

“A Spirit Led Approach” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Epiphany 5 February 8, 2026

- I. **Isaiah 58:3-11** – Previously read
- II. **People in our world do not always view Christians in a positive light.**
 - a. If you think about it, what problems do they have with Christians?
 - i. They say Christians are hypocrites... or Christians are too political... or Christians don't act like Jesus... or maybe Christians only care about their churches, but not the people in our community.
 - ii. Are these fair accusations?
 - iii. Do people have any evidence to support these charges?
 - b. In today's world of constant observation and videos of everyday life, Christians are often shown in negative a negative light.
 - i. Sometimes we see Christians fighting with others.
 - ii. We see women wearing cross necklaces prominently and yet dressed very provocatively.
 - iii. We watch musicians who claim to be Christians and yet their music, words, and behaviors are far from Christlike.
 - iv. We might even see pastors or ministry leaders caught in compromising situations that create a distrust of the ministry.
 - c. As Christians, we may see these things and feel sadness that people who don't believe may have more reason to reject Jesus...
 - i. We also might shrug our shoulders and just think all are sinners who need the forgiveness and grace of God.
 - ii. Yet, the truth remains, Christians do not always live in ways that shine the light of Christ in the lives of others.
 - d. Oftentimes, the world accuses Christians of supporting their church, but the homeless and poor are neglected, but is this true?
 - i. On some levels, the Christian Church is the greatest supporter of those in need of food, emergency support, and help to meet daily needs... all around the world.
 - ii. So, if the Church is doing all kinds of good in the world, why does the criticism keep happening?
- III. **Isaiah is a prophet** living in Jerusalem 700 years before Jesus was born.
 - a. He has seen the Northern Kingdom reject God and ultimately defeated by Assyria... and now he is warning the people in the Southern Kingdom to return to God before the same thing happens to them.
 - b. The religious leaders of his time believed they were doing God's will, but they were missing the most important part of life with God – love.
 - i. They were fasting... gathering... They were using the right language... and doing whatever looked faithful.
 - ii. And yet they cry out to God: “Why have we fasted, and You see it not?” (Isaiah 58:3)

1. It isn't like they failed to be religious... but they were using religion as a substitute for love.
- iii. They fasted, hoping to please God, but they oppressed their workers.
- iv. They had a posture of humility in bowing their heads, all the while ignoring the people under their care.
- v. They appeared holy to those around them, but they had no compassion for those who suffered.
- vi. So, these religious leaders looked faithful on the outside, but God declared that none of this is the fasting He desired or the kind of works that truly please Him.
- c. You see, the Lord did not want empty religious works divorced from mercy and love..... so He listed the things that should be done if we have a religion that is active.
 - i. Remove the bonds of wickedness... undo heavy burdens... let the oppressed go free, feed the hungry... shelter the homeless... and cover the naked.
 - ii. Yet these things are not supposed to replace religious life and worship... God is saying that He expects our changed lives in Him to be led by the Holy Spirit in acts of love.
- d. When the Church ignores its own members... or pastors ignore their flock... or when we act righteous and holy but have no mercy... we are told by God to stop it, because that is not what He wants us to do in His name.
- e. Rather, as we are led by the Spirit, we will open our eyes... we will begin to discern the best ways to share God's love and mercy as we point to Jesus.

IV. **This passage in Isaiah may cause some of you discomfort and guilt.**

- a. In other words, you read where God calls His people to feed the poor and bring the homeless into your house.
 - i. We see the homeless all over our city, and there are thousands of hungry people everywhere.
 - ii. Well, you all are religious, so therefore act like it so the people outside can see Christians at work, right?
- b. I don't mean to give you excuses, or get you off the hook as it were, because God may lead some people to various levels of help for others.
 - i. However, the Spirit led approach does not mean saying yes to every request, nor does it mean carrying guilt for all needs that go unmet.
- c. To give you some perspective, did Jesus heal everyone?
 - i. No, He went through towns and huge crowds where many still had sickness and troubles that went unhealed.
 - ii. He even withdrew from places where the crowds kept running after Him to heal them.
- d. Did Jesus feed everyone?
 - i. No, He fed the 5000 with fish and bread, but when they chased Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, He told them, "I am the bread

of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)

- ii. Jesus did not continue to feed them because He was pointing to something bigger than a meal... He came to save their souls.
- e. You see, sometimes Jesus gave help... sometimes He withheld help... and He knew when the right and loving response was patience... or telling the truth... or even allowing hardship to help the person turn to Him.
 - i. Jesus was the most loving person ever, and He did not always help.
 - ii. He wasn't cruel... He was faithful to the will of the Father... to bring all to the knowledge of salvation through the Son. (1 Timothy 2:4)
- f. For each of us, God wants us to have Spirit led discernment, which is faithfulness to the plan of God – that everyone comes to know His Son!
 - i. The Holy Spirit always points to Jesus, and because He is in us, we point to Jesus as well.
 - ii. Our faithfulness to God includes discernment on what is the best thing to do for someone.
 - iii. In fact, God teaches us discernment 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.”
 - 1. This doesn't deny care for the world around us, but it certainly gives us a priority and responsibility.
 - 2. We don't have all the answers... and we are not the Savior... but we can discern much better how to help someone when they are part of our own congregation... our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 3. As we bear each other's burdens, we are carrying out the will of God – not in empty works, but in love and mercy for those in our circle of influence.
- g. Is it possible that God might direct us to help people outside our church?
 - i. Yes! Absolutely. But the Spirit should lead us with discernment on what is best – especially as it points them to Jesus Christ, the only true healer and sustainer.
- h. And when Jesus is made visible, Isaiah promises, “Then your light shall break forth like the dawn.” (Isaiah 58:8)
 - i. This light is not your own, but the light God has put in you by grace through faith... and that light shows that God is at work in His people.

V. **Jesus Christ broke through the barriers that separated us.**

- a. He took the sin of our lack of love and mercy... our pride that thinks just going to church or wearing a cross is enough... our self-reliance on what we think should happen... and He bled and died with them on the cross.
- b. He repaired the relationship between God and us that was wrecked by sin.
- c. He also repaired the relationship we can now have with each other.

- d. As we are Spirit led, we cannot help but point to Jesus in every way, which is good because He is the only way.
- e. So, saved by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit's wisdom and discernment, we live with confidence... and as Isaiah declares, "your light shall rise in the darkness." (Isaiah 58:10) Amen.