

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 129

September 26, 2021



Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath by Bartholomeus Breenbergh Cir 1630

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah

One-Hundred-Twenty-Nine

The Tragedy of Sin

September 26, 2021

Daniel E. Woodhead

Isaiah 59:1–15

¹Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: ²but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear. ³For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue muttereth wickedness. ⁴None sueth in righteousness, and none pleadeth in truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. ⁵They hatch adders' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth; and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. ⁶Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. ⁷Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their paths. ⁸The way of peace they know not; and there is no justice in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein doth not know peace.

⁹Therefore is justice far from us, neither doth righteousness overtake us: we look for light, but, behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity. ¹⁰We grope for the wall like the blind; yea, we grope as they that have no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight; among them that are lusty we are as dead men. ¹¹We roar all like bears, and moan sore like doves: we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. ¹²For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them: ¹³transgressing and denying Jehovah, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. ¹⁴And justice is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness cannot enter. ¹⁵Yea, truth is lacking; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And Jehovah saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice (ASV, 1901).

SIN SEPARATES ONE FROM GOD

Isaiah 59:1–2

¹Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: ²but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear (ASV, 1901).

The nation Israel had begun to think that the Lord was incapable to respond to their needs. However, it was the people's sin that was the cause of their chastisements, both in the case of the Babylonian Exile, their present worldwide Diaspora and in the coming Great Tribulation. In the previous chapter, Isaiah elaborated on the conduct that would save Israel; now he chastises them for their previous actions. The prophet emphasizes that even though the nation had sinned, God is still close to them and He hears their prayers and if so properly led would save them from their dire situations. One's sins builds a barrier between the individual and God. Once a person is mired in sin it is the sinful behavior and thoughts that shapes his desires and activities. He has no common dialogue with someone who lives a life of holiness desiring to please God. Like someone who does not wish to hear or see someone else, God covers his face and ears, as it were, and ignores one's insincere prayers.

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God. Like a partition-wall dividing between them, so that they enjoy no communion with Him in His worship and ordinances; which is greatly the case of many churches. They profess the true God, and the worship of Him, and do practice it in an outward manner but their hearts are far away from God. Sometimes the worship is done in such a cold formal way, or with excessive men pleasing entertainment that the Lord does not grant His gracious presence to them, but stands at a distance from them. Therefore, the prophet says that it is your sins that caused Him to hide His face from you, that He will not hear the people's pleas to Him. This heartless worship will cause Him to hide Himself; withdraw His gracious presence; neglect the prayers put up to Him; deny an answer to them; or, which to the sinful makes it appear that He is not capable.

It is not a question of the Lord's ability to deliver His people from exile the horrible judgments of Tribulation (Revelation 6:1—18:24), or His cry of distress in those awful times. Let them see that it is their iniquities that have separated them from their God (Isaiah 1:15; 50:1). Israel's sins caused God to stop responding to their prayers in their distress until they would listen to the prophets sent to them with the truth. If there was truly a change of heart and behavior God would restore Himself to them in communication and blessing. The principle reasons the Lord does not answer prayer are:

1. God Doesn't Hear Us When We Have Unconfessed Sin

Sin separates us from God. It's that simple. It erects a barrier in between us and God. The only thing that will open the gates again is repentance. This is why it is so very important to live a life characterized by self-examination and repentance for sins so that He can forgive us and cleanse us. Then He will hear our prayers. (Isaiah 59:2: "*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*") Micah 3:4: "*Then they will cry to the Lord, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds.*" Psalm 66:18-19: "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear but certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.*" Proverbs 28:9: "*One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.*" 1 John 3:22: "*And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*"

2. God Doesn't Hear Us When We Worship Idols or Put Other Things Before God

The Lord repeatedly chastised Israel in this book of Isaiah which brought out idolatry as a major sin. He will not relate to His people when they place the abomination of false idols in place of God. When we put anything other than God on the throne of our hearts, it causes a barrier. (Ezekiel 14:7-8 *“For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself. I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.”* Galatians 5:4 *“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace).*

3. God Doesn't Hear Us When There Is Unforgiveness

We must forgive to be forgiven. It is simply not okay for a believer to harbor unforgiveness against anyone. We must choose to forgive and give those hard feelings to God for His disposal. This does not mean we must restore a relationship. We must live at peace with others in as much as it is within our power to do so. The parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates just how pointless it is when we don't forgive others since God has forgiven us so much. (Mark 11:25 *“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But, if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”*

Matthew 5:23-24 *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

4. God Does Not Hear Us When We Lack Charity

The Bible says, “Give to those who ask you,” and although there are certainly exceptions, if we know that someone has a need and we have the ability to meet that need, it is up to us to help. After all, we are but stewards. Everything we have has been given to us. We must do good and share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Hebrews 13:16).

Proverbs 21:13 *“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.”*

5. God Does Not Hear Us When We Don't Ask Correctly

When we ask for things for our own selfish pleasures, or when we want things that are not in the will of God, He doesn't hear us. When we make vain repetitions with words after words that are insincere, He may not listen. But when we ask according to His will, with our hearts, and in His name, He will hear, and we will receive. (James 4:3: *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”* Matthew 6:7: *“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.”* John 5:14 *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”* John 16:23-24: *“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*).

6. God Does Not Hear Us When We Ask in Unbelief

God won't answer our prayers when we don't believe He will do so. He hears us when we pray in belief that He is both listening and able to answer our prayers. (James 1:6-8: *"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."* Matthew 21:22: *"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."*)

7. God Does Not Hear Us When We Are Disobedient

When we know what God wants and deny giving it to Him for our own selfish motives, we are in rebellion to God, and that is sin. Even when what He is asking is hard or puts us outside our comfort zone, we must submit to God always. (Zachariah 7:11-13: *"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the Lord of hosts.* Proverbs 10:24: *"The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted."*)

8. God Does Not Hear Us When There Is Family Discord

Problems in a marriage can affect God's willingness to hear our prayers. We must honor our partners so that our prayers may, in turn, be honored by God. (1 Peter 3:7: *"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."* Ephesians 5:22-24 *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."*)

9. God Doesn't Hear Us When We Don't Ask Him

When we try to use worldly means to get the things, we think we need and want, we can cause ourselves more harm than good. Instead, we should humble ourselves and ask God for His help. (James 4:2 *"You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask."*)

THE LORD ENUMERATES ISRAEL'S SINS

Isaiah 59:3-8

³For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue muttereth wickedness. ⁴None sueth in righteousness, and none

pleadeth in truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. ⁵They hatch adders' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth; and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. ⁶Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. ⁷Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their paths. ⁸The way of peace they know not; and there is no justice in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein doth not know peace.

The Lord through the prophet proceeds to list an enumeration of the sins of which they were guilty. Since idolatry is not being mentioned, this prophecy probably belongs to other times than Isaiah's, when the sin of idolatry greatly prevailed. The prophet is given many prophecies which cover his time all the way to the end of the Tribulation and on into the Messianic Kingdom. He begins the account with the sin of shedding *blood*; the blood of innocents. *Your lips have spoken lies*; or *falsehood* that is, false, doctrines, so called because contrary to the word of truth, and which deceive men: *your tongue hath muttered perverseness*; that which is in the Church Age a perversion of the Gospel of Christ, and causing a ruin and misdirection to the souls of men; which is contrary to the truth of the Scriptures. This is premeditated, that is, done with design, and on purpose. The result of which is the abounding of errors and heresies in the present day, openly taught and divulged, to the ruin of souls, a concept the Lord also seems here to be referencing.

None calleth for justice, or righteousness; The leaders do not seek any true justice, the judges take bribes, and they either do not know God or think He cannot see what they do. No one calls out to God and if they attempt it is done improperly with insincerity.

They hatch cockatrice-eggs, and weave the spider's web. This refers to the promulgation of false doctrines according to their own misunderstanding of God's will and the Scriptures. On the surface they may seem fair and plausible, but are poisonous and wicked; as the *eggs* of the *cockatrice*, which may look like, and may be taken for, any eggs that are fit to eat. These false teachings that they spin out of their brains are nothing but schemes that are useless, and unprofitable, as *the spider's web*; and serve only to ensnare and entangle the minds of men, and will not stand before the word of God. God says that *he that eateth of their eggs dieth*: as a man that eats of cockatrice-eggs dies immediately, being poisoned. The deceived that approves of false doctrines, receives them, and feeds upon them, dies spiritually and eternally. These are damnable doctrines, which bring upon men swift destruction. They are poisonous, which destroy the souls of men: *and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper*; or *cockatrice*. The sense is, that if a man is cautious, and does not eat of the cockatrice-eggs, but sets his foot on them, and crushes them, out comes the venomous creature, and he is in danger of being hurt by it. So, a man that does not embrace false doctrines, and escapes eternal death by them, but tramples upon them, opposes them, and endeavors to crush and destroy them, brings upon himself the rebuke of the false prophets and teachers.

Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works. As spiders' webs are not fit to make garments, because they are too thin to cover naked bodies, or shelter from bad weather, or injuries from different causes, so neither the false doctrines of men

will be of any use to themselves, or to others that receive them. The person who places any hope or trust on them will be cut off, and his trust in them will be like a spider's web, ensnaring him of no avail to him. *Their works are works of iniquity*: both of preacher and follower, even their best works are sinful; not only as being imperfect, and having a mixture of sin in them, and so filthy rags, are insufficient to justify them before God. These false teachers and those who follow them make haste to commit all manner of sin, taking delight and pleasure, and continuing in it is their course of life. They have not made peace with God, being deceived that it is made with these false teachers, and not by God's will and are ignorant of the steps and methods taken to procure it; nor do they know the way of peace of conscience, or how to attain to that which is true and solid; nor the way to eternal peace and happiness, which is alone by God.

THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION WITHOUT GOD

Isaiah 59:9–15

⁹Therefore is justice far from us, neither doth righteousness overtake us: we look for light, but, behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity. ¹⁰We grope for the wall like the blind; yea, we grope as they that have no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight; among them that are lusty we are as dead men. ¹¹We roar all like bears, and moan sore like doves: we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. ¹²For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them: ¹³transgressing and denying Jehovah, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. ¹⁴And justice is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness cannot enter. ¹⁵Yea, truth is lacking; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And Jehovah saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice (ASV, 1901).

Under the conditions so vividly described in this chapter the prophet cites four dire results:

1. There is no justice; it is far from them. They have suffered untold wrongs from fellow Israelites, and particularly from the Gentile nations.
2. Righteousness does not overtake them. They are temporarily set aside in their national election (Romans 11:1-25), and God's righteousness in Christ has not been granted to them to displace their own self-righteousness because of forfeiture of spiritual privilege by long persistence in the sins described.
3. Spiritual blindness has overtaken them. Their hope for light ends. They are like dead men because they are lifeless spiritually (Isaiah 38:14 7:16),
4. Frustration and suffering follow them. In their sadness they mourn greatly like doves and growl like bears (Isaiah 38:14; Ezekiel 7:16). They are hoping for justice and God's salvation but it is far from them.

In conclusion, the wicked sin of perversion of justice is vividly admitted. Right judgment is exactly inverted. The innocent are condemned, the guilty acquitted. Justice seems too far off to be able to hear those who appeal to it. Truth is fallen in the street; *i.e.* false witness' prevail

over true witness' in the courts of justice. Equity cannot enter because it is not admitted inside the courts, but waits outside. Truth itself is altogether gone, and is missing. This is the worst of all. For truth is the basis of any society's social fabric, and the groundwork of all morality. Once there be no regard for truth in a state, no discredit to lying, then all virtue is undermined and evil-doers prosper. The man who "abstains from evil," and declines to employ (as others do) the practices of fraud and violence, simply draws the ire of those who are unscrupulous and evil.

Next message: THE SEARCH FOR A REDEEMER

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