



July 18, 2021 - “The Sin of Sniveling” - Isaiah 58:1-14

OPEN

There are a lot of interesting bumper stickers out there. Have you seen these?

If you can read this, I'm not impressed. Most people can read.

The more people I meet the more I like my dog.

Of course, there are all kinds of family stickers on the back window of vans. And perhaps Fb memes are the “bumper stickers” of today. But this week I was driving behind a truck on which was mounted this bumper sticker: **No Snivelling** Now, what is snivelling? It is “to speak or act in a whining, sniffing, tearful, or weakly emotional manner.” ([Merriam-Webster](#)) Sniveling is tortured crying and sniffing.

I fear that there is a brand of Christianity that we could describe as “sniveling spirituality”. In short, it means being impatient and presumptuous with God. “Why hasn’t God done what I asked!” Put another way, it is living with **high expectations** but **low engagement**. Rather than humble, authentic following...there is a sense of spiritual entitlement which dishonors the grace and mercy of God.

Do you remember what David Horita said last Sunday in his message “[Return To Normal](#)”? Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn wrote, “*the trouble with normal is that it always gets worse.*” What does the return to normal from pandemic restrictions mean for our church? How will we avoid the pitfall of God’s people in Biblical history – all too often, when God’s people returned to normal after spiritual crisis, they fell deeper into sinful, self-centered patterns.

It is essential that we listen carefully to God to ensure we return to a healthy, Gospel-saturated congregational life. What a tragedy to endure pandemic restrictions only to return to spiritual complacency...or spiritual sniveling! Our passage for today challenges us in this area. We are going to use the mirror of God’s Word today to point out any **sniveling** that might be present.

In **Isaiah 58** there are three threads that are woven together to give us a picture of what God wants us to be as His people. As W. E. Vine suggests, there is a predictable pattern in this chapter as in other parts of Isaiah: **rebuke, warning, promise.**

The FIRST thread of rebuke: “False Faith” - vv. 1-5

The first thread is to identify false faith. Let’s be clear, there is a place for tears and crying out to God from the depths of our being. Many passages express an anguished cry from an authentic religion. But in verse 1 God commanded that the sin of sniveling be exposed.

Sniveling spirituality occurs when followers of God default to pious performance with the belief that God is obliged to respond to ritualistic rigor. However, there only pretense of devotion (v.2). God’s people complained that God failed to act on their behalf. But their spiritual lives were marked with conformity and externality – not a humble, broken heart before God. In fact, their spiritual exercise was self-serving – as verse 3 points out, “you are fasting to please yourselves”!

David Horita made another great point. We need to consider why churches were not seen as essential during pandemic restrictions. Was the problem the way in which our society views the Church? Or was the problem the fact that the Church has not been living authentically, meaningfully, redemptively? Are you merely a “reed bending in the wind” (v.5)? Are you just going through the motions spiritually?

The SECOND thread of warning: “Real Religion” – vv. 6-7

James 1:22-25 challenges Christians to see Scripture as a mirror which reflecting where correction is required for our character or conduct. Isaiah 58 holds up a mirror to the rituals within Israel – especially fasting. What was reflected? Their religious activity was selfish so God gave two commands.

1. Living with justice – v. 6

Practicing justice is not reserved for global or national issues. Being just is lived out in everyday activities. But there are the big issues as well. You can check out [International Justice Mission](#) as it relates to oppression and trafficking. Here is a link for further reflection on [Indigenous Reconciliation](#).

2. Living with compassion – v. 7

Again, compassion is not just the money we send to other countries. Caring for people in our society can take many forms. Currently our Fellowship Pacific family is having a [Lytton Wildfire Fundraiser](#).

James 1:27 tells us, “*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.*” God always rejects an outward religion which is at the expense of living for others.

The THIRD thread of promise: “Divine Dividends” – vv. 8-14

In an online article titled, [The Gospel in Isaiah](#) Kelly M. Kopic writes,

Reading the book of Isaiah takes us into the precarious space between warning and wonder, faithlessness and fidelity, compromise and conviction: this is the world where a fallen people hear the holy God. Divine words come full of truth and grace; they expose sin while offering, beneath all failure, hope and redemption.

Isaiah 58 bears out what God declared in Leviticus 29:3-5. The mirror of God’s word is redemptive. The rebuke leads to restoration, if one responds with humility and obedience. That is what we see throughout Isaiah. In particular, this part of chapter 58 provides six promises from God for those who choose to submit to Him.

1. **Recover their wholeness in God – v. 8**
2. **Return to the presence of God – v. 9**
3. **Radiate the glory of God – v. 10**
4. **Restore the vitality of God – v. 11**
5. **Repair the purpose of God – v. 12**
6. **Revive the delight of God – vv. 13-14**

REFLECT

Though Ray Ortland (*Gospel Coalition blog*, June 19, 2013) was writing about those preaching God’s truth, I think the same could be said for **living** the Word of God authentically. We must be so careful about complacency. We must be on guard against the pit of spiritual entitlement.

*True [living] is brewed within, as the **gospel enters** into a man, **floods** his **awareness**, **rearranges** his own **interiority**, and **surges out** of him as something divine and yet still his own.*

Are you seeking benefits and blessings from God, but neglecting relating to Him personally?

Are you expecting God to act on your behalf because of the religious duties that you have performed?