

“Come Now, Let Us Reason Together”

“A New Thing” Series, July 4 & 5, 2026 [Independence Day Weekend] | Isaiah 1:11-20
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Why would God put anyone on trial?

Like a well-connected reporter, Isaiah always seemed to get the inside scoop.

Isaiah served across the reigns of multiple kings of Judah, and he knew his people well. He also knew the kings. He mourned the death of one king as though he had been a friend, and he walked right up to another king and confronted him. Isaiah 1:1 may tell us how—Isaiah was the son of Amoz. Tradition says that Amoz was a brother to one of the kings, which could make Isaiah a member of the royal family. Then again, Isaiah heard the voice of God speaking to him, and that gave him the real inside scoop on the people, the royal family, and the times they lived in.

Things looked okay on the outside.

Judah had been prospering for quite some time. The kings from the line of David seemed secure on the throne. People were even worshipping God in the Temple. Nearby empires were waking from a long slumber, but, for now, everyone felt safe, maybe even smug.

But God put His people on trial!

There is trial language going on in Isaiah 1. In **Isaiah 1:2**, God names the jury,

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth ...

Then God reads the charges:

... Children have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.

Shocking! Our well-connected reporter writes the headline, **“REBELLION!”**

Just because things look good on the outside doesn’t mean they are good on the inside.

I got a birthday card from my parents when I was a teenager. On the cover was a young man neatly dressed in a clean room. It was addressed, “To our son who got it all together.” Inside was a picture of the closet, bursting at the seams with dirty clothes and sports equipment. The inside continued, “... and stuffed it all in his closet.” Have you ever known anyone like that? Maybe you’ve known someone who is addicted to alcohol but still able to work and keep people from knowing what’s going on in the evenings. Or a family that is deeply involved and deeply loved at church, but at home one of them is a monster. Just because things look good on the outside doesn’t mean they’re good on the inside. Judah was like that. Do you ever feel like that?

How are things going in your life?

Are they good on the outside? Are they also good on the inside? And how do we know? God is surprisingly specific in His accusations against Judah. What He accuses them of tells us what He would find troubling in us and what He values in us. So, how are things going? Really. Let's find out.

Empty gestures try God's patience.

When our heart doesn't match our actions, worship can be just an empty gesture.

Given that God ordered Israel to come before Him and worship Him by sacrifices in a sanctuary, it's shocking that He says He has had enough. In **Isaiah 1:11** He says,

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? ..."

In essence, He asks what the point is of His people bringing so many sacrifices. In **Isaiah 1:12**, He accuses them of getting their footprints all over His house unnecessarily,

"... who has required of you
this trampling of my courts?"

Then in **Isaiah 1:13**, He tells us why

"Bring no more vain offerings ..."

There it is! God doesn't hate offerings; He hates vain offerings. He doesn't despise worship; He despises empty gestures.

Think of the movie trope of a mob boss ordering a hit and then going to confession.

He hopes his brutal act will be wiped away by going to Mass. With no real repentance and no real intent to change, his worship is just a magical ritual that wipes away his feelings of guilt. Plenty of us grew up that way. Not hoping to get away with murder but thinking of God as like a genie—you rub His lamp, and you get three wishes. You go to church, pay your tithe, take communion, and you're good to go. Our habits don't matter. The heart doesn't matter.

Those kinds of empty gestures try God's patience.

Listen prayerfully to the words of **Isaiah 1:14**,

"Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them."

Does your worship try God's patience?

In true worship, what's in our heart shows up in our actions.

Our heart always shows up in our actions. Judah's empty gestures showed that their hearts were empty; there was little love and little faith. Worship is meant to express awe, wonder, honor, glory, and love to God. True worship is when our actions come from hearts that feel what we're trying to express. Our faith powers our prayers, our love fills our singing, and our trust grounds our response to God's Word. That's the true worship God wants from us.

How well does your worship reflect your heart?

This is a singing congregation, and it is powerful when we all lift our voices together to God. When I sing, it can be a painful noise because singing in tune is nearly impossible for me. If you're a horrible singer, I empathize. But I sing because I want to say these things to God. I want to proclaim His greatness and praise His goodness. I want to worship Him. And sometimes His greatness and goodness bring me to tears. I don't like crying in public; it's embarrassing. But if God moves me, then I have to be man enough to be embarrassed for my Lord. How about you? Do you pray when we pray? Do you sing when we sing? Do you listen when we proclaim the Word? And are you asking God what next step He wants you to take today? Or are you always holding back? Is your worship coming from the heart? Or is it an empty gesture? God wants—He loves—genuine worship.

Justice denied leads to judgment.

God accuses His people of praying with hands full of blood.

In **Isaiah 1:15** He says,

“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.”

What a powerful image! God's people are reaching out to Him in prayer, asking for deliverance from one oppressor after another, that their blood might not be shed. And yet, their hands are covered in the blood of others. They have denied people justice and have oppressed vulnerable people. Now they ask for deliverance. It's pure hypocrisy, and God is incensed by it.

The evidence is there—they were not seeking justice.

In **Isaiah 1:16-17**, God tells His people what they need to do,

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from
before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause.”

The implication is that they have not been doing these things. They have not been doing good, seeking justice, or caring for the vulnerable. And in God's courtroom, the charge is simple, “You have not done justice.”

Then God gives the verdict: His people will be devoured in judgment.

"Come now, let us reason together," God says. Forgiveness is available even though they have sinned grievously, and they can change their fate by changing their ways. In **Isaiah 1:19-20**, God makes the choice clear,

"If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword ..."

Be faithful, obey God, do good, and you will live long in the land and prosper. That had been God's promise since Moses. But if they refuse, judgment will consume them; they will lose the land and suffer. It all comes down to justice. Will they act justly and protect the vulnerable?

God's verdict comes from His character, not some thin legalism we can sweep away.

The Old Testament is filled with specific laws that require God's people to act justly and protect the vulnerable. There are laws about administering laws, protecting immigrants, and providing for widows. As Christians, we can't just transfer those laws to ourselves and say that they apply in a legalistic kind of way. But God's demand that all His people act justly and protect the vulnerable transcends any one law. It's God's character! God protected Adam and Eve when they were vulnerable by sewing garments for them. He fed Israel in the wilderness, clothed them, and lit the way for them to travel. Jesus fed hungry crowds, gave sight to the blind, and gave a widow back her dead son. We can't sweep away justice as we turn the page from the Old to the New. This is God's heart and who we are meant to be!

Biblical justice goes beyond courtrooms and verdicts.

Neither is justice just a squishy, catch-all term for people getting everything they want in life. Here is a definition of biblical justice: Justice is right relationships under God's will, where the vulnerable are protected and fair laws treat people equally. Fair laws are enforced equally for all people. The vulnerable are protected; the Bible consistently mentions orphans and widows, but that list isn't exhaustive. Fundamentally, justice is when we as human beings are in right relationships with each other, based on God's will. What does God want us to do practically to administer His justice? This summer, 21 people from Valley will be at Joni and Friends Family Retreat. They will welcome and serve families affected by disabilities. Our people will make sure that they have everything they need for a time to relax, rejuvenate, and just feel at home. That's one of the faces of biblical justice—protecting the vulnerable. God judged Judah not only for their empty worship gestures but also because they did not do justice.

Will God judge my sin the same way?

Jesus paid the price for my sin, and that sin has been judged once and for all.

When Jesus died on the cross, God took my sin—complete with all my guilt—from my shoulders and put it on Jesus' shoulders. Then God poured out His wrath on Jesus, punishing my sin. My sin, then, has been fully paid for. When Jesus died, it's as though my sin died with Him. **1 Peter 2:24** says,

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

But is that really the end of my sin?

Is God judging us when bad things happen?

When I was 12 or 13 years old, the woman I called “Granny” was diagnosed with liver cancer. I proclaimed boldly to my family that God was going to heal her. She kept getting sicker and sicker, but I had faith. One day, we got a call that Granny was doing somewhat better; she had been sitting up and eating. I was convinced that she was being healed. I was elated. I was a little obnoxious about it. I may have told my family that they didn’t have enough faith. Later that same evening, we got another phone call. Granny had died. And I seriously wondered why. Why? Was God punishing me? You may have asked the same question at times.

Often, we walk out of the land of blessing by our own choices.

When we’re suffering, we’re quick to look for someone to blame. It could be an attack by Satan. It could be God disciplining us. Both of those are possibilities. But most of the time, when we are out of the land of blessing, it’s because we walked out ourselves, one step at a time. We failed an exam because we chose to cheat, instead of studying, and got caught. We’re suffering in a marriage where our spouse ridicules our faith because we chose to date and marry a non-Christian. We’re hip deep in debt because we charged one thing after another that we couldn’t afford. We did it, and there are real world consequences to our actions. Satan may have tempted us. Natural consequences are disciplining us. But God isn’t judging our sin.

We don’t obey God because we’re afraid He will punish us if we don’t.

Frankly, as a young adult, I made a lot of good choices for the wrong reasons. I went to a fraternity party during college. Someone stamped my hand at the door. I had done absolutely nothing wrong or illegal. Nevertheless, the next day as I sat in worship, I looked down at my hand and saw the stamp and felt as though I had the mark of the beast on my hand. I was afraid that God would judge me—that He would punish me and stop loving me. Looking back, I made a lot of choices because I was afraid of God. But that’s not who God is, and that’s not why we do what we do. That’s certainly no reason to do justice and protect the vulnerable.

We do justice because we’re moved by what God has done for us.

God loves us, gave His Son for us, and gave us eternal life that starts now. That leads us to repent; repenting of evil means that we seek to do good. It leads us to love God; out of love, we want to obey Him! So, we do justice. We pay generous wages even when our competitors cut corners. We are kind to our political opponents, even when they’re unkind to us. We take care of the vulnerable. I am so grateful for couples like Kip and Robin Mentzer who provide respite care to foster parents so that they can be foster parents for the long haul. That’s doing justice, and we do justice and live righteously, not out of fear, but because we’re moved by what God has done for us! And there is something more...

Our just God is shaping us into just people.

We do justice because that is God’s character, and He is making us like Him.

In **Leviticus 19:2**, God says,

“... You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

God is holy, so we are to be holy. In the same way, God is just, so we are to be just. His image is inside of us, and His Holy Spirit is shaping us to be more and more like Him. So, His character comes out in us over time. We're becoming just because God is just.

God's just character growing inside us makes us long for justice, too.

Think about your experience watching *Back to the Future* for the first time. George is the dad in the franchise. He's been bullied for decades by a guy named "Biff". Every time Biff humiliates George, sometime inside you wants it to stop. Something inside you wants justice for George. That's God's just character coming out. Justice doesn't mean throwing punches, but it does mean righting a wrong. Think about justice when it comes to human trafficking. Justice means rescuing victims of human trafficking. Plus shutting down traffickers and protecting young people from becoming victims in the first place. And changing laws so that trafficking stops. We are made in God's image to stop injustice.

Doing justice is like an offering we bring to God.

Think of what our Faithful Hands ministry does. They come alongside the vulnerable—people who for some reason cannot do for themselves everything that they need to live in their homes comfortably. It may be an older person who struggles to keep up with yard work and light home maintenance. Faithful Hands volunteers come alongside them and help. But they don't just show up, work, and leave. They go to the same home month after month and build a relationship with the people they serve. They pray together, spend time together, and build true community. That's an offering to God.

Is there blood on your hands?

I know it's a shocking question for me to ask. It was shocking when God accused His people of having blood on their hands, but they did. There were vulnerable people they had taken advantage of and neglected. So, while it is a shocking question, let's all take a moment and think. Are my relationships right? Are they guided by God? Do I serve the vulnerable? Do I protect them and include them in my life? Or is there blood on my hands?

Jesus can make us clean again—from our heads to our hearts to our hands.

He wipes away our sin, yes. But there is so much more. Jesus rewires our brains so that we think like Him. The Holy Spirit reshapes our hearts so that we love the way He does. And we become God's hands, doing good, and doing justice in His name.