

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part nineteen

Teaching #1979 - Sunday, July 2nd, 2017 - 6 p.m.

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THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD

Isaiah 66:1-4 - "Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? [2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. [3] "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; [4] I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

From chapter 56 to this point - a full ten chapters - the Prophet Isaiah has been, by the Spirit of God, exposing and denouncing the sin of these religious people. They only pay attention to the **external rituals** of their devotion to God. They are **selective** hearers of God. They betray Him in the way they have "**chosen their own ways**"(3) while offering their sacrifices in the temple. Somehow, they have encased their duty to God in the confines of the temple. This, they knew, was God's **turf**. In the rest of their lives, God says they "**chose that in which I did not delight**"(4).

Pause and digest that last phrase. God says they "**chose that in which I did not delight**"(4). How did God **know** these people were hypocrites? What was the proof their sacrifices in the temple were **worthless abominations**? Their hearts were prosecuted before God by the way they chose lifestyles that delighted **them**, rather than those that delighted **God**. God measures my heart by its consideration of **His** pleasure, not **my own**.

Only **secular** people - people void of the Spirit of God - make their life choices based on **self-fulfillment**. These people didn't stop, when they were **outside** the temple, to analyse their choices very deeply. They chose on the basis of their desires alone. They never took the time to assess the things that would be the most pleasing to **God**.

The Prophet's words in this magnificent text are designed to **expose** their sin. Its wording is crafted to **shock** these religious people (O, how wonderfully piercing and unpredictable God's Word is!). And the message is also sweetened with a word of **instruction, reproof** and **hope**.

1) THE GLORY OF THE TEMPLE WAS ABUSED IF IT WAS USED TO LIMIT GOD'S RULING PRESENCE TO THAT PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

Isaiah 66:1-2a - "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? [2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord."

While it's true that God commanded the building of this temple, the big idea of these verses is God and the Temple are not the same thing. You don't necessarily do devotion to the one just because you worship and revere the other. And the important difference - the **unforgettable** difference - is this: you can walk away from the temple. That's the deceiving thing about temples - or churches, or Bible studies, or youth groups. None of them is boundless or all-encompassing. But **God** is.

This is the idea lying behind God's almost sarcastic words in these two verses. "You think your temple is a beautiful place? Let Me tell you about where I live all the time. Heaven is where I live. Your temple is on the earth. It's a lovely structure. And I'm the one who commanded it be built. But let me tell you about the things on this earth. In fact, let me tell you about the **whole earth**. It's where I put my feet up. That's right. It's my **footstool**. So what house were you planning on building - you people with your stones and bronze and gold - what building were you planning to put up that would be big enough to contain me?"

Those are pretty good questions. The interview continues: "**All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord...**"(2a). "I have infinitely great creative powers. I have made everything you can see. I have made the universe and could have effortlessly made a thousand more if I so desired!"

This is God's rebuke to those who think they can seal Him up into the parts of life they choose to give Him. The Creator is utterly **uncontainable**. There is no part of our lives from which He can be conveniently segregated. Our devotion must be **seamless** or it is **non-existent**.

2) **WHEN RELIGIOUS DEVOTION IS EXTENDED ONLY TO CERTAIN PORTIONS OF OUR LIVES IT IS MORE SHOCKINGLY REPULSIVE TO GOD THAN WE IMAGINE**

To make this point move vividly the prophet puts together four pairs of actions that don't seem appropriately joined:

Isaiah 66:3 - "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations...."

"They have chosen their own ways...." How big a problem can that be? They're still going to the temple. They still offer sacrifices like the law of God required. Surely these things must count for something. Is their religious devotion to God undone simply because they have other times and places where they do their own thing and act independently of Him?

That's the question these verses drill down into. The Prophet links together **four pairs of actions**. And they each take the same literary form. A positive, commanded action of devotion is followed by a shockingly abusive one. And the religiously devout actions and the abusive, wicked ones are all joined together with the same little conjunction - **"like."** So the pattern is: **"He who does this is like the one who does that!"**

Look at how it all rolls off the tongue: **Isaiah 66:3** - "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations...."

Notice - these verses **don't** say these people actually have **done** these terrible things. They're not being accused of **murder** (killing a man), or **breaking a dog's neck**, or **offering pig's blood**, or **bowing and blessing an idol**. And even if they **had** done one or more of these terrible things, that isn't the point of this passage.

No. The point is very different and much more widely applicable. The Prophet's point is that people who go and worship in the prescribed ways in the Temple but **"choose their own ways"** when they're on their way **home** from the Temple are as morally accountable to God's wrath as those who **actually do** commit murder and worship idols.

God sees a **vileness** in choosing our own ways over His. This text labours to make it plain that while **we** might think it a small thing to make our choices without giving preference to what actually **pleases God**, God takes stern notice. It makes Him very, very angry. That's what your Bible says.

These verses are actually **structured** to help us see this. Notice the way the Prophet repeats the words **"chosen"** and **"choose"** - **"These have chosen their own ways" (3b)** - **"I also will choose harsh treatment for them" (4a)**. The point is clear. When we confine God to the Temple - to the religious portion of our lives - it's easy to presume a lifestyle that chooses actions with no direct reference to God.

But when your God is the **Creator** of all that is - when He's the almighty, sovereign God - you can't choose your own way without Him making His choice about your future. Suddenly all the chips are on the table with every life-style choice. Even in your everyday choices - the ones that seem the most to be your own business - the stakes for your soul are extremely high.

3) **IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL OF THESE DENUNCIATIONS GOD GIVES A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE HEART OF THE ONE ON WHOM HE WILL LOOK WITH FAVOUR AND BLESSING**

Isaiah 66:2b - "All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

What a contrast is painted. There are people who make most of their life's choices steered only by their own desires and delights. **Verse 3** says they **"choose their own way."** And God hates this. **Verse 4** says He too **chooses**. He fixes His wrath against those people. But then come these soft words. They're words of invitation and kindness:

"I'm looking for someone in particular. This person is getting very hard to find. I'm looking for **'the one who trembles at my word'** (2b)." People who hold Christian beliefs are a dime a dozen. People who have been raised in church abound. But Jesus' question is starting to have a haunting effect on me - **"When the Son of Man comes will He find faith in earth?"** Where are the people who are wired to look and listen for God in everything they do? Where are the people who constantly **give attention** to God?

That's the issue God speaks to in our text. "I have made everything you can see. Yet there is nothing in all of creation that compares in beauty before my eyes than a **trembling heart before My word!** Your temple of Gold and all of the sacrifices you can muster are insignificant compared to a trembling heart"

We should pay close attention to those words. God looks across this congregation and doesn't regard everyone alike. **"This is the one to whom I will look."** It's an individual thing. It can't be mass produced. "Yes, I love **everyone**. But I have a very special regard for a certain **type** of person."

Next week we're going to look specifically at the **marks of a heart that trembles at God's Word**. We will consider about half a dozen Scriptural marks of this God-prized attitude. But the central thing is simple. By that I mean it's simple to **define**, rather than simple to **maintain**.

Here is the kind of heart God looks upon with incredible favour: **1 Thessalonians 2:11-13** - **"For you know how, like a father with his children, [12] we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. [13] And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."**

"...when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...." (13). This is something we all nod our heads to. It's one of those mother-and-apple-pie truths. But holding on to it - especially in this "me first" age - is like trying to hold on to a soap bubble. We need to remember that God's Word **is** just that. It's **God's** Word. It's **His** command. We're not dealing with some **tradition**. We're not just handling **church** stuff in this place.

Stamp it on your mind all over again. Our God's throne is heaven itself. The earth is His footstool. We aren't free to hear His Word as one more **opinion**. It comes with nothing but **obligation**. And, just like those religious people described in our text, if we are blind and silly enough to **"choose our own way"** we will have to deal with a God who **"chooses harsh treatment"** for us.

This is just the starting point in this text. It might be a good rule of thumb never to leave your house in the morning until you've spent enough time before God in His Word that you feel you have His instructions for your life that day.

There's so much more to say. But this is the **first** thing we all need to come to terms with. Let all of us hear the word of the **Lord** today.