm. **Wake the worshippers up!** Tell the congregation that there is something terribly wrong with them if they come here and worship and sing and pray and fast and act like they are doing righteousness while people around them go hungry, homeless, naked, and oppressed. Blow the trumpet, Isaiah.

Isaiah's reveille says that **worship without good works of mercy is worthless.** "But we're fasting!" You say. "We do family worship every day!" You say. "We're delighting in learning about God!" You say.

"Doesn't matter." God says. "I don't care." God says. "Fake piety *disgusts* me." God says. "You're using worship as a cover for sin. Your worship is selfish; you're worshiping yourself, and you know how I can tell? I can tell because of *who you become* when you worship. If you were worshiping me, you would become repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to dwell in. If you were worshiping me, you would be transforming your city so that the lives of the hungry, the homeless, the naked, and the oppressed would be changed. Internal, invisible spiritual heart change is not enough! It doesn't matter how many warm fuzzies you feel toward Jesus if you ignore the hungry! It makes no difference to God how passionately you sing the psalms if you leave the homeless exposed out on the streets!

If God did what you did, if He just sang songs and prayed prayers and felt spiritual in His heart, then Jesus never would have left heaven to come and save you, and then where would you be? **Worship is not enough.** Saying that you love God is not enough. If you claim to be God's people, then you need to share your bread with the hungry, welcome the homeless into your house, and clothe the naked.

That's the startling challenge of Isaiah 58, and I want you to be startled by that trumpet blast. Do you care about the hungry and the homeless? Are you trying to break the yoke of the oppressed? And don't tell me that you give money to a Church that tries to help those people. Giving your tithes and offerings to God is an act of worship, but worship without *action* is worthless. Don't try to hide behind "the Church": "The Church does it, not me." *You are the Church!*

If God asks you why the hungry in your city were not fed, the widows and orphans not cared for, you can't say "That's someone else's problem. That's the pastor's job, that's the deacon's job, that's the government's job. It's not my problem." If you say that to God about the needs of your city, then when you stand before God to give account for your sins, and you look to Jesus to save you, you should expect Jesus to say, "That's his problem. That's her problem." Faith without works is dead, and that kind of faith does not save you. Worship without mission, without works of mercy, is dead, and that kind of worship will not save you.

So prove to yourself that your worship is not worthless. When did you last help the hungry? When did you last shelter the homeless? When did you clothe the naked? Can you name the ministries that we pray for that provide opportunities to do this work? Do you know where your nearest homeless shelter/ soup kitchen is? What's the name of the person who runs it? When is the next food drive?

If you are too busy sinning to love your neighbor, then this trumpet blast is meant for you. If you are too busy just living your life to love your neighbor, this trumpet blast is for you. Even if you are too busy worshiping God to love your neighbor, then this trumpet blast is for you. If your lifestyle keeps you from works of mercy; if all you have are good theological convictions or noble intentions, then you are sinning, and your worship is unacceptable to God.

And if right now you are thinking that this trumpet blast is meant for other people, then I am afraid for your soul. If you are sitting here making excuses or asking how many good works is enough, then the trumpet blast is a signal that God is getting ready to go to war against you.

Those are hard words, but they are God's words, and so they should resound like gospel thunder in your hearts. A dark stormcloud of warning is rolling over your heads, and if you do not run for cover, the lightning will split you open.

But in the darkness of this storm, hear these words from Psalm 112:4: "Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous." There is a direct connection between darkness and disobedience, and there is a direct connection between righteousness and light. Just as surely as God *threatens* and *warns* you against a heartless worship that doesn't love mercy, He promises *great blessing* to you when you walk in righteousness. "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in his commandments!" Psalm 112:1. And here's how that man is described: "He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever;" Psalm 112:9. The delighted worshiper who distributes freely is blessed by the Lord.

And Isaiah put it this way, contrasting the uselessness of dead worship with kind of worship that changes the world: "Is not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

What happens when your worship leads you to do good works like that? What happens? V.8: Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer (true worship, acceptable worship!); you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

I hope you were scared by God's threats, but I hope you are even more eager to receive God's blessings: Don't you want your children to have good lives and to be mighty in the land? Don't you want wealth and riches and an enduring testimony of righteousness? Don't you want things to go well with you? Wouldn't it be great if you could go through life completely unafraid of bad news? Don't you want God to guide you continually and satisfy your desire even in scorched places? Don't you want strong bones? Don't you want to be like a well-watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters do not fail? Don't you want your life to lay a foundation for future generations? Don't you want to be remembered as the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in? These are the blessings that God promises the man who fears the Lord.

Isn't this what we want for our city? "Annapolis had a homelessness problem, until Jesus showed up. People in Annapolis went hungry until the followers of Jesus fed them. Heroin was a huge problem in Anne Arundel county until Jesus drove it out. People used to be enslaved and oppressed and taken advantage of in Annapolis until Jesus brought His justice through the righteousness of His people."

This is what Jesus said: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

That's why we exist! To glorify God! That's why we worship, but what Jesus is saying is that there is a kind of "worship" that *dishonors* God by putting the light of Jesus under a basket, and that happens when we are so caught up in our own piety and prayers that we neglect justice and mercy!

Practical good deeds of mercy in the name of Jesus are what make the glory of God visible. That's how the light of righteousness shines: when Christians feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, visit orphans and widows, fight for justice, and break every yoke of oppression in Jesus' name.

Brothers and sisters, we are taking incremental baby steps as a Church towards this. But these words are solid meat to help us grow up *fast*. We need to stop thinking of good works as optional extras in the Christian life. We need to stop thinking of the opportunities set before us as something for other people to do. We need to stop putting our fingers in our ears when Isaiah blows his trumpet.

And God in His wisdom gives us terrible warnings, but He also woos us with abundant blessings. God doesn't just use one kind of motivation; He uses all kinds. And so I want you to take God's warning seriously, and I want you to long for God's blessings earnestly.

These past few weeks, we've seen the message of Epiphany unfold: Jesus is revealed as the light of the world. Jesus overcomes the darkness on the cross so that His light can start to dawn like the sunrise. And Jesus joins you to Himself and commissions you to be the light of the world. This morning, God has told you how to be the light of the world: Be gracious to the needy. Be merciful to the oppressed. Walk in righteousness, and let the light of Jesus shine through you not just in your own personal worship, but in worship that leads to works of righteousness that bring glory to God and light to world.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

*Let us pray:* "O Righteous God, you did not spare your own Son, but gave Him up for us all. Along with Him, you have given us food and clothing and shelter and all good things. We worship you for your goodness, and we ask that you would convict us by your Spirit and strengthen us to live out the Word we have heard today, so that you might be glorified as the gospel does its work in us and through us. We ask this in Jesus' name, and Amen."