

## Isaiah 65:2-7 (NKJV)

<sup>2</sup> I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way *that is not good*, According to their own thoughts;

<sup>3</sup> A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; Who sacrifice in gardens, And burn incense on altars of brick;

<sup>4</sup> Who sit among the graves, And spend the night in the tombs; Who eat swine's flesh, And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;

<sup>5</sup> Who say, 'Keep to yourself, Do not come near me, For I am holier than you!' These *are* smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.

<sup>6</sup> "Behold, *it is* written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will repay-- Even repay into their bosom--

<sup>7</sup> Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together," Says the LORD, "Who have burned incense on the mountains And blasphemed Me on the hills; Therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom."

Remember last week we looked at both Isaiah and Romans where this passage was quoted. We saw that verse **one** was about the **Gentiles**. And God displays Himself in almost a humiliating gesture of saying **Here I am, Here I am** to the gentiles. And we have flocked to God because of **His** pursuit of **us**. Now we see the opposite. We see here God's chosen race- the Jewish people. And their response is just the opposite.

What we are given here this morning is a series of bad examples that we should carefully avoid in our lives like the plague.

Now these were the people who had **every advantage**. They were familiar with God's Word in which God was saying "**Here I am, Here I am**" every time they would read it.

They were people familiar with God. They were used to looking like His followers. They thought of themselves as special because of this apparent relationship with God. But they were spiritually **oblivious** to reality.

This is an ultra dangerous attitude to find ourselves in. At the end of the day we must evaluate our standing only based on God's Word. We cannot allow ourselves to fall into the trap these very "spiritual" people fell into.

First, let's look at what God was doing.

<sup>2</sup> I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way *that is not good*, According to their own thoughts;

God was doing the same thing to the Jews that He was doing to the Gentiles.

He was saying **Here I am, Here I am**. He was stretching out His hands to them. He was inviting them into relationship. Over and over again He had

done this. When He did this to the Gentiles there was an **overwhelming** response. But when He did this to the Jewish race it had **meager** results. These people could not blame God for their failure. They only had themselves to blame.

And what was the core problem?

They did not want to be told what to do.

Rebellion. **A verb meaning to be stubborn, to be rebellious.**

*Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.*

How do you respond to being told what to do? Does it get your ire up? Does it make you angry? Will you immediately become critical of the style of the one telling you what to do? What comes out of your mouth? Are you instantly trying to figure out **a way to obey**? When you hear a command, are you thinking- there are obstacles to obeying this but how can I work it out so I can obey? Or are you trying to find a reason that **what is being asked of you is unreasonable**? Are you looking for an excuse **to not do** what you are told? Do you ever consider this question- **has God given this person the right to tell me what to do?**

Now it is granted that not everyone is in authority over you. But I am talking about those who have the legitimate right to tell you what to do.

How do you react? And we will all say “yes but” this or but that. We all will. We will say everything but “I have a naturally rebellious heart”. We usually see our rebellious response as someone else’s fault. When is the last time you even considered that **you** might have a rebellious heart? You might be the problem in this equation. We think- **oh not me**. No I have a very reasonable heart and the reasons have not yet been reached that make me want to obey. The problem is we believe the stuff we tell ourselves. We assume the problem cannot be with me. Our seemers always tell us we have a reason to revolt, a reason to tell this demanding person to back off, a reason to be miffed. If I feel upset, this person must have done something to make me upset. What a flawed assumption that conclusion is based on. And don’t we trust those seemers without question, without doing the homework of soul searching? If we **feel** offended, we assume we must have **been** offended. But our source of information was flawed from the garden of Eden until now.

We would do ourselves a tremendous spiritual service if we were to consider any **suspicious behavior that comes from us as being guilty** until proven innocent. It does not matter what we can say to get the heat off of us. It doesn’t matter that we can give a wonderful explanation that makes it seem like what we did was harmless, or ignorant, or good motivated. What does the evidence say? What does it prove? What does it say about us? We would do

far better to believe **the evidence** than to believe our **instinctive immediate defenses**.

Flesh is prone to rebellion. It is its first instinct. And it lies. So it will lie to cover any rebellious attitude or behavior. We have to assume this. We have to expect it. Even in wonderful us. And none of us are above lying to ourselves to avoid an **unwanted truth, unwanted work, unwanted guilt**. Our flesh does not like it when our God, or our bosses, or husbands or parents, or even the elders tell us what to do, like they have the right to boss us around.

I remember the anger I used to feel when my mom would pop some chore on me when I planned on doing something else. I would get seriously angry. And I absolutely **hated** the fact that it was not **her fault** that **I got angry**. It was mine. Oh, she could make it easier on me by writing a list so I could plan it out. And eventually she did this to my great relief. But she did not owe that to me. She had every right to tell me what to do. And I hated it. I knew the problem was my sin.

Do you see what I mean? It is extremely difficult for us **to admit** when the Bible talks about **rebellion** that it is describing one of our **most common** and natural attributes. We simply do not want to call that attitude what it is. We want to slip out from under that awful pronouncement with defenses. Yet I have not had a single child that **welcomed** being told what to do. And I didn't **deserve** to have one.

What would happen in your life if you called your resistance to obeying those who have a right to tell you what to do as rebellion? What would happen if you told your authority- "please forgive me for my sin of resisting to obey you? That was my sin, not yours." I think we might be surprised how much spiritual growth and blessing that might lead to.

So we see, right off the bat, we better be careful in our text not to say that this shoe being described does not fit our foot.

We continue in Isaiah.

**Who walk in a way *that is not good*, According to their own thoughts;**

We see a lot in scripture about walking. Walking is continual practice. It is not an isolated event. When we walk in something, it is something we are doing often and habitually. It is repeated behavior. It is a life direction. These people are continually practicing something that is not good.

**1 John 3:6-9 (NKJV)**

**6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.**

**7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness**

**is righteous, just as He is righteous.**

**<sup>8</sup> He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**

**<sup>9</sup> Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**

Now does this mean that a believer never sins? We know that cannot be true. But what it is talking about is walking in sin, continuing in sin. It is talking about walking in a way that is not good. And God does not say, “well that is one option for the Christian life. And the other option is obeying God.” No. It is saying someone who is content to habitually practice sin is not a believer at all. That is a huge deal. And that is what our Isaiah text is describing.

Now look at the last phrase-

**According to their own thoughts;**

Often when we are talking to people at the fair we will ask someone something and they will answer by saying, “I think that” and the most illogical untrue piece of nonsense will be presented. It would be nice if we could limit this nonsensical thinking to people who know nothing of God.

But our text is talking to people who know a lot about God and who have not dealt with their rebellious attitudes. They are walking in a way that is not good, it goes against what Christ commands, and it is based on something they have thought up, they have perceived, they have felt, they have an intuition about.

There are two ways we can live.

We can believe **“let God’s word be true and everything and everyone else be a liar, including that which exudes from our precious selves.”**

Or we can believe that **“my feelings and perceptions and logics are true and scripture that squares with that is ok with me”.**

We are usually living by one or the other. When we are faithful to God in the face of great resistance, we are choosing the first view. When we sin we are usually choosing the second.

We live according to **our own thoughts** or we live according to **God’s Word**.

How are you making the decisions you are making right now? How are you deciding what to do this week? What is going on in your mind? We are displaying one or the other of these decision making paradigms. Which is it? What do the people around you **expect** from you? How do they **expect you** to make a decision? What do they **predict**? That is probably a good indication of how you normally make those decisions.

In our text the Jewish people were making decisions justifying their rebellion based on what **came from their own minds** instead of **that which scripture says**. Do you think that is rare? It isn't. That is flesh's default position. "I am and there is none besides me."

<sup>3</sup> **A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; Who sacrifice in gardens, And burn incense on altars of brick;**

<sup>4</sup> **Who sit among the graves, And spend the night in the tombs; Who eat swine's flesh, And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;**

It is astounding how good humans are at **not** reading the obvious evidence of our lives. This is the evidence that God is basing **His** conclusions on.

First we see that God is angry. We talked about this before but one of the first things you need to understand about God is that **sin makes God angry**. I would challenge anyone to search scripture and find proof that refutes that statement. Sin makes God angry. God is **long suffering** with us and our sin, but it is still **suffering**. Sin is sin, no matter who commits it. If we want to make God angry, it is easy. Knowingly sin.

And if you really want to make God angry, tell God you plan to sin to His face. Of course none of us will pray and say, God, I intend to commit a sin against you today. We just block God out of our minds and we get all self focused and we just do it. But whatever we do, sin makes God angry.

Now what were these particular people doing?

Remember, we are looking at a bad example that we want to avoid.

**Who sacrifice in gardens, And burn incense on altars of brick;**

<sup>4</sup> **Who sit among the graves, And spend the night in the tombs; Who eat swine's flesh, And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;**

All of what we see here is related to the worship of foreign gods. And we look at this and we think, I would never do these things.

But all of these things were being done to **obtain something these people wanted**. Will you not do things that **God hates** to get what **you want**?

What will you do to get the **pleasure you want**?

What will you do to avoid the **pain that you do not want**?

What will you do to get the **power** you want?

What will you do to get the **money** you want?

What will you do to procure the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life?

That is all these people were doing. And every path of pursuing these things is idolatry.

It is so easy for us to read these passages and think, I would never do this. And that is the last thing we should think. What we should think is that this is **way too easy** for us to do every day.

What do you feel you must have that God has not promised to you? Follow that thing and you will find idolatry lurking at every corner. And if we allow ourselves to believe the lie that **we must have that thing**, there is no sin that we will not commit to have it. And if you do not believe that, look at your history. The person who knows what to look for can read us like a book.

**<sup>5</sup> Who say, 'Keep to yourself, Do not come near me, For I am holier than you!'**

Now this might be the most astounding part of the text. How do these rebellious idol worshippers being driven only by their own thinking see themselves?

They see themselves as **superior**. Superior. More holy than all of those around them. Holier than thou.

Pride is incapable of accurate self knowledge. It distorts all truth until it conforms to a kind of self worship. Evidence is never taken fully into consideration. Truth is never allowed to shine clearly. **Pride is a lens that can make the most abominable behavior be seen in a dismissive fashion.** One of the clearest evidences of the **Holy Spirit's influence** is that a person **can see and tell** the absolute truth about themselves, even when it is the most incriminating. One of the clearest evidences of **flesh** is that a person **cannot see the truth** about themselves, even when it is presented in multiple methods.

It is interesting in the new testament that the best examples of followers of Christ never saw themselves as being superior in any way. They knew important things. They had received truths and experiences from God. They did not pretend that they didn't. But they never presented themselves as being better than anyone else.

Paul, who wrote a large portion of the new testament, saw himself as the chief of sinners. In other words he was the best sinner there was. Everyone else spoke about humility and the need to see ourselves accurately. All of them pointed to Christ as the only example of superiority.

If we are ever to think of ourselves as being too holy to be approached by another believer, we are acting from pride and we are quite simply wrong.

**These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.**

This is not saying that these actions disturb God like **we** get disturbed around a campfire when the smoke hits us. This is saying that their actions are

**causing smoke** to arise in the nostrils of God, ready to breathe out His wrath. Nothing offends God more than those who think themselves spiritually superior, who do not need God's grace because their own goodness will carry them. We see Jesus's strongest reactions were to the so-called spiritual leaders of His day. It moved Christ to anger and rebuke.

Here the attitude of the Jewish people is moving God to wrath, these people who think themselves so good they do not want or need God's grace.

We need to be careful of any attitude that causes us to think that **we do not absolutely need God's grace every minute of the day**. We have never arrived at the point where we are good as we stand. That simply never happens. We constantly miss the mark, even when we are not committing any sin that we are aware of.

To sum up these verses I want to quote our brother Ortland.

**Human religion, whatever form it takes, is a mechanism for self-righteous exclusion and sanctimonious comparing and elitism and self-exaltation. It feels holy, it feels pious, but God says it provokes him to his face continually. One of the most important discoveries we must make in all of life is the difference between true holiness and false holiness. We don't always know evil when we get involved in it, especially when it presents itself in a religious form. We must know that God is offended ("These are a smoke in my nostrils," [v. 5](#)) by any religion, however much it may even quote the Bible, that rebels against the authority of his grace and sets its own self-serving preconditions.**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

Whenever we think we are better than each other, we find reason to mistreat others, degrade others, because, well, they deserve it. They ought to be as good as me. And the danger with legalistic religion is it is built on that foundation of superiority. It ends up with people who will burden everyone else down with a weight that they cannot carry and they do nothing to help them carry it.

Christianity is built on something different. It is built on **shared beggerhood**.

We are all spiritually homeless and we are promised a home. We are all orphans promised a family. We are all sinners promised forgiveness. We are all failures promised a final A. We are mutually lost and mutually found. And not a single one of us can take the **smallest bit of credit** for our salvation.

This creates an environment of love and inclusion. We truly are **all in this together**. Your **failure** is not significantly different from **mine** and your

**success** is not significantly different from **mine**. Everything good we were given. Everything bad came with us.

Now how does this end for those who are too good for God and His people?

**6 "Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will repay-- Even repay into their bosom--**

**7 Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together," Says the LORD, "Who have burned incense on the mountains And blasphemed Me on the hills; Therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom."**

Sometimes I think that because we can fool people and be regarded as people as **innocent**, when we are really **guilty**, that somehow we think **God** is fooled too. Oh, we don't think it through really. We just know that those around us believe us, so what do we have to worry about?

But God sees all. He knows everything that goes into our actions. He knows what really drives them. He knows the us that no one else knows, even those who **think** they know us.

And to those who are living faithlessly, this is what God has to say. He says He will respond, and He will not respond based on **what everyone else thinks of us**. He will respond to what **we really did** and **why we really did it**. That is why it is so important that we tell the truth to ourselves and about ourselves every step of the way. Truth is the thing that God sees. And God will respond to only the truth. Public opinion and how much we got away with will have no bearing with God. Truth is all that matters on that day.

And what was the truth about these people?

These people, while claiming to be spiritually superior to others, while claiming to have thoughts that were impressive, while maybe impressing all those around them, were committing adultery against the one and only God. They were burning incense to idols in an effort to feed their continual desire **to have those things that God was not providing** or that which they **did not trust** God to provide.

We are idol factories. If we do not guard our minds, our minds will create idols. That is how we are. And those idols always manage to put our flesh and pride in the center of focus. And they always make us pay horrible prices for the privileges of worshipping them.

We are getting closer to the end of Isaiah. I hope we have identified and done business with our predominant idols.



God is worthy of our all. He is worthy of true worship. He is worthy of being our one and only God.

Even to this idolatrous group and even to our easily distracted hearts God is saying something. And it is "Here I am. Here I am. Here I am." Will we allow that call to **have sway** in our hearts. Will we respond to His love and see ourselves as the most fortunate humans on this planet? Will we drop our gripes and pick up praise instead?

That is the glorious opportunity that God holds out to us this morning.