

Shallow Worship

Isaiah 58:1-7

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
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Isaiah 58:1-7 – Shallow worship exposed (NIV)

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. ² For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶ “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

v1 – What did God’s people need to hear?

Cry aloud, spare not...tell My people their transgression: God spoke loudly and directly. His people need to hear their transgression — but would they hear?

v2 – How did the worship of God’s people appear?

They seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways: On the surface, it seemed that God’s people loved Him and were devoted to Him. They had the reputation of a nation that did righteousness, and they looked like people who would take delight in approaching God.

How could it appear they were devoted to God and that not really be the case?

Their hearts were not in their rituals. They practiced religious ceremonies out of habit but didn’t really seek to know God.

v3 – How had God responded to the fasting of His people?

Why have we fasted...and You have not seen? With this spiritual veneer, they felt God was unfair to them. It was as if they said, “LORD, we have fasted, but You still don’t answer our prayer. Don’t you know that we seek you daily, delight to know Your ways, do righteousness, and take delight in approaching You? Yet You do not answer our prayers!”

Why had God not answered their prayers?

in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers: His people didn’t fast with the right heart and did it only as an empty ritual. The reality was that even on a day when they fasted, they still exploited their employees. God didn’t accept their fasting when it wasn’t connected with a sincere heart of obedience.

How had Judah exploited their workers?

They carried on the slave trade, trafficking in the souls, blood, and bodies of men!

v4 – What were their objectives in fasting?

Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness: They fasted for needs, certainly; but selfish needs like “LORD, help me win this argument.” “LORD, help me defeat this person.” Though their prayer was accompanied with fasting, it was still a selfish, even wicked prayer — so God did not answer.

Why did the Judeans fast?

You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high: The purpose of their fasting was to glorify themselves, to make their voice heard on high. God says, “No more. You will not fast as you do this day.”

v5 – What did God think of their fasting?

The kind of fasting God rebukes here is a hollow, empty, show, without spiritual substance behind it. This isn’t the kind of fast God has chosen. Even though they do all the right things in fasting (*bow down his head like a bulrush...spread out sackcloth and ashes*), God does not consider this a fast.

How did the people of Isaiah's day have the same problem as the Pharisees of Jesus' day?

They trusted in empty ritual, apart from the spiritual reality. Real fasting — fasting that is partnered with real repentance, and isn't only about image — has great power before God (Matthew 17:21).

- God sees through the hypocrisy of empty religious ritual, including fasting.
- In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, He told how the self-righteous Pharisee made a special point to say, *"I fast twice a week"* (Luke 18:9-14).

How may we avoid superficial worship?

John 4:23 – *true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*

The context here was the Samaritan woman at the well who asked Jesus if Mount Gerizim was the right place to worship God. The overall lesson about worshipping the Lord in spirit and truth is that worship of God is not to be confined to a single geographical location or necessarily regulated by the temporary provisions of Law.

- With the coming of Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the centrality of the temple in worship.
- With the coming of Christ, all of God's children gained equal access to God through Him.
- Worship became a matter of the heart, not external actions, and directed by truth rather than ceremony.

Worship is what we do all the time to honor God, it is not just singing hymns on Sunday.

Mark 12:30 – *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*

To worship God in spirit and truth necessarily involves loving Him with heart, soul, mind and strength.

How specifically do we worship God in spirit?

True worship must be "in spirit," that is, engaging the whole heart. Unless there's a real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit.

How specifically do we worship God in truth?

We must be properly informed about God with a biblical view of Him. Unless we have knowledge of the God we worship, there is no worship in truth.

What happens when we worship God in spirit only?

Spirit without truth leads to a shallow, overly emotional experience that could be compared to a high. As soon as the emotion is over, when the fervor cools, the worship ends.

What happens when we worship God in truth only?

Truth without spirit can result in a dry, passionless encounter that can easily lead to a form of joyless legalism.

How can we best meld spirit and truth in our worship?

The more we know about God, the more we appreciate Him. The more we appreciate, the deeper our worship. The deeper our worship, the more God is glorified.

- Truth and only truth can properly influence the emotions in a way that brings honor to God. The truth of God, being of infinite value, is worthy of infinite passion.

v6 – What kind of fast did God say He wanted to see?

God tells His people, "If you want to fast the way that pleases Me, begin with getting right with your brothers and sisters. Stop oppressing others and reach out to help others."

Why was it so important to stop oppressing others?

This is connected to having a right relationship with God... those with a flawed relationship with God will oppress others; those with a right relationship with God will be a blessing to others.

v7 – What should people be doing if they have a right relationship with God?

Sharing food with the hungry and providing shelter and clothes to those needing help. Viewing the needy as their own kin.

What is the proper motivation for helping others?

Out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us. It should not be that we think this will earn God's favor. Such an attitude will result in our rewards being burned up at the Bema Seat judgment...

1 Corinthians 3:13 – *each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is*

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- To avoid superficial worship, we must worship in spirit and truth; both are essential!
- Get right with God to be right with others
- It pleases God when we help others... there will be rewards in heaven for this!