

"What Is There to Talk About?" or, The Divine Summons

"Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1: 18).

Introduction:

1. The first chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah calls our attention to a much needed discussion. That this is a high level discussion is seen from the fact that it involves God Himself. The Bible indicates that some men have been allowed to reason with God.
2. Every man has been subpoenaed to appear in court — God's court. This is the court of eternity. In it stands every man, beset by personal sin, and deserving the wages, or the sentence, of death. Isaiah sounds the first "hear ye" of a divine summons, the themes of which are to be found throughout the rest of his prophecy — themes of a great indictment.

I. The Forfeiting of Life (Isa. 1:2-6).

A. By rebellion.

1. Isaiah pictures God as a loving father who mourns the disobedience of his children: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isa. 1:2).
2. The story of the prodigal son is as old as the story of man. Here we see it re-enacted on a nationwide scale.
3. Shakespeare's King Lear, suffering the heartbreak of having his own children depose him, cries out "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."
4. How pathetic it is to see children mistreat a father who has given them everything. How foolish to see children turn from a heavenly Father who offers them life itself.

B. By ungratefulness.

1. Coupled with rebellion is the sin of being inconsiderate of the source of one's blessings.
2. Isaiah sadly states: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isa. 1:3).
3. It is useless for people who frivolously ignore God to pretend that He is in any of their thoughts.

C. By being saddled with sin.

1. As Isaiah says, "Ah, sinful nation," he is literally saying, "Shame on you." He goes on to elaborate: "A people laden with iniquity" (Isa. 1:4).
2. Here are people who are burdened down with the weight of their own sins —

who have chosen to live life saddled with sin. So is every one who forsakes God and tries to live on his own.

D. By ignoring the malignancy of the soul.

1. Periodically, some national figure succumbs to the dreadful menace of cancer and we are again reminded that it strikes both the rich and the poor.
2. The Bible speaks of a more fearful malignancy which destroys the soul. Isaiah says, "Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither mollified with ointment" (Isa. 1:5, 6).
3. The malignancy described is the result of unforgiven sin. There is no medicine for such wounds.

II. Spiritual Confusion (Isa. 1:11-14).

In describing the worship of the people, Isaiah quite frankly states that they remind him of the leaders of those ancient wicked cities, Sodom and Gomorrah: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah" (Isa. 1: 10). These two cities, known for their gross wickedness, had a form of religion.

A. Sacrifice without meaning.

1. Sacrifice, rightly understood, is basic to any genuine worship experience. In the Old Testament it involved the sacrifice of animals.
2. In the light of the New Testament, sacrifice becomes personal, involving one's own life.
3. Yet we hear Isaiah say, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or rams, or of he goats" (Isa. 1:11).
4. Real sacrifice must involve giving something that you will miss tremendously. For this reason, the Old Testament sacrifice was to be a perfect animal, without blemish.
5. The New Testament pictures the sacrifice of placing one's daily life on the altar in such a way that self is denied and Christ is honored (Rom. 12:1, 2).

B. What is real sacrifice?

1. If what you are giving to God is something that you will never miss, then you have no concept of real sacrifice. Also, sacrifice to God implies undivided allegiance.
- 2.. This was not true of the people to whom Isaiah spoke. During his reign as King, Ahaz went to Damascus seeking to pacify the king of Assyria. Out of this experience we are told that Ahaz sacrificed to the gods of Damascus (2 Chron. 28:23). Having succumbed to the might of Assyrian pressure, Ahaz then imposed idolatry and polytheism, Assyrian style, in his own land of Judah. Judah became

like the other territories under Assyria and mingled the cult of the Assyrians into the temple worship at Jerusalem. "It is this kind of religious compromise and meaningless sacrifice that Isaiah has in mind. It does not take a seer to recognize that our contemporary society has many gods and many altars on which people give life itself. We do well to remember that God accepts only the sacrifice of one who worships Him alone.

B. Monotonous worship.

1. When people come to God's house with a worldly attitude and a noncommittal way of sacrificing, they accomplish little more than getting dirt on the carpets. Isaiah says, "When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?" (Isa. 1: 12). Therefore, God says of all their observances: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them" (Isa. 1: 14).
2. If worship services seem monotonous to you sometimes, just remember how they must seem to God when multitudes keep trampling down His courts without really meaning anything by it.
3. Of course, the thing that makes worship monotonous to people is that too often they leave their heart outside the door. Bending the knee at God's altar means nothing unless one's will is bent as well. Monotonous worship comes when you refuse to make any new adventures in faith, refuse all new opportunities for commitment, and decide to scale no new heights for the Lord.

III. The Demands of Holiness (Isa. 1:16-17).

A. Stop sinning and start living for God.

1. The admonition seems simple enough. Yet the simplicity of it leads many people to think it is something that man can do on his own any time he desires.
2. Few people have stopped to realize that there is difficulty involved in a man's obeying this admonition. Evil has such a grip on a man that he cannot free himself from its clutches without outside help.

B. Isaiah admonishes the people to "learn to do well."

1. Now animals by instinct do things as well the first time they do them as the last. But men are different. Sin has blinded them and they have everything to learn, and little capacity for the learning of it until somehow they can be granted a new nature.
2. How then does one live up to the demands of God's holiness? "We are no worse than others" would be a good excuse if the world were to judge us — but God is to judge us. This means that life has to be argued out with God. How then can we measure up?

IV. The Offer of God (Isa. 1: 18).

A. There is a way out — provided!

1. God reminds us that *if we are willing to listen to Him*, there is a way out of our sin problem. God offers to help us meet His own demands of holiness. The only way this can be accomplished is by conversion.
 2. Man has to become a new person through faith in Jesus Christ. Being born spiritually, through faith and obedience is spoken of as being a new birth - of being born again.
- B. It is said that poets are born and not made. Whether this is so or not I cannot say, but I do know that it is true where men are concerned. People have to be born spiritually from above.
1. This is the essence of Jesus' message to Nicodemus as He said, "Except ye be born from above, you shall not see the kingdom of Heaven" (John 3:3). Again, "Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). God's offer is that men can be made white — free from the stain of guilt.
 2. Isaiah vividly pictures our sins as the stain of blood which sinks into our very souls and which cannot be bleached out with any human remedy. Only God can erase the stain of sin. This is God's offer.
 3. To accept this offer one must accept the reality of his own sin and the futility of his own way of life, believe in Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:24; Rom. 10:9), repent of his sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30-31), confess his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:36-37), and be baptized in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47-48) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). His sins are then washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 22:16 with Rev. 1:5); he is born of water and the Spirit. He is now in Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27), and because he is in Christ he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

V. The Crisis (Isa. 1: 19, 20).

- A. The crisis comes as you contemplate your own decision in this matter.
1. Isaiah sets forth the great IF: "If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land: but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 1:19, 20).
 2. God is saying that everything depends on whether or not we are willing to consent to His terms and to hear His commands.
- B. God is calling you.
1. Above the clamor of the marketplace where men and women are selling their souls for trinkets, comes this word of God calling us to the crisis of decision.
 2. Since God gave us life, it is for God to say how it can be lived and how it can be forfeited. God's invitation to reason with him is another way of urging us to reconsider our plans, to examine what we are about to do with our souls.
 3. If somehow we would take the time to write out every planned decision, and then follow through with only those we could conscientiously justify in the light of God's Word, we would drastically revise our itinerary. Isaiah reminds us that commitment to God is not made in wild emotion but must ever be the result of clear reasoning.

4. We must always be on guard against confusing our opinions with the reasons given by God. A man who says he does not like apple pie but has never tasted it is being unreasonable.
5. You may prefer to reason only on the way you treat your family, your friends, or your neighbors. But God says that your relationship to Him is dependent upon how you have treated Jesus Christ.

Conclusion.

You must face God's invitation alone. No general has ever made a more crucial stand than that which God asks you to make. The offer is still yours, and while you wait there is a time of crisis.

— Author unknown
Changes were made on how
to be saved at IV., B., 3
in the outline