**Isaiah 43:22 – 44:5**

22 Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel!

 23 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense.

 24 You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.

 25 I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

 26 Accuse me, let us go to trial; set forth your case, so that you may be proved right.

 27 Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me.

 28 Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling.

**Isaiah 44:1**But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!

 2 Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen.

 3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring.

 4 They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams.

 5 This one will say, "I am the LORD's," another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, "The LORD's," and adopt the name of Israel.

**Psalm 50:1-15, 22-23**

The mighty one, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

 2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

 3 Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him.

 4 He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

 5 "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

 6 The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

 7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.

 8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.

 9 I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds.

 10 For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

 11 I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.

 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.

 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

 14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

 15 Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

22 "Mark this, then, you who forget God, or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver.

 23 Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God."

**Matthew 11:25-30**

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;

 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

 28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

**Sermon**

Any golfers among you all? Do you know what a mulligan is? Yeah… not always something to be proud of in a golf game is it? Not something you scream out to have… It is a do-over; when you really made a mess of a drive, you get to hit the ball again without any strokes added to your score. The mess up is forgotten, like it never even happened. How many times have any of you wished that you can get a do-over and not let the previous messes count?

Have you ever been there? Have you ever wanted to take a mulligan? Maybe it was something pretty simple like making a wrong turn, or you weren’t paying attention and got a speeding ticket or got into a car accident. It moves all the way to moments when we say something hurtful to someone else, you respond to an email with a scathing email telling that person what we really think of them, and hitting send; saying hurtful and mean words in a moment of anger; doing something we never though we did. Taking the extra drink when we shouldn’t have; reaching out to that one person that is now not there anymore… I bet there are many examples of when we would have liked to take a mulligan.

We’ve all been there in one way or another. We’ve all wanted to do something over again . . . we’ve all wanted a mulligan. We wish we could turn back the clock and start over again, to take back our words and actions, but we can’t.

Israel was not really on top of their game – no pun intended. They were still in exile in Babylon, out of no fault but their own. But even though they were in a different country and had no temple anymore, they never ceased the Temple ritual. The prayers continued, the Psalms were sung, the cult continued… sacrifices were brought. And God never accused Israel of not worshiping; he was taking them to task for the worship not really being about him. Their worship was dead. They ceased to respond in love to a God who loves them – their hearts were no longer in it. They ceased because they had wearied of Him, and it was not because they had been driven from the land, although their interest in other gods might have had something to do with it.

See, God gave Israel a pretty good instruction manual on worshiping – just go read Leviticus. They knew exactly how and what to sacrifice for whatever occasion. Israel followed the manual, sometimes even elaborately – to the point of 120000 sheep and 22000 oxen. That may make us ask – and that did not satisfy him? What more did he want?

God gave Israel this manual to unburden their sins – that was what the sacrificial system was for. He never meant for it to be a burden; for it to be a drudge every time they did it. God wanted for it to be a way to call on him, to unload their burdens; to come before the God who chose them, set them free and has been with them always. But now God is saying that the sacrifices Israel was bringing, were themselves sinful – it was without heart, without joy, without devotion.

See, Israel treated their worship as a mechanism for controlling God and putting God in their debt… a way to manipulate. And so, naturally, it became wearisome. How could it be otherwise? Lugging sacrifice after sacrifice to the temple to obligate God – there’s no release in that. Even God does not enjoy that much. Not a great attitude to have when you are actually worshiping the living Yahweh.

God wants worship to set our hearts free. God wanted Israel and us to know that when we come to him, that his burden is light. Remember – this sacrificial system of the old testament prefigured the cross of Christ, who said: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as the ransom of many”.

God locates his very identity in blotting out our sins and remembering them no more. And when Satan stands before God to accuse us, and when the records are pulled up, the only thing that comes up is the righteous record of Christ – nothing to blame us. It is a clean slate. God presides over promises and not punishment.

Think about this - I mean really consider this - I will remember the sins you commit against me. I may forgive you, but I will still remember your sins against me. I will hold onto them in some file drawer in my heart and brain – stored in the cloud somewhere for all eternity. It’s really, really difficult to cause yourself to forget something someone has done which hurt you.

But God tells us He will no longer remember our sins! In fact, it is deleted from the cloud. Sounds pretty good to me… I wish I could even forgive myself like that. But somehow, it seems to me that we have a really hard time doing this. Something inside us do not want to accept grace but would like to justify ourselves at least a little bit. If it is free, it is too good to be true. Something in our culture told us that we need to work for what we get. And we drag this way of thinking into our relationship with God. We give in order to get. Our natural drift is to worship God not to unburden ourselves but to obligate him. To tell him we deserve better and to ask of him everything our heart desires.

But, do we really want to get justice before God? Would we really rather go and explain ourselves; bring our case before God to judge and argue before him what we deserve? Or would we rather have grace and mercy? Paul tells us that we are all sinners, every single one of us… yes, even me... We want to do one thing, but we end up doing another. We want what we should not want. None of us wants to be hard-hearted, but sometimes we are. No one wants to self-deceive, but we rationalize all the time. No one wants to be cruel, but we all blurt things out and regret them later. No one wants to be a bystander, to commit sins of omission. But alas…

Luckily, this is not where the story ends, it is only the beginning. God does not leave us up to our own vices but brings us back into relationship… this is where he starts with us. That which you cannot let go of, in your life or in someone else’s is already forgotten – it is wiped clean and paid for by Jesus Christ – the carpenter who stood accused for all of us before God; who died on the cross so that the record is wiped clean. We are made pure and whole – whiter than snow.

God goes out of his way to assure us – the one who created and formed us – the one who chose us and who will always help us. This is the way of God’s grace. God does not want us to be insecure with him. In response to our violations of his grace, he gives more grace, and he wants us to know it. Our sins do discredit us and frees God from all obligation to us. We are not able to demand anything of him, but luckily it does not mean that God quits on us.

Christ died for us because he loves us. He forgives our sin because of who He is, not because we deserve it. We worship and bring our sacrifices trusting in his promises – that we are indeed forgiven and set free. We come to worship thirsty from the efforts of trying to carry it all on our own; to work for something that we can never achieve.

“Come to me, all who are thirsty”, says Jesus, “come and drink”. Jesus poured himself out with such a generosity that we became people saturated with God. We are filled with the Spirit that God promised and given on Pentecost. He quenches our thirst and help us to burst into life through his manifest presence. A life that flowers and blooms and bears fruit. A life that becomes the salt of the earth and light in darkness. A life that others cannot help but notice, because we are whiter than snow…

We come to worship, not because it is a burden… We come because we cannot help to come and praise the One who has set us free. We come because we believe the promise that we are forgiven. We come to bring our sacrifices out of thankfulness for what has been done for us. We come, unashamed to call ourselves the Lord’s. Unashamed to write his name on our hands, but showing with our lives whose we really are. We forgive each other because we have been shown mercy; we care for the least of these, to help ease their burdens; we come to worship because our slate is clean!!!