

## The Problem of Indifference

St. Mark Lutheran Church  
Three services

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*Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him when he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:6-9*

It is said that Napoleon's soldiers often used to sleep while they were on the march. They were moving forward, yet seemed to be almost asleep and indifferent to everything around them.

There may well be millions of Christians who are like them. They are moving forward quickly in their journey of life, yet they have long ago forgotten about the call and claims of God on their lives. They are indifferent to their need for a relationship with Jesus Christ.

What exactly is indifference? It can be defined as being without interest or concern, not caring, a feeling of apathy toward something. In our case, it is a lack of interest or concern for the church. It is the Church of Jesus Christ that we are talking about. If we are not concerned about his church, it is very likely that we are not concerned about following Jesus and his will for our life either.

Perhaps we can better understand our situation by studying God's Old Testament church, and hopefully we will learn something about ourselves by doing that. So I chose some words from God's great prophet, Isaiah, who spent a good part of his life battling the seeming indifference of those considered to be God's people. You see, indifference is a giant problem for a church because it can be deadly to the individual and it can devastate a body of believers.

Let me repeat part of our Old Testament reading this morning. Isaiah wrote, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him when he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he might have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Israel was guilty of the sin of indifference. God spoke to them one time after another through his prophets, but most of them did not care to listen. It was like speaking to a stone wall. The typical Israeli is described in Isaiah 45:20, "He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear." These words have been preserved for us for a reason. Indifference is a problem in God's New Testament church as well.

The reality is that probably all of us have been indifferent at some time. Isaiah 53:6 would seem to indicate this. Isaiah cried out about the cold indifference of his people when he said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way..." Paul says in Romans 3:11, "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." That seems to be our natural condition.

God calls on the wicked to forsake his way, and he calls on the unrighteous to forsake his thoughts. Who are the wicked? Those who are not in fellowship or have a relationship with God the Father. Who are the unrighteous? I would think they are believers who are letting wrong thoughts influence their minds. But I hope you noticed another key point in Isaiah 55. God calls on man to "return to the Lord, that he might have compassion on him..." and God promises that he will pardon him.

Now keep in mind who Isaiah is addressing here. It is the people of Israel. They believe there is a God. They probably believe that they are the chosen people of God. But they are not taking God seriously. Hear what God said to another of his prophets, Jeremiah, as recorded in Chapter 33, verse 31: "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain."

There is a danger in living a life of indifference to God. Israel discovered that. God warned them but most of them paid no attention. In ignoring God, in breaking his Sabbaths, in living lives of apathy to his commands, they offended God so much that he allowed the conquest of Israel and years of captivity and bondage. You have to wonder if America isn't guilty of the same thing today.

God wants us to look at the lessons of the Old Testament so that we might learn more of his nature and not repeat the mistakes of the past. So I ask you to ask yourself today, "When it comes to the things of God, the will of God, and the call of God, are YOU guilty of the sin of indifference?" Are you actively pursuing an increased knowledge of God? Are you seeking the will of God in your life? How much interest do you have in what is going on in your church, the church in which you have taken a vow to be faithful? When it comes to worship and serving God do you find it to be a dull routine in which you have little or no interest? (I shared some personal things here on how I used to be that way when I was much younger)

Are we too busy doing our own thing? Are we too busy with work? Are we too busy and wrapped up in the things of the world? Are we too busy for God? If so, then we are indeed too busy. God will not be ignored. His character, his attributes, will not allow it. There will be consequences. Jesus himself once said that he who was not with him was against him.

So you see, we find God sharply addressing the problem of indifference in the New Testament also. The Apostle John quotes the Lord in Revelation 3, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

There is a call for repentance in the New Testament as well. The Bible makes it clear that God is holy and that man is sinful, and that sin brings about separation between God and man. Without repentance, people cannot have fellowship with a holy God. Repentance does not mean to just feel sorrow because of our sins, but it also means to confess our sins to God and forsake them. It means to agree with God that what we have done is wrong, and to turn and go in the opposite direction. (Copied this from somewhere, but author is unknown to me.)

From all I can tell, repentance is not just a one time thing for the Christian. Despite the fact that we have been baptized into Christ, and received the Holy Spirit, we still have a sinful nature and at times commit sin. God, in his love and care for us, has provided a way to deal with that problem. The Word says in 1 John 1:8-9, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Last but not least, Jesus has provided a wonderful gift to his church by which we can deal with our sinful nature and strengthen our fellowship with God. In the last hours of his life, when he could have been doing so many other things, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion. I believe that the timing of that gift shows it to be of great importance. When I was much younger, I asked a former pastor here why we don't do altar calls at our church. He replied that we do altar calls every other Sunday here, when we confess our need forgiveness, and we come forward to be forgiven and renewed by receiving the body and blood of our Lord.

Are you indifferent or not? Don't deceive yourself. Take a look at your communion attendance, and you will probably get a good clue as to how seriously you are taking the Lord. May his gifts and his grace sustain you until you meet him face to face. Amen.