

Isaiah 44 6-23

Isaiah 44:6-23 (NKJV)

6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God.

7 And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them.

8 Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared *it*? You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is* no other Rock; I know not *one*.' "

9 Those who make an image, all of them *are* useless, And their precious things shall not profit; They *are* their own witnesses; They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.

10 Who would form a god or mold an image *That* profits him nothing?

11 Surely all his companions would be ashamed; And the workmen, they *are* mere men. Let them all be gathered together, Let them stand up; Yet they shall fear, They shall be ashamed together.

12 The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, Fashions it with hammers, And works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; He drinks no water and is faint.

13 The craftsman stretches out *his* rule, He marks one out with chalk; He fashions it with a plane, He marks it out with the compass, And makes it like the figure of a man, According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.

14 He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures *it* for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes *it*.

15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles *it* and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships *it*; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.

16 He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms *himself* and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire."

17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships *it*, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you *are* my god!"

18 They do not know nor understand; For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, *And* their hearts, so that they cannot understand.

19 And no one considers in his heart, Nor *is there* knowledge nor

understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire, Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten *it*; And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"

²⁰ He feeds on ashes; A deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, Nor say, "*Is there* not a lie in my right hand?"

²¹ "Remember these, O Jacob, And Israel, for you *are* My servant; I have formed you, you *are* My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!

²² I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

²³ Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And glorified Himself in Israel.

The context of our passage is that the people of God need the outpouring of God's Spirit that Isaiah prophesied. He says in 44:3 **I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring and my blessing on your descendants**. They need that because of who they are. They go through the motions, but they are weary of true service to God. They go through the motions of true worship on the outside, but hidden from others is their true worship. Their idolatry. We saw in Isaiah 43-22-28 God's people's weariness of God.

In 44-1-5 we saw God's spiritual refreshment

Now we see the **solid** and **factual** and **logical** reasoning why the worship of the **one true God** with everything we have is the only **good** choice. That is what our text is about today.

According to scripture there are only two options to worship. We can worship the one true God who reveals Himself in the Bible. Or there is **everything else**. It is fairly simple. And our choices, while they might seem very complicated and compelling, are really no different than Adam and Eve had. **Genesis 3:1-6 (NKJV)**

¹ Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

It is easy to see what is going on here. The first question is to shake Eve's trust in God's character. The tempter presents himself as knowing more about **who God is** and **what we need** than God does. Even the slightest mistrust of God makes us very vulnerable to the deceivers tricks. This conversation should have ended at this point. We see that clearly now. But

Eve continued.

² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;

³ but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Eve didn't have her facts completely straight. Maybe Adam was trying to protect Eve so he stretched what God said. Maybe Adam was the first legalist. Maybe he had made rules up to help God out. God says don't eat it. Adam says that means God says don't touch it. This would be similar to- God says to women to adorn yourselves in modest apparel. Leaders then say there is an exact hem length you must have on your dress. Same kind of thing.

⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Here the devil seals the deal. He gets Eve focused on the benefit of committing the sin. Isn't that how it always happens, even today. We think about the good thing that sinning will give me right now. We deny or refuse to focus on any penalty it brings with it.

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

In the garden things were simple. There was the worship of God and there was that **single tree** off bounds. There was the **worship of God** and the tree was their "everything else". The deceiver did not seek that the woman **worship him**. That isn't necessary to destroy things. He just got her to worship **something else**. And he has not changed from that day to this day. He casts the same distrust on God's character. He appeals to our flesh and all its desires. And he says, what will it matter. You need this. Can't you tell you need it by how bad **you want it**? No one needs to know. No one will be harmed. And no matter what, you can ask God to forgive it and He will. So eat that fruit. Doesn't it look irresistible?

And the more we stay in that devilish thinking, the weaker we get. Don't we see, that is what our deceiver wants. He wants us to choose the "**everything else**". Because in the worship of **everything else** is his only hope of **destroying us**.

This morning's text is God's appeal to us that everything else is really **nothing at all**. It is just a massive futility.

⁶ "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God.

Now why would God say this? Is it so he can rob us of all those other wonderful pleasures and vices? Does he say this so he can diminish our lives so we will not flourish in the pursuit of all those other things that our hearts relish?

No. It is exactly the opposite. He is telling us He is the real God. It has always been that way. It will always be that way. There is no **interim** god that can provide what our souls need. There is no one who can provide what the human heart must have. And there is no one that can provide us an eternity of bliss. It is the worship of **Him alone** that will provide us ultimate and lasting pleasure free of pain and harm.

He appeals to us to choose **the true worship** for our souls sake. This is an appeal to turn from **everything else**. God alone is worthy of our worship, of our lives. God is solely worthy of our worship and is intolerant of any other worship. The devil's alternative religions are often tolerant to competition. They allow for membership in their club and the world's club. They often cater to debased desires. But God is not like that. Jesus exemplified that when He said **I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except me.**

Now this exclusive God taunts all fraudulent competitors.

7 And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them.

God is saying, if someone else wants to make these claims let them show their sovereignty over all human history. Let them show how it was **them** that put God's people in place and sustained them. Let them show what **their future** will be. None can. They can **fake** being God. But they cannot **be** God.

I think we mentioned this before, but there is no other religion that describes human history like the Bible does. It tells what happened. But better yet it tells us **why** it happened. And it tells us that there will never, at any time, be a utopia created by humans. It won't happen and cannot happen because of the depravity of man. There will not even be a **perfect church** until the Lord returns. God taunts the other so called god's to get all this correct.

8 Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.' "

Have you ever been afraid you might be wrong? Have you ever thought, what if all these atheists are correct? They seem to be some brilliant people don't they? How could such smart people be so wrong?

Well, do any of their theories explain why we have not yet evolved into a superior race. Do their theories about what makes people better actually make people better? Can they predict what is going to happen to this world? Most of them seem to predict we will destroy ourselves? Why, if we are evolving. I thought we were supposed to get better.

We do not need to be afraid that we have the wrong God. We do not need to be afraid that there is some superior God out there somewhere. We do not need to be afraid that our God will not get the future right. He has always gotten the future right. He creates the future.

If you have questions about any of this, ask your questions. But ask them fairly. And pursue the answers until you get them. Don't let lingering doubts persist. They will weaken your stance. Get them out in the open and deal with them. God can handle it. We are in the wonderful position of having nothing to fear. This isn't wishful thinking, it isn't mindless idealism, it is on the basis of factual history. Our God is God. Period.

Now we are going to look at a picture of the trust earned by "everything else". We are going to see how wonderfully stupid it is to choose an alternative to God. And this reasoning really goes for **any** alternative of God.

9 Those who make an image, all of them *are* useless, And their precious things shall not profit; They *are* their own witnesses; They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.

10 Who would form a god or mold an image *That* profits him nothing?

11 Surely all his companions would be ashamed; And the workmen, they *are* mere men. Let them all be gathered together, Let them stand up; Yet they shall fear, They shall be ashamed together.

Now doesn't this look like a wonderful industry? Maybe one of the vendors could call his business, "Useless Manufacturing", or "gods aren't us". (I am almost afraid to get Brad and Tom thinking about this now.)

Now look at the product. A person creates an idol. How do you know if it is any good? Blind faith. People say Christians have blind faith but the critics frankly have no idea of what they are talking about. We have faith. But it is faith based on lots of evidence. Now idol worshippers, or those who worship "anything other than God", this is their test. They carve the idol and they stand it up. And they ask, tell us why we should worship you. Nothing. Tell us what you will do for us. Nothing. The source of worship does not even have the ability to communicate. Yeah. That is a wise choice of worship.

Look at the mocking God does of these idol worshippers. They may be respected. They may be popular. They may be seen as the geniuses of their culture. It doesn't matter. God says this.

Let them all be gathered together, Let them stand up; Yet they shall fear, They shall be ashamed together.

Here is the idol makers convention. They come together. They make their glowing and inspiring speeches. One talks about how he has had enormous success in his marketing of all these idols. They talk about their deep philosophical understandings and the virtues of their crafts. But then God shows up. The real God shows up. God's people are told over and over again to not fear. But these humans have reason to fear. They have reason to fear because they have profited from selling rebellion of the one true God.

We don't have any industries like this. Or do we?

What are our modern day equivalents? I can think of an easy target. How about Hugh Hefner and the playboy empire. Here is an example of one of our idol manufacturers. He has sold his idols in the millions. And he has induced the worship of millions. And don't mistake this. We are talking about worship. Worship of beauty. Worship of sexuality. And what is it all? Worship of something else, something other than God. Worship of the creation instead of the creator.

That is what our idol makers are like. That is what our idol industries are like. Hollywood has probably created far more idols than were ever created in the Roman empire. The devil has used that industry to manipulate our hearts to worship all kinds of things, lots of "anything else."

And what is it all? It is all false. It is all a futile attempt that **provides** nothing of value after **taking** that which is of great value.

And what will the sellers of the idols feel if they don't repent of their successful businesses? They will one day feel fear. They will one day experience the embarrassment of having spoken so knowledgably and discovering to their horror that they were just bumbling idiots.

Alright, lets look at the **iron** idol maker.

¹² The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, Fashions it with hammers, And works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; He drinks no water and is faint.

Here is a man creating an idol to sustain him and he is exhausting himself to do it. A person of **exhaustible resource** is creating a God by using his **exhausting effort** and the god he is making with such effort is supposed to sustain him. Here is a creature in his glaring weakness trying to create a god he can then worship to sustain him.

Oh how we exhaust ourselves in our service to our idols. But every effort is in vain. We would do well to rid ourselves of our “anything elses” and embrace the only true God.

Now how about the wood idol.

13 The craftsman stretches out *his* rule, He marks one out with chalk; He fashions it with a plane, He marks it out with the compass, And makes it like the figure of a man, According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.

Do you notice the great irony here? He makes it like the figure of man. Idol worship is ultimately self worship. We are worshipping a god we have made. And when we make a god, it always looks like us. We, the created things are making gods in our own image, or our own imaginations, to serve our own purposes. Why would anyone worship such a thing? I guess the only reason is we like **what we are** more than we **like God**. God does not appeal to our appetites. Anything else looks better.

14 He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures *it* for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes *it*.

15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles *it* and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships *it*; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.

16 He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms *himself* and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire."

17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships *it*, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you *are* my god!"

Now look at the first of this. We can almost see this written in the book of Ecclesiastes. Here is man living normally at the expense of God. He is enjoying the resources that God has provided. And he is using them for their normal use. He plants and harvests trees. Oh isn't God so good in providing us these things? We can heat with it. We can cook with it. And we can thank the one true God for what He has provided for us. But that is not how this story plays out. God provided this gift. And how does the warm, well fed human use it? To replace the God who provided the resources. Talk about irony.

And look at the absolute blind trust. The man takes this creation of his own, and he trusts it with his very soul. He says, “Deliver me for you are my God”. We would never be so foolish... we think. But we do it. We just don't call it

that. What do you feel you need to be delivered from? That is where you find out what your gods are?

Do you want to be delivered from pain, boredom, meaninglessness, life without excitement, without romance, without security, without safety, without extravagance? What are you looking to be delivered from? You will always pick your idols for the deliverance they offer. And you will bow to them and give to them what only God should have.

And in the end will they deliver? Of course not. They are man made. They are of human origin. And they will utterly disappoint you and leave you with a price tag that will be an embarrassment and a disgrace.

I want to add a quote of brother Ortlund here.

It's absurd to try to derive an ultimate experience from a less-than-ultimate resource. That's false worship.

For example, I have a Ph.D. God gave it to me. It's a good thing. I thank him for it. But if I rely on that to save me emotionally from my deep sense of insignificance, if I derive my sense of myself from a thing, as at times I have, I'm an idolater. *God* is my salvation. But for us all, trying to squeeze life out of objects is the most natural thing in the world. We are constantly turning to created things for the uncreated life without which we die. We don't perceive our roving desires that way, because we limit "salvation" to narrowly religious referents. We must understand that the life that is truly life, in every respect, comes from beyond anything created. God is our salvation, and he is able to make himself real to us, more real than the creation.

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

And a little more

why does Isaiah keep coming back to the problem of idols? Because idols *are* the problem. "The central theological principle of the Bible [is] the rejection of idolatry." Think about it. If there is only one God, and if we are *not* experiencing his reviving fullness, there is a reason. The reason is, idols are clogging the inflow of his refreshment. The exclusive reality of God forces the question of idolatry. We need to think about this because our world is crowded with idols.

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

This is the world we live in. We are tempted by idols, by the anything else, all day long. If you don't think you are, you aren't paying attention to your soul.

18 They do not know nor understand; For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, *And* their hearts, so that they cannot understand.

19 And no one considers in his heart, Nor *is there* knowledge nor

understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire, Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten *it*; And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"

²⁰ He feeds on ashes; A deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, Nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Here is the human condition apart from God. And again, here is a part of God we are not too wild about. These people cannot see the truth until God ordains that they do. He insures that they will not. They certainly do not deserve to see. None of us do. And if God did not open our eyes, we could have no complaint. Our decisions betray our rebellious hearts. Why should God be kind to human rebels.

But look at what else it says. God holds these humans responsible for their condition. He holds them to account that they would not consider the simplest of thoughts. Look, this idol is made of the same thing as my toilet seat. The ashes in my fire place are this idols brother. What in the world makes me think I am going to gain something by worshipping this lumber? He goes on to say, **a deceived heart has turned him aside**. Oh yes. Don't we have tricky hearts. We can convince ourselves of anything stupid if we set our hearts upon it. Sin is deceptive. And our sinful desires burst into flames and spread the deceptions everywhere.

What truth about yourself is so devastating that you cannot tell it to yourself? We need truth. We need truth everywhere. None of us are free to live in self deception. It is a frightening dangerous state that leads us open to any kind of false worship. God will help you deal with that truth. God will give you a truth of his grace that will supersede the truth of your tragedy or failure. There is healing in His wings. There is forgiveness through His son. No matter what the truth, you can deal with it in God's grace.

The deceived heart can no longer add anything up in their lives. They can no longer look at the utter absurdity of their decision making and say, that is wrong. That is a lie. That is not a source of deliverance. That is just a foolish pipedream. That will never get me where I want to go. **A deceived heart leads to a stupid head.**

Now after God has revealed the utter stupidity of the worship of anything else, he comes back to His people with an appeal. And that is ultimately what this is all about.

²¹ "Remember these, O Jacob, And Israel, for you *are* My servant; I have formed you, you *are* My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!

22 I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And glorified Himself in Israel

God appeals to His children to learn from the stupidity of loving "anything else". He appeals to who these people are. They are His servant. In essence we **belong to** God to **serve** God. We have a higher destiny than these people who are so desperate that they have to create with earthly resources their own savior.

This reminds me of the appeal in the new testament where we are told that we are not our own. We were bought with a price. We too are someone else's servant.

Now after God appeals to His relationship with them, He appeals to what He did for them.

God has blotted out their transgressions. He has redeemed us. We were bought with a price. And oh what a tremendous price.

Most of the new testament epistles lay a strong case about how we obtained our salvation before they tell us to **do** anything. The understanding is that once we understand **how our transgressions were forgiven**, once our redemption happened, that **we cannot help** but do what God wants, we cannot help worship Him. We cannot help praise Him. The same thing is appealed to here. Look at how I have loved you. Look at how I have forgiven you. Now respond appropriately. Return to me wholly and sincerely for I have bought you back at a heavy price.

23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And glorified Himself in Israel

This is the response our God is worthy of. He is not just trying to manipulate man into worshipping Him so he can **exploit** him because he wants something **from** him. No. God is worthy of **all** worship from **all** corners of the galaxy. God is not satisfied from only mere human worship. Everything was created by Him and through Him and for Him. And it is all to worship Him. We are probably the oddest exception because we have been the rebels of the king. And yet He chooses us to be one of His prized sources of praise. Why? Because we show off His grace for all time and eternity.