

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – 2023  
Saturday, 2/4 at 4:00 | Sunday, 2/5 at 9:00



# The Blessings of Being Sifted

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Text: Isaiah 58:1-9a NAS 1995

**Introduction:** Dear friends in Christ: **God loves us**, so He wants to ✦keep us close, ✦show us His ways, ✦surround us with His protection, and ✦hear our prayers.

Today, from **Isaiah 58**, we will see the problems – *for Israel long ago and for us today*. What is the solution?

**As sifting improves flour – by adding air and breaking up the lumps, so discipline exposes sin and leads to blessings!**

As we hear the LORD speak to Israel, *let us hear and repent; then, let us rejoice in God's goodness and love!*

1. **The LORD's Command to Isaiah:** <sup>1</sup>**“Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins.”** // Maybe a Drill Sargent enjoys shouting his discipline, *but most are hesitant*. So, the LORD made it clear to Isaiah to CRY LOUDLY and NOT HOLD BACK! Not to condemn the people *but to* ✦**love them** and ✦**help them!**

2. **The LORD Points Out the Right Desires of the People:** As I read them, notice that they are *TRULY RIGHT DESIRES*:
- “...they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. //** From the perspective of the people of Israel, *nothing is wrong with them*. They are ▶seeking, ▶happy with, and ▶doing *what is pleasing to their God*. What about us?
  - They ask Me for just decisions, //** Again, *sounds good*; they want God’s will to be done, not their own. What about us?
  - They delight in the nearness of God.” //** Again, *sounds good*; evil people stay away from God, *but they wanted to be close to God*. What about us?
3. **The LORD Reveals What the People are Thinking:** <sup>3</sup> **‘Why have we fasted, and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’ //** The people of Israel came to this conclusion: we ▶are doing right, ▶we have fasted, and ▶we have humbled ourselves, *so we do not understand why the LORD has not responded to us*. Do we feel the same way sometimes?
4. **The LORD Explains What Is Wrong:**
- Mixing fasting with pleasure: **“Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And drive hard all your workers.” //** A day of fasting should always be accompanied with self-denial, yet – on such days – *the people tried to gain even more for themselves by forcing their workers to work extremely hard*. On one hand they denied; *on the other they enriched*.

- b. Mixing fasting with abuse: <sup>4</sup> **“Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like *you do* today to make your voice heard on high.”** // If we fast it should be done **▶**with repentance and **▶**in secret, *but they were unrepentant and boasted about their fasting.* If their workers did not work hard enough, *they physically abused them.* They expected the LORD to hear and answer. **They thought He was wrong, but they were wrong!**
- c. Being outward right but inward wrong: The LORD questions the people of Israel: <sup>5</sup> **“Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?”** // The things mentioned are not bad, **BUT THE PEOPLE WERE LACKING REPENTANT HEARTS!** Whenever we are tempted to put on a good show for others, *let us always remember that **the LORD looks AT THE HEART!***
5. **The LORD Explains What Is Right:** We tend to think that fasting always refers to giving up food – *but notice what the LORD says here about fasting.* As you listen, *consider how He is calling you to fast in your life.*
- a. <sup>6</sup> **“Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke?”** // Those words refer to a radical change with how they treat their workers **▶***by setting them free* **or** **▶***by transforming their forced labor into labor that is done willingly and gladly!*

- b. <sup>7</sup> **“Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”** // As the LORD provided the needs of the people of Israel, *so He has provided our needs as well.* Therefore, **when we have repentant hearts**, we will **▶see** our abundance, **▶be** thankful, and **▶share** with those in need. How are we doing so?

6. **The LORD Explains the Benefits:** To encourage us and all to have repentant hearts, *the LORD tells us the benefits:*

- a. <sup>8</sup> **“Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; //** As the first light of the morning quickly covers the earth, *so our repentance will quickly be seen by others!*
- b. **And your righteousness will go before you; //** As the LORD guided the people of Israel with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, *so the LORD will guide repentant ones by His Spirit through His word!*
- c. **The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.” //** As the LORD protected the people of Israel from their enemies, *so the LORD will watch our 6!*
- d. <sup>9</sup> **“Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’” //** A repentant heart is the key to unlock the benefits; then, *we will pray, He will hear, and we will be blessed!*

**Let Us Pray:** Dear LORD, like Israel, we can be blinded to our sins. So please **make** them known to us, **give** us godly sorrow, **turn** us to Jesus, and **help** us to rejoice in Your benefits!

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