

What Catches God's Eye

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[0 : 00] So, we're going to be in the Old Testament today, and I've opened up my Bible to Isaiah 66, and I encourage you to do the same. There we go.

Isaiah 66, and we're going to read this text in pieces in a little bit, but to sort of set up our study, I'm going to share with you something that I have on my keychain, and it's a brass skeleton key.

This is a memento from our old church building in Buena Park, California. After pastoring there for 19 years, we sold the property and moved over to Anaheim and merged with another church, and we took some keepsakes with this.

There were some old doors from the 1930s that we had turned into bookends, and so if you come to my office, you'll see that it still works. It doesn't open a door, but nifty little keepsakes that we had.

The Lord opened up new doors of opportunity for us. Now, if you'd ever gone by our old property, you will not be impressed.

[1 : 07] Buena Park Bible Church was lovingly built by the founding members in 1934, in the height of the Depression, and it looks like it. There were odd things in that building.

You know, about 20 minutes away is the Crystal Cathedral, and they would have these grand productions every year, the glory of Christmas, and I would joke, well, we might be able to pull off the glimmer of Christmas, you know, here at our property.

But we all know, we all ought to know, that the church is not the building. The church of Christ is its people. God never has commanded Christian people to build palaces of worship.

Now, he did ordain in the Old Testament something like that. The tabernacle, which then turned into the temple, were God's ideas. Unfortunately, the Hebrew people tended to not only build those buildings, they also constructed faulty ideas about those buildings.

And for the Jews who would come back from the Babylonian exile and rebuild the temple, there would be ongoing issues about how they should view that place, and how it helped them to relate rightly to God.

[2 : 24] What we're going to see in our study this morning is that what catches God's eye most is not the rituals of an impressive house, but righteousness from a humble heart.

Let me say a little bit about the book of Isaiah before we narrow down to this passage. The book of Isaiah is a masterful collection of Isaiah's preaching over a 40-year period.

You should not read it, though, like a journal. It's not like Isaiah 1 is the first thing he preached, and 2 is the next thing. It's really arranged more like a hymnal.

It's arranged topically by theme. In fact, I would say that Isaiah 1 comes from about 20 years into his ministry. Isaiah 6 backs up to the first year of his ministry.

And this book of prophecy is divided into two great halves, and perhaps later you can study it on that chart. There's what has been called the book of judgment, chapters 1 to 39, where Isaiah is largely laying down prophecies of judgment about how God is going to bring the curses of the covenant on Israel and Judah for centuries, seven centuries of violating the Mosaic covenant.

[3 : 44] The Lord is going to war against his own people. But the second half of the book... I want to back up. The second half of the book is the book, what's sometimes called the book of comfort.

These are largely prophecies of restoration and deliverance. And you find that the Lord's war plan includes redeeming his people, even sending a servant who would take away the sins of the people.

Who would ever have guessed that the strong arm of the Lord would look like that? That's Isaiah 53. And throughout this second half of the book, there are prophecies mostly of encouragement.

Now, chapters 40 to 66 is truly prophetic preaching, because Isaiah is speaking in these chapters primarily to Jews who would be over 100 years after him.

He speaks in these chapters about the Jews coming out of Babylon and going back to the land. He even names the king, Cyrus, who would give the decree for them to go back to that land.

[4 : 50] The people of Isaiah's own day would benefit from what he said, but the people of about 150 years later would really benefit from what he said, as they would find true as the Lord's word came to pass.

And there are many things in these chapters which look beyond even that era to the coming of our Lord Jesus and his first advent and his second advent. The last major section of the book of comfort, the last nine chapters, addresses issues and sins and discouragements that the Jews coming back to the land would face after the exile.

It even rewinds for them to consider how they got into exile and the sins that they had before then. But it also fast forwards to the end of the age, the glorious end that God has planned for his people. Chapter 66, where we are today, is of course the last collection of Isaiah's prophecies. And he begins it by focusing on the majestic greatness of God.

The majesty of God has no counterpart in the earth. Not even the most majestic things that people make for his namesake can rival him.

[6 : 08] What catches God's eye most? Not the rituals of an impressive house, but righteousness from a humble heart. We're going to see these two things in these six verses today.

Firstly, we'll consider the worship that God wants. And then we'll see the hypocrisy that God hates. Now we're going to read these verses in segments.

And as we consider the worship that God wants, I'm going to read now verses 1 and 2. I'm reading from the New American Standard. Thus says the Lord, heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

Where then is a house you could build for me? And where is a place that I may rest? For my hand made all these things. Thus all these things came into being, declares the Lord.

But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word. One of the things I note in these opening verses is that the worship that God wants is not about beautiful buildings.

[7 : 23] Now it's important to preface what we just read, and what we're saying here, that God had ordained Jerusalem to be the place where a temple would be built, where he would place his name on the earth in a very special and unique way in the Old Testament era.

You can find many passages about this. One of them would be Psalm 132, verse 13 and 14. The Lord has chosen Zion.

He has desired it for his habitation. And then the Lord says, This is my resting place forever. Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. Ah, yeah, so it wasn't like the Jews invented the idea of picking Jerusalem and building a temple there.

This was the Lord's doing. But he never intended them to develop the kind of superstitious, ritualistic ideas that some of them developed about the temple.

Because God was always so much bigger than the temple. And Solomon knew this. When Solomon dedicated the temple back in 1 Kings 8, he says, Will God indeed dwell on the earth?

[8 : 31] Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house which I've built. That's 1 Kings 8, 27. The temple was always supposed to be representative of God's presence, but it was never thought to be some kind of a containment unit where you could have God in a box.

But Israel, because for so many centuries, so many of them, their hearts were not regenerated, they often elevated symbol over substance.

And while God would authorize them to rebuild the temple in the days of Ezra, Israel would also make that into something that it was not supposed to be.

You know, it is so tempting for us to do the same thing, maybe in lesser ways and in different ways. But for many Christian people, the church property defines their church.

When they think of their church, they think of a building. They think of a steeple. And all the money and all the time and all the work days. And I'm not saying that we should not care at all about where we meet or how well we take care of things.

[9 : 45] That can be an expression of hospitality. But sometimes the building becomes the be-all and the end-all. Or maybe it's not the property, maybe it's the programs the church has.

More than effectively ministering to people is, well, we've started spinning these plates years ago, and we've got to keep spinning these plates. And then, of course, you hear all sorts of stories about churches that have huge, dramatic arguments over what color the carpet ought to be.

I knew of one church in the South where they were at such odds over what color the new shingles should be on the roof that if you approached the church from one direction, they were green, and if you approached it from the other direction, they were black.

I guess that's a compromise. We need to keep the most important things the most important things, and that is, of course, the Lord himself. Look with me, again, in the middle of verse 1, the Lord says, Heaven is my throne.

The earth is my footstool. And that includes the earth, the temple on earth. There's royal imagery here that would be very impressive to people in Isaiah's days because ancient thrones were very elevated things.

[11 : 01] You know, imagine here we have a small platform. Imagine this being tripled in height. And there's a large chair consuming the entirety of the platform. Well, if you're sitting on an elevated chair like that, you've got to have a footstool because who wants to have a king with his feet dangling?

So, but the Lord's throne is heaven above, and earth, including the temple, is just where he puts his feet.

So big, so great, so grand is God. Obviously, no house, no building can begin to represent all that he is. Yes, there's a sense in which God's throne on earth in the Old Testament was in the temple. I mean, the mercy seat, as it's called on the Ark of the Covenant, serves in many capacities. One of them is as a throne of sorts. But in the greater sense, he is Lord over everything.

All of creation is his throne room. He's so much greater than the earth that it's like the footstool in which he puts his feet. And if the whole earth is his footstool, not just Jerusalem, that indicates something that all of the earth is like sacred space to him.

[12 : 19] And so it matters how we live for the Lord, not only at the gathering place, at the sacred place, but in every place. It matters how God's people live day by day.

God has never been impressed with one-day-a-week worshipers. God has never been impressed with the faith. God has never been impressed with one-day-a-week worshipers. Who regard the sacred time and the sacred place, but live as they want otherwise.

Look at the Lord's logic in verse 2. For my hand made all these things, thus all these things came to be. He's alluding here, of course, to Genesis 1, where the Lord repeatedly said, Let there be, and there was.

God can never be impressed with the physical things we construct because he made the essence from which all of it comes.

Our creative powers, architectural work and the like, artistic work, they're only derivative powers. We can only imitate and manipulate what the Lord himself has already made.

[13 : 31] He may be pleased, and he can be praised with what we do with our hands, but he is never impressed. You know, the New Testament alludes to this opening verse, these opening verses, a number of times.

In Acts chapter 7, when Stephen is giving his last testament before he's martyred, he goes on a sermon against the Jewish leaders, and he talks about how focused they were on the temple, and after that, he quotes from this verse, and then he says to them, Acts 7, 51, You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit.

You are doing just as your fathers did. Or how about the Apostle Paul in Acts 17, when he's on Mars Hill preaching to the Greek philosophers.

He alludes to this passage. He says, The God who made the world and all things in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. So this idea that the earth is the Lord's, and there's no house that contain him, this is not just a lesson for Jewish people.

It's for Gentiles too. It is a human idea, a fallen human notion, that we think that God can be somehow contained, or limited, or worse off, manipulated by places that we construct for him.

[15 : 07] It's almost like the Tower of Babel mentality. You know, after the Jews would come back from the exile, they would rebuild the temple.

And that temple would be a source of conflict for centuries, until it was destroyed again by the Romans. In Ezra and Nehemiah's day, there were debates over the procedures, and who was allowed to serve there, and who couldn't, and they had to sort through all of that mess.

After the Old Testament period, there were fights over the temple. The Samaritans to the north rejected the temple in Jerusalem completely, and built their own one. The people who lived out at the Dead Sea rejected the temple, and said it was illegitimate, and they started their own religious movement.

All of these disputes led to wars before the coming of the New Testament. And in Jesus' day, the temple of Herod was very controversial, and it's questionable whether even the high priests who were serving were legitimate high priests by biblical standards.

Today, similar pitfalls ensnare people about buildings. Much time and money can be spent maintaining monuments.

[16:20] Now, let me say, I am no opponent to churches owning property. I enjoy looking at beautiful church architecture. It can be quite inspiring, but I also thought to myself many times, you know, I'm glad I'm not a pastor of one of these historic church properties, where how many hours of my week has to be spent with how are we going to reset this stone and take care of the steeple and where's the money going to come from and historical society, are they going to get involved?

You know, the tail starts to wag the dog in so many ways. I mentioned before that I pastored not very far away from Robert Shuler's Crystal Cathedral.

That name familiar? The Crystal Cathedral? Oh, okay. Well, Robert Shuler was a, the definition of a feel-good preacher. The power of positive thinking.

And he constructed an enormous church made of glass panels. Called it the Crystal Cathedral. And had a television program called the Hour of Power. Which eventually got reduced to a half hour, but it didn't have the same marketing that the half hour of power.

And as he aged and the church aged and their methods no longer were working, the church began to crater. And they came to a point where they could no longer maintain this amazing edifice.

[17:39] And ironically, it ended up being purchased by the Roman Catholic Church who turned it into the cathedral of Orange County. What a strange, strange twist and turn of things.

You know, and to a lesser degree, good churches, Bible-believing churches, can fall into traps over the trappings of their property. It is so much more important to build into each other's lives.

Edification is far more important than any edifice. The worship that God wants is fundamentally not about beautiful buildings.

It's fundamentally about humble hearts. And you see that especially in the second half of verse 2 where the Lord says, But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at my word.

What really catches God's eye is not grand structures. What catches his eye are the lowly of heart. A similar idea was preached by Isaiah back in chapter 57.

[18:53] Would you flip back a few pages in your Bible? Look back with me at chapter 57 verse 15. For thus says the high and exalted one who lives forever whose name is holy I dwell on a high and holy place and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite.

Yes, this is what God wants. Be humble. This is a term for being often for being poor. Certainly for being lowly. Lowly. Here the emphasis on a poverty of spirit.

Exactly the kind of thing that Jesus was talking about in the Sermon on the Mount. Someone who's contrite. This is related to a verb for striking. That is when the word convicts they receive it and they're gripped by it.

Who trembles at my word? Chapter 66 says. What a profound expression. There were a few instances in Old Testament history where Israelites literally trembled when they heard God's voice. Like when God appeared at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. After the giving of the law it says in Exodus 20 verse 18 all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking and when the people saw it they trembled and stood at a distance.

[20:21] In a less dramatic way when the temple was rebuilt in the 500s in the days of Ezra. Ezra chapter 9 verse 4 everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me and I sat and appalled until the evening offering.

People heard the law read and they realized oh no we have fallen so far short. In both instances you have people who are deeply aware that they are not relating rightly to the most holy God. Trembling is due to a great seriousness and a concern a recognition of God's absolute authority and an awareness of our own inadequacy.

Now don't misunderstand or misapply a statement like this. It's not that every moment that we're conscious of our relationship with God that it must be quaking in our boots. Nobody can live like that.

The fear of the Lord which this would be a representation of is not about living in constant dread. Now there are moments where dread and scare it could be very appropriate and you see these.

[21 : 42] Isaiah himself felt this when he sees God and his burning holiness and the seraphim crying holy, holy, holy he falls down expecting to die. Yes.

But he doesn't live his whole life in that existential moment. I didn't plan to say this but I'll say it. You know I live with a fear of the car and so do you.

Because none of us today are going to walk out of here and go out to the main road and just casually stroll across it. you don't do that. You know those things have an ability to take you out and so you have a proper fear of that.

Now none of you are quaking about it. I doubt any of you came today with great anxiety but I hope we survived crossing the street today. But you have learned to stay in your lane as it were.

And so the fear of the Lord governs the way we relate to him. Well these two verses tell us what the Lord wants.

[22 : 50] Let's look now at the remaining verses of our passage today which speak about the hypocrisy that God hates. Now I'm going to read right now only verses 3 and 4.

We will take up verses 5 and 6 in a moment but look with me at verse 3. But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man.

He who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog's neck. He who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood.

He who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways and their soul delights in their abominations so I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what they dread because I called but no one answered.

I spoke but they did not listen and they did evil in my sight and chose that in which I did not delight. Now these are some hard hitting verses and maybe confusing verses.

[23 : 57] It focuses on sins of hypocrisy although the word hypocrisy is not used. The notion is certainly there. Before I start to unpack verse 3 I have a sort of a sidebar for us to consider about the varieties of hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is replacing God's worship with a fake and as we think about the kinds of hypocrisy we find in the Bible and that we're familiar with in life we can think of these.

There's the kind of hypocrisy where you're being contrary with yourself. That is where you say one thing about your relationship with God but you do another. you claim one thing but actually live a different way.

That is a notable kind of hypocrisy. And then there's the kind of hypocrisy where you're contrary with others. You require one thing of other people but you do something else yourself.

Parental hypocrisy. Pastoral hypocrisy. And then there is being contrary with God. this is where you're doing religion but not God's way.

[25 : 05] You're claiming to be worshiping him serving him but it's not at all in accord with what God has called for or required. And this is I think the most dangerous and it can be the most self-deceiving of hypocrisies.

And it's not even just about person's motives although that can be at play. We're talking here about a false religion a kind of hypocrisy that claims to accomplish what it does not.

Now really hypocrisy can include all three of these sorts of things can't it? It's possible for one of them to be most prominent and I think it's this last kind of hypocrisy that Isaiah is preaching against here.

Now I will say that on one level or another sometimes all of us are hypocrites. I think we have to confess that. We are sometimes contrary in the way we live from what we confess.

Sometimes we are contrary in what we require of others and what we allow for ourselves. And we're sometimes contrary with what God wants. But I'm not speaking here about Christians, believers

who are struggling with inconsistency.

[26 : 19] You know I would sometimes have people come to me and say pastor I feel like such a hypocrite. And they say well what's going on in your life? Well I come to church and I sing this and I worship the Lord but I'm struggling with pornography or I'm struggling with this and I just feel like maybe I'm not a real Christian.

So of course I want to probe and help them analyze their own heart but there is a difference between struggling with inconsistency and flat out hypocrisy. And there are degrees of hypocrisy that are more grave, that are more fundamental and that's the sort of thing that Isaiah is tackling here.

A hypocritical religion is often the focus of his preaching in this last half of the book. It is an evil that infected Israel for centuries even after the Babylonian captivity.

So now let's come to verse three and we'll consider the awfulness of hypocrisy. How this is insulting God's wishes by doing clearly the opposite of what he requires.

And now we come to these difficult phrases which I read a moment ago and you're probably wondering who in the world is, what is all this about killing animals and killing people and the like? There are clearly two kinds of sacrificial worship that are mentioned in alternating fashion.

[27 : 34] You can see verse three, he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man. Okay, killing an ox could be good. Killing a man, probably not good. Sacrificing a lamb, law says to do that.

Breaking a dog's neck, I don't remember any requirements for that in the Old Testament. And so you can go through each of these. So there's two kinds of sacrifices side by side.

The Hebrew text is challenging here because it simply puts these two actions each time side by side. Literally, here's the Hebrew text. He who kills an ox, he who slays a man, he who sacrifices a lamb, he who breaks a dog's neck, he who offers a grain offering, swine's blood, he who burns incense, he who blesses an idol.

This is poetry. And Isaiah, the poetic prophet, has jammed these phrases together to force his readers and listeners to wrestle with how does that relate to that?

And authorities have differed over this. In fact, I don't know what Bibles you all might have in your lap, but different versions go in different directions. Either there is a series of comparisons that's being made, my New American Standard and ESV render it that way, or maybe it's a series of combinations of things.

[29 : 06] So both of these are edifying ideas to think through. I don't normally do what I'm going to do, but here I am. There are two views. I'm going to share with you both of them. They're both edifying. Now, only one of them can be right in terms of this text, but we'll profit from thinking through this together.

Is this about having rituals without real righteousness? Is it that kind of hypocrisy? That's the sort of rendering you get from the New American Standard, the NIV, the ESV.

Some Israelites went through the right rituals of worship, but God wanted righteousness more than rituals. This is like the text that we had read to us earlier today from Psalm 50.

This is what Isaiah begins with. Turn back with me to Isaiah 1. This is a great example of Isaiah's preaching and indictment. And as you turn there, I'll tell you there's four major kinds of prophecies that Isaiah and his peers give.

There's prophecies of indictment where they preach against the sins of their generation. There's prophecies of instruction where they tell you this is what the Lord is and what he requires.

[30 : 24] There's prophecies of judgment where he announces the Lord is going to bring judgment on you for your violation of the covenant or whatever the sin might be. And then there's prophecies of salvation.

Where the Lord is going to bring redemption and make all things new. And throughout the book of Isaiah, there's cycles of these. Here in Isaiah 1, it begins with indictment.

Look at verse 4. And as you keep reading, you realize these are code names for Jerusalem.

What are your multiplied sacrifices to me? Says the Lord. I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats.

When you come to appear before me at the temple, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer. Incense is an abomination to me.

[31 : 43] New moon and Sabbath, the calling of the sins. I cannot endure iniquity in the solemn assembly. And on the indictment goes. It's almost as if God is telling these self-righteous,

hypocritical worshipers who are going through rituals without real righteousness, get off of my porch.

This is a big theme in Isaiah. Jesus preaches against this kind of hypocrisy again and again.

Matthew 23, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

You're like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The Bible is full of instruction warning against this kind of hypocrisy. And we need to be on guard against it. It is so easy for us to get caught up in routine, and for that routine, good it may be to become a substitute and alternative for real righteousness.

Now, there's another view, and I actually, as much as I just preached that one, I think this one is what Isaiah really has in mind. And that is that Isaiah is going after here right rituals that have been mixed with paganism.

[33 : 07] This is an even more severe form of hypocrisy. This is the view that you would find if you have a Christian standard Bible or New English translation.

Syncretism, that is the mixing together of the things of God that he's required with the things of pagan religions and sort of melting them together.

This was a massive problem throughout Israel's history. I mean, here they are, a people who believes in only one God on paper, but many times they succumb to mingling in devotion to other gods or maybe taking the forms of worship for those other gods and applying them to the one true God.

So, if that's what we're to read here, then you have a person who on one hand, they go to the temple and they bring a bowl and they have it offered. A lot of expense, a lot of effort to do that, but then they go out and engage in pagan rituals too, involving human sacrifice.

All of these things that are listed here, by the way, the killing of the person, the dog, the pig's blood, and all of this was practiced by peoples like the Hittites. Archaeologists have found remnants of this sort of pagan worship.

[34 : 27] They might take a human male, a kid goat, a puppy, and a piglet, and after they had won a battle, they would sacrifice man, dog, pig, and mix all their blood together.

So I've given you in your handout, and I'll put it up here on screen, here's the way that the Net Bible, that's the New English translation, renders this.

The one who slaughters a bowl also strikes down a man. God had commanded the sacrificing of bulls and oxen, but never the sacrificing of a human.

Pagan nations around Israel were known for this, like offering sacrifices to Molech. Other prophets of Israel would go after Israel for this kind of grossness.

This is like, listen to Ezekiel 23, Ezekiel 23, 39. When they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered my sanctuary on the same day to profane it, and thus they did with my house.

[35 : 34] Look at the next phrase, the one who sacrifices a lamb also breaks a dog's neck. God, of course, had commanded the sacrificing of lamb and sheep, never though sacrificing a dog.

Dogs, in Hebrew thinking, were regarded as little better than pigs. But you know, the Hittites had customs where when they would seal a covenant relationship, how many young people are here? They would break the necks of puppies, and that was part of their sealing the covenant.

Archaeologists have found remnants of this covenant-making ritual in Israel.

Look at the next phrase, the one who presents an offering includes pig's blood with it. Grain offerings, good. They're part of thank offerings, but absolutely not the use of swine's blood in sacrifice.

Sacrificing a pig at God's house was the greatest of all desecrations. It's what Daniel calls the abomination of desecrations, the foul thing that desolates the sacred thing.

[36 : 46] Look at the last one Isaiah mentions, the one who offers incense also praises an idol. Incense, good. praising an idol? I mean, how does the Ten Commandments begin?

How do the Ten Commandments begin? I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.

You see, there's only one God, and so all worship must go to Him. This is what Moses ingrains into the people of Israel in the last month or so of his ministry.

Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 to 5. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. And because He is one, and the only one, therefore, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might.

Because there's only one God, He must receive all. See, pagan peoples believe in a variety of gods. They might favor one of them and give most of their devotion to this particular Baal, but there's other ones too, so you have to reserve some devotion for other ones too, and give some sacrifice to this one and to that one.

[38 : 06] No, no, no, that won't work with the Lord. He must have it all. God alone is worthy to receive all worship. Look with me in the middle of verse 3.

It speaks about the outcome of hypocrisy, experiencing God's wrath. And again, we're speaking about this most fundamentally dangerous form of hypocrisy, this complete substitution of the knowledge of the Lord.

The middle of verse 3 says, As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abomination, so I will choose their punishments, and will bring on them what they dread.

They've made up their own way about relating to deity. They practice the Bible up to a point, but they're not truly loving the God of the Bible as he's revealed himself.

They're turning religion into something of their own making. It's a self-righteous, hodgepodge religion that they've cobbled together, and it is an abomination to God. It was really no better than sheer paganism.

[39 : 13] They've made their choice, and so God makes his choice. He announces judgment. Now, bear in mind that we're speaking here about unregenerate Israelites.

Throughout Old Testament history, I can't give you a percentage, but all throughout Israel's history, it's really only a small remnant of them who truly know the Lord. I mean, this is why it is, how it could be that people could be saved from Egypt, and they go through the Red Sea, and they see all the plagues, and they come into the promised land, and they turn around, and they do these outlandish things.

I mean, they're at Mount Sinai, and they make a calf to worship? I mean, we think, how? See, that's because they were saved from Egypt, but most of them were not saved from their sins.

And throughout their history under the Mosaic Covenant, the history of the Old Testament is mostly the history of Israel breaking the covenant. And so the Lord would have judgment for them.

I think that this is one of those spots where Isaiah is sort of rewound to explain to the Israelites of a later generation, how did we get here? How did we get into exile? How did we get to the point of losing our temple and losing our land?

[40 : 32] What they dreaded was God's disapproval, and despite all their efforts to appease deity, they found themselves on the wrong end of God's judgment?

Let's move on to the middle of verse 4, where the Lord explains what the origin of all this hypocrisy is. The origin of this hypocrisy is ignoring God's word.

So this is not just that they were insincere, it's really that they were unsubmitive. Middle of verse 4 says, Because I called, but no one answered.

I spoke, but they did not listen, and they did evil in my sight, and chose that in which I did not delight. How did God call?

How did God speak? He did it for centuries, raising up prophets and leaders, calling them back to himself, and some did, some listened, some had ears to hear, but most did not.

[41 : 43] What a sad thing it is to know that God has spoken, and then to choose to ignore it. You know, this is the kind of gross hypocrisy that was alive in Jesus' day, where you had religious leadership, some of them actually knew who Jesus was.

They saw it. They knew it. And they knew the consequences of accepting him would mean repentance, and unwinding all of the hypocrisy, and they chose to stifle it, and suppress the truth and unrighteousness, and send Jesus to his death.

Isaiah warns that there is an outcome, the overthrow of hypocrisy is coming, and this takes us to our last couple verses, which we'll read at this point, verses 5 and 6.

verse 5. Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word. Your brothers, who hate you, who exclude you for my namesake, have said, let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy.

But they will be put to shame. A voice of uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, the voice of the Lord, who is rendering recompense to his enemies.

[43 : 11] Now, some Bibles have a paragraph break before verse 5, and some have a paragraph break after verse 6.

So there's a bit of debate to the verses we just read, are these the introduction to the next prophecy that closes out the book, or is this the tail end of the prophecy we began reading at the beginning of our lesson today.

And, you know, there are sometimes different ways to cut the pie that doesn't mess the pie up. We could say these two verses are transitional. They, in one sense, look back to what we've just talked about, but they also prepare the way for the glorious prophecies of deliverance that are about to come.

There are several references to speech in these verses. Isaiah speaks, and then he quotes the Lord. The Lord speaks and mentions his word.

The enemies speak. And the Lord thunders in his reply. So these two verses, I'm going to break them up into three parts, and because there's no more room on the screen, we'll create a little space.

[44 : 21] We're going to see in the beginning of verse 5 an encouraging word for God's people. Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word. The tremblers of God's word were mentioned back in verse 2, that these are the ones to whom the Lord looks.

Trembling before God sounds perhaps unsettling and frightening, but there's a kind of fear and trembling that brings encouragement and joy. You know, this is John Newton, the author of the famous hymn Amazing Grace.

Twas grace that taught my heart to what? We know it, right? Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.

Yeah. There's a good kind of fear, kind of trembling before God that results in a confidence that can't be shaken. So the Lord is going to say something that's going to bring encouragement to them.

And the Lord quotes a discouraging word from ungodly leaders. Your brothers, says the Lord, your brothers, Jewish brothers who hate you, who exclude you for my namesake, have said, let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy.

[45 : 38] This is a strange talk. The brothers are fellow Israelites in the flesh, although not brothers in the Lord. And in some ways, we don't know exactly how, they were excluding righteous people.

Maybe it was informal street shaming, and not selling to them, not having business with them. Maybe it was temple shaming, excluding them from the temple, not letting them come, charging them more, some sort of official exclusion.

And then they've wrapped it up in this pious talk. Well, we're doing this for the Lord. And let the Lord be glorified.

You have to read this with sarcasm. Let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy. It sounds pious, but really it's twisted and self-righteous.

I mean, glorifying God should result in joy, but their application of it's wrong. It's a kind of a mockery. It's almost like, well, let's see how much glory and joy you get out there on your own.

[46 : 41] John Oswalt summarizes their sarcasm this way, quote, They're always blathering on about the glory of God? Well, fine. Let them go give glory to God somewhere else.

Not where we are trying to do the business of religion. They keep going on about the joy of the Lord. Well, let's give them a chance to put all that into action. Let's see how joyful they are when they're out on the street.

Did things in the temple really get that bad? You don't have to read too far in the Gospels until you see that sort of twisted religion. I mean, Jesus warned his disciples about this.

John 16, verse 2, They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. E.J. Young, the great commentator from Westminster Seminary, said, Is not the consistent Bible-believing Christian an object of ridicule and reproach on the part of the organized church today?

So it will ever be. Now, E.J. Young wrote that in the wake of what's called the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. A century ago, most of the mainline denominations in the United States succumbed to theological liberalism.

[48 : 00] It was a massive movement that led to many Bible-believing Christians coming out of the mainline denominations and forming independent Bible churches and independent Baptist churches.

In the 1930s, there was a church in Philadelphia called the North Broad Street Presbyterian Church, pastored by Merrill McPherson. And McPherson was firm in opposing the wave of liberal theology coming out of the Presbyterian seminaries and many of their leading churches.

churches. And he made a stink about it again and again. He was outspoken. And the local presbytery told him he needed to pipe down. And he wouldn't do it.

So on one Wednesday night in 1936, the people arrived at church for their evening service and found the front doors chained shut. No one had a key. No one could get in.

The presbytery had locked them out. So they walked across the street and eventually they found a hall that was where they were allowed to go in and they said, what are we going to do?

[49 : 06] And after some weeks of meeting for prayer and discussion and the chain still being on the church across the street, they decided to form a new church. And they deliberated.

What are we going to call it? And someone said, the church whose doors will never be chained. Well, that doesn't work too good on a sign. Another said, the church whose doors will never be shut. And finally, someone came up with a stroke of genius and they said, how about the church of the open door? And so there was from that era a large number of independent Bible-believing churches who took on similar names as that.

They heard discouraging words from ungodly leaders. Look with me, lastly, in the end of verse 5 and end of verse 6, an ominous word from the Holy Lord.

Verse 5 ends, but they will be put to shame. You know, in the Hebrew text, I won't recite it to you, but all of that drama earlier, Isaiah took 16 words, Hebrew words, to generate all of that drama and that conflict.

[50 : 19] And these here, but they will be put to shame. And the Hebrew text is just two words. Two words. As if to say, it doesn't take much for the Lord to make things right.

Only two words are used, but a lot of commotion is described in verse 6. Isaiah hears something. It's almost like he's having a vision.

In other contexts, when something like this is described, it would be prefaced with, I heard, and here's what Isaiah hears, a voice of uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord who's rendering recompense to his enemies.

Isaiah hears something. He turns around and hears and sees the Holy One of Israel is purifying his temple and setting things right and bringing to judgment those who have corrupted his house and his worship.

It is a vision, I think, of final judgment. Those, though, who tremble at his word have nothing to fear of this voice. It's only those who will not tremble now who will be made to tremble in that day.

[51 : 42] Those who truly listen to God's word now hear his vindicating voice that the Lord will make all things right.

You know, it's hard not to think about our Lord Jesus as he came through the temple in his ministry. On two occasions, cleansed the temple. His actions were a foreshadowing of this final restoring and making right of all things.

Because in the end, the Lord God will have a holy and pure house. And only those who know him, who have been redeemed and transformed, will have a place.

And if you are in Jesus Christ, you are part of that people already. What we're learning from this text is that what catches God's eye most is not rituals of an impressive house, but righteousness from a humble heart.

For some reason, we tend to think that God can be easily impressed. Maybe because we are. But it's not about building great things for God.

[52 : 58] It's making God great means seeing ourselves as small. And even our biggest efforts as little things. And the more we learn what the Lord is really like, the more we learn what he really likes.

And how to be like that. And one thing we know is that the Lord likes it, that he takes his glory and puts it on display in clay pots.

When you find a pot of gold, you don't rejoice in the pot. It's the contents. And we always need to remember that all of our best efforts, we are just arranging the clay pots to put God's glory on

display.

Lord, we thank you for your word. As Isaiah has here thundered against the hypocrisy of his day, we are mindful that we are, the human fallen heart is prone to the same sorts of sins expressed in many different ways.

We desire, Lord, to offer you what you truly want. Hearts that are humble before you. That tremble before your word. That take you seriously. Guard us, Lord, from making up our own way to you.

[54 : 18] Our own forms of service. May we be all about what you have said. Empower us by your spirit to do what we cannot do on our own. To worship you aright in spirit and in truth.

We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.