

Isaiah 1:10-20

Last night at dinner, my son was singing one of my favorite Christmas carols, the Little Drummer Boy. I think there is something beautiful about seeing the smallest, meager talents bring a smile to Jesus' face. As my son sings this song to himself, it's sweet and touching and not at all what he's supposed to be doing. He's singing this song I love, but what I really want him to be doing is eating his dinner. He's not confused about where we are or what we're supposed to be doing, he's just choosing to do something else.

It's a lot like Israel during Isaiah's work there. The people have a multitude of sacrifices they're bringing. They have offerings, festivals, and feasts. All of these are good things in their own right. They just aren't what God has called Israel to be doing. In fact, because of this, God calls these activities sin; He can't even look at them when they pray!

As sweet as it is for my son to sing this song, after telling them several times that he needs to be eating his dinner, I start to get angry. I've told, encouraged, and now I threaten. Unless he eats his dinner, we won't be going to the bookstore. His face gets sad, his eyes get big, his chin trembles. And he picks up his fork. I have no desire to cause my son pain, but as his father, I have a responsibility to take care of him, even when it means correcting him so that he does what he ought to instead of what he wants to. I want my son to sing. I love to hear him sing. But I want more than that for him.

In much the same way, God does not enjoy causing pain, but neither will he let his people live for what they want to do (even "good" things) without doing what they ought. They ought to "learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow". These are where their focus should be. This is what God has called them to.

My son ate his dinner. He didn't eat everything off the plate and I didn't need him to. I needed him to eat the food to give him the nutrition so that he can continue to grow, learn, and experience life. God also has hopes for us, reasons why he wants us to live one way over another, His own way over our own. He wants to cleanse us, to make us holy. He wants us to be able to "eat the best from the land". But such things only come from obediently being his people. Expect the unexpected. God will judge us, not to destroy us, but for our redemption.

Prayer

Giving God, help us to live as we ought, not as we want. Helps us to remember the fatherless and the widow this Advent, to love them as we love ourselves. Reveal yourself to us that we may understand better how to live for and love you in the places we find ourselves. May we live so faithfully that when we do sing, it brings a smile to your face. Amen