

Doing Justice, the Doorway to JOY

Isaiah 58:1-14



Background: Our text this week opens with a heated exchange between God and his people. The people are disgruntled because they have been zealous in their ritual observances, but find that God no pays absolutely no attention. “Why do we fast, but you do not see?” Sound familiar? In response, God sounds an alarm from heaven, as if this is a life and death matter, therefore we better get it right. There is gaping disconnect between their “religion” and their relationships, an insidious hypocrisy that perverts righteousness for profit and destroys lives. In relentless severity God exposes their “religion” for what it really is. What happens next is not what we would expect. Instead of thundering down judgment, God shows them the road home and the manifold blessings that pour forth when his people join him in doing the holy work of justice. Read his appeal (vv.6-14) out loud before Sunday and allow the repetitive cadences to wash over your soul with increasing intensity. This is God’s “I have a dream!” speech. May it stir our hearts and awaken us from sleep to “ride on the heights of the earth” (58:14). After the message we will partake of the Lord’s table together. So have the elements ready before we start. The love of Christ be with you all.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 58:1-14 (ESV)

I. A Perplexed People: Ritual with no Reward (58:1-3a)

¹ *“Cry aloud; do not hold back;*

*lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.*

² *Yet they seek me daily*

*and **delight** to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that did righteousness
and did not forsake the judgment of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they **delight** to draw near to God.*

^{3a} *‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not?’*

Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’

II. An Angry God: Not Ritual but Right Relationships! (58:3b-5)

^{3b}Behold, in the day of your fast you seek **your own pleasure**,
and oppress all your workers.

⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.

Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.

⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the Lord?

III. Justice Spelled out in Black and White (58:6-14)

A. Freedom rings and fellowship sings (6-9a)

⁶“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?

⁷Is 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?

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.

^{9a}**Then** you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’

B. God’s presence becomes palpable (9b-12)

^{9b}“If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

¹⁰**if** you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.

¹¹And the Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.

¹²And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.

C. God's pleasure becomes delight (13-14)

¹³ *"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing **your pleasure** on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a **delight**
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking **your own pleasure**, or talking idly;
¹⁴ **then** you shall take **delight** in the Lord,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- a. As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you most?
- b. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- c. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?

2. Sermon questions (pick 3)

- a. Intro: As host, Sharon talked about "enjoying scenic routes." What would it look like to take a scenic route this week *in order to* spend time with God?
- b. In Isaiah's time, Israel was caught in rule-keeping (ritual) instead of relationship-keeping (righteousness and justice). Is there an area in your life where you tend to do the same thing? Explain. (For example, our disciplines can sometimes fall into ritual instead of relationship. It is good to remember that our disciplines are for the sake of love not to keep the rules).
- c. Isaiah calls out Israel for oppressing the poor. Where/how are you caring for the poor during this pandemic ("expending time, energy and/or money toward loving the poor")? Discuss ways your small group can do a service project in this time. One idea is this one:

A PBCC friend has begun being a site leader at a new 2nd Harvest food distribution center in San Jose. This particular site (at Yerba Buena High School near the SJ Giants ballpark) distributes food on Mondays, 1:30-6:00 PM. You can sign up here:

https://www.shfb.org/give-help/volunteer/volcalendar-general/?group_type=individual&job_type=Distribute%20Food&tab=calendar&calendar_start_date=6/1/2020

More Details:

This links you to a calendar where you can select the day and site, then sign up from there. Sign-ups are for individual days and people, so you need to

re-do it each week and for everyone. Yerba Buena is a drive-through distribution site, where clients stay in their cars, and we put boxes of food in their trunk. This takes a lot of volunteers to help run smoothly.

- d. Sabbath: Sabbath is a time to stop producing and begin adoring God. It's a time to remember that we are not in control, but He is. It's a time for us to recognize he holds us in his hands and takes care of us. Do you take a Sabbath, or at least Sabbath moments, each week? (Remember, this is not ritual, it is for the sake of love). If not, how can you begin to plan Sabbaths/Sabbath moments into your schedule?
- Extra thoughts on the Sabbath: I lean toward the view that the Sabbath is built into this creation, which means it is built into us. In other words, we are made to take a Sabbath each week. We function best when we take Sabbaths. I think if we would begin taking Sabbaths (or Sabbath moments), we would put many doctors and psychologists out of work. But, also, it really is a powerful antidote to our culture's fascination with consumption, greed and narcissism. In other words, we fight the secularism of our time by taking Sabbaths.