

Seeing and Serving the Poor and the Oppressed with the Justice of God

I. Isaiah 58 and God's Concern for the Poor and Oppressed

"Cry aloud; do not hold back;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

²Yet they seek me daily
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that did righteousness
and did not forsake the judgment of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they delight to draw near to God.

³'Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.

⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.

⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the Lord?

⁶"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

⁹Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

If you take away the yoke from your midst,
 the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry
 and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
 then shall your light rise in the darkness
 and your gloom be as the noonday.
¹¹ And the Lord will guide you continually
 and satisfy your desire in scorched places
 and make your bones strong;
 and you shall be like a watered garden,
 like a spring of water,
 whose waters do not fail.
¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
 you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
 you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
 the restorer of streets to dwell in.
¹³ “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
 from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
 and call the Sabbath a delight
 and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
 if you honor it, not going your own ways,
 or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the Lord,
 and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
 I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
 for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” – Isaiah 58

The Book of Isaiah

“The point of Isaiah 58 is this: Piety that does not produce a passion for God-exalting social justice and practical mercy is worthless. Or to put it positively: God promises that we will break forth like the dawn if our piety produces a passion for social justice and practical mercy.”¹

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“Piety that does not produce a passion for God-exalting justice and mercy is worthless. God promises that we will break forth like the dawn if our piety produces a passion for justice and mercy.”

¹ John Piper, Sermon, October 6, 2002

He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? – Micah 6:8

While justice can be used to talk about retributive justice in which a person is punished for their wrongdoings, most of the time the Bible uses the word justice to refer to restorative justice, in which those who are unrightfully hurt or wronged are restored and given back what was taken from them. Taken this way, the combination of righteousness and justice that God dictates means a selfless way of life in which people do everything they can to ensure that others are treated well and injustices are fixed.

“The gospel is the good news of what God has done, especially in Jesus Christ, especially in his cross and resurrection; it is not what we do. Because it is news, it is to be proclaimed. But because it is powerful, it not only reconciles us to God, but transforms us, and that necessarily shapes our behavior, priorities, values, relationships with people, and much more. These are not optional extras for the extremely sanctified, but *entailments* of the gospel.”²

Isaiah’s Indictment

Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high. – Isaiah 58:4

“There is a well-known sermon that many of you have heard about the pain of Good Friday turning into the joy of Easter, called “Sunday’s Comin’!” The refrain occurs over and over, “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s comin’!” Well, we need another sermon to become well-known, namely, “It’s Sunday, but Monday’s comin’!” We’re here with our voices lifted and our heads bowed and our prayers rising! What does God think of it? You’ll find out tomorrow: “It’s Sunday, but Monday’s comin’!” Will the piety of Sunday produce a passion for justice on Monday? That’s the question of Isaiah 58.”³

What Kind of Justice and Mercy Does God Seek?

“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to **loose the bonds of wickedness,**
to **undo the straps of the yoke,**
to **let the oppressed go free,**

² DA Carson

³ John Piper, Sermon

and to **break every yoke?**
⁷Is it not to **share your bread with the hungry**
 and **bring the homeless poor into your house;**
 when you see the naked, to **cover him,**
 and **not to hide yourself from your own flesh?**
 If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
¹⁰**if you pour yourself out for the hungry**
 and satisfy the desire of the afflicted...Isaiah 58:6-10

What Does Humanity “Need?”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” - Exodus 20:16

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” – Ephesians 4:25

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” – Ephesians 4:29-30

“Many times, by their fears or jealousies, critical spirit, and suspicions men create that in their hearts which had never a place in the suspected parties’ imagination.”⁴

He has told you, O man, what is good;
 and what does the Lord require of you
 but to do justice, and to love kindness,
 and to walk humbly with your God? – Micah 6:8

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
 is God in his holy habitation. – Psalm 68:5

“The Rock, His work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.” (Psalm 89:14)

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute,” (Psalm 82:3)

⁴ Ralph Venning, “The Puritans On Loving One Another”, pg. 23.

“...learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and plead the widow’s cause,” (Isaiah 1:17)

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others,” (Luke 11:42)

How Do We Walk in This?

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” – James 1:26-27