

Isaiah 46 Sept 2

**Isaiah 46:1-13 (NKJV)**

**1 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; Their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages *were* heavily loaded, A burden to the weary *beast*.**

**2 They stoop, they bow down together; They could not deliver the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity.**

**3 "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, Who have been upheld *by Me* from birth, Who have been carried from the womb:**

**4 Even to *your* old age, I *am* He, And *even* to gray hairs I will carry *you!* I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver *you*.**

**5 "To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal And compare Me, that we should be alike?**

**6 They lavish gold out of the bag, And weigh silver on the scales; They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; They prostrate themselves, yes, they worship.**

**7 They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it And set it in its place, and it stands; From its place it shall not move. Though *one* cries out to it, yet it cannot answer Nor save him out of his trouble.**

**8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors.**

**9 Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me,**

**10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'**

**11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed *it*; I will also do it.**

**12 "Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, Who *are* far from righteousness:**

**13 I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory.**

**Isaiah 47:1-15 (NKJV)**

Our next section consists of two chapters, 46 and 47. Chapter 46 shows the idols of Babylon. Chapter 47 shows the fall of Babylon. And the two are powerfully related to each other.

Look at the 10 commandments. Here is the first one. God could have put them in any order. But this is the first He chose.

## **Exodus 20:3 (NKJV)**

**<sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before Me.**

We have got to ask ourselves why is this? Why would God put that at the top of the list.

In the New Testament Jesus said the most important command is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. If that is the most important thing for human beings to do, the most dangerous thing is to put something else in that place. We can love God, which is what we were created for. It is where our hearts are safe. It is where our destiny is wonderful. It is where our lives are the most meaningful. It puts us where our lives are protected by God and God's word. It is, in a word, **life** to us. We have new life, abundant life, guaranteed life.

We can love God or we can love anything else. We can shape an idol out of anything that God has made. We can love other human beings to the place that we will sin, if sinning is required to keep their favor. We can make an idol out of our spouses or our parents or our kids. We can make idols out of stuff that God has created. We can worship the pleasure provided by the created things. We can worship the accumulation of wealth, thinking that this will provide the security we desire. We can worship just about anything that is important to us.

So there is the love of God. And there are all the competing loves, the idolatries. But we don't fare so well with the idolatries. God **sustains**. Idols always lead to our **destruction**. You cannot have one without the other. If you worship idols, you set yourself against the one true God.

If you are a Christian you will find that such a pursuit will have a destructive effect on your life until you bow to Jesus as Lord of every area of life. The path of idol worship in your life will leave a path of regret and damage. You will have spent much of value that you could have trusted to God for **His purposes**, and what you will have to show for it are tears and heartache.

If you are not a believer you will find that whatever false gods you worship, whatever you **look to give you what only God can give you**, that thing will lead you to eternal destruction.

**Hosea 8:4 tells us that "With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction"**

Now if anyone were to tell you, here are the ingredients for poison. I would like you to put them together and then drink them, we would look at that person as if he were crazy. But the devil does the same thing and we think that we are smart to trust him. We think we are smart to suspect that God is holding out on us for this pleasure or this pursuit or this way of meeting our

needs. So we build our own poison, we set up something in God's place, and we **give ourselves to it** lock, stock and barrel while it destroys us, while it sets burdens on our shoulders that will never go away. The sin will be forgiven if we are believers. But the opportunities for faithfulness will be lost forever.

We do well to take this to heart. You shall have no other Gods before me. Love the Lord God with everything you've got. If we only did that one thing we would have most everything else in our lives licked.

Our brother Orland has some wonderful words here.

**Silver and gold are good things, beautiful things, valuable things. An idol is not in essence a smelly monstrosity. It's a good thing God created for us. So how does a good thing go bad? We corrupt it by the way we perceive it and feel about it. Not in our formal, conscious commitments, but in our functional, emotional commitments we exchange the Creator for something created ([Romans 1:22-25](#)). We trade down because the gift seems more real and more rewarding than the Giver. That is idolatry. It's a matter of the heart. The prophet Ezekiel said, "Their heart went after their idols" ([Ezekiel 20:16b](#)). Whatever good thing your heart goes after, if you prefer it to God himself, it's an idol.**

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

Let's look at the gods of the Babylonians.

**<sup>1</sup> Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; Their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages were heavily loaded, A burden to the weary beast.**

**<sup>2</sup> They stoop, they bow down together; They could not deliver the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity.**

It is interesting that the idols of Babylon did not **carry the Babylonians**. The **Babylonians carried them**. Babylon used to have a new years celebration where the most important gods were hauled through the city streets. They were celebrated for all the wonderful things they had provided for the Babylonian people. One would think that the first clue to the problem was in the fact that **the idols were not mobile**. They idols could not do anything for themselves.

Have you ever noticed that we rarely choose our idols because we are convinced they are effective in the long run? No one worries because they know it will protect them from bad things happening. No one chooses a life of pleasure because those who choose lives of pleasure have the happiest or healthiest lifestyles. No one chooses to make an idol of a person because they know that is the surest way to have good relationships. No. We feel

compelled and we follow our compulsion. It is not as much about thinking as it is about wanting, desiring, needing.

Here we see the most important gods of the Babylonians are bowing down, defeated by the one true God. The things that the Babylonians worshipped failed the worshippers. Their hopes were bashed. Their glory was shamed. Their false gods did not deliver. When confronted with real life and the one True God, the idols fail. They are seen for what they are. Fiction.

How slow we are to learn. This is true of everything we set our hearts on apart from, or competing with, the worship of God. We are only guarantying future disappointment. We really need to get this. As hard as it is, we need to get this through our heads. Anything that is not received gratefully by us from God's hands, anything we cannot faithfully thank God for, anything contrary to obedience to God's stated will, is a certain disappointment.

An easy example are believers who have knowingly chosen to enter into marriage relationships with unbelievers. There is no question about God's will. But oh, the heart has so many compelling reasons. And at the bottom is the perception that one's greatest fulfillment will be found in this relationship. This is what one needs. This is what one must have. This is what a person's soul deeply wants. Yet nearly every person who has ever done this, and is still a believer after many years, would give the advice- don't do it. Don't yoke yourself with a non believer. It will bring you misery. You will regret it. It will not give you what your heart longs for. God may be merciful. He may bring that person to Himself. He may actually provide a good relationship in His goodness to his child. But that is not how you go about serving God. You will live to regret your unfaithfulness.

This is just an easy example to prove a point, but the point can be made with any idol. Idolatry disappoints. And it must. Because there is only one true God. Nothing else can deliver what our souls need. If we would only believe this we could free our lives of all kind of future misery.

Our temporary idols will one day bow down. They are insufficient to provide our souls with what they need.

Now look at the contrast in verses 3 & 4.

**<sup>3</sup> "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, Who have been upheld *by Me* from birth, Who have been carried from the womb:**

**<sup>4</sup> Even to *your* old age, I *am* He, And even to gray hairs I will carry *you!* I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver *you.***

When is the last time you even had a thought that you needed to carry and sustain your God? When is the last time you thought God really needed your assistance so He could get around to where He needed to be?

If you understand God at all, this isn't even a possibility. If we exist, we are being upheld by God. In Him we live and move and have our being. It started at conception and it will never end. **Our God does the carrying.**

That is where true security comes from. That is the kind of relationship we were designed for. The hearts of believers are built with a vacuum that only God can fill.

This is a God that **will never bow**. This is a God who will **never be conquered**. This is a God who is fit **to be called God**.

Then he goes on.

In vs 5 we see that God has no competitors. There is no one like God. No not one. There is God. And there is everything else. And everything else may be **worshipped like a god**. But that does not **make them a god**. It just makes people look stupid for choosing so badly.

Again in 6 and 7 Isaiah points out the absurdity of idol worship. It's **source** is man. And it cannot **save** man. Man needs a god that can save. Mankind needs a god that is bigger than itself, outside of itself, so it can intervene in the lives of men.

**Verse 8** is a cry for reason. Reason does not cause us to go after other gods. Our passions do. Our cravings do. Our compulsions do. Look what God calls upon here.

**<sup>8</sup> "Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors.**

What God is saying is, THINK! Use your heads. Reason this out.

We sometimes get the idea, I think, that God is compassionate regarding the reasons we follow our strong feelings into paths of idolatry. It is like **God will believe** the things **we expect other people to believe** when we say, you just don't know how hard it is for me to do the right thing here. You just can't know unless you were in my skin how difficult it is to be faithful here.

Well, I don't know of a single verse that shows God's compassion for believers choosing to sin. He can empathize for how hard the struggle can be, because He was tempted in like manner. But there is no empathy for choosing to fail. After all, it cost Christ His life so we could be victorious. God is not going to play games with that. If Christ gave His life so we could obey, He is not going to pity us for choosing to fail. He will forgive us. But that is not going to pull on His heart strings. God is impossible to fool. People are easy to fool. And

we will nearly always believe what we tell ourselves. For some reason we trust the source.

God calls us always to reason.

We need to **remember**. That is intentional brain activity. We need to show ourselves as reasoning human beings that **can be led** by reason. The word for “show yourselves men” means something like “put yourselves on a firm foundation” It is an appeal to acting like we were designed to act. An appeal to act in a way that is solid, not to live by our impulse. **We need to exercise our thinking, not our excuses**. We don’t need to better recite our reasons to disobey. We need to more clearly understand and believe God’s reasons for us to obey. We need to gather people around us who will believe **what God says** rather than **what we say** when the two conflict.

I love how the Bible addresses us. Our culture would say that we must address people as wonderful individuals that we know they are. God never feels that need. He addresses us as we are. Humility is always called for when we are addressed by God. God says “**Do this you transgressors**”. Why does He say that? Well, I suppose it is because that is what we are. God never flatters His children. We are never told we are wonderful and here are ways we can be more wonderful. No. It is more like we are prone to wander and this is how we can remain safe. We are prone to to sin and here is how we can be faithful. The assumption is that our flesh, **what comes naturally**, always leads us away from God and not toward Him. Our hearts are idol factories, always leading us to worship the creation rather than the creator. And we have to constantly be processing truth in a factual manner to keep reorienting to the reality of God.

Do you want to be on a firm foundation? Think correctly. Allow every thought to be directed by the words of God. Don’t assume that any response that rises up within you is good. Always check it with the words of God. That is what these people are called to. They are challenged to THINK right. Now where does God direct them?

**<sup>9</sup> Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me**

If you want to think correctly, start with what God has done. Our culture tends to not value the things of old. We think that the new things are the best things, the truest things. Things like understanding and wisdom are not the necessary skills. We need progressive things. We need technical skills. We need innovation.

But when God wants people to begin to think with a firm foundation he doesn't point them to **look inside** or to **look outside**. He tells them to **look back**.

We need to start with creation and work our way to where we are. That is where we will find wisdom and perspective. Then we can look at what **God has done** in our lives while we veered left and right thinking to meet our own needs. And we need to look at how God graciously put an end to our plans and brought us back to himself. That is when we begin to understand just how powerful and gracious our God is to us.

Then in verses 10 and 11 we are shown how everything God that says will happen happens. He is calling the shots. The other so called gods have their followers trying to guess the future.

**10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'**

**11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.**

This goes way beyond God saying, I know what is going to happen in the future. There are some who explain God's foreknowledge in salvation as being **God knowing something ahead of time** and He plans with that knowledge in mind. But we can see in our text this morning, that is not how God explains his own actions.

And the word used for foreknowledge in scripture is not referring to factual knowledge. It is a word used for relational intimacy. It is not that God knew **about** people ahead of time. The word really means **he loved them** ahead of time. It fits much better with how God describes his actions here in Isaiah.

In verse 10 we see that God declares things well before they have happened. He has the book of Revelation completed before He begins acting out Genesis. But look closely at verses 10 and 11.

**'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'**

**11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.**

God intends it to happen.

God predicts it will happen.

Then what. Does God watch as it happens? No. He is far more active than that. **God makes it happen.**

I will bring it to pass.

I have purposed it.

I will do it.

God does not **predict** the future as much as He **creates** the future and announces His intentions ahead of time.

Do you realize the security this truth can produce in your life? Do you realize just how solid this makes our lives. It can look very shaky. But it is as certain as the intentions of God for you. **Your life** is not happening to you. **God's plans** are happening to you. Sure, much of it has to do with living in a sinful world. It is not the best of all existences. There are things that are necessary now that will not be necessary in eternity. But they are still in God's hands.

**Now what thing do you need in your life** that is bigger than God raising up a political leader to bring an end to the Babylonian rule? Do you not think that was a pretty big undertaking, taking over 100 years to set the stage and put all the players in place. Now, do you need something bigger than that? Do you really think that God does not have the resources to shape your future in a way that is best for you and all your fellow believers.

We say we believe this stuff. But do we? Do we really?

Do I think God can take care of all the bad things I can imagine happening?

Why is it that we can spend hours **imagining bad things happening** but we cannot spend hours imagining **the good things that God might do**? Why does God so seldom get the benefit of the doubt in our minds? Why do we so much prefer the gods of our own making than the tested and true God that has come through for us time and time again?

<sup>12</sup> **"Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, Who are far from righteousness:**

<sup>13</sup> **I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory.**

Wow God sure is negative isn't He? How does He expect to get a following when people are making choices of which gods they will choose?

Again, God never apologizes for describing His creation as it is. We need to humble ourselves if we ever hope to have a good relationship with our God. Jesus told one of his best friends on earth to "Get behind me Satan." If we are to be serious in our relationship with God we need to be very serious about loving truth, no matter how it might first hit us.

Sometimes tough truth is the tool of tough love. God loves us enough to tell the truth to us about us. Our problems, just like the people in Isaiah's day, are often due to the condition of **our hearts** more than they are the conditions of **our heads**. We can think right. We just will not humble ourselves to allow it. Who of us wants to be addressed by God as "you stubborn-hearted"? But who of us do not deserve from time to time to be called exactly that?



And again, we can't miss what we have seen over and over again. God does not wait for us to become righteous. He does not wait for our self improvement program to have dramatic success before He acts.

No He says I will bring My righteousness near. That is what God has always done to save people. That is what God **must do** if people are ever to be saved. We need a righteousness outside of ourselves. It is not **caused** by us. It is not **produced** by us. It comes to us by the grace of God. And it is **offered** to us. It is not offered to us when we are **near** to God's righteousness. It is offered when we are **far from** His righteousness. We receive it when we have no hope in ourselves of ever attaining it. Christ came to save sinners, not the righteous.

When these people heard Isaiah, they probably thought he was talking about political salvation. And in context, that may be part of the application. Cyrus was going to arrive. There is a certain rightness about that that we alluded to earlier. But the **bigger** salvation, the **more important** salvation, the salvation of people's souls was just around the corner. It may have been hundreds of years. But it was one of the next significant acts of God.

God is not slow as some think of slowness. He is moving to save. And He will do it in perfect timing.

Look how Isaiah ends his discussion about the idols.

**I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory.**

People place their salvation-idols in their worship nooks all the time. We are continually setting up the new next thing that will bring us happiness and contentment. But God is going to do a work far better than any of our attempts. He will, by His grace, place His salvation smack dab in the middle of His people and His city. And this stiff necked people will kill Christ, and by so doing play a part in allowing all people everywhere to be saved.

And why is God going to do this?

For Israel My glory. Ultimately why do the people of God hold such importance to God? Because they are the people He has given the earth to represent Himself. And by glorifying them He glorifies Himself. We see it again and again. The story is all about the goodness of God. And it is especially about His goodness to people whose only contribution to their salvation is to initially run from it.

What would happen if we really acted like we think God, and God alone, knows how life should be lived? What would happen if we clung only to His words, His direction, His instruction as our guide to living? What would happen if we really believed that apart from His word and guidance we really don't know anything of value at all. All of our desires and cravings and

compulsions are inadmissible evidence regarding how we should live or what we should do.

If I understand it correctly, this is how the normal Christian life should be lived. This is true discipleship. And God expects it. Because God is worthy. It looks like maybe God has given us another week to work on this. I pray that God would give us greater and greater success in this process of glorifying Him this week.