

When God's People Go Bad: Isaiah 1:21-31

Isaiah 1:21-31

How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. 22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: 23 Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. 24 Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: 25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: 26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. 27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. 28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. 29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. 30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. 31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen an abandoned church building? Maybe you've driven by one. Broken windows. Weeds growing everywhere. The parking lot empty. You stop and think. "What happened?" At one time that building was full. People sang there. People prayed there. People were saved there. Children ran through those halls.

Now it's empty. What happened? Or maybe you've known someone. They used to be faithful. Sunday morning. Sunday night. Thursday night. Soul winning. Bible reading. Then little by little they disappeared. What happened? Isaiah 1 answers that question. This isn't written to Babylon. This isn't written to Egypt. This is written to Jerusalem. God's own people. How does God's people become like the world? Why do God's people go bad?

Imagine taking your boat out onto a calm lake. You shut the motor off. You don't row. You don't anchor. You just sit there talking with your family. An hour later you look up. You're hundreds of yards from where you started. You never decided to drift. You simply stopped doing what kept you close.

That's exactly how Christians drift. Nobody wakes up one morning and says, "Today I'm going to quit loving God." It happens one small compromise at a time. And I see it all the time. Don't let that be you. Don't let something take you away from God. How does this happen? Isaiah 1 answers that question.

I. A FAITHFUL CITY BECAME UNFAITHFUL

Isaiah 1:21-23

How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. 22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: 23 Thy princes are rebellious, and

companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Let's start with the very first word. **"How."** That word is filled with emotion. God isn't asking for information. He's expressing grief. How? How did this happen? Can you hear the heartbreak in God's voice? "How?" Not because He doesn't know. But because He's grieving. Imagine a father standing outside a jail looking at his son and saying, **"How did we get here?"**

Imagine parents watching their child destroy his life saying, **"How?"** That's God. He isn't beginning with anger. He's beginning with heartbreak. Notice the contrast.

How is the faithful city become an harlot? A harlot is not faithful to one man. A harlot is a prostitute that sells her body to different men for money. The city **was** faithful. Now, it's become a harlot. Think about that. This wasn't always true.

There was a time Jerusalem loved God. There was a time justice mattered. There was a time righteousness lived there. King David lived there. King David led the people in faith. Now murderers fill the city. It's totally different.

Imagine walking into your childhood home that was a great home. But now everything is different. The walls are covered with graffiti. The furniture is destroyed. The windows are broken. You stand there thinking, "What happened?" That's God right here. He's looking at Jerusalem. The city He loved. The city He blessed. The city where His temple stood. And He asks, **"How?"**

Notice verse 22. "Thy silver is become dross..." Silver didn't disappear. It became polluted. That's important. God doesn't say, "There isn't any silver." He says, "The silver has become dross." The value became corrupted. Imagine someone hands you what looks like a solid silver bar. It's shiny. Heavy. Valuable. Then a silversmith melts it in a furnace. As the silver melts, black impurities begin floating to the top. You couldn't see them before, but the fire revealed them. That's what compromise does. It slowly pollutes what was once pure.

Then... "Thy wine mixed with water." What happens when someone waters something down? It becomes weaker. Less valuable. Less pure. Think about a glass of pure orange juice. Then imagine adding more and more water. At first you barely notice the difference. Keep adding water and eventually it doesn't even taste like orange juice anymore. That's compromise. Nobody becomes worldly overnight. Little by little, God's truth gets watered down.

That's compromise. Nobody drifts toward God. We drift away from Him. We drift the wrong way and not the right way. We allow this sinful world to take us away from God. You don't want that to happen. Nobody ruins their life in one day. They drift there one compromise at a time.

II. COMPROMISE ALWAYS REACHES THE LEADERS

Isaiah 1:23

Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

"Thy princes are rebellious..." Notice where God begins. The leaders. They love rewards. They chase money. Justice disappears. The fatherless are ignored. Widows are forgotten. Imagine the captain of a ship deciding he doesn't care where the ship goes.

How long before everyone onboard is in danger? Leadership matters. Parents. Pastors. Government. Teachers. Influence always flows downhill. But don't miss the personal application. Every one of us is leading somebody. Your children are watching. Your grandchildren are watching. New Christians are watching. Somebody is following your example.

Think about your children. And if you don't have children, one day you might. They notice whether you pray. They notice whether church matters to you. They notice whether the Bible stays closed all week. They notice how you speak to your spouse. Whether you realize it or not... Somebody is becoming more like you every day. You are a leader or will be a leader no matter what. You will be influencing others in your life. I have to do better. You have to do better. Let's do this together.

III. GOD DOESN'T GIVE UP

Isaiah 1:24-28

Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: 25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: 26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. 27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. 28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

Now something beautiful happens. Judgment is coming... but so is purification. God says, "I will turn my hand upon thee..." Why? To destroy? No. To purify. Look at verse 25 there. "and purely purge away thy dross." Imagine a silversmith. He places silver into a hot fire. Why? Because he hates the silver? No. Because he loves it enough to remove what doesn't belong. The fire isn't destroying the silver. The fire is revealing the silver.

Sometimes people ask, "Why is God allowing this trial? Why is God allowing this to happen?" Maybe He isn't trying to destroy your faith. Maybe He's revealing things in your heart that couldn't be seen any other way. Sometimes God allows difficult seasons... not to destroy us... but to remove the things destroying us. Nobody drifts toward God. Sometimes God lovingly turns us around.

IV. EVERYONE MAKES A CHOICE

Isaiah 1:29-31

For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. 30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. 31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.

Now Isaiah ends with a warning. People trusted idols. Trees. Gardens. False worship. Those trees and gardens were places where many people practiced idol worship. They thought those places would bring blessing, protection, and happiness. God says the very things they trusted would become the source of their shame.

Imagine grabbing onto a rotten branch to keep yourself from falling. At first it feels strong. Then... it snaps. That's idolatry. The false gods in this world won't hold up.

People grab hold of money. Popularity. Pleasure. Success. Relationships. They expect those things to hold them up. Eventually... they fail.

Look at verse 30 there. "Ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth..." Imagine walking through a beautiful garden in the middle of spring. Flowers everywhere. Everything is green. Then imagine nobody waters it. Come back a month later. Brown leaves. Dead flowers. Dry ground. Looks horrible. What happened?

The garden didn't die overnight. It slowly dried up. Christians do the same thing. Stop reading your Bible. Stop praying. Stop coming to church. Stop serving. Eventually your soul dries up too.

Verse 31 says something frightening. The strong man becomes tinder. His work becomes the spark. Both burn together. Sin doesn't simply disappoint. It consumes. Nobody drifts toward God. We drift away from Him.

CONCLUSION

Let me ask you one final question. How does a faithful city become unfaithful? One compromise. One watered-down conviction. One ignored commandment. One sinful choice. Nobody wakes up planning to drift from God. It happens slowly. Quietly. Almost unnoticed.

Until one day... you look back and realize you're somewhere you never intended to be. Remember that boat we talked about at the beginning? It never decided to drift. It simply wasn't anchored. Let me ask you this: What's anchoring your life? Is it God's Word? Is it prayer? Is it faithful church attendance? Is it serving God? Or have you pulled up the anchor... shut off the motor... and you're just drifting now? Here's the frightening thing about drifting. You usually don't realize how far you've gone... until you try to come back.

God looked at Jerusalem and asked, "**How?**" Don't make God ask that same question about your life. Stay close to Him. Stay anchored to Him. Don't drift. Here's the good news. The same God who warned Jerusalem... still calls people back today. If you've drifted... come back. If you've compromised... repent. If your love for God has grown cold... He is still calling.

Because God's desire has never been to destroy His people. His desire is to purify His people. So ask yourself: **Am I drifting closer to God or farther away?** Because nobody accidentally becomes close to God. But many people accidentally drift away.

Let's pray.