

Temple Worship
Isaiah 66: 1 – 6

Our sermon text this morning will be Isaiah chapter 66. We'll be looking at verses 1 to 6. Before we look at that Scripture, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we ask now that we would be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. Speak to us, Father, from your word. Father, please help me to speak as you would have me speak, words that are pleasing to the living God, that I not be one who fears man, but let me be one who obeys God. Father, may all our hearts may be made meek and humble before you, that we would receive your word for that which it is, the very word of God. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 66, starting our reading at verse 1. Hear the word of God:

“¹ Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? ² All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. ³ He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; ⁴ I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.’

“⁵ Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: ‘Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, “Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy”; but it is they who shall be put to shame. ⁶ ‘The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!’” Amen. May God bless that word to us.

In ancient times, a temple was the place where a person went to be in the presence of their god. You built a temple for the name of your god. In the temple, you placed an image of your god. You went to the temple to sacrifice to your god, to make offering to him or her, to draw close to that which was your god.

Scripture starts with the construction of a temple in the book of Genesis. It finishes with the revelation of a temple in the book of Revelation. The temple in the book of Genesis was what's called “the garden”—the garden where God walked among His people, the garden where Adam was told to protect the garden and to expand the garden. “Let the garden fill the earth, and fill the garden with your offspring.”

What were Adam and Eve? Remember, this temple that I spoke of has an image of God in it. What were Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis? They were created in the image of God. God speaking of a garden temple, a living temple, that was made with what? Well, “What is the house you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made.”

That garden temple in the book of Genesis was a temple made without human hands. And Adam and Eve, as the image-bearer of God, were made without human hands. They were, in their original state, an image of God that was not an idol. In the commandments, we are strictly commanded to make no image of God. Never make an image of God—not of anything, from the heavens above, from the waters below, or anything that walks upon the face of the earth—don’t make an image of God. But God made an image of God—Adam and Eve.

You go to the book of Revelation, and where does mankind end up? In the presence of God. Revelation chapter 21 tells us there’s no actual temple there. A temple was not necessary. The Lamb, indeed, was the temple of God. Now who’s the Lamb? Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten Son of God. But what is the Lamb now? What does He bear? What did He take upon Himself when He became incarnate? “And the Word took upon Himself flesh.” Remember, He was not fathered by a man of this world. Though He was born to the house of David, He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. He’s the image of God, made without human hands, though He Himself is truly human and truly God.

So the people of God in the book of Revelation dwell in the presence of God, bearing the image of God, worshiping God through the very person of God, the Lamb Himself, who is *the* true image of God. You see, the way God planned it to be is the way it is going to be. The rebellion of Satan, and the rebellion of humanity, and the damage and the destruction that was wrought by sin, will not have the victory. Ultimately, God’s plan will come to its fruition, to fulfillment.

That vision that you’ve got in the book of Revelation, it’s a garden vision. There are trees there—specifically, trees that you saw in the Garden of Eden, the tree of life, and more than one of them, bearing fruit for every month of the year. You see, the picture there is eternal life. The last place that there was a tree of life was in the Garden of Eden. Now we’re looking forward to the tree of life in the garden of the temple of the presence of God.

And that golden candlestick that was in the tabernacle in the wilderness and in the temple in Jerusalem, was it something like a tree? Was it made to look something like an olive tree, a symbol of the tree of life?

And the temple that was built in Jerusalem, if we went back and read about the construction undertaken at the direction of Solomon, according to the plans given him by his father, King David, it was filled with garden imagery—vines, fruits.

The garden—what’s it pointing to? It’s pointing to that vision that John gives us at the end of the book of Revelation—redeemed humanity dwelling in the very presence of God, in an eternal Garden of Eden that fills the whole earth, and the whole earth is filled with the image of God—not made with human hands.

It seems that the only one who can make an image of God is God Himself. No one else can do it. Any person tries to make an image of God is sinning. We can’t get there. It’s beyond us. It’s greater than us. I think that’s why God put such an emphasis upon words in His Word and the preached word—because He doesn’t want us to deal in images, He wants us to deal in words. He doesn’t want us to think in pictures, He wants us to think in words.

Isaiah 66, verse 1, starts with God making this declaration: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’” What’s the significance? What does this tell us? Well, you need to consider all that’s come before in the book of Isaiah.

What has Isaiah told the people, starting back at Isaiah chapter 1? God abominates your worship. Your worship is false. Your worship is actually evil in the sight of God. God is sending you into captivity. You will be dragged off to Babylon in slavery. You will be brought back eventually to the promised land, and there you will indeed build another temple. But that’s not the salvation that God is promising.

What’s the salvation that God promises? It starts all the way back in Isaiah chapter 2, with the idea of the mountain of the Lord, and the law of the Lord, and the word of the Lord going out and being preached to all the nations. And it’s revealed to us in Isaiah chapter 7: “Behold, the Virgin shall conceive.” It’s revealed to us in Isaiah chapter 9: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” It’s revealed to us in Isaiah chapter 11: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

It’s revealed to us again and again and again. Isaiah chapter 40: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity is pardoned,” which is where the synoptic gospels all begin. The preaching of John the Baptist, what does he preach? “Comfort, comfort my people.” And they say, “Who are you?” And he says, “I’m the one who was sent before the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

And then Isaiah reveals to us the servant: the servant who is Israel; the servant who is the Son of God; the servant who is pleasing in the sight of God; the servant who draws forth from the people of God songs of worship; the servant whom God says “will speak my words, and you must listen to Him. You must hear His words.”

And then in Isaiah chapter 52, and on into Isaiah chapter 53, we realize the servant is a suffering servant—wounded for our iniquities. He suffers. He dies. And in His suffering, God is well

pleased. He makes an offering for sin that is pleasing in the sight of God—one great offering, the offering of a man without sin, the offering of the God-man, the image without sin. The perfect image dies on a cross, crucified.

So considering all these things and God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth, why would God then tell His people through Isaiah, "Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would make for me?" What is the house that you would make for me?

So what's He saying to the people of Judah? Once again, He's saying to them, "Do not imagine that the salvation that is coming is a re-establishment of the old covenant. It is not. The old covenant has been broken." For example, in Jeremiah 31, verses 31 to 34, we're told the old covenant has been broken. "Though I was your husband, yet you broke the covenant."

God's not promising a restoration of the old covenant, though the people return to the land, and though the people will rebuild a temple of sorts. The Scripture's pretty clear. You read Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, some of those other minor prophets—the temple that was rebuilt was not the fulfillment of the earlier promises. It was a place for worship until the revelation of the Son. It was a place where the Jewish people would gather. But it wasn't the fulfillment that was promised in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It wasn't the fulfillment.

Now, if God has sent forth this servant, if God has sent forth this Son of David, this one who was born of a virgin—what use is there, what value is there, what power could there possibly be in the sacrifices that went on in a Jewish temple? None. None.

What's the value of the blood of a bull, a goat, a lamb, a bird, compared to the value of the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord? None. What could the blood of an animal contribute, now that God has spilled His own blood—to use, for example, Acts chapter 20, verse 28, where it says that "God has purchased the church with His own blood"? What's it saying there? That the death of Jesus and the shedding of His blood is as though God Himself had shed His own blood.

What's the value of temple worship when God has shed the blood of His own Son? The value of it is—none whatsoever. What can you add to the works of Christ? What can you add to the things that Jesus has done? How can you make the offering of Jesus for sin better than it is? The very thought itself is blasphemous. The very thought itself is fatal to Christian faith. It's destructive to the people of God.

The blood of His Son was shed for our sins. If you believe that, how could you possibly be interested in anything else? "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?" We can't build a temple with our human hands. We can't. Churches buildings, are not temples. We can't build temples. We can't make images. We can't do these things. But God, by His hand, can.

Let's turn, for example, to First Corinthians chapter 3. The Apostle Paul does speak of a temple, writing to the Corinthian church a letter of correction, telling them that they are not doing well in many things. Let's start reading at verse 10 of First Corinthians 3:

“¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. ¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

In verse 16, “Do you not know that you”—that “you” is in the plural. We have one word for “you” and in context, in English, you work out whether it's plural or singular. Or in Australia, we say, “Youse all,” if we really want to make it clear—“all youse-all,” something like that. This is the “all youse-all.” “Do you,” do all of you “not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you”—all youse-all—“are that temple.”

You've got a temple on the earth, but it's not built with human hands. Who built the temple? What's the foundation? Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul speaks earlier in verse 12 of “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,” what's he doing? It's a contrast. The thing about gold, silver, precious stones is that they survive the test of fire. Gold, silver, and precious stones were put upon the earth by God. Wood, hay, and stubble—that's a man's work. You see what he's saying: This temple has been built by God.

So what are we supposed to find in the temple, that is, the church—any church that wants to call itself a church? I'm speaking both of what you would call the body of Christ, the invisible church, the genuine church to be found the world over, and any individual congregation that wants to call itself a church. It's to be a temple of the living God, not made with human hands, and filled with the image of God.

Each and every one of us who are truly regenerate, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who are sons of God through adoption—what are we to be? Images of God. People are supposed to be able to look at us and to see something of God in us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. We're God's people. We're the images of God to be found in the temple of God, in this present evil age, whilst we await the new creation. We're the new creation living within the old creation. We're God's invasion of this present evil age. I often like to think that the church is to be a suburb of heaven, thrown up upon this earth. What is the place of my rest? What is the place of my peace? His church. It's the only place where you can enter into the rest of God.

Let's read on, verse 2: "All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD." You see what He's saying. "If I've sent forth this servant, this Savior from the house of David, if I've sent forth this one who speaks my word and who indeed is YAHWEH incarnate, I already own everything that's upon the earth. I made it. It's there because I made it. It's upheld by my will. Do you really think you're going to curry my favor by giving it back to me? Do you really think I'm going to approve of you because you made some certain expensive offering?"

Turn to Psalm 34, verse 18: "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." What offering does God want? What does God require? God wants us. He wants us. He wants us to be offered up in His presence. In Romans chapter 12, Paul says, "Offer yourselves a living sacrifice." Offer yourselves a living sacrifice.

What makes us an acceptable offering? Well it's certainly not our own righteousness. It's certainly not our own good works. What makes us acceptable? Only the work of God's Son Jesus Christ, only the righteousness that is imputed to us in justification. But what accompanies this imputation? The knowledge of sin. God doesn't want our offerings. As I say that, don't misunderstand me. Does God say you should support the church? Yes, He does. Does God say you should support missionaries? Yes, He does. But He never says these things buy salvation. He never says that by doing these things, "You please me in a way that brings salvation." He simply says that by doing these things, you offer acceptable sacrifices through faith.

Back at Isaiah 66, verse 2: "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." And trembles at my word. Isn't that a long way away from where most churches are at in our nation today? It seems that the very last thing that they want to say to anyone who comes through their door is that you ought to be broken in the presence of God. You ought to be humble in the presence of God. You ought to be trembling as you hear His word read. Most churches today count the numbers that come through the church door, and that's all they count. They're not counting the numbers that go through heaven's door. They want people to come through their door. As far as they're concerned, that's a successful ministry.

And don't tell anyone anything that they don't want to hear. Don't challenge them, either mentally or spiritually. Don't make this Christian thing seem at all serious, difficult, or heavy. Attract them with music, attract them with popular songs, with pretty girls, back-up singers. Attract them with anything that you can, but don't put the weight upon their shoulders of their sins. Tell them God doesn't care about sins. The moment you tell someone God doesn't care about sins, you've lost your gospel. You've lost the good news. The proof that God cares about sins is the fact that Jesus died upon a cross. That's the proof that God cares about sins. He hates sin, even as He loves His people! Somehow or other, His hatred of sin and His love for His people had to be expressed. You won't find it expressed anywhere other than in the cross of Calvary, where Jesus was put to death.

How much does God hate sin? Well, what did Jesus suffer? Flogged to within an inch of His life, humiliated, most likely crucified naked. The paintings, the images that foolish people make are probably wrong. The Romans tended to crucify naked for the purpose of humiliating the victim. There He died—for sin! For sin. God hates sin. He really, truly, literally hates sin. It's an abomination before Him. God abhors the evildoer.

Turn to Psalm 5. Reading from verse 4: "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. ⁵The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. ⁶You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." We say, "Hate the sin and love the sinner." Heard that pretty often, haven't you? Hate the sin, love the sinner. "The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." Or back at verse 5, "You hate all evildoers." Sins don't get sent to hell; sinners get sent to hell. Yet God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

You see, our job as Christians seeking to preach the good news to the world is to reveal God—the fullness of God, everything of God, all there is to be known of God, everything of God that He has revealed of Himself. He is a God who judges sin, who hates sin, who indeed will send sinners to hell, and there they will suffer for eternity. They will be under His judgment, His wrath, for eternity. That's our God.

But He is also a God who loves and will forgive the humble and the contrite in spirit, gifting them with totally undeserved eternal life, dwelling in His presence, in His garden temple that fills the earth—the temple that is the Lamb. That's our God. He's all of that and more. And we try to hide Him. The church tries to hide God from the world, in case the world is upset—cowards that we are, fearful fools that we are.

However many years we've been given in this world, I'm telling you, they're not worth eternity. They're not worth eternity. Eternal life is life in the presence of God, for all of eternity. What do you gain if you gain the world and lose the soul? The answer's obvious—you gain nothing! You gain condemnation, which is no gain. It's an eternal subtraction.

God looks upon the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at His word, the one who knows that he or she is a sinner, the one who knows that they cannot contribute to their salvation, the one who acknowledges that they are so wicked that they can do nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing except beg forgiveness! And that's it. "Forgive me, Lord, a sinner."

In the little parable Jesus gave, it was the tax collector who said, "Forgive me Lord, a sinner." He was the one who went home justified—justified in the sight of God, declared righteous. The one who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at the word of God is the one whom God says is righteous. The one who says, "God, I'm a sinner," God says, "Mine. Righteous one. My love, my blessings dwell upon you. You've acknowledged your sinfulness in my presence."

So then, reading on in our text, particularly verse 3. God speaks of His rejection of what had been covenant, legal worship, lawful worship. They were supposed to slaughter oxen. They were supposed to sacrifice lambs. They were supposed to make grain offerings. They were supposed to make incense offerings.

And God says of their offerings, “He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man.” You’re like a murderer. “He who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig’s blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol.” The absolute rejection of old covenant temple-based worship. “Disgusting in my sight,” says God—disgusting in my sight.

As I’ve said, what could make this possible? There’s only one thing that could make this possible. If God has said in His Old Testament, in the books of Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy, that certain offerings are to be made at certain times, and He will be pleased with these offerings and He will accept them as a pleasing aroma in His nostrils, now He says they’re not. He says He hates them, and He hates the people who offer them. What’s made the change? Well, it can only be the work of the servant. It can only be the fact that God has sent forth an offering that is pleasing to Him. And so He’s saying, “If you want to continue worshiping me apart from through faith in my revealed servant, I reject your worship.”

Those who return from Babylon, those who made offerings on the altar of the rebuilt temple, unless they had faith in the coming servant, I’m telling you, their offerings were an abomination in the sight of God—that that temple which was later to be developed into the massive structure that Jesus speaks of in the synoptic gospels, that that temple itself was already pronounced doomed. God had already said, “This is a temporary thing and when the end comes, it comes in no uncertain terms. As far as I’m concerned, worship made through this temple is like worship offered to an idol.” God says, “These have chosen their own ways,” the last part of verse 3. “These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations.” They’ve chosen their own ways. They’ve refused to hear the word of God. They’ve refused to hear what it is that God has to say.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 10. In the book of Hebrews, the author—and popular, scholarly opinion at the moment is that the book of Hebrews is the recording, or a written-down sermon from the Apostle Paul, probably written down by his friend Luke. If it’s Paul who’s preaching, then in the book of Hebrews overall, Paul is arguing amongst people who are Christians of Jewish descent and are tempted to return back to temple worship, that there is nothing to go back to. You can’t go back.

It would seem that as persecution built up, as increasingly the Jews informed the Romans in the early church that this sect of the Nazarenes is not a Jewish sect—“We reject them, and we want nothing to do with them”—it was basically allowing the Romans to persecute them. The Jews themselves had made peace with Rome. The Jews themselves had a running agreement with Rome that they could worship as they pleased, and Rome would not trouble them. Once the

Jews rejected Christian worship, the Christians were without that protection. They became an illicit religion, an illegal religion, a religion not recognized by Caesar.

It seems that those who had been converted from the background of Judaism were thinking to themselves—and you’ve got to understand, the threat of being burned alive, fed to animals, seeing your children torn limb from limb, etc., etc., etc., was possible—they’re thinking to themselves, “Okay, we’ve got the teaching of the apostles here, and what we understand is that old covenant worship was worship of YAHWEH, new covenant worship is worship of Yahweh. Surely God would understand if we just sort of blended back in to the Jewish people—if we just sort of blended back in and went to the temple. We know that we really have one offering, and that offering is Jesus. But if we just sort of blended back in and fitted back in with Levitical worship, the heat might come off us a bit, and we wouldn’t suffer persecution.”

And the book of Hebrews is saying to those people, “No, no, no, no, no. There’s nothing to go back to. There’s no benefit to be gained from seeking peace with the world through compromise. Indeed, what you will do is you will lose your souls.” So let’s read Hebrews chapter 10, the first ten verses:

“¹For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

“⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” ⁸When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’ He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

So let’s stop and quickly summarize what he’s saying. I think it’s fairly clear. He’s saying that those Old Testament offerings were never, ever complete. They never, ever did the thing that you desired. They never, ever bought you into a state of true justification. Justification was never, ever by anything other than faith. “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

He’s saying that Christ has made a sacrifice that actually does bring you into a state of justification, that does actually bring you once and for all through to the very presence of God. Just looking at the last part there of verse 9 and into verse 10: “He does away with the first in

order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Now I want you to drop to verse 26. He goes on to speak of the role of priests, and of the fact that Christ is now our great High Priest. But we’ll pick up his argument again at verse 26: “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth”—now in context, what is that sinning? You see, he’s not here speaking of things like lying or breaking the commandments. In context, what is the sinning? The sinning is the making of an offering apart from accepting the finished work of Christ. If we go on sinning, if we go on offering lambs, oxen, goats—if we go on sinning, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

You hear what he said to the people? You can’t do this. If you, having received the knowledge of truth, go on with temple worship, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one”—now listen carefully—“by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Notice what he’s saying about temple worship, the offering of animals. “The one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace.” You can’t get much clearer than that. What’s he saying? You go back to the blood of animals, you’ve rejected the blood of Christ. You’ve profaned the blood of Christ. You’ve basically walked over the blood of Christ. It says, “You’ve trampled underfoot the Son of God.” You’ve said, “The offering that God made through Christ, it’s nothing to me. It’s nothing. It’s like the dirt on the footpath. I walk over it. I walk past it. I ignore it. His blood is nothing to me.”

God has rejected those offerings under old covenant law because the new covenant offering, which is Jesus Christ Himself, has superseded the old covenant offerings—replaced them, made the irrelevant. They’re finished! Any who seek to worship the living God through the offering of animal sacrifices are indeed committing idolatry. It says so here in our text. One who makes a memorial offering of frankincense is like one who blesses an idol. There’s only one way to worship the living God—through Jesus Christ our Lord. “No one comes to the Father but through me.” They’re the words of Jesus.

Once again—not very popular to announce this exclusive message of salvation in the world today. We’re supposed to all be happy pluralists. Everybody has their religion, everybody acts according to their best light. Everybody’s on their way to the top of the same mountain, however they get there. It doesn’t matter. The view’s the same.

No, they're not on their way to the top of the same mountain. They're on the wide path that leads down into hell—the broad way, the easy way. The road to hell's an expressway—wide, broad, smooth, great sweeping bends. It's easy to get there! They're not on the same path. They're idolaters. God hates sinners, remember? We read that in Psalm 5. God hates sinners. He abhors sinners.

Back in Isaiah 66, at verse 4: "I also will"—Now notice, it says, "They have chosen their own ways." "These have chosen their own ways," at the end of verse 3, "and their soul delights in their abominations. Well, do people have the right to choose? And the answer is, Yes. Everyone chooses. I'm a Calvinist. "Don't you believe, therefore, that people don't have free will?" No. Everyone has free will, according to their nature. That makes sense, doesn't it?

If you're a sinner, given over to sins, you can freely choose whatever way you want to sin. Your choices are yours. Take them! And if you've been granted life through the power of the Holy Spirit, if you've been made a living one in the sight of God, well, you're making choices on an entirely different basis. And you are making choices. You are exercising your will. But the seat of your desires, your heart, has been renewed, and so you exercise your will, you make your choices in a different way.

And the only one who can grant life, and can take that which is dead and make it living, is the only one who could create life in the very first place—God. He made a man out of the ground, and then it says He breathed into the man—**breathed, ruach, spirit**—somehow or other, the creation of humanity was a Trinitarian act. God gave the first man life by His Spirit. And if anyone is to live in the presence of God, they must once again be given life by His Spirit. And if you're given life, you won't choose abominations, and you won't choose your own way, you'll choose God's ways. Your desires are changed. You now want what God wants. You want to be pleasing to God.

"These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations." Notice now, God says, "I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them." You see what He's saying. This idolatrous worship, it's kind of like superstition now. It's kind of like doing things for good luck, and hoping that everything goes well. It's not actually true worship. And here's the thing: "I choose—I choose what they get. They choose abomination, I choose harsh treatment for them. I bring their fears upon them. That which they thought they were averting is going to fall upon them."

Notice: "Because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen." When I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen. Isaiah repeats himself. He said the same thing in earlier chapters. Looking at Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 12, it says, "I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in."

“When I called, you did not listen.” God says, “I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask me,” Isaiah chapter 65 verse 1, “I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by my name. ²I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices.”

“Because when I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they did not listen.” There’s a universal call that goes out to all humanity—all humanity. This is not the “effectual” call that the Apostle Paul speaks of particularly. This is the universal call to all humanity. It goes out to all. “Repent of your sins! Put your faith in the living God, and you will be saved!” It goes out to all, and all who repent will be saved. Full stop, no doubt about it, no question. We’re not speaking about the means of repentance, but we’re simply speaking about the facts of it. God holds out His hand. “Repent and be saved!” But they would not. They chose that in which God did not delight.

Verse 5. God addresses Himself now once more to His own people. “⁵Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word.” Now, that immediately puts our mind back to verse 2: “This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” These are the ones, here in verse 5—that’s who God is speaking to. “⁵Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: ‘Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name’s sake have said, “Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy”; but it is they who shall be put to shame.’” The sarcasm.

Have you ever noticed, my Christian friends, that the people who hate confessional, reformed Christianity most are the people who like to call themselves Christians, but are not? Have you ever noticed that? The people who like to call themselves Christians, but are not, do not like genuine, evangelical Christianity. They hate it. Why? Because they know that our very existence makes them guilty of hypocrisy. If we want to put this in the context of the birth of the church, well, the brothers who hate the Christians are the Jews who have rejected their Messiah.

Turn to John chapter 16, verse 2. John chapter 16, we’ll read from verse 1: “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ²They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” The Jews who’ve rejected their Messiah will reject all of those who have accepted the Messiah.

Jesus is the dividing point, the dividing line. He’s the one that separates sheep from goats, and it starts from the moment that He’s resurrected and ascended on into heaven. He starts from the moment that the New Testament church, the new covenant church, becomes active in the world, preaching the gospel. “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” They think they’re serving YAHWEH. They imagine they’re serving YAHWEH.

Turn to Revelation chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, from the letter to the church in Smyrna: “9 ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.’”

What have we got? People who say they are Jews, but are not. Their synagogue is a synagogue of Satan. They are the ones who slander. Verse 10 says, “Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison.” They’re going to be rejected from the synagogue of Satan. Synagogue is the place, if you don’t realize it, where the Jews meet. They reject the Messiah, they become the servants of Satan. All who reject the Messiah become confirmed servants of Satan.

Turn back to Isaiah 66. Notice again the sarcasm. “‘Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy’; but it is they who shall be put to shame.” If persecution comes to our nation. If our government turns against the church, or against evangelical Christianity, you know what’s going to happen. As they make their proclamations, telling people what it is they must believe, what it is they must say, and what it is they must not say, they will have on their left and on their right people who claim to be Christians, people who claim to be church leaders.

And those church leaders will be saying, “You see, we’ve made that compromise, and our church is still a church, and we’re still Christians. Why can’t you be wise and compromise, just like us? These decrees of the government are very reasonable. Why can’t you compromise, just like us? You think you’re Christians, but it seems to us that you don’t know much about the love of God. Compromise! Fit in! Open the doors wider!”

And so the government will say, “We don’t really persecute Christians. All of these Christians are here on our side, and they agree with us!” But they’re not churches. They’re synagogues of Satan. They’re servants of the Devil himself. They’ve rejected the Messiah! The wisdom they call “doctrine” is the wisdom of the world, dressed up in religious clothes. All it is, is religious atheism, whether it comes from the Roman Church or the Uniting Church, or any other liberal church you care to name.

There’ll be liberal Presbyterians saying, “Why don’t you people just back off?” Liberal Baptists saying, “Why don’t you people just make it easy? You’re making us look bad. The government’s on our side.” “Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy.” That’s what they’ll be saying. We can all praise God together, side by side. “But it is they who shall be put to shame.”

Isaiah 66, verse 6: “The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!” The sound of the Lord, rendering recompense to his enemies! They say that in AD 70, when the temple was destroyed, not only was there the weeping and the crying of the people as they saw what they thought was the only way to worship God being destroyed—burnt, the gold taken from it and melted down—but many

claim that there were supernatural noises, noises the likes of which they had never heard. You find things like that in the historian Josephus.

“The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!” People being slaughtered. People being slaughtered in what was the very temple of God. In the very temple of God. The judgment of God beginning in the house of God. The judgment of God beginning where those people who took the name of God to themselves find out that the God whom they have named is a God to be feared, a God to humble yourself before, a God at whose word we should tremble. The judgment of God falling upon these people.

Let’s close. Let’s take a reading from Acts chapter 7, and there we’ll close. The book of Acts. The church is being born. The church has grown so quickly that the apostles realize they need to appoint deacons, and the deacons themselves are filled with the Spirit of God and become great preachers and evangelists. One of them in particular is called Stephen, and Stephen is accused by the Jews of blasphemy, and blaspheming the law, and blaspheming the temple, and blaspheming God.

Acts chapter 7 is Stephen’s closing sermon—a wonderful sermon. We won’t read the whole thing. It’s a long chapter. But it’s basically a complete retelling of the history of God and His redemptive dealings with humanity, from the beginning until now. I want us to pick it up at verse 44. Acts chapter 7, verse 44:

“⁴⁴ ‘Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.’”

And here’s the quote of our text: “⁴⁸ ‘Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, ⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’ ⁵¹ ‘You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.’”

There’s the quote of our passage. There’s the application. There’s your New Testament application. We have every reason to believe that Stephen was speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit. We’re told so in verse 55: “⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” “He, full of the Holy Spirit.”

Stephen, preaching to those who will not accept the Messiah, to those who insist on offering oxen, goats, sheep, birds, frankincense, incense. And what does he say? “You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

The judgment of God fell upon the temple. I’ve already alluded to it—AD 70, the destruction by the forces of Rome, complete destruction, the people enslaved, the temple destroyed. Temple worship, sacrificial worship, has never occurred since then amongst the Jews—never. Finished. Why? Because God sent His Son. Because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

There’s only one way to God. It’s through Jesus Christ our Lord. Tremble at His word, my friends. Fear the judgment of God. You have no righteousness of your own. I have no righteousness of my own. We need the righteousness that is the freely given gift of God, and it is only found through faith and repentance, and calling upon the name of Jesus Christ.

God has rejected temples made by human hands—utterly rejected them. He is to be worshiped only in temples made by His own hands, and there’s only one of them, and that’s His church, made without human hands—you and I, made without human hands, made alive in the sight of God by the work and the power of His Holy Spirit applying the completed redemption to be found in Jesus Christ.

From Genesis to Revelation, God asks the question, “What will you do with your hands? What can you build for me? Nothing! I build it for myself.” And here’s the blessing of God—“I make you an image-bearer of the living God, and I place you in my temple that is built without human hands.” God rejects temple-worship because God wants Jesus-worship. It’s as simple as that. God wants us to come to Him through only Jesus Christ, His Son. Let’s close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you for the good things that you have revealed to us in your word. We pray, Father, that we here in this place, in this congregation, would be indeed a temple of the living God, that we indeed would be images of the living God, made without human hands, and that we would be re-created and made in the likeness of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for we know that this is pleasing to you. Father, help us to be Christlike. Help us to be truly obedient to your will. Help us, Father, to love you, to receive your word for that which it is, and to be obedient in all that we do. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

A good sermon to come before a communion service. Notice that the next hymn is called, “Amidst Us, Our Beloved Stands.” It’s the hymn that we normally sing for a communion service. Amidst us our Beloved stands. Very apt. This is the presence of the living God, my friends. If we are truly a church, we indeed are a temple made without hands, and in our midst is to be found Christ. So please be up standing.