

# THE GOOD SHIP-WOR

8/8/10

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Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

<sup>1</sup>The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

<sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

<sup>11</sup>What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed breasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

<sup>12</sup>When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more;

<sup>13</sup>bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation—I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.

<sup>14</sup>Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.

<sup>15</sup>**When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.**

<sup>16</sup>**Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil,**

<sup>17</sup>**learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.**

<sup>18</sup>Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

<sup>19</sup>If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;

<sup>20</sup>but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

(This sermon is written in such a way that the speaker can follow the text easily; therefore, paragraph changes do not necessarily reflect a change in subject)

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Ever since the beginning of recorded history the human race has been trying to improve on it, get more out of it, and find people who study its effect on the human situation. Thousands of people are trained and receive degrees every year in leading it and propagating its usefulness to life.

Large buildings are constructed of the best materials and designed by the best architects to inspire and instill a sense of awe. These are built with the sacrificial gifts of people who consider themselves worthy aspirants to a higher experience that they search for on an almost daily basis.

Yet, when it comes right down to it, each of us is absolutely sure the way we want it done is the correct way, but, in reality, none of us is ever absolutely sure we do it right; and when we study how it has been done down through the years, we are absolutely sure there have been times when it has been done absolutely wrong.

We would never condone the sacrifice of children as part of a ritual to feel a closer presence to God, but it has been done, all in the name of worship.

When the god Malek didn't seem to be satisfied with the children who were sired by upright men and born to temple prostitutes and thrown into flames coming from his statue, the practice of worship evolved and for the sacrifice, children were replaced with animals and birds.  
**THINGS WERE IMPROVING!**

Eventually the bodies of animals were separated from their blood and the meat was used for food and the blood was poured upon alters.

**THINGS WERE IMPROVING!**

But in the process of these sacrifices, people were ignoring the needs of those around them and the prophets began to cry out for justice and a changing of their ways.

Thus we come to our lectionary text today from the Prophet Isaiah. In the context of the larger issue of how to worship Isaiah says, “15-17”  
**READ.**

Worship is such a simply profound subject that it is almost impossible to talk about and much easier to experience it. But, the lingering issue before the congregation of Isaiah’s time is the same issue that lingers before us and our time; “are we worshipping correctly”?

This sermon is an attempt to have us realize that faithful followers of God should not presume acceptance on God’s part when it comes to worship. Sincerity may be the basic virtue when it comes to worship but in the Isaiah passage it would appear there is a case of being sincerely wrong.

On a trip to ID, we had the privilege of worshipping with a congregation that belongs to a denomination that does not practice open communication. That’s a problem for me! It was not good when I sat down in the pew and saw the Communion Table was set.

However, when it came time for Communion, our row was ushered up to the kneeler, we received the wafer (Kind of like a quarter made out of starch) and then the little cup of real wine (kind of made me smack my lips and the starchy taste disappeared).

After the worship I had an opportunity to talk to the pastor and thank him for including us in the Communion. He said, “We consider this the Lord’s Table, you are always welcome.”

I was shocked! They had stepped away from the denomination’s teaching of exclusivity.

I felt good, but it certainly is an example of one situation that differs between Christian Churches and begs the question, does God have an opinion on that issue? Are they worshipping correctly by fencing the table? Are we too inclusive by open communion?

Are there certain things which God looks for in the practice of worship and do we meet God’s criteria? Where are God’s specific instructions written down clearly? Can God’s people lose sight of the connection between worship of God and serving God’s purposes in daily life?

To be the people of God is not just to use the correct words or worship in some prescribed manner handed down from Moses’ time and to do so in dedicated places.

To be God’s people means to behave according to God’s will in relationship with our neighbor; “seeking justice, correcting oppression, defending the orphans and pleading for the widow.”

A few examples: Big Brothers or Sisters or Foster Parents or mentoring, helping those who have a need when we have, the resources; time, talent, and maybe treasure.

It would seem it is not so much sacrifice but sacrificial living that God desires.

It is possible, so to speak, that we have blood on our hands and prayers on our lips and important festivals of observance that seem oh so

important; God may want to have an argument with us about some of our “worshipful acts.”

“Come now, let us argue it out,” it says in V-18a. That doesn’t sound very polite!

Let’s ask ourselves a few basic questions that should cause at least a little introspection.

When you go to Church to worship, do you put on your best clothing? Why? Is it for your need or God’s or someone else? Does it help you worship God better if you are dressed up? Are we honoring self or God and can we separate the two under those circumstances? Clothing can be connected to what we feel in worship.

When a child is fussy in worship, does your first thought go something like this, “noisy children in worship are like New Years Resolutions, made to be carried out?”

Or is it something like, “oh, it’s that same kid but soon he will grow out of it and if I miss a line or two of the sermon; so be it. After all I’ve had 50 or 60 or 70 years of training and I should have it right by now.”

Is it really true that some people can worship better on the golf course than on a hard pew? Or, is it true that God some how seems to be more present in the gathered community than when I just stay home and listen on the radio or watch Schuler, Osteen, or Schwiegert?

When I go to church and fall asleep during the sermon does God care more than the preacher or my wife who keeps poking me?

A lady asked her neighbor what color her pastor's eyes were, "I don't know" she replied, when he prays he closes his and when he preaches I close mine."

A preacher was digging under his bed one day looking for his favorite pair of shoes when he ran across a box with two eggs and two thousand dollars in it. Immediately he went to the kitchen to inquire about his strange find from his wife. "Oh" she said, "every time you preach a poor sermon, I put an egg in the box."

He got a rather proud look on his face since he had been in the ministry for 40 years and there were only two eggs. "But what is the \$2000 for," he asked?

Whenever I get a dozen eggs I sell them," she said.

When it comes to the subject of worship, in the light of our text today, there are two aspects we probably need to consider.

One has to do with the movements of worship and the second has to do with the motivations of worship.

Under movements, we could put such actions as call to worship, confession, assurance of pardon, acts of praise, preaching the Word, fellowship and sacrifice.

These, along with getting yourself to the house of worship, offering a ride to someone, being involved in the worship in some way to make sure it is carried out smoothly are important aspects of paying tribute to God (in and through Jesus Christ); important movements.

As important as these are, the motivations are more critical than the movements.

Isaiah's message is: know your motive.

As Christians, we should be asking ourselves how our personal piety is connected to the practices of daily living. What measure of consistency is there between the hearts and the habits of those who profess allegiance to God?

We all, at one time or another, have gone to church out of habit. Our attitude was wrong, we sat behind someone whom we didn't like, the preacher took to meddling in the sermon and to top it off the plate was passed twice. That's a recipe for quit!

That's enough to make you consider not coming back for a couple of weeks or years. But out of good training and good habit you came back to the next week anyway, why?

Probably because you realized that though your motions and motives were empty on that particular Sunday, there was a loving God standing behind the veil of meaningless worship waiting for you to get your heart right; to adjust your attitude.

To realize once again that motive is what puts soul into the moves we make. That is why it is so important to have our hearts right coming into worship!

It is what gives Spirit and life to the letter of the law and helps us to realize that no worship service is perfect and no worshipper is perfect.

Sinful as we are and with as much blood as we may have on our hands, as much distraction as we have on our minds, as intentional as I may be at times in my ignoring a needy neighbor and as callused as I am to some of the moral issues that I know I should be addressing;

Behind the veil of worship stands a God who in Isaiah's words says, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson they shall become like wool."

I suspect that every Sunday there are acts of worship planned by the preacher that are not how God would have them done.

I equally suspect that every Sunday there are parishioners taking part in those movements and with motives that are suspect.

But, I do not suspect; I KNOW! There is a God who loves us with an eternal love. Each Sunday while looking down at our feeble attempts to worship God may quizzically look down at how and why we do certain things. But, then is reminded of the great Grace given to us in Jesus the Christ.

And God says as a mother says to her child who has lined up all the chairs in the living room and is leading worship for her dolls and the family dog; "Isn't it fun to play church!"