

Introduction:

1. Describe a task or job that you had to do where your heart was not really in it and you just went through the motions. Why was that?
2. Of the different kinds of people who are downtrodden, who do you have the most compassion for? Why is that?

Understanding:

3. Read Psalm 32:3-5 and Isaiah 1:4. Compare the situation of the Psalmist with what is going on in Isaiah. What do they have in common? What is the remedy that the Lord provides for us?
4. Read James 4:3-4 and Isaiah 1:15. How do the unanswered prayers in James connect to the unanswered prayers in Isaiah? How should this affect how we pray?
5. Today's passage uses action verbs for the downtrodden peoples: Defend them. Take up their cause. Plead their case. God was saying to the people of Judah, "You're guilty of neglecting the very people I'm most concerned about!" Can we suddenly spring into action by making a resolution to help these people? Why or why not? What do we really need? How does this connect to the theme or purpose of this new series?
6. Look at verse 18: "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Those words contain so much hope—don't they? What is meaningful to us as Christians about the image of a piece of cloth, once dyed deep red, becoming white again?
7. In Isaiah 1:9 there is a hint of hope in the darkness. Compare that verse with Romans 9:29. Then read Romans 9:30-33 too. Who is the stone? How do we get rescued from the bad religion described in today's Isaiah passage?
8. How would Isaiah's listeners have felt about being compared to Sodom and Gomorrah? What kind of comparison in today's culture would be a similar wakeup call?
9. Today was baptism day at the Chapel. Baptism is the picture of a believer's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Read Colossians 2:10-12. Here "flesh" can stand for all the religious stuff we do. How does reflecting on what happened at your baptism encourage you to be able to take compassionate action in Christ?
10. Read Micah 6:6-8. Compare it to today's passage. Are there any differences? Why do you think that is?

Application:

11. In Matthew 15:8, Jesus was talking to a group of Pharisees, and here's what he told them—"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." So here's what this means for us: it is very possible to attend church; to pray prayers; to listen to Christian radio; to read the Bible; to give generous offerings...and still God could say, "You've turned your back on me." And you say, "What do you want from me, God?" And God says, "Your heart is far from me. I don't want your religious activity; I want your heart." When is your heart most far from the Lord? In this season start praying for the Lord to change your heart in that area.
12. Based on today's teaching how would you answer someone who says "The church is full of phonies. I will just be a Christian on my own. "?