



**A Spiritual Encouragement Message
May 14, 2020**

Unholy Bonds

The book of Isaiah is a powerfully written book with great condemnations of Israel as well as strong redirections from God. Consider it, if you will, as the book in which God corrects, rebukes, and calls Israel to a greater purpose. That's not even acknowledging the vast amount of prophecy regarding the "prince of peace". Isaiah's years of work are generally viewed as around 750-700 B.C. The number is rather foreign to us as we live in AD 2020. Yet, there are significant markers in Israel's history from this time period. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that the Northern Kingdom of Israel would be dominated and exiled by the Assyrian nation in 722 B.C. The Assyrians were a wicked people! In fact, they were a murderous and treacherous army. Even Jonah knew better than to show pity on the Assyrians when he was told to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Of course, as we've studied in Jonah, he was wrong to hold back mercy.

Yet, I want to address a different point. One that helps us understand the depravity of the Jews in Isaiah's day. They had gotten so wicked that God used the evil, wicked, and murderous Assyrians to punish the Jewish people. What would cause God's people to go so terribly wrong that only wickedness of a different sort would satisfy the punishment? Well, hold on to your hats... God lays out the wickedness of his people rather plainly in **Isaiah 58:3-5**.

Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, 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. Is 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?

Fasting for the people of God has always been about humility, mourning, and reliance on God. What they had done was made fasting about pomp, show, and “religiosity”. Fasting had become the veneer of faith that determined who was “faithful” in the eyes of the Jews. Sort of the same way we today love to gauge the faith of others based on one or two minor “infraction”. Interestingly enough, we, like the Jews of Isaiah’s day, can easily put all of our focus on outward signs of religion while completely ignoring the inner heart. I want you to note in God’s correction of these ascetic religious actions, God tells them what true religion, true fasting looks like:

**“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? 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.”
(Isaiah 58:6-8)**

So, to straighten things out, the Jewish people in Isaiah’s day were overly focused on asceticism and pomp, the “outside of the cup”, while largely ignoring their inner faith and the oppressed people before them, indeed, one of their greatest sins, one that is brought up in almost every prophetic book (prophetic books deal largely with punishment for sins) is the oppression of the needy and their unwillingness to extend a helping hand.

Now, when God said that they had their “bonds loosed”, He had the Exodus from Egypt in mind. Yet, for us, we too have had our “bonds loosed”.

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom. 6:17-18)

The question is, what are we going to do with our broken bonds? Are we going to fall back into asceticism and pomp? Are we going to focus on the easily deceptive outside of a man, or seek to transform the inner man in Jesus Christ? It is so incredibly easy to fall into the trap of “people pleasing”. So long as others think we’re religious, then we must be doing well. After all, “let another man’s lips praise thee” (**Prov. 27:2**), right? WRONG! When people praise us for pushing tradition, for tightening bonds, and for oppressing the needy, we need new people!

Furthermore, we might think of bonds in terms of that which is obvious, “sin”. The problem is that when we say “sin”, we create this vague and impersonal term. So, let’s put a name to some sinful bonds:

- Tradition that is not found in scripture
- Forcing political views on each other
- Money (idolatry)
- Comfort (self-seeking)

There are still many others. Yet, it is important that we begin with few. Folks, one blessing to being apart for this long is that we are given an opportunity in self-reflection. We are given a chance to examine if our faith rested in people, services, or some other outside source, or if it truly rests in God. If God, then we hold fast to that which is good: we focus on HIS Word, breaking the bonds of men, and helping those in need. If you are not currently in need, look for those who are indeed! I love you, and hope this message finds you well.

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