

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

Teaching #1981 - Sunday, July 9th, 2017 - 6 p.m.

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THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD (continued)

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."

The theme of this text, and the core of last week's teaching, is God's rebuke to religious people who try to live in two worlds at the same time. Specifically, it's a rebuke to people who try to **"keep up"** the forms of their religion while they **"choose their own ways"**(4) in the parts of their lives not lived in the Temple.

The way they convince themselves that this charade will last is by telling themselves the Temple is God's House. It's where God does His **"God stuff."** And then it's easier to tell themselves that when they're **not** in the Temple - or on their way to or from church, or youth night, or prayer meeting, or Praise Band practice - then they are **"on their own time,"** so to speak. But God says this isn't so. He isn't contained in any man-made structure or religious system. He is the Creator of each one of us and claims sovereign interest over all our thoughts, moments and choices.

So the key point of last week's teaching was these weren't **"bad to the bone"** people. Their sin was they were **partial** in the recognition of God's claim on their time. Certainly God had the right to prescribe sacrifices, and fasts and ceremonies - all the **religious** stuff - all the **temple** stuff. Choirs, offerings, Bibles, communion - **that** sort of stuff was God's turf. But they reserved the right to pursue their **own** agendas and desires when they were **away** from the temple. In the words of our text, they **"chose their own ways."**

That's basically where we finished up last week. Except that the Prophet Isaiah also, in contrast, mentions one particular person God seeks to bless and use. God looks for someone - someone totally **unlike** these religious pretenders in our text. He looks for someone who lives his or her whole life turning an ear toward God. God looks upon the one who **fears missing something from God's Word.** Today we're going to study what it means to **"tremble at God's Word."** Consider five points with me:

1) **A TREMBLING HEART SEES THE AUTHORITY OF GOD BEHIND EVERYTHING IN GOD'S WORD**

We'll never know for certain how it comes about - how a heart suddenly wakes up to **making God important in all of life** - but you always know when you've just bumped into someone like that. They're **genuine** and **whole.** Perhaps through trial - perhaps through financial set-back - perhaps through suddenly coming to grips, **really** coming to grips with the shortness of life - **usually** through encountering the pain and bondage that always comes eventually from **not** taking God seriously - but **somehow** they've bumped into God.

And however it happens, at some point **God and His Word start to count.** Meat and muscle start to form on the bare habit of church-going. It isn't to score points or get to heaven. It's to **hear God.** It isn't to provide a good example for the kids. It's to **hear God.** It isn't to see what **"what's his face had to say this week - Looked might it might be an interesting topic."** It's to **hear God.** The whole thing takes on a life of its own because suddenly **God matters.**

People who tremble at God's Word, at some point, start to **hear** it at a different level. They start to think it all through **for themselves.** They **care** about it all. You can actually see Moses reminding the people of exactly this point: **Deuteronomy 32:46-47** - ".....he said to them, 'Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. [47] **For it is no empty word for you, but your very life....**'"

God's Word is your **"very life."** God's Word about sexual immorality - about material consumerism, about your entertainment - about dishonesty - about seeking first His kingdom. God's Word isn't about **restricting** your life. It's

about *maximizing* your life.

This is a *seeing* issue. You can't *force* it on someone. It's a matter of spiritual sight and perception. Pray about this more than your physical health or financial prosperity. Those needs are tiny in comparison. This is why Paul prays for the Christians at Ephesus, first and foremost, that the **"eyes of your heart may be enlightened"** (Ephesians 1:18). When you come to God's Word do you just see *words* - do you just see *topics* - or do you see *your life*?

This is what puts the **"trembling"** in the trembling heart. The person has come to know - at a very deep level - that he or she will be making *life-diminishing* choices every time God's Word isn't consciously taken into account. And that's not the way we naturally think. We all have that Eve and Adam mind that sees only a *piece of fruit* eaten on our own terms. And what can be so serious about that? Only the trembling heart will see a future with God at stake.

So this is the foundational first point. The trembling heart sees God in all that God says. And I don't mean just the head belief that God gave us the Bible. That conviction, by itself, gives very little spiritual traction. I mean the conviction that just as surely as He created the universe, He empowers His word to accomplish His creative purpose in our tattered lives. Making **God** count is making *life* work.

2) A TREMBLING HEART WILL NEVER FORM A CASE AGAINST IMMEDIATELY PERFORMING GOD'S WORD

Here you have one of the clearest proofs of a trembling heart. It would rather suffer any *other* loss than go against the Word of God. All else is secondary. Here's a Bible picture to help us get this:

Revelation 6:9 - "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."

Picture all those blood-spattered lives piled up under that huge altar. Why are they there? They're there because they would rather be slain than go against the Word of God. Other people would look at the same word and never see what they saw. Others did not have the same heart to stay close to God's Word. Keeping the Word would only be worth so much. But the heart that **"trembles"** at God's Word trembles at the thought of *not* yielding to it *more* that it fears the cost of *honoring* it. Simply put, that's the whole deal.

All of us give a *certain* honor to God's Word - a certain level of buy-in. We've been *raised* to do so. Usually those beliefs are held almost as a second nature. We're Christians with the same amount of effort that we're French, or Italian, or English. My conviction is God will bring each of us to the point where we must *choose* our convictions with a higher *awareness* and *cost* than that.

God will bring each of us to a point - and I pray you're alert to it when it happens - a point where we will *tremble* one way or the other. Either we will tremble at the opinion of our friends and peers. We will tremble at the loss of "coolness," or power, or wealth, or the loss of what you perceive to be your freedom. Or we will actually tremble inside and out because we might carelessly miss the will of God for our lives.

This is the only test I know of for determining where your heart stands with God. You will come to a point of decision. And at that point, it's not what you *believe* that reveals who you are. It's what you *most fear giving up* when you are confronted with a choice between what you want and what God's Word requires. If there is anything you fear losing *more* than you fear losing the pleasure of God, your Christian life is thin and joyless. But if what you fear losing *most* is delighting God, and winning His approval, you can't make a bad decision.

This is why you will notice over and over again, the Bible equates *wisdom*, not with your *beliefs*, which can be held at an intellectual level even while you rebel against God, but wisdom is equated with what you *fear* - **Psalm 111:10 - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!"**

And here is the best advice I can give you. When you come to that point, that point of *choosing* God when it *costs*, you are at the biggest shaping point of the rest of your life. No time is worth more weight and concentration and prayer and diligence than that point. It's the *tipping point* for your future. Guard your heart when it comes. Stand firm in your faith. Tremble at **God's Word** and tremble at *nothing else*.

3) A TREMBLING HEART FEARS THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD UPON THOSE WHO DISREGARD HIS WORD

Because many churches don't train us to consider any consequence to refusing to hear God's Word other than,

perhaps, a certain lack of personal fulfillment we might have received, many Christians mistakenly assume that *not* always caring about God's Word is fairly normal and almost to be expected in a compromising age like ours. But the Bible paints a much more shocking picture. To God, it is simply unbelievable that anyone would refuse to tremble before God's Word:

Jeremiah 5:21-25 - "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. [22] *Do you not fear me?* declares the Lord; *Do you not tremble before me?* I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it. [23] But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. [24] *They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.'* [25] Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you."

God says, "What a strange thing it is that people, who are so dependant on my patience and mercy - *who couldn't even last without rain* - will harden their hearts against My might and authority!" All the angels in heaven gasp in amazement. They're stunned that anyone could think that he could rebel against the Word of God and not have God bring him to task for it!

But there seems to be something in us that is slow to wake up. These people in Jeremiah's day were *already suffering from the pain of their disobedience to the voice of God*. The Prophet says the fields and crops were drying up before their eyes as God closed up the heavens. Yet they're still choosing their own ways rather than God's.

So I see there is something beyond mere intellect involved here. Choosing my own way over God's both stupid and addictive. It's like a bad drug. Everyone else sees what it's doing to my life. I'm the only one missing it.

4) **THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD KNOWS IT REACHES TO THE VERY DEPTHS AND CORE OF HIS BEING**

Our whole culture trains us to deal only with the surface of our lives. We're driven by entertainment and toys. We are taught to treasure things that have nothing to do with the core of our persons. And all of this makes it hard for us to *value God*.

This is really what our text in Isaiah 66 is all about. The people had closed their eyes to the real God by persistently choosing their own ways when they weren't in the Temple. The result of this was they came to actually believe that a surface religion of going to the Temple was all they needed to please God.

And you can see how they came to think this way. It happens all the time. Because we live in a *world* that only looks at the surface of our lives *we too* learn to only take the time to deal with the surface of our lives. This is where we're taught to put our attention. And if *we* come to believe that only the surface matters, probably that's all that matters to God as well. In other words, skin-deep *people* create a skin-deep *god*.

But such thinking is hopelessly out of touch with God and hopelessly out of touch with the way He created our own hearts. God's Word never deals with the surface. It always cuts to the center: **Hebrews 4:12** - "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The one who trembles at God's Word knows the level to which God desires to work. He knows his own natural *unwillingness* to yield to such grace. Only God's Word will tell you the truth about your own deceptive heart. Tremble before it. Nothing will make you pray about your heart more than the depth of God's reach.

5) **THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT THE WORD, IS MOVED BY GOD'S UNBELIEVABLE GRACE AND PROMISE**

This may be surprising to some people. The Bible teaches that it's not only the *fear of the Lord* that should make us tremble. The *goodness of the Lord* should too - **Psalms 2:11** - "Serve the Lord with fear, and *rejoice with trembling*."

Now, we've already been given a clue as to what "*rejoicing with trembling*" means. The prophet Jeremiah was amazed that the people didn't fear the Lord in spite of the fact that He was the One who sent rain and sunshine to make their fields flourish.

In other words, the object - the **real** object - in sending rain wasn't just to give a harvest. The real object was to make the people think about **God**. Just as the real reason God will send rain and bring all your roses and hydrangeas to life this spring **isn't** so you can look at how pretty your yard is while you sip lemonade. The **real** purpose is to make you stand in awe of God and become a holy person.

God sends all these manifestations of grace to make us **spiritually attentive**, not to consume all of our energies on personal enjoyment. Taking the pleasure without yielding the commitment is what **prostitution** is all about. Which is exactly why God told these selective hearers of His Word they were unfaithful **adulterers**. Enjoying these material blessings without deeply considering and fearing God is like enjoying sex without the commitment of marriage.

Today it is as it has always been. God, say the Scriptures, sends His rain on the just and the unjust. But the unjust don't think about God when it rains. God's goodness bounces off them like water (sorry)! Not so the righteous. It's not just their gardens, but their **hearts** that get softened by God's rain. They tremble in amazement before Him. And nothing is ever wasted in a life like that.