

“Feeling Disconnected?”

ISAIAH 59:1-2

**Baxter T. Exum (#1198)
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Most of us here this morning have probably had the experience of trying to make a phone call, but maybe because we are inside a large building, or maybe because we are out in the middle of nowhere, we are not able to make the call, because we fail to get a signal. Or, maybe we are in the middle of a call, and something happens – maybe we move, maybe the other person moves, maybe a battery dies, maybe we accidentally push the wrong button, maybe we drop the phone in some water – but whatever the case may be, we lose the call and we lose contact with the other person.

As we look around us, we realize that most people seem to be almost constantly connected to the rest of the world through their phones – we use those phones for email, and texting, and various forms of social media, and when we get disconnected, we quickly start to feel a little bit uneasy. Those phones go with us just about everywhere – we love having that contact with other people, and when we get cut off, we have this feeling that something very bad is happening to us.

If this is true with technology, then it is also true in our face-to-face relationships. We think of couples who have been married (sometimes for many years) – over time, sometimes trouble has a way of sneaking in and causing a husband and wife to feel disconnected from one another. Maybe there is sin involved, or maybe we have an ongoing stream of little issues that go unresolved and build up over time to the point of creating a barrier in the relationship. And so a married couple might go from the closeness of the honeymoon to a point several years later where they wonder what they got themselves into. The truth is: They got together because they were connected – at one point, they listened to each other, they shared their hopes and fears, they looked for excuses to spend time with each other, but for one reason or another, they became disconnected through the years. The same thing can happen with close personal friends. At one time we might have had a close personal relationship, but sometimes we drift apart to the point where we are completely disconnected. Something is not right between us. We have drifted apart. There has been a fracture in the relationship.

This morning, in response to a request from one of our members, I would like for us think for just a few moments about the danger of becoming disconnected from God. As bad as it might be to lose a cell signal in the middle of a call, as bad as it might be to become disconnected from a spouse over time, as bad as it might be to drift away from a close friend, most of us would probably agree that it is certainly much worse to be separated from God. And it's worse, because the stakes are so much higher. We know that in the beginning,

man and woman were created to have a close and intimate relationship with God, and yet we also know that that intimate relationship was cut short. It is that break in the relationship that I would like for us to study this morning, and one of the clearest passages on the subject is found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah – Isaiah 59:1-2 (p. 1163). We know that the book of Isaiah was written roughly 700 years before the time of Christ, and it was written into a time of great turmoil in the nation of Israel. The people were drifting farther and farther away from God, and God sent the prophet Isaiah to bring a very important message – a message of hope, but also a message calling out the sins of the people, a message demanding repentance.

This morning, then, as we study this request concerning the danger of becoming disconnected from God, I would like for us to look very carefully at God’s words through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 59:1-2,

- 1 Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save;
Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear.**
- 2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,
And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.**

As we look at these two verses, I would like to keep it very simple this morning. I’d like for us to look at what does not cause the disconnect, and then I would like for us to look at what does cause it.

- I. **But first of all, let us please notice that when we are disconnected from God, IT IS NOT GOD’S FAULT (verse 1).**

Sometimes, when feel far away from God, sometimes, when we feel as if our prayers are not being answered, sometimes, when we feel as if there is something wrong between us and God, sometimes it is very easy to point a finger at God. It is very easy to question and doubt. It is very easy to look to God and to ask the Lord, “What is wrong here?” Or, “God, what is the problem?” And I suppose, that is the way it is with human nature. It is almost always easier to blame someone else than it is to take personal responsibility for something. I’m thinking of the situation with Lance Armstrong this past week. As I understand it, he was asked whether he cheated, and the answer was “No.” And at this point, it appears that the justification for that answer was that everybody else was doing it. And so, it was not my fault! This is the way the game is played, and I was simply doing what everybody else was doing.

This past Wednesday as we studied Proverbs 19, we talked just briefly about how our children are so good sometimes at claiming “accident” status on something. So, yes, I whacked my little sister over the head with a spoon, but it was an “accident.” It really was not my fault! It is easy, then, to blame others or to blame our circumstances, but in this passage, it appears that the people were in some way blaming God for their trouble. And if we think about the history of Israel, maybe we know why. In the past, God had always helped the people. God fought their battles. God led them out of Egypt. God brought them safely across the Red Sea. God led them through the wilderness. God fought the battle of Jericho. God was responsible for every good thing, and now that the good things had stopped happening, it was very easy for the people to look to God and to blame God for not doing what he had always done in the past.

As we look back at verse 1, then, we find that God (through the prophet Isaiah) answers the accusation concerning whether all of this is God’s fault, and the answer is: No! The relationship between God and the people has broken down, but it is not God’s fault! And the prophet (in verse 1) uses some rather graphic language, “...**the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear.**” We have the picture here that God is handicapped in some way. We have the idea that God has had his arms

chopped off. We think of those ancient statues that are missing their arms. That's the picture the ancient Israelites apparently had of God. The blessings have stopped, so they God must suddenly be missing his arms! And the same goes for the ears. They apparently have the idea that God's ears must not be working for some reason. And again, the idea is that God is handicapped in various ways. The Lord is unable to hear their prayers, and even if he could hear, he doesn't have any arms. Certainly that must be the reason why God is no longer blessing the people as he had in the past. There has been a terrible accident in heaven, and God is now unable to do anything! "It's obviously not our fault; it must be God's fault," the people were saying. But not so, says the prophet Isaiah, ***"Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear."*** If we are looking for a cause for the broken relationship, Isaiah says that we need to dig a little deeper.

II. **And of course, if we continue reading with verse 2, we find the real problem, and the problem is: WHEN WE ARE DISCONNECTED FROM GOD, IT IS OUR FAULT.**

This is not something we can blame on God, but the prophet says that we need to look at ourselves. In fact, he refers to ***"iniquities"*** and ***"sins."*** ***"...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."*** The issue, then, is not that God is handicapped in some way, the issue is not that God has been maimed in some horrible accident in heaven, the issue is not that God is physically unable to hear your prayers, but the real issue is ***"your sins"*** and ***"your iniquities."*** In other words, God sees what we have done, he determines that we have sinned, and then he willingly cuts off that relationship. We might say that God takes sin rather personally. I know we have illustrated it a similar way before, but it makes sense to me: If you go out to the corner of Jade and Acewood and take a hammer to my little Toyota Corolla, then you and me are going to have a problem! And if you are the one who does that to me, if I am the innocent victim, then it's not my problem, it's your problem. You are the one who did this to me. And assuming I know that you are the one who did it, we are going to have a rather awkward relationship. Things will not be right between us. If you come in and say, "Hey, how are you doing?" I will not see that as being nice, but I will see that as ignoring the issue. That will just make me even more upset. That relationship will be broken...until something happens to bring that relationship back together, until we (meaning you) do something to make things right. And that is what we are talking about with God in Isaiah 59:2.

Somebody might say, "Well, I've never smashed in God's car with a hammer!" And yes, that may be right, and yet God has a way of taking our sins against others very personally. In fact, he takes all sin personally. I'm thinking of those who will be lost, who, on the Day of Judgment, will hear the Lord say, ***"I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me"*** (Matthew 25:42-43). Of course, as we know from the rest of that account, they object that they never overlooked the Lord in those ways, but the Lord will reply, ***"Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."*** In other words, the Lord takes all kinds of sin quite personally, and those sins cause our relationship with God to break apart.

Throughout the Bible, in fact, we have a number of sins that are specifically described as causing God to turn away and to not hear us when we pray. We could start with the very first sin back in the Garden of Eden. As I understand it, Adam and Eve were given an amazing amount of freedom; in fact, there was only one thing they were told not to do. How about that! One rule! And yet we know that they broke the one rule. God said, ***"...from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat."*** That's it! Here they were in a garden full of the purest and most amazing food we could possibly imagine, and yet they ate the fruit from the one

tree that God told them to avoid. And then, after they ate, the relationship with God was damaged. As soon as they ate, they hid themselves from God. In a sense, they had bashed in God's car with a hammer, and that relationship was severed.

We see other examples of this in the Scriptures. In a few weeks, we hope to get to Proverbs 21:13 in our Wednesday night class, a powerful verse based on King Solomon's many years of observation, ***"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered."*** If you don't listen to the poor, God will not listen to you. In a month or two, we hope to get to another one of these verses in Proverbs 28:9, ***"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination."*** Do we realize what that means? If we fail to listen to God's law, our prayers will be an abomination in the eyes of God. Let me ask: How much time did you spend reading God's law this week? If we do not pay attention to the Law, God will not pay attention to us.

We have several other similar passages in the New Testament. In the context of prayer, James says in James 4:3, ***"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."*** So, if we ask with selfish motives, the Lord has promised not to listen to our prayers. Another very powerful verse can be found in 1 Peter 3:7, where Peter says, ***"You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."*** In other words, those of us who are husbands need to treat our wives with the utmost of respect, otherwise, God will not listen to our prayers. Husbands, have you been a jerk to your wives lately? If you have not been nice at home, I would suggest, based on the word of God, that God is not listening to your prayers anymore. You may be praying, but God is not listening.

Going back to Isaiah 59, if we had time, we could keep reading the rest of the chapter, and God outlines some of the problems that he had with the nation of Israel. In verse 3, for example, through the prophet Isaiah, God said that the people's hands were defiled with blood. I can't help but think of our own nation. This week we mourn the 40th anniversary of our own nation slaughtering millions of its own innocent children. Over the past month or so, we have seen all kinds of justified outrage over the murder of the 20 children in Connecticut. As a nation, we ought to be upset by that. As a nation, however, we are apparently blind to the fact that there are that many children murdered every 25 seconds in the United States alone. As a nation, like the ancient nation of Israel, our hands are also defiled with blood. Isaiah goes on from there to mention lying, and wickedness, and mischief, and iniquity, and acts of violence – all of these various sins were keeping the people from having a deep and meaningful relationship with God. The people sinned, and God was personally offended.

And, as Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, this sin is a universal condition. All people reach a point in life where they understand right and wrong, and they need to make a decision. Unfortunately, all of us will at one point fall short of God's perfection, and the wall of separation starts going up. As Paul put it, ***"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** The word for ***"sin"*** Paul uses there is a word that refers to missing the mark. We think of shooting at a target. In the ancient world, when people would take a bow and arrow and shoot at a target, if they missed, the scorekeeper would use this word. Literally, they had sinned – they had missed the mark. Anything short of a bull's eye was a miss. And that's the way Paul explains our relationship with God. If we miss even once, we fall short of God's glory. We are separated from God.

Conclusion:

This morning, then, we have learned that when we are disconnected from God, it is not God's fault, but it is our fault. God hasn't had his arms amputated, God does not need a hearing aid, but our sins are responsible for the separation between us. That is the bad news. Once we have sinned, that wall goes up, and there is nothing that we can do about it on our own. The good news is that God wants the relationship to be restored.

So, as we close, I would invite you to turn with me to several verses in the New Testament book of Colossians (p. 1842). In Colossians 1, Paul is describing Jesus as being the **"image of the invisible God."** He refers to how everything that we see around us was created by, through, and for Jesus himself. In Colossians 1:18, we read about how Jesus is the **"head of the body, the church,"** and then we come to Colossians 1:19, where we read,

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Up in verse 22, the word **"reconcile"** refers to being brought back, the idea of getting back on target. We missed, but God has a way of making it right, and the way God made it right was to send His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Notice in verse 22, **"He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death."** If we accept that sacrifice, we can then be presented to God as **"holy and blameless and beyond reproach."** And I would also point out: There is a big **"if"** in verse 23. All of this is true, **"...if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard."** So, in order to be reconciled, we have to continue in the faith.

We started the lesson this morning by thinking about how frustrating it is to lose that signal and have a call get dropped on us. We talked about how sometimes couples drift apart over time. We talked about good friends sometimes getting disconnected. But our focus this morning has been on our relationship with God. In response to a request from one of our members, we have looked at the fact that sin separates us from God. We have learned from the prophet Isaiah that it is not God's fault when that happens, but it is our fault. That's the bad news. The good news is that God wants us to come back. We come back by accepting the gospel message. The Lord Jesus was crucified in our place. He paid the price. We accept the gift by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be briefly immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you have any questions, we hope you will ask. We would be glad to meet with you this afternoon or sometime this week. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, we would invite you to write it down and let us know. If you would like to respond to God's message in any way, please let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com