

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

***The Least of These:
Ministering to Those in Need***
Lesson 6: Worship the Creator

How is worship and how we treat the poor connected to the 1888 message?

Isaiah was known around the nation for his strident pronouncements and his claims to speak on behalf of God. He certainly caught the people's attention when he arrived at the temple and his proclamations echoed around the city like a trumpet blast. He had a message from God. But the people missed it, frustrated that their recent faithfulness had gone unnoticed.

"We have fasted before you!"...

"Why aren't you impressed?"

We have been very hard on ourselves,

and you don't even notice it!" (Isaiah 58:3, *New Living Translation*).

Isaiah reported that God had noticed their efforts to catch His attention, but He was not impressed. Their hard spiritual work was noted, but not appreciated. Their religious endeavors were somehow missing the mark of what God longed to see in His people.

Speaking through Isaiah, this is how God responds to His people in search of revival: the kind of worship I want from you is to serve those who need your help. Help people be released from the things that hold them back, help them live as freely as possible. Feed the hungry. Provide shelter to the homeless and those who need it. Share clothes with those who don't have enough (see Isaiah 58:6, 7). Even if we have only a little, it might be more than someone else has, and God calls on us to be generous with any resources we have to those who need help.

Such service is not merely a "nice" thing to do; these verses describe it as a way to worship God. It is not the only way to worship, but, speaking through Isaiah to His revival-focused people, God urged them to try this seemingly different approach to worship. In God's view, it seems this form of worship might be preferable to some of the people's more traditional worship practices, especially if that worship is conducted while ignoring the needs of others.

In the words of Amos, following his assessment of worship, he writes: "Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living" (Amos 5:24).

This kind of worship is something that flows outward. Worship is not inwardly focused but something that brings a blessing to all those around the worshipers of God. It is

remarkable that the spirit of Jesus and the heart of faithfulness to God are so other-focused that even our spiritual renewal is not about us—reaching out instead to the poor, the oppressed, the hurting, and the hungry. “The true purpose of religion is to release men from their burdens of sin, to eliminate intolerance and oppression, and to promote justice, liberty and peace.” [1]

In Isaiah 58:8-12, God promises blessings in response to this form of worship. God is saying that if the people were less focused on themselves, they would find Him working with them and through them to bring healing and restoration. This was the revival the people were seeking, a renewal of their hope and purpose as found in God with a real sense of His presence in their lives and community: “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. Then when you call, the LORD will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ He will quickly reply” (Isaiah 58:8, 9, NLT).

Sharing Sabbath

Interestingly, Isaiah 58 also connects this serving-others kind of worship with a renewal of “delight”—filled Sabbath keeping, which is something that should catch our attention. Compared to their religious strivings described earlier in God’s response through Isaiah, Sabbath is a gift. It arrives each week and only requires our remembering it for it to affect our lives. Sabbath is a symbol of God’s grace by which our salvation is not earned but received.

There is something about Sabbath that should transform our relationships with others. In the form of Sabbath, this same grace and goodness is to be shared with others. Reflecting on these verses, Ellen White commented, “The prophet is addressing Sabbathkeepers, not sinners, not unbelievers, but those who make great pretensions to godliness. It is not the abundance of your meetings that God accepts. It is not the numerous prayers, but the rightdoing, doing the right thing and at the right time. It is to be less self-caring and more benevolent. Our souls must expand.” [2]

Little wonder that Isaiah would describe the Sabbath as a delight as we set aside a day to focus on things that are more important than all the other things that keep us busy for the rest of the week (see Isaiah 58:13). Again these verses come with a promise of renewal, delight, and an ever-growing closer fellowship with our God (see verse 14) and by extension with ourselves, with others, and with the rest of creation.

The truth of creation vis-à-vis the loud cry message that lightens the earth with glory, is seen by E. J. Waggoner who offered a thoughtful comment: “An intelligent contemplation of God’s creation gives us a true conception of His power; for His eternal power and Godhead are understood by the things which He has made. ... It is faith that gives victory; therefore, since faith comes by learning the power of God, from His word and from the things that He has made, we gain the victory, to triumph through the works of His hands. The Sabbath, therefore, which is the memorial of creation, is, if properly observed, a source of the Christian’s greatest reinforcement in battle.” [3]

We have long known that the message of Revelation 18 will be God's people presenting "the Sabbath more fully." [4] Obviously, that is what God intended the 1888 message to accomplish for us.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Nathan Brown, "The Witness of God; the Them-ness of 'Us,'" *Adventist World*, November 2015.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 36; "Doing for Christ," *The Review and Herald*, August 16, 1881.

[3] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 36, 37, 1890 ed.; p. 43, Glad Tidings ed.

[4] Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 33, 85.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eTErxrtsyA>

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