



“Empty Worship”

Pastor Jason West | October 11, 2026

Isaiah 1:1 “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.”

I. The _____ God Sees

Isaiah 1:2a “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: ‘Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.’”

Romans 1:21 “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

II. The _____ Sin Does

(James 1:14-15; Romans 9:23)

Isaiah 1:5 “Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.”

Isaiah 1:6 “From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.”

Isaiah 1:7-8 “Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.”

Isaiah 1:9 “If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.”

III. The _____ God Rejects

(Amos 5:21-24; Matthew 15:8; James 1:22; 1 Samuel 15:22)

Isaiah 1:10-11 “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 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.”

Isaiah 1:12-13 “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? 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.”

Isaiah 1:14-15 “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 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.”

IV. The _____ God Requires

Isaiah 1:16 “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil”

Titus 2:11-12 “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age”

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

James 1:27 “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.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

V. The _____ God Offers

(Psalm 22:1,6; Matthew 27:28; Zechariah 13:1b; Isaiah 53:5b; Revelation 7:14b)

Isaiah 1:18a “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord”

Isaiah 1:18b “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

Psalm 51:2 “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!”

1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Isaiah 1:18b “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”



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BACKGROUND:

Following the death of Solomon, the United Kingdom of Israel divided into two nations: the Northern Kingdom, called Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, called Judah. God called the prophet Isaiah to proclaim His message to Judah during a time of spiritual rebellion and moral decline. Through Isaiah, God challenged His people to move beyond outward religious rituals and worship Him sincerely from the heart. His desire was that those who heard and obeyed His message would turn from their sin, seek His forgiveness, and experience His restoration and healing.

The central message of *Isaiah 1:1-20* is that God condemns hypocritical religion, demands justice for the vulnerable, calls His people to genuine repentance, and graciously forgives all who return to Him.

DIGGING DEEPER:

In verses 10-15, God strongly rejects Judah's religious practices because they had become empty and meaningless. He condemns not only their rituals and sacrifices, but even their prayers, because their hearts were far from Him. "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen" (verse 15). God even addresses them as "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" (verse 10), comparing His covenant people to some of the most wicked cities in Scripture.

1. What might God's concern be for someone who faithfully maintains religious observances, yet whose heart remains far from Him? Is there a way for us to be better in tune to when our heart is faithful in our worship or merely ritualistic?
2. Read *Genesis 4:1-7*. God established both grain offerings and firstfruits offerings as acceptable acts of worship. If the object being offered was not the issue, then why did God reject Cain's sacrifice? What did God mean when He told Cain that he had not "done well"? In what ways does this account teach us that true worship is ultimately a matter of the heart, not merely the act itself?
3. How do you think God responds differently to someone whose worship is merely external versus someone who worships with a surrendered heart? Pray right now and ask God to reveal the truth of your own heart.

In verse 16, God calls His people to repentance. Genuine repentance involves the surrender of both our will and our behavior. It begins with a renewed mind and is marked by a continual turning away from sin and turning toward God.

4. How do repentance and faith allow us to be washed clean and cease doing evil?

5. A repentant heart produces a change in behavior. How has God changed your heart? How in the past have you seen God transform you as a result of your repentance? Are there areas where He is still calling you to grow?

6. What should a person do when there are areas of ongoing sin that God is calling them to repent of?

In verse 17, God clearly defines the justice and righteousness He requires of His people. True religion includes caring for widows, orphans, and the oppressed while remaining unstained by the world (James 1:27). The justice God desires is not merely theoretical; it involves actively defending and caring for those who are vulnerable and unable to defend themselves.

7. Read *Micah 6:8*. What does the Lord require of you?

8. What do justice, kindness, and humility look like in your daily life? How have you received justice, kindness, and humility from God? Do you extend them as freely as you have received them?

9. To seek justice, correct oppression, and plead the widow's cause (verse 17) are all forms of advocacy. How do you advocate for others in your life? In what areas might you need someone to advocate for you?

"Come now, let us reason together" (verse 18). God invites sinners to come before Him and receive His mercy. He offers two powerful images: scarlet sins becoming white as snow and crimson stains becoming like wool. The picture is clear: God can remove even the deepest and most deeply ingrained sin.

10. How is turning to God the most logical and sensible choice a person can make?

11. Why is it such a gracious act of God that sinful people are invited to approach His holiness?

12. Read *1 John 1:7*. How does John's description of cleansing through Christ compare with what God revealed through Isaiah?

TAKING IT HOME:

God is not interested in religious performance apart from a transformed heart. He desires sincere worship, genuine repentance, compassionate justice, and willing obedience. In verses 19-20, God presents His people with two possible responses: they can be "willing and obedient," or they can "refuse and rebel". God's grace is freely offered, but our response matters. Blessing follows repentance and obedience, while judgment follows rebellion.

13. How are physical and spiritual well-being connected to a willing heart and a lifestyle of obedience to God?

14. How does Isaiah's prophecy demonstrate that true worship is ultimately a matter of the heart?

15. What does the phrase, "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken", mean to you personally?