

Sermon Notes 2024

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Foreword

Herein contains my summary of the sermons for 2024. These sermons notes are mostly typed out during the sermon as the pastor preaches. Sometimes I will add in some of my own clarifications/notes/thoughts to the points given by the pastors, hence one can safely assume that any theological errors found herein are to be attributed to me, not the pastors.

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7th January 2024: I have had enough

Text: Isaiah 1:11-20

[11] “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

[12] “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? [13] Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. [14] Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. [15] When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. [16] Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, [17] learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

[18] “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. [19] If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; [20] but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Notes

- In our text, we see that Judah’s offerings in Isaiah’s time are prim and proper. They offer up all the required offerings in the ceremonial law, and they offer them abundantly.
- But somehow, God is rejecting all of their worship. See v11-15. why?
- This is because Judah, though they appear prim and proper in their worship, they are actually rebellious and rotten. There is much evil, oppression, and failure to care for the marginalised.
- This shows us that to God, obedience is more important than sacrifice. And obedience must be whole. It is pointless to obey all the ceremonial laws but ignore all of the laws to fight oppression in the land. What Judah was doing was trying to seek a Holy and Just God through their sacrifices even though their hands are full of sin.
- This is why God tells them to repent of their sin first (v16-20). If they repent, they’ll be forgiven, but if they don’t repent, they will die by the sword. And this is what happened to Judah.
- First sunday of the year is always a sermon about worship. This makes sense because there are 51 more sundays in a year where we come to worship. Thus, from our text, we should find out what makes our worship acceptable to God.
- Firstly, the form of worship is important. A worship service has to be liturgical and participative (liturgy means works of the people). That is, during Sunday worship, we are not just there to have an experience, but we are there to render our works to God. In the past, in time, it would be to bring their burnt offerings to God. And it would be to listen intently to the teaching of the Levites. In our time, we are to participate in the service by singing to each other, to listen intently to the Spirit of God speaking to us through the pastor’s message and the songs. In our form of worship, we must also give of our best. To Judah’s credit, she did give of her best here, by bringing fat animals to sacrifice to God. We can learn this from the

ancient Israelites. Do we come for Sunday service in a sleep-deprived state? For example. Or do we come fully energetic and ready to worship God.

- But apart from the form of worship, what is more important is the quality of our lives (quality as in from God's POV, ie our obedience). We must not be just "Sunday Christians", because that would be religious hypocrisy just like Judah here. As James says, it should not be that the same mouth comes blessings to God and curses to man. How can we say that we love God when we do so much evil to others? Because loving God and loving our neighbour cannot be separated. Our whole lives are to be offered as a worship to God, that is the more important worship.
- But it's not that we should stay away from church unless we're perfect. [KH: (My analogy: we can think of church as an alcohol rehabilitation centre. A person who is happily addicted to drunkenness and thinks alcohol the best thing ever right, no point going to an alcohol rehabilitation centre. That is hypocrisy. But the alcohol rehabilitation centre is open to people who want to quit alcohol but who struggle with quitting and who perhaps even from time to time take a bit of alcohol out of the weakness of their flesh.) The key is repentance and a desire for obedience. When we have those, and we come to church, God will honour our desire for obedience and cause us to obey Him through His Holy Spirit working in us when we come to church to worship.]
- Form of worship and obedience is important, but we cannot use it to manipulate God. It is not that when we serve God in church, then we expect God will bless us. [KH: True love of God obeys God not because of the gifts that God gives, but because of gratitude for God's acts of creating us, redeeming us, and providing for us which reflect His glory and beauty, which makes Him worthy of worship just because He is God.]
- Here, we have a call to repentance. Repentance is key, and repentance is the reason why we gather for public worship. See Hebrews 10: 19-25. Through Jesus' work, His sacrifice has cleansed us for all time, and His blood perfects all our imperfect (because of sin) service to God. As long as we believe in Jesus and repent, when we gather together, His Holy Spirit works through the service to transform us even as we offer up our voices in worship of God.

14th January 2024: Do I have to attend to him

Text: Luke 10:25-37

[25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [26] He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” [27] And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” [28] And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

[29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” [30] Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34] He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” [37] He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Notes

- This is the second sermon on a series of sermons on the “call of Christ’s church”. Last sunday, the topic was on worship.
- This sunday, the topic is on community. There is no such thing as a lone Christian. We are all parts of the same body with Christ as our head. We are all living stones of the new temple of God, of which Christ is the cornerstone. We are all children of God in God’s family. From all these analogies, we see that community is key in the Christian life.
- As a church, just as how Christ is the revelation of God to the world, we are the revelation of Christ to the world. We are the light of the world, just as how Christ is the light of the world.
- For today, instead of looking at texts that specifically talk about community, we will look at the parable of the good samaritan. The idea is that if all of us act like the good samaritan to others but especially to the church community, the church community will be a healthy one.
- Three ‘S’ for today.
 1. Situation
 2. Story
 3. Significance
- First, the situation at hand. The “lawyer” in our text refers to someone who is trained in the OT law. Here, he wanted to put Jesus to the test. He asked Jesus: “what shall I do to inherit eternal life”. We will come back to this question at the end of the sermon. To answer him, Jesus characteristically asked the lawyer back a question, “what is written in the law”. The lawyer then quoted two portions from the Law, the “Shema” (Deuteronomy 6:4-17) and Leviticus

19:18. As Jesus has said himself, these two commandments (to love God and loving one's neighbour) summarise all of the 10 commandments.

- Since the lawyer was on the right track, Jesus then told him to “do it”. Now, the lawyer was probably feeling quite embarrassed; he wanted to test Jesus, but he ended up answering his own question! He probably knew that it was impossible to keep these two commandments perfectly, and perhaps in a bid to narrow the scope of “neighbour”, and also to continue testing Jesus, he asked Jesus: “who is my neighbour?”. In those times, Jews probably only considered other Jews as neighbours.
- Next, the story that Jesus gave. We have four characters in the story. We have an injured man, a priest, and a levite, and a samaritan. Why did the priest and levite not help? They were definitely not rushing for time, since they were coming down from Jerusalem (which means they have already done their job). Was it because they thought that the injured man was dead, that's why they didn't want to be defiled? Or were they afraid of their own safety?
- On the other hand, a compassionate Samaritan was the one who helped the injured man. This story could have blown the lawyer's mind. Jesus could have told the story with a Jewish helper, and a Samaritan victim. This would already be big brain, because Jews were generally antipathic to Samaritans and hence a Samaritan would be the last person that the Jews would consider as neighbours. But Jesus' story is even more big brain, with a Jewish victim and a Samaritan helper. Just as how Jews disliked Samaritans, the Samaritans also disliked the Jews. But this Samaritan gave so much of his money, time, etc to the Jew without expecting anything in return.
- The significance of the story is this; the lawyer's question is wrong to begin with! He asked “who is my neighbour?”, whereas the correct question that Jesus wanted the lawyer to think about was: “am I a good neighbour?”. If we were good neighbours, then to us, all people would be neighbours. All people, including people from different ethnic groups, different socioeconomic classes, even people who dislike us and hate us. As Jesus said, “blessed are the merciful”, and we are to be merciful to all people around us. If we fail to show mercy to the people around us, then maybe we don't understand the mercy that God has given us. Or maybe we think that we are incapable of helping because of our schedule etc. But that line of thought forgets that it is God who empowers us to be merciful in the first place, and thus we can always look to God for strength to self-sacrifice. And as Paul says in Galatians 6:10, “so then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith”.
- In Church, we like the *idea* of loving one another, but actually loving one another is difficult and requires self sacrifice. The world says: “birds of the same feather flock together”. But the church can definitely do better than that! As per the vision in Revelation where we have all tribes and tongues worshipping God, let's aim to have “birds of a different feather flocking together”.
- And we must also realise that Jesus is the ultimate good Samaritan. We are those who are beaten and left half dead on the road. And Jesus, instead of giving us oil and clothing for us, gave us His blood. Jesus has loved us and shown us compassion and mercy, and as recipients of Jesus mercy and grace, we must “go and do likewise”, love others as Jesus has loved us!