

Isaiah 66 3-11 Sept 1

Isaiah 66:3-11 (NKJV)

3 "He who kills a bull *is as if* he slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb, *as if* he breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain offering, *as if* he offers swine's blood; He who burns incense, *as if* he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, And their soul delights in their abominations,

4 So will I choose their delusions, And bring their fears on them; Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

5 Hear the word of the LORD, You who tremble at His word: "Your brethren who hated you, Who cast you out for My name's sake, said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, That we may see your joy.' But they shall be ashamed."

6 The sound of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the LORD, Who fully repays His enemies!

7 "Before she was in labor, she gave birth; Before her pain came, She delivered a male child.

8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? *Or* shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children.

9 Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?" says the LORD. "Shall I who cause delivery shut up *the womb*?" says your God.

10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, And be glad with her, all you who love her; Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;

11 That you may feed and be satisfied With the consolation of her bosom, That you may drink deeply and be delighted With the abundance of her glory."

Does God always like it when we do the right things? (repeat)

Remember in a previous passage we talked about the fact that God is **easily pleased** but it is **very hard for us to please Him**? And we talked about the problem always being on our end. Well this morning we will see more of the same.

Does God always like it when we do the right things? The answer is clearly a resounding "No".

We know from scripture that **without faith** it is impossible to please God. So any right thing we do that is **not from faith** will **not** please God.

In fact some of the most scathing words of Christ were toward people who were doing a whole lot of right things.

Matthew 23:23-25 (NKJV)

23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

24 Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

We see Christ's anger unleashed against these people who were doing a lot of right things. And they could have pointed to Bible verses to explain **just how committed** they were to **obeying** God. They had loads of evidence to support their theories. They were doing lots of right things, things that God said to do. But the whole time they had serious heart issues that they refused to do business with.

Now look what Isaiah says about the enemies of God.

3 "He who kills a bull *is as if he slays a man*; He who sacrifices a lamb, *as if he breaks a dog's neck*; He who offers a grain offering, *as if he offers swine's blood*; He who burns incense, *as if he blesses an idol*.

Look at this. Look at all the right things they are doing. They are things **prescribed by scripture**. They are things **God commanded**. And how does God regard them?

He despises what they are offering Him.

Last week we saw that **building God a temple** was not anything that God needed. This week we see that **simply obeying what He says** will not buy Him off either.

What God really wants from us is not **what we can do for Him**. What God wants most from **us** is **us**, at the core of who we are, with no reservations, trusting ourselves wholly to Him. That is faith. That is trust in the character of God to the place that we will do what He commands and believe what He says. That is what God wants.

I am convinced that when we look back on our lives on this planet the things that we will be **the most glad for** are those times when we surrendered ourselves most fully in every area of our lives. And those times when we did a bunch of things that **God commands** and Christians **should do**, but we would

not trust Him enough to obey Him in some other area of our lives, I think those times will have a shallow ring to them.

God does not need a temple. He does not need bulls and lambs and grain. He does not need help with evangelism or discipleship or anything for that matter. None of that is satisfying to God unless it comes from a heart of faith, a heart that just wants to please God.

We can never get the idea that anything we do buys God off, as if He is getting what He wants out of this deal. Because the next thought will be, hey, I gave God what **HE** wants, now I have a right to go get **what I want**. That is always the danger of any seed in our minds of legalism.

God saw the obedience of this people as being detestable. And next we see why.

Just as they have chosen their own ways, And their soul delights in their abominations,

4 So will I choose their delusions, And bring their fears on them; Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

Here we see what God was looking at.

There are **two ways** to choose from- God's way and our way.

There are **two soul delights** to choose from- God and everything else.

And those things are not unrelated. They both flow from the condition of our hearts.

What is the litmus test? How can we determine the status of someone's heart? How can we know the status of our own hearts knowing just how tricky our hearts can be?

The litmus test is what do we do when God communicates His truth to us.

Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

We tend to want to make this very complicated. We want to factor in our psychological predispositions and life events and adverse circumstances and lack of support and a myriad of other things. God keeps it wonderfully simple.

When I speak, what do you do?

When I speak, what do you do?

When we read a command or a prohibition in scripture, how do we respond?

If the sentences starts with "yes, but" we have already given ourselves away.

We might say, Lord, I don't see how I can do this. Please show me how.

We might say, Lord, I have failed at this a thousand times, but I want to succeed. Please help me.

We might say, Lord I know I cannot do this in my own strength. It is going to take a miracle from you in me for me to do this. But I will obey. I will trust. If we will start with **"Yes Lord"** instead of **"Yes, But"** He will work with us on the **"how"**. He knows our weaknesses. He sympathizes with weakness. But He has no sympathy for disobedience.

There is another important application here. Never allow a point where you are **obeying Christ** to excuse a point **where you refuse to**. In that condition there is only one thing to focus on- the point where you are rebelling. There are a lot of points that Christ asks us to do things that are easy for us. But they aren't the points that reveal us most. It is the points where Christ calls upon us to **give up our competing loves** that tell us what we are really made of. We cannot gain solace by obeying Christ in 9 out of 10 areas in our lives. The Pharisees had a mindset similar to that and we can see how that worked out for them.

If we want to please Christ, we must answer when He calls. When He says **Here I am Here I am** we must respond- have your way in my life Lord. Here I am Lord. I surrender to you as the absolute Lord of my life.

If we know what God says and we do the opposite we are in very great danger. We may be proving ourselves to not being a believer at all. Or we may be inviting the Lord's discipline, and the Lord is very good at providing discipline. Why invite such misery into our lives? Why not just obey?

We see the people in our text chose to do that in which Christ does not delight. They were proving themselves of **not being** those who humbled themselves before the Lord like in verse 2, those who were poor and of contrite spirit who trembled before the words that God spoke.

We are only presented with two alternatives here- those who tremble when God speaks and do what He says. And those who do not listen when God speaks and do whatever they feel like doing.

If we to rid ourselves of all the self talk, which were **we** this week? Was it really how we want this story to end? The Lord's mercies are new every morning. If we need them, we better make certain to call upon them.

⁵ Hear the word of the LORD, You who tremble at His word: "Your brethren who hated you, Who cast you out for My name's sake, said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, That we may see your joy.' But they shall be ashamed."

Now isn't this a strange change of events?

Look at this closely. The Lord is speaking to those who obey Him. He is speaking to those who tremble at His word. He is speaking to those who are truly humble before God, who tell the truth about themselves to God. Who submit to the Lordship of Christ. And what might we expect from those who say they are fellow God worshippers? We might think we would get respect from those folks. We might think they would want to hear what we say. But we would often be wrong.

We need to take heed of this truth. We see it from Cain and Abel until now.

Those who, in their false worship of God, will not submit to the Lordship of Christ will soon persecute those who worship truthfully. (Repeat)

We can count on this to happen. It has happened **continually** and it is sure to **keep happening** until Christ returns. We have to watch our hearts like a hawk. Because we gravitate to this kind of evil so easily. Who are the greatest critics of those who follow the Lord most **truthfully**? It is those who follow the Lord most **dupliciously**. It is not the heathens, who could care less about God. It is not those outside the church who do it the most harm. It is those inside the church that will commit these crimes. It is those for whom pride has gained the high ground in their hearts. It is those who trust their perceptions. It is those who believe their seemers when their seemers tell them they have reason to be offended by those **who are saying yes to Jesus**. Let's read that again.

⁵ Hear the word of the LORD, You who tremble at His word:

These are the people described earlier. These are the true followers of Christ. These are the people who respond to the hearing of the word by the doing of the word.

"Your brethren who hated you, Who cast you out for My name's sake, said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, That we may see your joy.' But they shall be ashamed."

⁶ The sound of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the LORD, Who fully repays His enemies!

Here is how they will be treated. First note that they are hated. Why are they hated? Have they done horrible things? No. Their only crime is that they lived to please God and they did please God. That is what they are guilty of. So they were hated for their faithfulness.

And how did their accusers, those who sat on the sidelines and picked them apart, how did they couch what they were doing? Did they say, my pride has gotten full reign of my heart and I despise you because of it? No. Pride knows very little honesty.

No. It said- **Let the Lord be glorified.**

Wow. How scary is that.

These people have deceived themselves to the place that they think **they** are the **true** representatives of God and their condemnation of the true followers is just. How do we get to that place? How does that happen? It happens when we believe our own lies. We believe our own self perceptions. We assume our own **rightness** in every cause. And we quit believing that God is true and every man a liar.

Now this kind of pride and arrogance can be very harmful. It can destroy churches. It can reek havoc on fellowships. It can have very bad effects in the short run. But in the long run it will never prosper. Verse 5 says They shall be ashamed.

In this life there is a lot of injustice. The **false** comes across as **being true**. The **true** is portrayed as being false. That which is done from **good motives** is often maligned and that which is done from **bad motives** is often praised. Sometimes it truly is only God that knows the truth.

Often true worship and true service is criticized and false worship and false service is praised. Flesh will never welcome God's intrusion into our lives to change everything that He does not like to into what He does like. Flesh does not welcome the prayer "**Thy will be done**" when that means we have to die to the things that we love so much.

Mr Ortland says it is like this. True worshippers of God are saying something like this. : "**You're always saying you want to glorify and enjoy God. Let us help you. Let's see how joyful you are as we show you to the door.**"

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

Those who really love God will embarrass those who say they love God but really just **want what they want**. They will anger those who want to make claims of being a Christian but find reasons **not to believe Him** in those parts where **trust is absolutely required**. True worshippers will be a bane to those who cling to excuses.

Christ does not apologize for the price that needs to be paid for following Him. He does not apologize that this price sometimes comes from inside the church and sometimes it comes from outside the church. Again I like what Mr. Ortland says.

He looks us right in the eye and says, "You're getting beaten up for me? Feeling sorry for yourself? Get over it. Your reward is great. What if prophet-assassinating people liked you?"

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

But a believer takes solace in the fact that no matter how many times we pay what seems to be an **unfair price** for sins we **have not committed**, in the end it will all be made right. First, look at all the sins **we have committed** that we will **never** be punished for. And second, one day the truth of our case will be made evident. And that is wonderful if we are being faithful.

But the opposite is also true. All those lies we have told to **defend ourselves and our status** will be seen to be exactly what they are. Even the lies **we told ourselves** that we sincerely believed. And those people we lied to are going to see very clearly that they have been deceived. Everything will one day be laid out to be exactly what it is. It may not be pretty, but it will be true. We should keep that in mind in our interactions with one another.

⁷ **"Before she was in labor, she gave birth; Before her pain came, She delivered a male child.**

⁸ **Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children.**

⁹ **Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?" says the LORD. "Shall I who cause delivery shut up *the womb*?" says your God.**

I have a question to all the mothers here. How many children would you **have had** or how many children **would you have** if you never had to go through labor?

Basically this passage is promising an impossible thing. The church here is the mother and she will be having a nation of children all at once without anything that you would expect **would have to happen** for such a thing to be true.

Remember the day of Pentecost when 3000 people came to Christ on one day. What a wondrous thing. And that may have happened many times in the years since then. Sometimes we hear of wondrous revivals where people turn to Christ in great numbers. That is all amazing.

But it looks like there is a time coming when people will come to Christ in massive numbers, numbers that seem too good to be true.

Our God is very capable of such miracles. He could have that be true in Oakland tomorrow if He wanted it. They might all go to the internet, find a gospel message, and all come to Christ without us lifting a finger. There is nothing to stop God from doing such a thing. We need to always keep that in mind in our evangelistic attempts. God is not limited by **what we do** or **do not do**. But He has graciously allowed us to be part of His efforts of drawing every future believer to Himself. We have the chance to play a part. And what a wonderful opportunity that is.

10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, And be glad with her, all you who love her; Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;

11 That you may feed and be satisfied With the consolation of her bosom, That you may drink deeply and be delighted With the abundance of her glory."

Jerusalem was the city of God and the center of God's worship. For us, now, it is the church. Church is where the worship of the one true God is happening. And we know that the Church has a wonderful glorious future.

So we can easily apply what this is saying to the church.

Now this church is, for sure, universal. It is spread throughout the whole world. And that is absolutely a wonderful truth. But it is not administrated universally except by Christ. The New Testament breaks down the church administration into local units. The local church is where church happens and is experienced.

What these verses are telling us is that church is where our hearts should be. We should rejoice with the church.

But wait, we say. There is so much wrong with her. She is filled with people who will not do what Christ says, who will not believe what Christ promises. She is filled with so much apathy and compromise. She fails so regularly. She is filled with people like me. We might think that only mourning is appropriate.

And that might be true if the church depended ultimately on man. This is a quote from another commentary.

If the future of the Church depended upon man, there would be cause for mourning but none for rejoicing; inasmuch, however, as the future of the Church depends upon the covenant God, those who mourn may indeed joy in the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth, for God Himself is in the midst of her.

Book of Isaiah, The - The Book of Isaiah - Volume 3: Chapters 40 to 66.

We can truly rejoice **in** the church and **with** the church. The church is what **God is doing**. And that is wonderful. Do we mourn? Sure we do. If we know ourselves at all we mourn. We are never what Christ deserves us to be. Our sins and failures are worthy of mourning. There is no doubt about it. But God has pledged the **ultimate destiny** of the church and the **destiny** is one of **rejoicing**. So we are free to begin now.

And look here. It is good to love the church. As ragtag a group of people as we are, it is appropriate to love what God is doing in His people, even here. It is wonderful to get behind what God is doing even in a church as small as

Ferndale and even at a location as remote as Oakland MD. This church is a miracle, just as any true church is. And if it is a miracle, it is a work that God has initiated and chosen to do.

**That you may feed and be satisfied With the consolation of her bosom,
That you may drink deeply and be delighted With the abundance of her
glory."**

Those who will not commit to being church have missed out on much that Christ has provided for them. Those people who ask "Can I be a Christian if I do not go to church?" might as well ask "Can I be a human if I live on mars?" Why sure you can. If you want every act of survival to be way harder than it has to be and if you want all of the things we are intended to have to sustain us to be provided in an artificial means. Sure I guess. If you want to live a **stupid spiritual life** I guess maybe you can survive. But why in the world, if you **are** the bride of Christ would you want so much to **avoid** the bride of Christ? Why would you not want the wealth of what Christ has provided for you? If you loved Christ, does it not make sense that you would love His Bride?

Believers are intended to gain sustenance from Christ's church. We are intended to get much of what we need from the church. And some of what we need is what **we get** and some of what we need is what **we give**.

We do well to adapt to what Christ has provided with the church. And **will it be a mess?** Well, are **you** invited into it? Well then yes, it will probably be a mess. But it is the vehicle that Christ will use to provide to His people what they need. They will get their nourishment there, much like a baby gets its nourishment from breast milk. It will not only **keep us alive** but it will keep us **gaining spiritual weight**. The church is intended to sustain us.

I hope this week we look at our decisions and actions and choices and ask, am I doing this in faith? Am I doing this as if Jesus is invisibly walking right next to me. Can I share in this experience gladly with Him? Or is this something I would want to hide, and only show him the good things I am doing, hoping that will somehow buy Him off from the intrusion into those questionable areas.

Faith pleases God. Anything not of faith is sin. Will we welcome His presence into every minute of every day, committed to obey Him no matter what the price and no matter who resists us? That is what pleases our Lord. God is easily pleased. But sometimes it is very hard to please Him.