



The Sermon

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Isaiah 5-6

"The Man for a National Crisis"

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TRANSCRIPT

I want to give you a big picture this morning. I know it talks about Isaiah 5 and 6 as the subject, but I want try to help you understand kind of where we are in terms of the church and the gospel and the purposes of God that are unfolding in our time. So I'm going to go through a lot of passages surrounding Isaiah 5 and 6, and I'd like to begin in Acts 14. So if you have a Bible, turn to Acts 14.

There are just a couple of verses here that will serve a starting point for us. Verse 15, the apostles Barnabas and Paul are saying to this crowd that are worshipping them as if they are gods, "Men, why are you doing these things?" Verse 15. "We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." And then this really remarkable statement in verse 16: "In the generations gone by He" – that is God the Creator – "permitted all the nations to go their own ways." That is an astounding statement.

"God permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." God has put not only His power on display in creation, as Romans 2 says and Romans 1; God has not only put His power on display in the heavens, as Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God"; but God has also

put His goodness on display in the provision He has made for humanity throughout its history. "God is not without a witness, in that He did good and gave you rain, satisfied your heart with food and gladness." This is what Calvin coined as common grace. So all the nations in history have benefitted from the revelation of God through creation and through common grace.

History then is linear – and I want to begin by saying that in no uncertain terms. History has to be linear because it is an unfolding plan that God has ordained before the foundation of the world, so it's going from its beginning to its culmination. History is linear as God moves; and He moves unhindered, and He moves on schedule to the final goal of redemption: the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge the wicked, to bring the righteous into His kingdom, to reign for a thousand years, and then to establish the new heaven and the new earth, which is the eternal state. So there is reality in the sense that history is linear. It's going from the first creation to the second creation. The first creation is in Genesis, the second creation is at the end of Revelation, the new heavens and the new earth. It goes from an inexorable first order to an inexorable second order, in an inevitable ending; and we get nearer to it every ticking second.

At the same time though, we have to acknowledge that history is also cyclical. There are cycles of history, and you just read the essence of that cyclical aspect of history in verse 16: "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own way." There is a pattern that is repeated over and over and over through all of human history, and that is that God shows Himself, reveals Himself, demonstrates His power through creation, demonstrates His goodness through the benefits and the fruitfulness of creation, fills people's lives with all levels of goodness, and that is the revelation of Himself, which when it is rejected and people turn from God, turn against their conscience, against the law of God written in the heart, against what is obvious from the creation and the goodness of God, God lets them go.

Do you get that? He lets them go. There's a point in which God says, "I'm through. I'm backing out." "He permitted them," it says, "to go their own

ways." That word "permitted," the verb *eaō* - it's a little short verb - it basically means to leave alone. You remember our Lord saying Ephraim is joined, the prophets saying Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone? Well, that's essentially what this is about. God has limited tolerance for the nations that turn against Him, and that would be essentially all the nations of human history.

Now more is revealed about this in Romans 1, and I don't want to belabor that because that's a long passage. But turn to Romans 1 for just a moment, and you will get a picture of what happens when God lets a nation go. When they turn against the obvious revelation, when they don't follow that which is revealed in conscience, the law of God of the heart, creation and the goodness of God, when they turn that rebelling against God, God lets them go. What does that look like? Verse 18 of Romans 1: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

So we're talking about a wrath here that God unleashes on nations that suppress the truth, not necessarily biblical truth. In our case, yes. We have not only the truth of the law written in the heart in the activated conscience, not only the truth of God revealing His power in the creation - and we know more about the creation now than we ever have known; not only the macro, but the micro - we not only have all of the revelation of God in terms of His common grace and goodness, but we in our country have also had biblical revelation from the founding of it.

So when people turn against that, the phrase "suppress the truth." And suppressing the truth is an act of unrighteousness, and that's very clear. Suppressing the truth is an act of unrighteousness just in our own culture today with the new powers that have been established in Washington. There will be an escalated suppression of the truth because they are unrighteous people. We have a wicked king and a wicked court in Washington, and the agenda is going to be to suppress the truth. The greatest danger in this nation right now is the truth, it's what they hate the most; that's a suppression of the truth.

So, "When nations suppress the truth, when they reject" - verse 19 - "what is known about God that is evident in them, when they reject what is known of God from what is around them," - verse 20 - "the creation of the world," - shows His invisible attributes, His eternal power, His divine nature - "having been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." It's inexcusable not to understand the nature of God by looking at creation and looking at all that God has revealed of Himself in creation.

Here's the problem: "Though they knew God," - that is they knew God existed - "they did not honor Him as God or give thanks; they became futile in their speculations, their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools." So this is the cycle of nations. They go from the revelation of God being manifest to them, turn against it, develop their own gods, they develop into idol nations. You go down to verse 23, "They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

So you have this cycle going on all the time, and when it talks about wrath in 1:18 there's lots of wrath. There's eternal wrath, eschatological wrath, sowing and reaping wrath, "What you sow, you reap." There's cataclysmic wrath, like a tidal wave or something like that that takes hundreds of lives, or thousands of lives. This is not that. This is the wrath of God letting a nation go; and He does that in the case of every nation through human history.

No nation in human history - did you hear that? - no nation in human history has been faithful to the revelation of God given to that nation. The degree to which they have been given the revelation of God may vary, depending upon their scientific insight, which then exposes them to a greater understanding of the greatness of God in His creation. And if they've been given the Word of God, there's even a greater judgment to fall on them. So God's wrath is unleashed on nations that turn away from Him, and that's precisely what all nations do; and He lets them go. I want you to keep that in mind.

Now what does it look like when that happens? Here the wrath is explained, starting in verse 24 - and I'm just touching the main points. "God gave them over" - or God gave them up. So this is the way the wrath works: "God gave them over." That is a verb that means to turn someone over to punishment; that's a legal term. So God judicially turns the nation that turns away from Him over to judgment. What does that judgment look like? He lets them go their own way.

So, "He gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them." When God lets a nation go you'll have a sexual revolution. Whatever vestiges of morality were holding that nation together in some Judeo-Christian framework, we could say, begin to disappear, and there's a sexual revolution. And this, because in verse 25, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and they worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

So the first phase of God giving a nation over is you will have a sexual revolution; we've been through that. The second phase is in verse 26. The second thing is a homosexual revolution: "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural," - starts with women because they're assumed to be less drawn into homosexuality because they have mothering instincts, childbearing instincts. And when this kind of wrath is unleashed on a nation, women, feminists, will lead the homosexual movement.

Not just them, verse 27: "In the same way men abandoned the natural function of the woman, burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts, receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error," which could be referring to AIDS or some built-in disease. So when God turns over a nation, when He lets a nation go, there will be a sexual revolution, verse 24, followed by a homosexual revolution, verse 26.

There's a third step in verse 28: "Since they didn't see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind." This means

there's a kind of insanity. And I used to wonder what that is. That's when you don't know whether you're a man or a woman. That is the ultimate insanity, because what is patently obvious is denied. That's a non-functioning mind. And out of that comes all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice," and it goes on and on and on. They practice these things.

"They know" - verse 32 - "they're worthy of death, but they do it anyway, give hearty approval to those who practice these kinds of things." So when you have a culture that's gone through basically a sexual revolution, followed by a homosexual revolution, followed by insanity where you have people in Washington who say there are a hundred genders, this sounds like somebody thinks he's a potato chip. This is insane! You know the wrath of God is at work because that's the way it's spelled out. So while we say history is linear in that it goes from God's first creation to His last creation and moves inexorably to that; at the same time cycling through that linear history is the rise and fall of nation after nation, after nation, after nation, after nation, after nation. God gave them over.

Now that's just foundational to what I want to talk to you about. There's a classic illustration of this and it's the best illustration because you would think it's the most likely nation to escape this cycle, and that is Israel. So with that general introduction let's go back to the book of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 1, verse 2. This is Isaiah, his opening message to kings of Judah, the people of Judah.

"Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; for the Lord speaks, 'Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me.' - just like every other nation - 'An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand.' Alas, sinful nation." So once they reject God, once they revolt against Him, once they forfeit their understanding, then they will be, as we saw in Romans 1, "weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him." You would think that they would be the one nation that would be faithful and that the cycle wouldn't repeat itself

there, but they're the greatest illustration of the sinfulness of sin even unto the best of all revelatory opportunities.

Verse 5, after saying they have turned away from Him, "Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, not softened with oil. Your land is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your fields - strangers are devouring them in your presence; it is desolation, as overthrown by strangers." This is God letting them go, right? This is God permitting them to go their own way.

Verse 8, "The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city." Like that shack that once was a hut on the farm and there's nothing but barren ground around it. "Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah." That's how history works. Even the nation Israel went through rebellion, and only at the end were there a few survivors, a few survivors. This is human history.

To add one other, I think, very helpful perspective to this, look at Psalm 81. And we're going to hone in on Isaiah 5 and 6 in a minute, but this is very important to get the big picture. Psalm 81, just a few verses there. Verse 10: "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it. But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices." That's the same indictment, isn't it? Sounds exactly like Acts 14, sounds exactly like Romans 1. God did with Israel essentially what He has done with every nation. And, of course, Isaiah, in particular, is pointing them in the direction of the coming Babylonian captivity, which was so devastating.

Now with that as an introduction, look over at Isaiah chapters 5 and 6. And to cover two chapters is pretty epic for me, so we're going to move rather rapidly. Here's the most powerful account that I know of, the most powerful

account that I know of, of a nation that goes beyond God's protection, goes beyond God's provision, and it's the nation Israel; and God let them go their own way.

Now chapter 5 begins with a marvelous, marvelous picture. Let me read the first couple of verses. "Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only *beushim*," the Hebrew word for sour berries, inedible.

This is the parable of the Lord. This is the parable of the Lord. It is an exquisite poem. It is an elegy. It is a dirge. It is a funeral song. It is a plaintive weeping song. It is a sad song, and everyone who heard it or read it would get it because they all understood what a vineyard was and how much effort went into producing a fruitful vineyard.

But just exactly who are we talking about here? Go back to verse 1: "Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved." This is the Father referring to the fact that the vineyard that's planted is the vineyard that belongs to His well-beloved. And who is His well-beloved? At His baptism, what did the Father say about Jesus? "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." So Yahweh, God the Father, sings a funeral song for the vineyard that was His Son's.

Now everybody knew about vineyards. The hills of Judea even today are filled with vineyards; there's still some remaining. In the valleys of the land of Israel they grew grain. On the hillsides they terraced with all the rocks and they grew the vineyards; stony hills in Judea. In fact, the rabbis used to say somehow God when He created the world made a mistake and dumped too many rocks in Israel because there were so many of them.



But just exactly who is he talking about here? Who is this about? Verse 7 explains it: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard." So it's God and His vineyard, given to His beloved. He says, "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce *beushim*, worthless berries? Now I will tell you what I'm going to do to My vineyard: I will removed its hedge, it'll be consumed; I will break down its wall, it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." God curses the vineyard that bore sour berries instead of good grapes.

Who is this vineyard? Verse 7: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel." And we read that from the Psalms that God said, "You are My vineyard. I brought you out of Egypt and I planted you." "The men of Judah" - verse 7 - "are His delightful plant." And then you have a play on words: "He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress." The vineyard is Israel. The vineyard is Israel.

God did everything He could do. He asked some rhetorical questions: "What more could I have done? When I expected good grapes, why were there worthless grapes? Is this My fault?" And then comes the judgment of abandoning it, not protecting it, not pruning it, not caring for it, and not allowing rain to fall on it. God provided absolutely everything for the nation Israel, more than any other nation had ever received from His good and kind hand.

In Romans it says, "Theirs were the promises, the covenant, the Messiah, the law, the divine revelation of the word of God." Psalm 80:8, "You removed a vine from Egypt," - this is Israel - "You drove out the nations and planted it, brought them into the land and drove out the other Canaanite nations. You cleared the ground before it; it took deep root and filled the land." In other words, "You brought Your people into the land and You prepared for them to be productive."

So backing up a little bit just really quick, what do these elements mean? Verse 2: "He dug all around it and removed its stones." This is creating a separation, a mote or some kind of barrier to keep animals from coming in to destroy the crop. Gathering out the stones may have reference to the elimination of the Canaanites and other Pagan nations to make Israel safer. "Built a tower in the middle of it." All these vineyards would have a tower so that somebody could observe the coming of an enemy to do damage. The tower was the watchtower, probably a reference to Jerusalem. The wine vat, a reference to the sacrificial system. In other words, God did everything He could have done. "And even the choicest vine." What is the choicest vine? I think we all understand that Jewish people are a noble people.

I was just reading last week something pretty shocking. One-tenth of one percent of the population of the world is Jewish, one-tenth of one percent. There are 27 Jew Nobel Prize winners. Fifty percent of the World Chess Champions are Jewish. Twenty-one percent of all who go into Ivy League schools are Jewish. There's something about that vine that is noble. They've made massive contributions to human survival.

So God picked a genetic strain that was noble, and He put them in the land and He cleared the land, and He put a tower in the city of Jerusalem from which the prophets and the priests could be the protectors. He created a sacrificial system that would confront their sin and draw them to Him for salvation. He had every reason to expect a fruitful result. That did not happen. Was it His fault? No. What more could God have done? Nothing more.

And He looked; and what did He see instead of justice, which is *mishpat*. He saw bloodshed, which is *mispach*. Instead of righteousness, *tsedaqah*; distress, *tseaqah* – couple of wordplays. God expected justice and righteousness, saw bloodshed and distress. So here's a picture of Yahweh, God, lavishing love on this one particular nation; and they have gone the exact same way that all the other nations go. And as a result, we come to verses 5 and 6, and destruction from heaven is unleashed; and God takes away all their protection. So that's the general picture that Isaiah is giving

them, which essentially is looking at what is coming in the Babylonian captivity which devastated the whole nation.

Now when you come to verse 8 we shift from the parable to what I like to call the probing. The Lord goes deeper – and I won't spend a lot of time on this. But the indictments of what Israel's doing are laid out in a series of woes. "Woe" is sort of an onomatopoeic word in Hebrew: "*Oy!*" It's a passionate expression of horror over judgment.

So the first woe is against extensive materialism. You add, "House to house, field to field, till there's no more room, so that you have to live alone in the midst of the land! In my ears the Lord of hosts has sworn, 'Surely, many houses shall be desolate. Judgment's going to come on your materialism and your wealth; and great and fine ones are going to be without occupants. And your vineyards are going to produce famine condition crops.'" That's what he's saying in verse 10. So God's going to judge your materialism.

Second woe is in verse 11: "Woe to those who rise early in the morning and may pursue strong drink, who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!" This is drunken pleasure-seeking. "Banquets or parties accompanied by music. They do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of their hands," which is probably the dissipation of their bodies. God's work of His hands is the creation of human bodies. So you have specifically in Israel rasing materialism, drunken pleasure-seeking.

Verse 13 sums it up: "My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge, their lack of knowledge." They have turned against that revelation which God gave them. Verse 16 then, "The Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness."

Then He comes to a third woe in verse 18: "Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood." This is defiant sinfulness. This is like putting your sin on parade, putting all your sin in a cart and hooking up animals to

pull the cart. In other words, this is parading your sin. And with a defiant attitude toward God," - in verse 19 - "you're saying to God, 'Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it. Let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come to pass, that we may know it! If God doesn't like it, let me see Him do something about it.'" This is scorn. This is mockery. This is shaking a fist in the face of God.

Then they are characterized by moral perversion, as we saw in Romans 1. "They call evil good, they call good evil. They substitute darkness for light, light for darkness. They substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." What begins to happen is they criminalize righteousness and they make laws to protect iniquity, which is exactly what we're seeing in our country, dominated by rasping materialism. The wealthy become so wealthy that they overpower the entire culture, characterized by drunkenness, parties; characterized by defiant sinfulness, shaking their fists in the face of God; characterized by moral perversion, everything is overturned, and righteousness is going to be criminal. You're going to be held responsible for hate speech if you say something against legalized sin. This is just the beginning.

In verse 21, the fifth woe: "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!" Arrogant conceit. You go from moral perversion to arrogant conceit. And then it culminates in verse 22: "Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine, valiant men in mixing drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!" Essentially, corrupt leaders.

This is what a culture looks like when God has taken His hands off of it: it will be consumed with materialism; it will be defined by a drunken pursuit of pleasure and all manner of personal, lustful fulfillment; it will be defiant about and open about its sinfulness; it will be characterized by every kind of moral perversion; it will not be humble about its condition, but rather arrogantly conceited about it; and it will all be driven by corrupt leaders. This is what a culture looks like that God has abandoned.

From those probing indictments you come to verse 24 and you have the judgment of God. I'm not going to go through all of that, but the best way to look at it is verse 26: "God whistles and the Babylonians come." God whistles and a distant nation comes, and they devastate, they absolutely devastate the land of Israel, the people of Israel. Massacre, slaughter, occupation, people taken captive. We're familiar with all of that history. We don't need to know a lot of details.

They're just fearsome things in the ancient world. This army is fast, verse 26. It is unrelenting, it never stops, it never tires, verse 27. It is deadly, verse 29. It is powerful, verse 28, like a lion growing as it seizes its prey, and it growls over it in the day like the roaring of the sea. All of those things are indications of the power, devastating power of the Babylonian army. When they came, as you know, they began to come just – well, like culminating, they're coming in 586 BC.

So that is the punishment of the Lord. And all of that gets us to the sixth chapter of Isaiah – and I'm skipping some things because I want to make sure we get to this. So the question is this: "If you happen to be alive in a culture that has been abandoned by God, what kind of person do you need to be, right? What do you need to know?" because that's exactly where we are in this country.

Everything that characterized that nation characterizes us. Everything that was true of the judgment cycle of Romans 1 is true of us. We've had a sexual revolution, a homosexual revolution, and now we're in the category of the reprobate mind where we can never find our way back to sanity again because our minds don't function, and we're legalizing the insanity, and we're making laws to protect the insanity against reality. So we are in the insanity of the reprobate mind. We are driven by the very same sins categorically – the grasping materialism, the drunken pleasure-seeking. We're driven by all of those things – moral perversion and wicked leaders. So Isaiah gets this message. And the question is posed in his mind, "What is going on?" And what he needs is to find God. He needs to see God, because I think he's wondering whether God is still on the throne because it just seems too far gone.

Now remember, this is not just any nation, this is Israel, God's chosen nation. So as we come to chapter 6, Isaiah has the fulfillment of his heart's desire. "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord." Does that matter that King Uzziah died? Well, it does if your name's Uzziah. But it mattered for the nation as well because he had been king. He died in 740, so he had been king 52 years – same amount of time that I've been at Grace Church he had been king, a long time. And as long as he was king, there was security, there was peace. They had a strong cold war position because they had a good army. His reign had been a very, very peaceful reign for 52 years, and it was as if in spite of all the decline and all the devastation going on spiritually, as long as Uzziah was alive it was sort of life everything was okay, God was still on our side. Uzziah was a kind of a symbol of God's protection.

But 2 Chronicles 26:16 says this: "When Uzziah became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and was unfaithful to the Lord his God." What did he do? "He entered the temple and he offered a sacrifice." You say, "Isn't that something people were supposed to do?" No, it's not; it's something priests were to do. He invaded the priesthood. He moved from his kingly position into the role of a priest. Upon doing that he was confronted by 80 priests. And after that, the Lord nailed him, and the Lord hit him with leprosy; and he lived in separate isolation for the rest of his life until he died of leprosy.

Cut off from the house of the Lord. He went into the house of the Lord only that one time and usurped the role of a priest, violating what might seem to you as a non-spiritual sort of ritual command. But every command of God is true and pure and to be obeyed. And as a result, he never ever entered the house of the Lord the rest of his life, and he died in isolation as a leper. So now Isaiah is saying, "Well, the symbol of God's blessing is gone. This leaves us unprotected. And the question is, 'What's God doing, and is God still on the throne?'"

So we pick it up in chapter 6: "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling

the temple." You think that gave him a sigh of relief? One thing you want to check in on when you get into the cycle that that nation was in and that our nation is in, you want to make sure God is still sovereign - right? - on the throne.

The question comes up, "Where is God in all of this?" Answer: On the throne. "I saw the Lord," - an accurate view of God is the foundation of life and understanding of history; and God is still on the throne - "lofty and exalted," and His glory permeated the temple Isaiah's vision. He is sovereign. He is undisturbed. He is unconquered, unconquerable, and I'm going to add this, impassible. He is unmoved by what is going on. It is not out of His control, it is His doing. He's on the throne.

The sovereignty of God is the most important of all Christian truths. By the way, those descriptions of God - lofty, exalted, sitting on the throne - those verbs in Hebrew are repeated in Isaiah 52 where they refer to Christ, which then is another evidence that Christ is one with God. The ultimate comfort for the believer is the sovereignty of God. I know there are people who don't believe in the sovereignty of God. I don't want to live in their world. I really don't want to live in the world where they think Satan is sovereign.

Listen to Isaiah 14, and just a couple of verses, verses 24 to 27: "The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, 'Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, just as I have planned so it will stand.'" Is that helpful to you? You want to live in that world? "Just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand." Verse 27, "For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His outstretched hand, who can turn it back?" You're not seeing God lose control, you're seeing God in total control, total control, the greatest comfort. History is His story.

So the first thing we find is comfort. In the sovereignty of God He is still on the throne, still lofty and exalted above all others, and His glory fills everything in that vision. And then we read in verse 2, "Seraphim stood

above Him," - those are angelic beings apparently in Scripture who have kind of a guardianship over His holiness - "and each having six wings: with two he covered his face" - because they're created beings and they can't look on His face any more than Moses could in Exodus 33 without being incinerated - "and with two he covered his feet," - which means the place they stand is on holy ground - "and with two he hovered." These are the hovering seraphim. Why are they hovering like celestial helicopters over the throne of God? They're waiting to be sent as ministering spirits to minister to the saints and carry out the work of God, as Hebrews 1:14 says.

So you see these angelic beings. And verse 3, "One called out to another" - this is antiphonal - "and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.'" So we go from sovereignty to holiness; and sovereignty and holiness work together because holiness means God is unique, He is other than we are, He is separate from us; and sovereignty is separate from us as well. No one occupies the sovereign place in the universe except God; that is part of His uniqueness. He is Holy, Holy, Holy, the trisagion - Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son, Holy is the Spirit. "Holy, Holy, Holy," thrice repeated. No other attribute in the Bible is ever repeated three times. This is God's uniqueness.

So Isaiah saw a comforting picture of God's sovereignty, and then Isaiah saw God's holiness, and that had the opposite effect. Verse 4: "And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined!'" This was a pretty sudden shift. He went from comfort to sheer terror. He went from feeling secure in the sovereignty of God to feeling terrified over his own sin. He knows what woe means, he just used it - right? - six times in chapter 5. It's to pronounce a curse.

The verb "ruined" means lost, destroyed. "It's the end of me." Why? "Because I'm a man of unclean lips, I have a dirty mouth." Why does he refer to his lips? Because it is with your mouth that you sin most freely and most frequently. While you're planning to do some sinning, you don't have to plan to do some speaking sinning. "It's out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," right? Never are you more in touch with your depravity



than when you listen to your mouth. You have to plan to do things, you don't have to plan to say things.

So he's simply confessing his utter sinfulness, and it's so profound that he believes he is lost and destroyed. It could be translated, "I'm crumbling into pieces." "Because I'm a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." He didn't think he was any better than the nation. It's like Daniel in Daniel 9, where he confesses the sins of Israel and does it with a "we" which encompasses himself. "I live among a people of unclean lips."

So we've gone from the parable, to the probing, to the punishment, now to the presence of God; and the presence of God is a twofold experience. It is an experience of comfort in the sovereignty of God and terror over the holiness of God. That is why in Isaiah's final chapter, chapter 66, we read what all of us should be familiar with. The opening few verses of chapter 66, if I can get the page here. It's coming. There we go.

"This says the Lord, 'Heaven is My throne, the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'I don't need you to build Me anything; this is what I need. Through this one I will look: to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who' - what? - 'trembles at My word.'"

Yes, we live in that sort of spiritual schizophrenia of being comforted by the sovereignty of God and terrified by the holiness of God; and that's where we have to live. That means on the one hand we sing the hymns that we sung so beautifully this morning, we express our love to God from the bottom of our hearts, and we sing with joy because we know God is sovereign. But at the same time, there's a deep, deep ache in our hearts over our own sinfulness.

The clear view of God is both reassuring and terrifying. It is a frightening thing, fearful thing, to fall into the hands of Almighty God, Hebrews 12.

The prophet knew he had a sovereign God, but he also knew he was a wretched sinner, and he said, "Woe is me. I'm disintegrating. My sin" - to borrow from another scripture - "is ever before me." Why do you say this? Why are you speaking such words that indicate you have a lack of healthy self-image? Why are you saying that? End of verse 5: "Because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

It depends on who you compare yourself to, right? You can do well if you compare yourself to the people you resent. That's why Peter, when the Lord helped him catch those fish miraculously in Luke 5:8, he didn't say, "Wow, Lord, that was some miracle." What the Lord did proved that the Lord was God the Creator, and Peter's response was, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." So these two things are at the heart and soul of our understanding of God.

When people ask my friend who's now with the Lord, R. C. Sproul, "What is the greatest need in the evangelical world?" he would always answer the same way, "To understand the nature of God." It's still the greatest need. There's a book floating around written by a guy named Ortlund. I think it's called *Meek and Lowly*, or something, that looks at God only in the sense of Jesus saying He's meek and lowly; and it is so out of balance because there's nothing in the book to terrify even the redeemed sinner, because God is holy.

This generation has neither understanding of God's sovereignty or His holiness. We have people fussing around in Washington trying to fix this country when, these are "evangelical people" who think somehow that this thing is out of control, and there's some Christian organization that can fix it. I got news for you: this is the work of sovereign God. We are under divine wrath obviously. He allowed us to go our own way because we rejected Him when we had the revelation of Him. And we've cycled through the sexual revolution, homosexual revolution, reprobate mind. He can't fix it.

No amount of Christian nationalism or lobby in Washington is going to fix this. And God is not in heaven rubbing His hands like some Armenian saying, "I hope somebody can work this deal out because I'd like it to go another direction." That is just an absurdity. If you don't understand God is sovereign and you are looking at a cycle that has repeated itself over and over and over through all of human history, including with the nation Israel, then you don't understand your God. God is at work, and you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

My other little great-grandson was running around. He ran his first tour of Grace Church campus. He's, what' 14 months; his little legs. And his dad was watching him go; and he would dart between people after service was over, and he went all the way around the worship center, and somebody said, "You know, it's so sad that little guy's going to grow up in this world." I said, "I got news for you: this world is under the control of the sovereign God, and He made that little guy for such a time as this."

And you're here because this is your time; and this is the time for Trinity Bible Church, that's why you're here. You're not here because somebody had a good idea, you're here because God ordained you for this time. This is your time. You have to have a view of God's sovereignty, and then you can rest in what's happening; it doesn't take your joy away. And you must, at the same time, have awareness of God's absolute holiness.

His sovereignty is missing from evangelicalism; it's almost a threat. It's certainly a threat to pragmatics. If you think you can build the church by clever design, then you think you're sovereign, and that's a form of blasphemy. God is sovereign; and not only that, God is holy. This generation knows nothing of either. Even the evangelicals know nothing of either. God is treated in a frivolous way.

Well, Isaiah feels it. He feels the satisfaction and the comfort of divine sovereignty, and he feels the agony of his own sinfulness before a Holy God. What's he going to do about it? Well, he's like Nicodemus; he can't do anything about it because it's not in his hands to do it. You don't initiate

salvation. But in this image something marvelous happens. From the presence of God comes the purification.

As the building is shaking in the vision, filling with smoke, and he's confessing his wretchedness, verse 6 says, "One of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'" Wow, what a moment. What a moment. This is a picture of salvation. There's an altar here; that altar would look forward to the cross - right? - the altar on which the sacrifice was made.

Repentance is painful. I don't know if you've ever tried this, but you can have an illustration of the painfulness of repentance. The next time you have a barbeque, Joe Biden says you can have one on July 4th, and when you do that, you can take a coal off the altar and you can put it on your tongue, and you will feel the symbolic pain of repentance.

So repentance is painful, and cleansing is sovereign. And he was forgiven, he was forgiven. That's the only hope for us to be any help to this culture, isn't it? What is God looking for? People who see His sovereignty, see His holiness, and whom He forgives, whom He cleanses. This is the purification - powerful, painful, heavenly. The altar is the place of atonement. The word "behold" is used because this is the surprise of sovereign, saving grace. "Your iniquity is atoned for," is the Hebrew, "and your sin is forgiven," a picture of the cross. And the sinner then goes from uselessness to usefulness.

And then the proclamation of the Lord in verse 8. This is really where I wanted to get. This is the culmination: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'" Notice the "Us," Trinitarian "Us." "Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" You know, I've heard preachers say, "Isaiah stepped up and said, 'Here am I. Send me.'" I don't think this was some kind of bold thing, I think he looked around in the

vision and it was no one else there. It's probably more like, "You could send me?" and maybe a duck.

So who's going to go? Who is going to go to this nation under judgment? Who is going to go? Who is worthy? A dirty mouth prophet whose mouth is no better than the rest of the population? No, not unless something dramatically happens to him from heaven, unless his sins are atoned for and he is forgiven; and then he is useful. "Who will go unto this nation under condemnation, under judgment" - now listen to this carefully - to warn them of what is coming?" This is humble, this is willingness, this is brokenness. "Here am I. Send me." That's been used so many times for a missionary call; but people don't get the rest of the story.

Verse 9. From heaven the word comes: "Go. Go and tell this people. You're just exactly what I'm looking for, someone who understands My sovereignty and My holiness, someone who has been touched with atonement provided by Christ on the cross, who has gone through repentance, atonement, and cleansing. Go and tell this people."

"So, what do I tell them, Lord?" Are you ready for this? "Here's what you tell them: It's too late. It's too late. That's what you tell them. Too late." "Are You kidding?" "No."

Look at verse 8: "Keep on listening, but don't perceive; keep on looking, but don't understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." That is not the commission that you have associated with, "Here am I. Send me."

"Go tell them it's too late. Go tell them they can see and hear, but not understand. Go tell them that it's too late, their hearts are insensitive, their ears are dull, their eyes are dim, so that they cannot see with their eyes, they cannot hear with their ears, they cannot understand with their hearts, they cannot return and be healed. Go tell them it's too late."

By the time you're this far down in the cycle of judgment, you can't repent and you can't believe. This is judicial blindness, judicial hardening. The hour is dark, the judgment is sure, the doom is inevitable, and the future is decided. "Go and preach judgment." I don't hear that being preached. I don't hear that being preached. "Tell this nation it is too late, it is too late." When Jesus came, He preached the same message. This passage from Isaiah, verses 9 and 10, you will find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke - Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8. And Jesus said the same thing: "It's too late. It's too late. It's too late."

Listen to what John said about this in recording our Lord's judgment, John 12:37. "But though He had performed so many signs before them, and they were not believing in Him." This is the Israel of the first century. We were looking at the Israel of the eighth century with Isaiah, now we're looking at the Israel of the first century. "He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" That's from Isaiah 53:1. "For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again," - and here comes the passage we just read out of Isaiah 6 - 'He has blinded their eyes, hardened their heart, so they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.'" These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory and he spoke of Him. This means that the vision was of Christ, as we said.

Jesus gave the same message Isaiah gave: "It's too late. It's too late. It's too late." To illustrate that look at verse 42: "Many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." Too late. Even those who wanted to believe couldn't believe; they were held captive by pleasing men.

So what is the message to this culture? The message is the same message that Isaiah gave: "It's too late." It is the same message that Jesus gave: "It's too late." And at the end of Acts, if you look at chapter 28, verse 23, "They

set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening." He's still trying to talk to the Jews.

"Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, 'The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, you're no different than what Isaiah saw, saying, "Go to this people and say: You'll keep on hearing, you will not understand; you'll keep on seeing, you will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.'" - verse 28 - "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." A final turning from Israel, in the eight century, in the first century, with Jesus and with Paul. The message to this nation that had cycled into God's wrath is, "It is too late. It is too late."

Now go back for a closing from Isaiah 6. Now if I had been Isaiah and that had been my commission, I would have asked what he asked. Verse 11: "Then I said, 'Lord, how long? How long do You want me to do this? Since judgment has come and it's too late, how long do I preach this judgment message?'" Now get this. How contrary is this to evangelical conventional wisdom about how you approach the unconverted world in which we live with this schmaltzy, "God loves you and He's just holding His breath in hopes that you'll run to Him."

"How long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate, and the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. You do it until there's not a soul left here to talk to, until no one's left. You just keep doing it." And what are you saying to

them? "It's too late. It's too late. It's too late. Now you wouldn't believe, now you can't believe."

"Why would I do that? What's the point?" And this comes to the promise, which is the final thing in verse 13. This is challenging even in the Hebrew; I'll just give you the gist of it. "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, and it will again be subject to burning, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump." When everything is burned down there'll be a tenth. This is the doctrine of the remnant. There'll be a holy seed. What is that referring to? The holy seed is the elect, the chosen people. Why do you preach judgment until there is no one left? Because there is a holy seed, there is a remnant, there is a stump.

Back to Psalm 81 again and verse 11: "But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices." And then this: "Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries. Those who hate the Lord would pretend obedience to Him, and their time of punishment would be forever. But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Did you see that? Verse 13: "Oh that My people would listen to Me, and Israel would walk in My ways! If you would turn, I would bless you." That is obviously the promise of the remnant: "If you turn, I will bless you."

Go back to Isaiah 1. I read you down through verse 9. Let's pick it up in verse 10: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom" – this is really referring to the people of Judah and Jerusalem; he's identifying them as if they were Sodom and Gomorrah – "and you people of Gomorrah. What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" say the Lord. "I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling



of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals, your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I'm weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I'll hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood." So He says, "I don't want your religion. I don't want your religion."

Then the invitation, beautiful, verse 16: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. I'll cleanse you if you repent." Too late for the nation, but not too late for those who are penitent. Too late for our nation, but not too late for the remnant - right? - for the holy seed.

In closing, Mark 12, Mark 12. Jesus here draws from Isaiah 5: "Began to speak to them parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower.'" Oh, that sounds familiar, doesn't it? Right out of Isaiah 5. Only He says in this case this has to refer to Israel - right? - because He's referring to Isaiah 5, which is Israel.

So the Lord is telling another parable about Israel, and He says adding to it, "and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another slave; they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. He sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others." This is Israel and what they did to the prophets, isn't it? That's how far gone they were.

"He had one more to send," - verse 6 - "a beloved son," and the beloved is the one who owned the vineyard in Isaiah 5. "He sent him last of all to

them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' They took him, and killed him, threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and give the vineyard to others." Stop there.

This is where we are. Preachers of truth are vilified. One of our graduates of the seminary is in prison in Canada for preaching. They're going to crank up the hostility against those who preach the truth. People are worried about freedom of religion; there's always freedom for false religion because it belongs to the darkness. This is a picture of the Father sending the Son, and they killed Him. So when the culture silences preachers and resents the Son, if you reject Christ you're guilty of crucifying Him afresh, right? Our society would crucify Jesus again if He were here.

But that's not the end of the story. Quoting from Psalm 118:22, Have you not even read this Scripture: "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone. This came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes." What is that? The resurrection. Yes, they rejected the stone, they killed Him; but He became the chief corner stone: the miracle of the resurrection. So Christ's triumphant resurrection over His enemies is the culminating marvel of our proclamation. You may reject the Son, but He lives, and He reigns, and He is sovereign. He is the chief corner stone. It is marvelous in our eyes.

It says we will give the vineyard to others. Who's that? The church. So now we are the possessors of the vineyard of the beloved Son, and our responsibility is to care for that vineyard on behalf of the one who is the chief corner stone having risen from the dead, and to proclaim to the culture around us, "Too late for the nation, but not too late for you." Who knows, but that you are one of God's chosen. How do you know that? Cry out to Him and see if He hears and gives you salvation.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, so rich and full; and we feel like we've barely touched the surface of these profound realities. But He gives

us a sense of history, a sense of the reality of the world in which we live, and of the world in all its history, to understand that it's moving inexorably toward the coming of Christ, the establishment of His kingdom, the destruction of the ungodly, the reign of the saints, and the new heaven and the new earth. But in the process of that linear, sovereign, unchanging plan, there are cycles in which nations rise and fall, and You let them go their own way. You abandon them; You leave them alone. We saw it with Israel. Even they couldn't avoid it, and nor can our nation and the nations of the world in our day.

May we be faithful to be the Isaiah who see You as the Sovereign and are comforted by that, we see You as holy and are terrified by that, understand the reality of Your holiness and our sinfulness, come to You for cleansing, come to You for atonement and forgiveness, and then represent You in proclaiming judgment, not that judgment is about to come, but judgment is here. It's too late for this nation. But there is a remnant. There is a remnant. To them we can say, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they can become like wool."

May we preach both judgment and gospel grace and forgiveness, and may this church become a light shining in the dark world for Your glory. May there be many here who say, "Here am I. Send me," and will be used to proclaim the reality of judgment and the surprising offer of saving grace, to the end that You would be glorified, in Your Son's name. Amen.