Isaiah Prophesied, Jesus was the Fulfilment

I was moved to make comment on the Old Testament reading this week - which is about, in a nutshell, Isaiah having a pop at the people of Judah - challenging them to examine the essence of their faith. Specifically, posing the question as to whether it was it based on how genuine they were in their worship? Or whether or not worship had become just a ritual. Were they truly a people whose hearts had been transformed by their relationship with God, or playing lip service to it?

Isaiah points out to Judah that any religious practices (such as feasting, sacrifices and prayers) are meaningless if they're not accompanied by righteous living (in accordance with God's way of doing things), by promoting peace, harmony and justice-for-all.

Furthermore, Isaiah makes it clear that God requires them to not only just recognise such hypocrisy, but to turn away from it… by seeking (what we would term these days) social justice for everyone. And in return for obedience to this call, God offers them forgiveness (to "eat the good of the land")…

Thought for the Week: It occurs to me that there have been (and still are) many wars and lesser conflicts falsely fought "in the name of religion"; and distrust and hatred abound because of religious, social and political divisions. We see evidence of this every time we read the newspapers or watch the news on TV.

In the context of this passage from Isaiah, people's outward displays of religious observance (or the opposite!) only demonstrate that their hearts are far from righteous cause and universal justice. There are exceptions of course - but they seem to be getting harder to spot these days!

God's way of doing things can be defined more in terms of truly caring for the vulnerable, seeking to promote and support social justice (for everyone), and demonstrating the power and effectiveness of ethical behaviour (faith-in-action, so to speak). These things will, ultimately, bring about restoration of what God wants "from us." It looks like a long journey lies ahead at a time when things seem to be slipping.

However, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus remains a game-changer: in spite of our human frailties and many ‘failures’ throughout the last 2000 years or so in particular, our current (global) situation need not have the final say. God remains committed to His people, even in the face of repeated rejection by them - and Isaiah’s warnings at the end is preceded by words of hope that we should share and practice:

“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land”

Isaiah 1: 10-20

1 The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah
and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah,
kings of Judah.
10
Hear the word of the Lord,
you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
11
What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.
12
When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more;
13

bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
14
Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
15
When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
16
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
17
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.
18
Come now, let us argue it out,
says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
19
If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
20
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken