

Sharing the Joy of Living Part 5

Sackcloth and Ashes

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Isaiah 58:1-12
 Isaiah 60:1-5
 Joel 2:12,13
 Revelation 14:6-12

“Brighten the Corner Where You Are”
 “Saved By Grace”
 “Sweeter as the years go by”
 “We’ve A Story to Tell to the Nation”

The prophet Isaiah is burden with the great need of reformation of God’s people. They had lost their first love. They were not representing God’s message of Love. They where busy going to church and looking good doing it. From a far the people outside watching would not know that spiritual stench on the inside. They their land was suffering because of the wickedness of the people. So he pleads in Joel 2:12-13

That is why the Lord says,
 “Turn to me now, while there is time.
 Give me your hearts.
 Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.
 13 Don’t tear your clothing in your grief,
 but tear your hearts instead.”
 Return to the Lord your God,
 for he is merciful and compassionate,
 slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
 He is eager to relent and not punish.
 14 Who knows? Perhaps he will give you a reprieve,
 sending you a blessing instead of this curse.
 Perhaps you will be able to offer grain and wine
 to the Lord your God as before.

Let us remind ourselves of the setting once more. The message is to church members. They have a form of godliness but no God in reality in their hearts. Note also there was a tradition of wearing a special garment when someone was repenting and fasting. It is called sackcloth. Sackcloth is a coarse, black cloth made from goat’s hair that was worn together with the burnt ashes of wood as a sign of mourning for personal and national disaster, as a sign of repentance and at times of prayer for deliverance. So they not only had on this ugly black cloth but they would pour ashes over them.

When someone wanting to show his or her repentant heart that one would often wear sackcloth, sit in ashes, and put ashes on top of his head for about 25 hours. Today some churches still have the practice but they call it Ash Wednesday when they put the ashes on their foreheads as a sign of penitent repentance.

Note what Joel said. He is saying you do have a tradition of showing your repentance by ripping your clothes and sitting in ashes, but it has not done a thing for you yet, because to never really understand the real meaning of it. So he said in Joel 2:13: **Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.** Accompanied with this sackcloth and ashes was fasting. As the fasting, and outward righteousness, was not cutting for the people of God.

What is sackcloth symbolizing for us today? Is it self-righteousness? Is it works without faith or a relationship with Jesus? Is it hypocrisy? We can look so pious, like those sitting in ashes, but while "sitting in ashes" we are still doing what we want to do underneath it all.

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had this burden of making sure the people of God make the gospel attractive. But they made it a burden. They needed reformation. In your attempt to make things right with God don't pretend by your pious actions. I know you believe that the outward practice of tearing off your clothing and sitting in ashes is sign that you are repentant. But do not do that. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead."

Here we see a clearer picture of this message in Isaiah 58:1-12 Turn in your bibles, iPad, smartphones

Here in Isaiah the prophet is pleading for reformation, repentance.

"Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins!

2 Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me.

They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God.

They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me.

3 'We have fasted before you!' they say. 'Why aren't you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don't even notice it!' "I will tell you why!" I respond.

"It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers.

Does this sound familiar?

4 What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling?

Note this important part

This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me.

5 You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance,
bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind.

You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes.

Is this what you call fasting?

Do you really think this will please the Lord?

That is a serious question to ponder. Why do you do what you do? Is it because of a loving relationship with Jesus or are you trying to get brownie points?

Here's the kind of fast

6 "No, this is the kind of fasting I want:

Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;

lighten the burden of those who work for you.

Let the oppressed go free,

and remove the chains that bind people.

7 Share your food with the hungry,

and give shelter to the homeless.

Give clothes to those who need them,

and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

The real evidence of a relationship with Jesus is our involvement is social justice. This is the heart of the gospel

- **This is unconditional acceptance**
- **This is unconditional love**
- **Compassionate living.**
- **Kindness**
- **Meekness (Humility)**

Let us continue to read the results of this kind of fast.

8 "Then your salvation will come like the dawn,
and your wounds will quickly heal.

Your godliness will lead you forward,

and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.

9 Then when you call, the Lord will answer.

'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply.

Now let us go to Isaiah 60: 1-4 Here the prophet is writing as though the reformation has taken place. Now we see the results

“Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see.

For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you.

2 Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth,
but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you.

3 All nations will come to your light;
mighty kings will come to see your radiance.

4 “Look and see, for everyone is coming home!
Your sons are coming from distant lands;
your little daughters will be carried home.

5 Your eyes will shine,
and your heart will thrill with joy,
for merchants from around the world will come to you.
They will bring you the wealth of many lands.

Note brothers and sisters this morning. The light is Jesus. Light is a symbol of Divine presence. We are to lift up Jesus and all mankind will be drawn to him. Right where we are we are to shine. The song says (we sang earlier)

Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do,
Do not wait to shed your light afar;
To the many duties ever near you now be true,
Brighten the corner where you are.

Brighten the corner where you are!
Brighten the corner where you are!
Someone far from harbor you may guide across the bar;
Brighten the corner where you are!

We have a task to do. We are to expose not impose. There are some tough messages to share but without a loving relationship with Christ, those messages cannot be properly understood.

Turn with me to Revelation 14:6-12. This is the THREE ANGLES MESSAGES

6 And I saw another angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to this world—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. **7** “Fear God,” he shouted. “Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water.”

8 Then another angel followed him through the sky, shouting, “Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen—because she made all the nations of the world drink the wine of her passionate immorality.”

9 Then a third angel followed them, shouting, “Anyone who worships the beast and his statue or who accepts his mark on the forehead or on the hand 10 must drink the wine of God’s anger. It has been poured full strength into God’s cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. 11 The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever, and they will have no relief day or night, for they have worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of his name.”

12 This means that God’s holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus.

We have a story to tell to the nation. That story is about Jesus and his love. That’s the story. Now, like parents have to raise children, sometime, there are some information about the future parents have to share that might not be to share, but it is necessary. The child will appreciate and understand the message best only when the relationship between the parents is a loving one. The first thing I want them to hear and see is Jesus. It is the same thing with the Three Angels Message. It may seem harsh on the surface. But when we know that Jesus is our judge and savior (the prosecutor and the defense lawyer) we have no worry. Most importantly, we have a loving relationship with Jesus and serve him out of a true motive of love, the messages are not so harsh anymore. And we can share them in a more loving way because we have been with Jesus.

Can you see Jesus and can others see Jesus in you.

Open our eyes lord we want to see Jesus

We’ve a story to tell to the nations,

That shall turn their hearts to the right,

A story of truth and mercy,

A story of peace and light,

A story of peace and light.

Refrain

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,

And the dawning to noonday bright;

And Christ’s great kingdom shall come on earth,

The kingdom of love and light.

Stanza by Barrington Brennen

We’re to make the gospel attractive

By our lives and attitude sweet

With hearts and hands spreading love

So others will know God’s peace

So others will know God’s peace

Refrain by Barrington Brennen

For the gospel of Jesus is beautiful
And our lives will reflect his love
So soon we will see our Savior come
When we would have shared his love.