

October 22, 2006

“Revive Us, O Lord!” (part 6: What is The Affect on Society?)

Isaiah 58

Based on *The Heart of Revival* by Nicky Gumbel

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Two pastors held revival meetings at their church. After the revival had concluded, the two pastors were having lunch with a third pastor. During lunch they were discussing the results of the revival meetings with one another.

One minister said, "The revival worked out great for us! We gained four new families."

The other preacher said, "We did better than that! We gained six new families."

The third pastor who did not hold meetings said, "Well, we did even better than that! We got rid of our 10 biggest trouble makers!"

Isaiah 58 points out the danger of having:

**Love Of God Without Love Of Our Neighbor. (vs1-5)**

*"Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Tell my people Israel of their sins! 2 Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to hear my laws. You would almost think this was a righteous nation that would never abandon its God. They love to make a show of coming to me and asking me to take action on their behalf. 3 'We have fasted before you!' they say. 'Why aren't you impressed? We have done much penance, and you don't even notice it!'"*

*"I will tell you why! It's because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting. You keep right on oppressing your workers. 4 What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? 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 a blade of grass in the wind. You dress in sackcloth and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the LORD?"*

v1a in the NIV says, "Shout it aloud, do not hold back." The prophet clearly believes this is an important message. God is rebuking His people. "They act so pious!" He says. They have a form of religion. They come to the temple to show devotion. They pray and even fast and do other things required by their religion. But the problem was that they did not obey the Lord in their treatment of others. Although they did religious things God was not impressed, because they did not refrain from wrong behavior. God tells them in v3b why He is not impressed He says: *It's because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting.* How? What were they guilty of:

***They were oppressing and exploiting their workers (v3b)*** [(i.e.) taking selfish or unfair advantage of a worker for personal gain. Employees are doing that today when they pay a worker off the books for less than what they should be getting paid and neglect giving

them benefits. Don't take a job off the books...it is illegal first of all and God does not want us breaking the law. Perhaps we see this exploitation especially with the hiring of illegal immigrants. Christian employees ought not to be doing these things.]

***They kept on fighting and quarreling with one another (v4a)*** [In the church today we should not be fighting one another, rather than loving one another. We so easily get bogged down in our little world and fail to see the bigger picture and the needs of the world around us. God rebuked the people for fighting and quarreling, for putting confidence in ritual practices rather than in obedience, which would result in a wide range of good works.]

### **Love For Our Neighbor (vs 6-12)**

*"No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. 7 I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.*

*8 "If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes, your healing will come quickly. 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.*

*"Stop oppressing the helpless and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumors! 10 Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day. 11 The LORD will guide you continually, watering your life when you are dry and keeping you healthy, too. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. 12 Your children will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as the people who rebuild their walls and cities."*

No religious observance is of any use unless it is geared to the benefit of others and to the needs of society. First of all we do not love our neighbors if we withhold from them the good news of Jesus Christ [see today's insert to reach children with the gospel]. Yet sharing that message *and* social action are partners. Both are needed in every local church as a responsible expression of Christian love.

God has called and gifted people to "specialize" in evangelism, political activism, or social services. For example, Billy Graham is called mainly to evangelism (although his organization does social work also). Martin Luther King Jr. was called primarily to political activity, while Mother Teresa was called primarily to social service. God has given us the task of witnessing to Jesus through both what we say and social action. Here Isaiah concentrates on our social responsibilities.

### ***Social Action***

In v6 he mentions three scourges of a society: Injustice (*free those who are wrongly imprisoned*), inhumanity(*stop oppressing*) , and inequality (*Treat ...fairly*). It is not always easy to recognize injustice, inhumanity, and inequality. They abound around the world, but they also exist in our own society. Nick Gumbel in his book *The Heart of Revival* (of which this message is based) states: “One example is the issue of abortion. What could be more unjust than killing of innocent babies before they are even born? What could be more inhumane than the way it is done? What could be more unequal than treating unborn children so differently from those who are slightly older? Christians need to be involved in the structure of our society at a local and national level in order to fight injustice, inhumanity, and inequality wherever it is found.” (by the way one way to do that is to vote your values on election day, November 7<sup>th</sup>).

### ***Social Service***

The prophet now moves from social action, to social service and in v7 points to four areas of need: **The hungry** (*share your food with the hungry*). Millions of people die of starvation each year, even though God has provided enough food for everyone’s need. It is inexcusable to have mountains of food stored away while much of the world is starving. We can do something about this, we can end poverty and hunger. It is do-able in our lifetime. [Bono of U2]

The next area of need mentioned in v7 is: **The homeless** (*welcome poor wanderers into your homes*). In Calcutta alone 250,000 sleep in the streets at night. Of course it is obvious that there is a problem with homelessness right in our own country. [Millard Fuller]

The third area mentioned by Isaiah goes along with the other mentioned needs of **the poor** (*Give clothes to those who need them*)

And finally Isaiah says, *and do not hide from relatives who need your help*. We must not neglect our own **family**.

1 Tim 5:8 (NIV) *If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

When you see the need, hunger, poverty, homelessness, the need for clothing, indeed when you see any need, it is your duty to act.

I know the needs are great, in your own family there are needs, in our community there are needs, in our country, and around the world people are in need. Nazarene Compassionate Ministries has a list of ongoing projects. The media makes us aware of needs. We can be overwhelmed by the massive scale of problems. Can we really make a difference. When we were in Louisiana this summer responding to a plea from Nazarene Compassionate Ministries to come and help the homeless there one of the leaders organizing the work there gave us this illustration: One day a man was walking along a beach as the tide was receding. He saw tens of thousands of starfish stranded on the beach, drying out and slowly dying. He noticed a young boy picking up the starfish one at a time, and throwing them back into the sea. He approached the boy and said to him,

“With tens of thousands of those starfish lying up and down the beach you aren’t making much of a difference.” As the boy tossed yet another starfish into the sea he turned to the man and said, “I bet it made a difference to that one.”

All you can do, is what you can do, so do what you can.

### ***The Results***

The prophet presents the promises that follow obedience to God’s command to love others: First, God promises **a new beginning**: (v8a) *“If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn.”* Second, He promises **restoration and healing**: (v8b) *“Yes, your healing will come quickly.”* Third, God promises **security and protection**: (v8c) *“Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind.”* Fourth, we can expect **answered prayer**: (v9a) *“Then when you call, the LORD will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.”* Fifth, God promises to bring **light in the darkness**: (v10b) *“Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day.”* Sixth, God promises **guidance**: (v11a) *“The LORD will guide you continually.”* Seventh, God promises **strength**: (v11b) *“watering your life when you are dry and keeping you healthy, too.”* Eighth, God promises fresh **resources from within**: (v11c) *“You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.”* Ninth, God promises **rebuilding**: (v12) *“Your children will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as the people who rebuild their walls and cities.”*

### **Love Of God Combined With Love Of Our Neighbor (vs 13-14)**

*“Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don’t pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD’s holy day. Honor the LORD in everything you do, and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly. If you do this, 14 the LORD will be your delight. I will give you great honor and give you your full share of the inheritance I promised to Jacob, your ancestor. I, the LORD, have spoken!”*

Love of God without love of our neighbor is not enough. But neither is love of our neighbor without love of God. This is expressed in the call to ***“Keep the Sabbath day holy.” (v13a)***. This is a call to put God’s schedule before our own. It means to have a heart so captivated by God that to set aside time with Him is a *“delight.”* (as it says in v13). The Christian Sabbath is Sunday. Isn’t it interesting that love for God according to Isaiah 58 is to, *“Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don’t pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD’s holy day.”* Many Christians today do the opposite of this verse...they pursue their own interests on that day. Is it that they don’t delight in the Lord’s holy day, they don’t delight in honoring, and worshipping God? God and keeping the Sabbath as a day first and foremost as a day set apart for God is not a priority. That reveals a need for spiritual revival. Of course we are to not only please the Lord on the Sabbath (v13b) ***“Honor the LORD in everything you do, and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly.”*** Our whole life and heart ought to be devoted and submitted to the Lord. The key phrase is ***“don’t follow your own desires...”*** If we delight in the Lord and love Him above all else, we will want to do His pleasure rather than our own. As we combine our love for our neighbor with a love for

God He promises us three things: “*If you do this*” First, God promises **Joy**: (v14a) “*the LORD will be your delight.*” Second: God promises **honor** (v14b) “*I will give you great honor...*” Those who honor God will be honored. This speaks also of security and confidence that comes from being right with God even in the face of life’s problems. Third, we will find **satisfaction** (as we spoke of last week): (v14c) “*I will give you... your full share of the inheritance I promised to Jacob, your ancestor.*” And all these blessings are guaranteed because God says, (v14d) “***I, the LORD, have spoken!***”

We need both our “vertical” relationship (with God) and our “horizontal” relationship (with others). On the cross Jesus looked up to His Father and stretched out His arms to the world.

*We must not sit around waiting for revival to happen. We are called to respond to God’s love for us, to show our love for God by loving our neighbor. This means communication the message of the Gospel. It involves attacking the causes of human need by social action, and the direct relief of human need by social service. (Nicky Gumbel, The Heart of Revival, pg. 129).*