

It is very disrespectful if you deliberately turn your back on someone while they are trying to talk to you. In our passage for today, Isaiah lists as one of our sins, **“turning our backs on our God” (59:13)**. On this Ash Wednesday, instead of turning our backs on our God, **Let us turn back to our God.**

**Let us Turn Back to Our God**

- I. By repenting of our sins.**
- II. By looking to our Redeemer in faith.**

Our passage begins, **“For our offenses are many in your sight” (59:12)**. Here Isaiah points out two things about our sins. First, they are many. **“Our offenses are many.”** We haven’t just committed a few sins. We have committed a great many sins. The second thing Isaiah points out about our sins is that God sees every one of them: **“our offenses are many in your sight” (59:12)**. We can’t hide our sins from God. He sees every one of them.

Not only does *God* see our sins, but we ourselves often see them and feel them in our hearts. Isaiah says, **“Our offenses are ever with us” (Isaiah 59:12)**. That means they are always on our mind. Our sins are with us in our memories wherever we go.<sup>1</sup> **“Our offenses are ever with us and we acknowledge our iniquities” (Isaiah 59:12)**. Notice how much in this passage the word “our” is used. **“For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities” (Isaiah 59:12)**. We Christians often talk about the sins in the world out there, but we must acknowledge that we also have many sins. **“We acknowledge our iniquities.”**

Isaiah then gives a list of some specific sins of God’s people: **“Rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, inciting revolt and oppression, uttering lies our hearts have conceived” (Isaiah 59:13)**. Isaiah gives a list. It would be quite a powerful exercise if you or I were to sit down with a piece of paper and actually make a list of every sin we have committed that we can think of. We would need more than one piece of paper. And even if we were writing for a long time, it would not be an exhaustive list of every sin we’ve ever committed.

And if we were to look at that list of sins that we have committed, we would see a long list of things that have caused us trouble and grief and sorrow. And we would realize that we turned our backs on our loving God to do a bunch of things that have caused us trouble and grief and sorrow.

So instead of turning our backs on *our God*, let’s turn our backs on *those sins*. Let’s repent. God says at the end of our lesson, **“The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins” (Isaiah 59:20)**. The word for “repent” in Hebrew means “to turn.” Let’s *turn away* from our sins. Let’s be sorry for our sins and resolve to stop committing them. Let’s turn away from our sins and turn *back to* our God.

**Let’s turn back to our God I. by repenting of our sins and, secondly, II. by looking to our Redeemer in faith.**

Isaiah says in verse 15, **“The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one” (59:15b-16a)**. The Bible says in the book of Romans that **“No one is righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10; quoting Psalm 14:1)**. Isaiah goes on, **“The LORD was appalled that there was no one to intervene” (Isaiah 59:16)**. If humanity was going to be saved, God would have to do it himself. Isaiah says, **“So his own arm achieved salvation for him” (Isaiah 59:16)**. God saw that we were helpless to save ourselves and so he himself saved us.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I owe this insight to the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon.

<sup>2</sup> I owe this insight to Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, and August Pieper’s commentary on Isaiah 40-66.

Isaiah describes God as a Warrior who put on armor and came to save his people. **“He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head” (Isaiah 59:17)**. In the story of David and Goliath the Bible describes Goliath’s armor. In 1 Samuel 17 it says, **“Goliath had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels” (1 Samuel 17:5)**. Goliath was a mighty warrior with heavy armor, but he was nothing at all in comparison to the LORD. David said to Goliath, **“I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel” (1 Samuel 17:45)**.

God is a mighty Warrior. And he came to save us from enemies much mightier than Goliath. God came to save us from sin and death and the devil. And *the way* God saved us from our sins was by paying a price. Isaiah says, **“The Redeemer will come to Zion” (59:20)**. A “redeemer” is someone who *pays a price* to set someone else free. Jesus is our Redeemer. And the price that Jesus paid to set us free from our sins is his holy precious blood, shed on the cross. Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own...” **“The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins” (Isaiah 59:20)**. Jesus is your Redeemer. Repent of your sins and look to your Redeemer in faith.

Isaiah talks about people looking to their Redeemer in faith when he says, **“From the west, people will fear the name of the LORD” (Isaiah 59:19)**. In the Bible, “*fearing* the LORD” is a very full concept. It includes fearing his judgment against sin. But often in the Bible the concept of “*fearing* the LORD” also includes *trusting* in the LORD as our Savior from sin. Trust in the LORD as your Savior from sin.

**“From the west, people will fear the *name* of the LORD” (Isaiah 59:19)**. What is the *name* of the LORD? Well, one time, God told Moses that he was going to pass in front of Moses and proclaim his name, the LORD. The LORD was going to, in a sense, “preach a sermon on his own name.”<sup>3</sup> And the book of Exodus says that the LORD passed in front of Moses proclaiming, **“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7a)**. By our sin we turned our backs on our God, but let us turn back *to* our God because he is forgiving and compassionate. It’s like it said in our Verse of the Day for today, from the book of Joel, **“Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”** Let us turn back to our God, for with him there is forgiveness. **Let us turn back to our God I. by repenting of our sins and II. by looking to our Redeemer in faith.**

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> I first heard this phrase from Professor Joel Fredrich at Martin Luther College.