

## **The Bitter Harvest** **Isaiah 5:1-30**

Isaiah chapter 5. We're taking the whole chapter for our text this morning. Before we read it, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we do pray that you would grant to us understanding of your word. We pray that you would speak to us by your Spirit from your word. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Isaiah 5, starting at verse 1: “<sup>1</sup> Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. <sup>2</sup> He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

“<sup>3</sup> And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup> What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? <sup>5</sup> And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. <sup>6</sup> I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

“<sup>7</sup> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

“<sup>8</sup> Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. <sup>9</sup> The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing: ‘Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. <sup>10</sup> For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.’

“<sup>11</sup> Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! <sup>12</sup> They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands.

“<sup>13</sup> Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honoured men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst. <sup>14</sup> Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exults in her. <sup>15</sup> Man is humbled, and each one is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are brought low. <sup>16</sup> But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. <sup>17</sup> Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.

“<sup>18</sup> Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, <sup>19</sup> who say: ‘Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!’ <sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call

evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! <sup>21</sup> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! <sup>22</sup> Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, <sup>23</sup> who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right! <sup>24</sup> Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. <sup>25</sup> Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.

“<sup>26</sup> He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth; and behold, quickly, speedily they come! <sup>27</sup> None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken; <sup>28</sup> their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses’ hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind. <sup>29</sup> Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey; they carry it off, and none can rescue. <sup>30</sup> They will growl over it on that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds.” Amen.

Well for a title this morning, I’ve come up with “The Bitter Harvest.” Because we’re looking at a whole chapter, to make it a little bit easier to digest, we’ve got for the main points or subtitles of the message, Part 1, A Bitter Love Song; Part 2, Bitter Fruit; and Part 3, the Bitter Harvest.

This is the end of Isaiah’s introductory words. The book, in a way, from chapter 6 onwards, reboots. It starts all over again. In chapter 6, we have Isaiah’s vision of Yahweh lifted up—high and lifted up. And the book of Isaiah, as I said, sort of reboots from that point on, and we start getting a slightly different emphasis. But we’re not there yet. We’ve got to finish with Isaiah’s overall picture. And what I think we’ve got is an overall picture of the land of Judah before the judgment of God descends upon it. Chapters 1 to 5 are giving us a picture of the nation, of which Isaiah is speaking. And this, in a way, is a summary of the history of the nation of Israel. It’s a summary of God’s dealings with that nation.

### ***The Bitter Love Song***

Part I, as I said—A Bitter Love Song—verses 1 to 7. Let’s look at it. There’s some interesting things that we ought to notice immediately. First of all, it’s a parable that is actually a trap. It’s designed to suck people in and have them actually pronounce their own condemnation. We’ll have a look at that shortly. There are other parables in the Bible, both Old Testament and New that work in exactly the same way. There are very similar places in Scripture.

The second point I just want us to notice is, I guess you could call it a literary device, or the way Isaiah uses words. When he starts off, the voice is his own voice. “Let me sing for my beloved.” But then if you look down at verse 3, the voice has changed. “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.”

So Isaiah says, “Let me sing of my beloved,” but then after a couple of stanzas, suddenly the beloved sort of steps in and says, “Enough from you, Isaiah. I’m now going to speak. I will speak.” And so we find out who his beloved is, and his beloved is obviously the Lord God. And the story of this parable is the story, as I’ve already said, of the people of Israel—the nation of Judah, and how God established that nation in a covenant relationship with Himself. So, The Bitter Love Song.

Turn first of all, to Second Samuel, chapter 12. What we’ll find in Second Samuel chapter 12 is another example of a prophetic parable that’s designed to trap. It’s designed to bring someone to realize their own guilt. It’s the parable that the prophet Nathan used when David had committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and then arranged for the killing of her husband. In other words, he had murdered him. So let’s start reading Second Samuel chapter 12, at verse 1:

“<sup>1</sup> And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, ‘There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup> The rich man had very many flocks and herds, <sup>3</sup> but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. <sup>4</sup> Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.’”

Verse 5: “<sup>5</sup> Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, <sup>6</sup> and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.’”

“<sup>7</sup> Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. <sup>8</sup> And I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.’” We’ll stop there. David, by his own mouth, interprets the parable. “The man who has done this deserves to die.” And Nathan says to David, “You are the man!”

Let’s turn in the New Testament to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 21, and there we’re going to start reading at verse 33. Now this is Jesus speaking, and you’ll hear how very similar it is to the Song of the Vineyard, and there’s also a twist in the tale. Starting at verse 33 of Matthew 21:

“<sup>33</sup> Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. <sup>34</sup> When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup> And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.””

“<sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, “This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.” <sup>39</sup> And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed

him.<sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’

<sup>41</sup> They said to him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.’”

Once again, the trap is set. The verbal trap is set, if you like. The story’s told, the parable’s presented. And by their own mouths, those who hear the parable interpret it and pronounce a death sentence, and the death sentence falls upon themselves.

Well let’s have a look at Isaiah’s parable, back to Isaiah chapter 5. As I said, it starts off, Isaiah speaks, and he speaks about his beloved—his beloved having a vineyard set upon a very fertile hill. Stones were cleared out, choice vines were planted, a watchtower was built in the middle of it to look over it, to keep it safe. A wine vat was dug in it.

Do you have any idea how much work that was in ancient times? You know, we’ve got bulldozers and stuff, and excavators and graders. It’s not too hard for us to move rocks off a field. It’s not too hard for us to dig out an old-fashioned wine press. You basically need sloping ground, you need to dig out a great hole in the ground, which you line and make it more or less water-proof. You have a drain that runs from that hole in the ground—it runs from the higher hole along the ground, and then below there you put another hole in the ground, which you dig out and you make water-proof. And you put the grapes in the top one, and you crush them, and as it fills, the juice rises and flows down into the second one. And by that means, you’ve got a crushing and a gravity filtration system. What you end up with at the end of your harvest, in the top you’ve got lot of, you’d call it grape mush, and in the bottom you’ve got juice.

Backbreaking work—an amazing amount of work goes into that kind of preparation of a vineyard in that day and in that age. And as I said, in verse 3 and 4, now God steps in and speaks. It’s not Isaiah speaking of his beloved, it’s now God speaking through Isaiah: “Judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?”

I’ll use a little bit of, I hope, sanctified imagination, and imagine that at this point, Isaiah stops talking for a moment—a nice long pregnant pause. He’s speaking to people, and Isaiah stops at this moment, and the people are sitting there and listening. “Hmm. Put a lot into that vineyard. Planted the best vines in that vineyard. He planted it on fertile fields. Ahh. There’s nothing more He could have done for that vineyard. There’s nothing more He could have done for those vines. There’s nothing more He could’ve done for that place. What should He do with it? He should tear up the vines, start all over again. Obviously, they were dud vines.”

Someone might even have said it, just as in the parable that we looked at in Matthew—the Jews themselves spoke their own condemnation. Perhaps someone said it. You know, sometimes people speak back to preachers. Perhaps someone said it: “This vineyard ought to be destroyed.” And then we get the answer. “Yeah, now you’ve got it. Hear this. I’ll tell you what I’ll do to the vineyard. I’ll remove its hedge. It will be devoured. I’ll break down its wall. It will be trampled. I will make it a waste. It won’t be cared for. The pruners will not go through it. The soil will not be dug.”

Now in a vineyard, you've got to dig between the rows of vines. You keep the weeds under control, otherwise the weeds take over the vines. "It will not be dug. I will command the clouds and they will not rain upon it." Now at that moment, the people should have gone, "Ohhhh—'I will command the clouds'? Who can command the clouds? Who can command the rain? Only God." Only God. This vineyard is God's vineyard.

And now we get the interpretation of the parable. Now we get the finger pointed very particularly. <sup>47</sup> "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!" In other words, the vineyard—you can imagine Isaiah now pointing—"You! You! God expected good things from you. God set you up with every advantage in this ancient age, or in this time in which we live"—this is Isaiah speaking—"He set you up with every advantage, and He had every reason to expect good things. He had every reason to expect good fruit. He's revealed to you His righteous law. He hasn't left you without a place of worship. He's revealed to you His gospel in the sacrifices, whether you could see it or not; whether you choose to see the truth or not." He looked for righteousness, but behold, an outcry.

Good things didn't come. Good things didn't come. God's vineyard is disappointing. But it's worse than just disappointing, as we'll see as we move now through the chapter. It's not just that the vineyard didn't produce. It's not just that the grapes didn't come. It's not that it's infertile—it's not neutral. It's not that you've got grapevines and no product coming from the vines. You've actually got positively evil product coming from the vines."

The picture there is, "When I looked for it"—in verse 4—"When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" Well it's been translated "wild" grapes—sour, bitter. The root of the word even gets back to stinking. Why did it yield sour, bitter, stinking grapes—good for nothing, bad tasting, and bad smelling?

And you know, there's a myth in our world, there's a myth in our society, and it's the myth of neutrality—the myth that something can be of no particular importance. There's no such thing. There's absolutely no such thing. When it comes to the ideas of humanity, the thoughts and the words of mankind, there's nothing neutral. There's no neutral song being played on the radio. There's no neutral movies going through the cinemas. There's no neutral TV shows coming into your living room. There's no neutral news coming from wherever you get your news—whether you listen to radio news, TV news, or read it off the Internet.

There's nothing neutral. It's either coming from the philosophy and the foolishness of man that masquerades as wisdom, or it's coming from the point of view of God, the living God. There's nothing in-between. The grapes are either good grapes or they're sour, bitter, stinking grapes. There's no neutrality. Now you know, the picture of neutral ground just doesn't exist in God's eyes. There's not dead-man's land. There's either obedience or disobedience; there's either godliness or wickedness. Sour grapes.

The vine metaphor gets used in other places in Scripture. We won't turn to it, but in Psalm 80, verses 8 to 13, the Psalmist speaks of how God took a vine out of Egypt and planted it in the Promised Land. And the vine is Israel. Or John chapter 15, as we read earlier, where Jesus

speaks of being the true vine—the true vine that’s going to give the true fruit. And He speaks later on in the chapter of how He chose them. They didn’t choose Him, He chose them: “I chose you, that you would abide and go out and bear fruit.” What kind of fruit? The good fruit—the fruit that God had always been looking for.

### ***The Bitter Fruit***

Okay, we’ll look now at the next section. “The Bitter Fruit,” I’ve called it. And you can see I’m playing on the idea of bitterness. Now what’s the bitter fruit? Well, those wild grapes have a human aspect, and here’s the human aspect, here’s what the people are doing that God has called the wild and stinking grapes.

There are six woes here—six. I’ve counted them. Interestingly in the next chapter, the seventh woe. We all know that seven is the number of perfection. The seventh woe falls on Isaiah himself. He comes into the presence of the living God and says, “Woe is me, for I have seen the God of Israel.” But woe—<sup>8</sup>“Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field.” The property accumulation, the driving people off their family lands.

Now God does not hate the wealthy. He doesn’t see wealth in and of itself as being something particularly evil. The thing that gives wealth is nature is how it’s accumulated and how it’s used. The thing that makes wealth either good or evil is, Does the person come into wealth by honest means, or by selfish means? And having that wealth, what do they do with it?

First Timothy chapter 6, verses 17 to 19 reads: <sup>17</sup>“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup>They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup>thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

That’s wealth being used the way God says wealth should be used. And the obvious assumption here is that they don’t have that wealth by wicked means. You can become wealthy by running an Internet pornography business. You can become wealthy by running a gambling business. You can become wealthy through having a franchise chain of brothels. No. Gaining your wealth by those means is wickedness, and God says so. And when it comes to actually having the wealth, God wants to know, What are you doing with it? What are you doing with it? Are you using it only for the glorifying of yourself.

“Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field,” until there is no room and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. What does that mean? Well remember in the book of Joshua, the land was distributed amongst the tribes, and then amongst the tribes, the land was distributed amongst the clans, and then amongst the clans, the land was distributed amongst the heads of each individual household. And that land was distributed to them as land from God, given by God to them, to each individual family. And God’s law said that that land was never to permanently leave the possession of the family to whom He had given it—never to permanently leave the possession of that individual family.

There was a law called the “law of Jubilee.” Turn to the book of Leviticus, chapter 25. We’ll start reading at verse 1. It’s going to be a longish reading, but you do need to see and understand this. Leviticus, chapter 25, from verse 1:

“The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, <sup>2</sup> ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. <sup>3</sup> For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, <sup>4</sup> but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. <sup>5</sup> You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. <sup>6</sup> The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, <sup>7</sup> and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food.

“<sup>8</sup> You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. <sup>10</sup> And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. <sup>11</sup> That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. <sup>12</sup> For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.

“<sup>13</sup> In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. <sup>14</sup> And if you make a sale to your neighbour or buy from your neighbour, you shall not wrong one another. <sup>15</sup> You shall pay your neighbour according to the number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. <sup>16</sup> If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. <sup>17</sup> You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God.”

Do you get the point there? No family permanently loses its property. You go into debt, you have hard times, perhaps you have to sell up. You can’t sell up for any longer than fifty years, and the person who buys your property can’t buy it for any longer than fifty years, depending on how close you are to the next year of jubilee. And at the year of jubilee, you get your family lands back again.

The picture here in Isaiah is that these people in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 8—joining house to house, field to field—they’re breaking God’s law because they’re evicting families from their God-given property, and they’re not practicing the year of jubilee. They’re taking and they’re keeping. They’re taking for their own benefit. They’re milking the people. They’re destroying. In other words, a system has been set up where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and the families lose their independence, and they lose their self-sufficiency because the wealthy are accumulating everything under their own control.

But the Lord has an answer to that. Verse 9 of Isaiah 5: “<sup>9</sup> ... ‘Many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses.... <sup>10</sup> For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.’” What that’s saying is, “All right. You’ve gotten rich. You’ve built up property for yourself. You’ve become real estate speculators. I’m going to make sure that your real estate produces next to nothing. You’re going to sow more seed than you harvest.”

And my friends, I’ve lived on a farm. I’ve worked through drought time. I’ve seen and felt the depressing feeling of going to all the trouble of working up land and sowing seed, and reaping no harvest. Not even less than you’ve sowed, actually no harvest. No harvest at all. You get the green shoots of the wheat or the oats—they come up a few inches just above the ground, and then the westerly winds come and it blows for two, three months, and just desiccates everything. And at the end of that, all you’ve got left is just nothing—dust, clouds of dust just moving. And that’s it. The depression. It’s soul-cracking to work your heart out to sow, and not to reap a harvest.

And that’s what God is saying to those who are joining house to house. God was expecting a harvest, and then they were expecting a harvest. God didn’t get the harvest He was expecting; therefore, they’re not going to get the harvest they were expecting.

Verse 11: “<sup>11</sup> Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! <sup>12</sup> They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands.” Now once again, I make the point: God doesn’t hate celebration. God doesn’t hate joyous celebration. Jesus blessed the wedding, John chapter 2. He blessed the wedding with more wine, that the party could go on for the rest of the week. A wedding in those days was a one-week festival. Jesus doesn’t hate celebration. He’s not against the enjoyment of God’s goodness.

God does not hate celebration. In the law, He actually tells the people that there are some of the feasts that they go to in Jerusalem where they’re allowed to convert their offerings into money, and when they get to Jerusalem, they’re allowed to buy wine and celebrate the goodness of God. And He says, Buy as much as you want, and celebrate as much as you like, worshipping God. And I know that seems foreign to us in this day and age. We wonder how can that be, and I don’t want to encourage anyone to have a drunken party. But the point here is simply that these people are celebrating day by day, for no good reason. All they’re drinking for is the fact that they’re rich enough not to have to work. They’ve accumulated enough wealth that they no longer need to labor, and they drink. They drink strong drink in the morning, and they drink wine in the evening. They have musicians. It’s party, party, party. And it’s not for the worship of the Lord. “They do not regard the deeds of the law, or see the work of his hands.”

Verse 13: “<sup>13</sup> Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honoured men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst.” Keep reading, verse 14: “<sup>14</sup> Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exults in her. <sup>15</sup> Man is humbled, and each one is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are brought low.”



What a picture—Sheol, the place of the dead, the grave. Now it doesn't always carry the same meaning in the Old Testament. You need to pick up the meaning from the context, because King David also speaks, for example, of the fact that when he dies, he will go into the grave. And we have no reason but to believe that King David was a justified and faithful man who was going into the presence of God. So you can't sort of read the same meaning into it every time, but the meaning here is entirely and clearly negative.

The grave is being enlarged; the place where the dead go, that place of punishment in this instance, is being enlarged. It's opening wide its mouth to swallow these sinners. The picture is almost like the picture of the rebels who were killed in the time of the ministry of Moses, when Moses said, If these people die like a normal man dies, well then God hasn't spoken by me. But if the earth opens up and swallows them alive, you'll know that I'm God's prophet. And the earth opened up and swallowed them alive. That's a similar picture here. Isaiah's saying, Hell is opening its mouth wider. A reservation has been made for you in a place you don't want to go to, and you'll go there. You'll end up there.

Verses 16 and 17: “<sup>16</sup>But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. <sup>17</sup>Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.” The Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. Once again, I look at the way our society, thinks of God today—the way most churches teach about God today. They're afraid to mention the fact that God is holy and that the holy God will pass judgment on wickedness. And they're afraid to mention that God is going to be glorified, not just by saving—He's going to be glorified by judging.

But here it is. It's explicit before us, in the very word of God Himself. “The LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.” With regards to the wicked, God will judge. Judgment is certain. And remember, as I said, there were good grapes and there were sour grapes, and there was nothing in between. There's no neutral ground. There's no one walking between evil and goodness.

In Jesus' picture of the gates of hell and the rock that is His church, there was nothing in between. The gates of hell, it says, could not prevail against His church. Why? Because the rock is bashing the gates. The rock is against the gates, and there's nothing in between. People are either behind the gates of hell, or they're standing upon the rock. It's as simple as that. God will “show himself holy in righteousness. Then, the Lamb shall graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.” And I'm not going to go off too much in the idea of lambs, and we are His sheep. You know that. You know Psalm 23. You know Isaiah 53, and many other references—Ezekiel chapter 34. You understand that. You know one of the more common pictures in the Old Testament is that we are the lambs of God, the sheep of God, and we are His flock and He is our Pastor.

Verses 18 and 19. What we're looking at there is basically a lifestyle of denial and practical atheism. Let's read it: “<sup>18</sup>Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, <sup>19</sup>who say: ‘Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!’”

First of all, verse 18 is suggesting to us that these people have so much sin that it can only be moved around through industrial-size transportation. Putting it in modern terminology, they move their sin by the B-double load. Their sin—they need a cart to move it around. They need ropes of iniquity to draw the cart. There's so much sin that it can barely be measured. But these sinners, these fools who are drawing this sin, and themselves being drawn into the grave—look at what they say, verse 19: “Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!”

What are they saying? They're hearing the warning with regards to their sin, and they're saying, “I'll believe it when I see it. If there is a God, let Him prove it to me. If there's a God, let Him show Himself. If there's a spiritual realm, let it be proven. And I want to put a yardstick against it. I want to measure it. I want to take a photograph. I want evidence, hard evidence.” And their lives? I mean, I've never met anyone who's said that and who actually meant it, because if they meant it, the word of God is here. I mean, this is enough. This is all that's needed. They say that because they don't want to know God.

You know, the people of Israel, the nation of Israel, were redeemed out of Egypt. Think of the things that they saw. Think of the so many different ways that God manifested Himself to them. And did all believe? Did all finish the journey? We're told that God was not happy with them, and that they perished in the wilderness. They're liars. They're arrogant. They're practical atheists. They may not know it, but they live as though there is no God, and their very words condemn them.

Verse 20: “<sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! <sup>21</sup> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” We live in an age of calling evil good, and good evil. We live in an age where bitterness is called sweetness. And we live in an age that is wise in its own eyes. Well, nothing's changed. Go back to the time of Isaiah, and there you find exactly the same forces at work, exactly the same social constructs being acted out before our very eyes.

Now what does he mean? What's an example of those who call evil good, and good evil? Well, think of the Northern Kingdom and the golden calves—evil being called good, because they called those golden calves “Yahweh,” the God who saved them. Think of Solomon, forming alliances. King Solomon, the son of David, forming alliances by marriage with Egypt and the nations around him. “It's good to have alliances,” he said. And God said, “No, it's not.” And think of King Solomon expanding his army, importing horses and chariots. “It's good to have a strong army,” said Solomon. And God's word said, “No, it's not. You don't multiply horses and chariots in my nation.”

We call evil good. It happens today. It happens all the time. I think of a particular church I know—it could be just about any church, but the worship services are designed, and specifically and particularly designed to produce in the people an emotional response. And any thought that comes across anyone's mind, they're encouraged to think that this is some kind of movement of the Spirit of God, and you've received some special revelation. And they call it good. And say the nonsense they publish is the work of God. It's just rubbish. And they're calling evil good.

Or I think of other churches that would call themselves evangelical, and the compromises that they make with the world around them. Are you even aware, in the coming years, if things continue on their present trajectory, how many churches that claim to be gospel-preaching evangelical churches are going to fold on the subject of homosexuality and sexual perversion? They're just going to fold. They're going to say "your battle's not worth fighting." And they're going to accept the doctrine of demons that comes to them through liars and pretenders—people like Matthew Vines in the USA, who come up with divergent and evil interpretations of Scripture, claiming they've found a way to interpret the Scripture that shows God is not against homosexuality, and He's not against lesbianism, and He's not against all those perversions.

Well, I'll tell you—there's going to be an awful lot of churches that claim to be evangelical, and they're going to fold. They're going to say the battle's not worth fighting. And when they fold, they're then going to look at a church that holds the line, that is suffering for holding the line, and they're just going to say, "Give up. Why don't you just give up?" They're not going to stand up for anyone's rights. "Why don't you just give up? We gave up, and our church is going just fine. Give up." Calling evil good, and calling good evil.

How many churches do you go into where the pastor preaches anything from the law, anything regarding righteousness, anything. You know, me—to many Christians, I'm a preacher of legalism. Now you've heard me, if you've sat here for any period of time. We went through the book of Galatians. I spent over a year preaching about legalism and Phariseeism, and how justification is by faith alone. But you will be accused of being a preacher of legalism and not a preacher of the gospel the moment you try to tell people that righteousness is according to God's law; that God's holy law is the only guide we have as to right and to wrong; and that God expects His people, His regenerate people, the people whom He has indwelt by His Spirit and empowered—He expects those people to live in the fulfillment of His law, and that you can't be a Christian and trample all over God's law. And they'll tell you, "Ah, no, no, no—you're just a legalist. God just forgives sin."

I don't deny that God forgives sin, and God will forgive any sin of anyone who is truly repentant. I don't deny that. But God does not call people into His kingdom so that they may sin all the more. "God forbid," says Paul in the book of Romans, when the question was asked, "Well then should we sin all the more that grace may abound?" The apostle Paul says, "God forbid," or, "May it never be," or, "No, no, no, no, no." It just depends on how you want to translate that particular word. They call good, evil. They tell you that anyone who preaches true Christlikeness is a legalist. We live in a society filled with it. They put bitter for sweet, sweet for bitter; darkness for light, light for darkness.

I listened to a debate on the subject of homosexual marriage. There was a Christian guy debating with another guy who claims to be a Bible-believing evangelical Christian. And after two and a half hours, the guy arguing in favor of the acceptance of homosexual marriage came out with this line—I'm paraphrasing—I don't remember it word for word, but he said something along these lines: "We've got to understand that the Holy Spirit is telling us that we must be compassionate toward these people, that there is new revelation coming from God, and that we as Christians have harmed these people throughout the generations."

The very thought that the Holy Spirit is now changing His mind and going to say something different to us from what He's put in God's word through the prophets and the apostles tells me that that guy is actually not regenerate. I don't care how much he says he believes. I don't care how much Bible he says he reads. I don't care how much he says he loves the Lord. I'm not interested. The moment you start trying to tell me that the Holy Spirit does not stand by the Spirit-breathed word, the word breathed out by God, you're not talking about the Holy Spirit, you're talking about the Devil himself, and you're putting darkness for light.

And Isaiah is dealing with a people who put darkness for light, and the doctrine and the teaching of demons in the place of the doctrine and the teaching of God's word. People who say that it's fine, it's fine to be idol worshipers in the morning and a Yahwah worshiper in the evening, and it's fine to practice demonic religious worship with all of its sin and wickedness and then turn up and offer your sacrifice to the temple, and imagine that your sins are thereby just washed away, they're putting darkness for light.

Let's read on. Verse 21: <sup>21</sup> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! <sup>22</sup> Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, <sup>23</sup> who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!" Wise in their own eyes, shrewd in their own sight. They think they're wise.

Have you ever heard some of the advice that people give in the world? You know, some of the little pearls and gems of wisdom that supposedly come forth? What was that movie that came out? "Eat, Drink, Pray"? She supposedly was very wise, that lady. She'd learnt so much from the god within. And that book and the movie were more or less a self-help manual, advising people that what you've got to do is, you've got to learn to go within yourself and speak to the god within, and the path to happiness is to follow the leading of the god within.

And if you want to know, the god within her told her to leave her husband for no particular reason, other than she wanted to leave him. And the god within her told her to take up with a particular boyfriend for no particular reason other than she liked the look of him, and then the god within her told her to take up with another different boyfriend. And the god within her told her to go to places like India, and there sit at the feet of swamis, etc., etc., etc. My friends, that went out into our world in its millions, all right? That went out in its millions. And people listened to that rubbish, that nonsense.

Oprah Winfrey, another example—the god within. It's making her millions. It's doing her the world of good, I guess, in this world that she's being fattened for the slaughter. She's one of these people, drawing in iniquity with cords of falsehood, drawing in sin as a cart with ropes, being prepared for destruction, lest they repent.

And these people are supposedly wise, and they're wise because it works for them in this world. Pragmatism. "Heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, acquitting the guilty for a bribe, depriving the innocent of his right!"

In the end, there's no true justice in this society. In the end—and we've spoken of this before—in the end, what's happening is that in the eyes of the court, people are not equal. In the eyes of the court, people are not receiving fair judgment. And if you've got the money to influence, you get the favorable decision. And God hates such things. He cannot stand for such nonsense.

### *The Bitter Harvest*

The final section I've called "The Bitter Harvest." We read in Second Kings chapter 25 of the destruction and the imprisonment of Jerusalem. We read of the killing of the king's children. Imagine that. The last thing Zedekiah saw was his children put to death. Then they put out his eyes. That's the purpose. That's the purpose—so that what burnt into his mind is the destruction of all that he held dear.

The harvest. God looked for a harvest. He looked for a harvest of sweet grapes. He got nothing but sour, bitter, stinking grapes. The wealthy looked for a harvest, and God said, "No. No. I'm going to make sure you don't get a harvest." And now we come to God's harvest. This is the harvest of God. This is the fruit of the wickedness of humanity. This is the fruit of the wickedness of God's people. Start reading at verse 24:

“<sup>24</sup> Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. <sup>25</sup> Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.”

It changes from present tense to past tense. “Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against”—verse 25. It's a device the prophets used. It speaks of certainty. He speaks of something in the past tense so that we can be absolutely certain that this *is* going to happen. It's as though it's already done. God has said it's going to happen, and therefore, it's happening. There's no avoiding it. Keep reading, verse 26:

“<sup>26</sup> He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth; and behold, quickly, speedily they come! <sup>27</sup> None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken; <sup>28</sup> their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind. <sup>29</sup> Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey; they carry it off, and none can rescue. <sup>30</sup> They will growl over it on that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds.”

What the people of Judah don't apparently understand is that all of the nations of the world were under the control of the sovereign God, and that God could call forth a nation as easily as we whistle our dogs. He'll whistle for them from the ends of the earth. The only other places in Scripture where it speaks of whistling, it says God whistles for them like bees.

Now I did a lot of research into that. I thought, What's going on there? Apparently in the ancient world, there were bee keepers who could actually lead a hive of bees by whistling. I've never seen nor heard that, but that's apparently the truth. There were beekeepers who could communicate with their bees through some form of whistling, and that's the word that's used: He whistles for them from the ends of the earth. I'll say whistles like a dog—"(whistles)—Come up!" And they come.

And here's the thing—verses 27 and 28 tell us that God is helping them. God is no longer helping the people of the vineyard, He's helping the people who are coming to destroy the vineyard. He's helping them. They're not getting tired, and they're not stumbling. Their waistband is not loosening. Their sandal straps are not breaking. Their weapons are sharp and ready to be used. Their horses, their wheels are like a whirlwind. God is actually on the side of their enemies. God is opening the door for their enemies. He's bringing their enemies in to destroy them, to cast His judgment upon His people.

Once again, my friends, look in our world, look in the nations that were once Christian nations—whether they were Christian because they had a State church, or whether they were simply Christian because they had the gospel. They no longer have the gospel. They're actually against the gospel. And what are they getting? What are they being flooded with? Nations from afar. And those nations from afar flooding in seem to be helped, don't they? It seems to be very easy for them to get in there and to cause their trouble.

And they're very boastful, those nations from afar. They claim that they're going to conquer the world, and the world has opened the doors, and they're coming in, and they're going to take it over. And nothing can stop them. Well, I hope they keep boasting, because I hope that the God in heaven hears them boasting and silences them.

But these enemies are invited in. They're invited in. This vineyard—God once built a hedge around it. He once protected it. He once withheld it from evil. But now, the doors are open. "It's here. You want it? Come and take it. It's here. You want it? Come and get it. You can do as you please." God has thrown away, cast down, His protection.

So now some concluding thoughts. What I want us to simply understand in conclusion is that when God's people will not discern good from evil, they will perish. When God's people will not discern good from evil, they will perish. Let's start off at an individual level. There are many people I believe who are Christians who actually don't think things through. They have true faith in Jesus, they are truly regenerate, but either due to the fact that they receive no good teaching, or due to the fact that they had loyalties to churches or families where they're not willing to break those loyalties, they don't think things through and they don't practice the discernment that I'm going to try and speak to you of.

But on a larger level, a people who claim to be the people of God and who will not practice the discernment of good from evil, that people will perish. That people will perish. I know of a church—it was a small church, claimed to be a gospel-preaching church, and that church had within the church a practicing witch as their organ player. A practicing witch. Now that church is still kind of in existence, it's kind of running. It's got about eight members, and they're all

over 80 years old, and none of their children are faithful and believing, and it's soon going to perish. It's soon going to die. They would not practice discernment. They would not discern good from evil.

Now I'll tell you, when you want to practice discernment, people are going to say negative things about you. You're going to be run down, you're going to be attacked, you'll be called a "fundamentalist." It's like there's no worse word you can be called—a "fundamentalist." Look, I really almost couldn't care less about that label. The people who use it in Australia don't even know what it means anyway. It's just a word they've heard, and they want to try and bury us under it. You know, the way argument is carried out in Australia these days—you attach a label and repeat it. That's what you do. And the label they attach to a Bible-believer is "fundamentalist." It means a different thing in America, where the word actually came from.

"Fundamentalist"—they say you're narrow, or a legalist, a cultist even. "You're in a cult. You believe the Bible is true? You're in some kind of cult. They're brainwashing you!" And all the while, they just soak up all the propaganda that gets poured into their heads through the TV, and through the movies. And we're the ones that are brainwashed? They're the ones that sit for hours a day, soaking up the propaganda and not asking a question—and we're the ones that are brainwashed? People are strange, I think.

Let's have a look then at people who will not discern good from evil. Start in the book of Revelation, chapter 3. There I want to look particularly at the church of Laodicea, so we're going to start at verse 14:

<sup>14</sup> And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup> The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Look back up at verse 18: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich." How would you get gold refined by fire? How would a church get gold refined by fire? How would Christians get gold refined by fire? Don't turn there, just let me read to you First Peter chapter 1, starting at verse 6:

<sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

This lukewarm congregation, the Laodiceans, what they lack is gold refined by fire. And Peter told us that the way you get gold refined by fire is to stick to the doctrine you've received from the apostles. In other words, to stick to the teaching that God has given us through the word of God. The Laodiceans were the lukewarm congregation. They were the pliable ones, the ones who just wanted to get on with the world. They were the ones who were quite happy to fold.

You know, today the testing point, as I've said to you, is probably most likely going to be the question of homosexual marriage and homosexual rights, and supposed discrimination. Well back then, the testing point was other things. It was Caesar worship. Do you walk through the temple to Caesar once a year, and throw incense in the fire that burns to the supposed god, who is the Roman Emperor, and say that Caesar is Lord? That was their testing point. Or, do you stick to the Christian confession, which is, Jesus is Lord?

They were lukewarm. They were prepared to fold. They were not prepared to fight. They did not want to be tested by fire. That's what happens when you stand up for Jesus. That's what happens when you live according to God's word. That's what happens when you uphold Christian principles. You get attacked. People get angry at you.

You know, when I was baptized, I and my brothers together, someone in our family said that they would rather we were drug addicts on the street than being baptized into the church—the anger that we copped because we turned our back on our irreligious family. They like to talk about being Anglicans, and not one of them believed a darned thing. And the anger and the hatred and the persecution that I and my brothers copped because we chose to be baptized, we submitted to baptism into the Lord's body, was enormous at that time.

I was being refined by fire. My brothers were being refined by fire. We've got to expect it in this world. This world does not want us to walk holy in the sight of God, to walk in righteousness before God. This world does not want us to live a Christ-like life, because they know that when we do, our life is actually a condemnation of their wickedness. The way we live is actually putting light upon the way they live. The light is showing up their darkness. They hate it.

Turn to First Corinthians chapter 10—once again, this issue of discernment. Now the Corinthian church was a church in trouble. You know, people like to say, “I want to go back to the early church—the way the church was under the apostles.” Okay. Just be careful. Next time you lie to a pastor, you might fall dead, because you might just be lying to the Holy Spirit. You know, just be careful what you wish for. But reading this, First Corinthians chapter 10, from verse 14:

“<sup>4</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup> I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? <sup>19</sup> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with



demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup> Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?"

What's he saying to the Corinthians? "My friends," he's saying, "open your eyes and understand what's behind the pagan religions that you're tempted to continue to participate in." In that day and age, for example, there were things called trade guilds. If you were a coppersmith, you most likely ran a little workshop on the coppersmith street, where all the other coppersmiths were, and had a right to be there and to deal and to trade among the coppersmiths.

And to be recognized as a coppersmith in that town, you had to join the coppersmiths guild. And the coppersmiths guild had its own god. And to be part of that guild, you had to compromise and bend the knee, and throw the incense to that god. In other words, if you were a Christian, you couldn't be a coppersmith trading on the street of the coppersmiths. And if you wanted to, you had to do it by mixing with demons, by eating meals in the presence of demons.

That's what Paul's saying to the Corinthians—practice and discernment, by friends. Do you really think you can make these compromises with the pagan society around you and still call yourselves Christians? Do you really think because you come to church on the Lord's Day and break the bread and drink the wine, do you really think you can walk away imagining that everything's okay—I'm all right with Jesus, I'll spend another six days just living amongst this city the same way everyone else lives? You couldn't do it. You had to practice discernment. You had to work out what is right and what is wrong, and stick with what is right. And you had to work that out from the word of God.

In First Corinthians, just move over to chapter 11. This is the end of the discussion concerning communion. Verse 27: "<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

Notice verse 29. The person taking communion must be practicing discernment. In this instance, they must be discerning the Lord Himself. They must be looking and discerning the presence of the Lord in the preached word and in the symbols, which themselves are a preached word, a picture of our salvation. They must discern the presence of God in the communion service.

You know, I'm not being Roman Catholic here. I'm not talking about transubstantiation. The elements don't change. But in a spiritual sense, we must discern the presence of the Lord. And what does Paul say? If you fail to do so, verse 30, "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." The refusal to practice discernment leads to perishing. It leads to dying. It leads to death. "But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged," verse 31—discerning our own true nature. If we discern ourselves truly.

You know, John Calvin, at the start of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, said two things. There's two things you've got to know. These two things, he says, are the foundation of all human knowledge. You've got to know the nature of God, and you've got to know the nature of man. If you know the nature of God truly, and you know the nature of man truly, you've got a foundation upon which you can build knowledge.

And that's what Paul is saying here. You've got to discern the Lord, and you've got to discern your own true nature—judge your own heart. Know what you're like. And hear what he says: "If we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged." People who practice discernment are actually humble. They discern what *they* are like. We understand our own sinfulness and our own wickedness. We understand that we're before God by nothing other than the grace of God, and that we're in the presence of the Lord Jesus by nothing other than the grace of God. We have done nothing, and can do nothing to earn this presence, to earn this gift of eternal life. Otherwise, verse 32, failing to discern yourself, failing to judge yourself, you're going to be judged by the Lord, and you're going to be disciplined.

Let's finish off at First Thessalonians chapter 5, starting at verse 19: "<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil." Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. What does he mean there? The churches in that day, before they received the revelation of the New Testament, a preacher was often called a prophet. The preacher or the teacher was preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was prophesying to them. He didn't have the Scripture. He had the Old Testament, not the New Testament. He had the spoken teaching of the apostles.

Basically, in that day and age, a good preacher, and even today, but a preacher had to have special help from God to speak the word of the Lord. And I still need, and all preachers still need that help. But we've got the Bible. We've got God's written word to work from, especially the New Testament concerning Jesus. In that day and age, they did not have it.

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." Test all things. Test everything. Put everything to the test. What's the test? God's word. Is this according to God's word? Is this teaching according to God's word? Is this act in obedience to the will of God? Is this teacher speaking from the word of God? Can everything be justified by a reasonable understanding of the word of God? If not, abstain, because it's evil. It's the wisdom of man. It's calling good evil, and evil good, even if we can't understand it. That's what Paul is saying. That's what Scripture is saying.

If we will not practice discernment, if we will not choose between the good and the bad, if we will not carefully choose what we take in, what we accept, what we submit to, we can't expect to have the life of God evident among us. You just can't expect to have the life of God evident among you if your head is still with worldly nonsense.

Education's a good thing. There's nothing wrong with learning. But the church today is losing thousands of our teenagers, and we're losing them because they're moving from the church into higher education, and they're placing what they learn in higher education over what they have

learned in the church. And instead of filtering what they're being taught in the universities through the word of God, they try to filter the word of God through what they're learning in the universities. They're not discerning what is good and rejecting what is not good.

And you know, there's stuff to be learnt, even from worldly people. There's stuff to be learnt and things that can be learnt and used. But it has to be in submission to the word of God. I'm not saying, for example, don't listen to the news. I've said a lot already about the propaganda that we receive day by day by day through whatever form of media you're taking in. I'm not saying that you don't ever listen to the news. But what I am saying is, practice some discernment. Practice wisdom. Practice understanding. Is this the truth? Does the person who's telling me this have some kind of agenda? Are they actually supporting their own agenda and putting a particular slant on what I'm being told?

You know, you would think—listen to the Greens for example—you would think Australia has never had a hot summer in all of history if you listen to the Greens. I notice there's an article in the paper today—it's going to be over 40 degrees in Birdsville. Do you realize, my friends, it was 40 degrees in Birdsville when I was five years old? And when my grandmother was five years old, back in 1912, it was 40 degrees in Birdsville in summer. But the news makes out that a hot Australian summer is just the most incredible climate-based disaster that could ever happen. And people sit there and they swallow it up. “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Increase the taxes. Give the government more power. We've got to bring this under control.” As if giving a government more power and increasing the tax burden could bring it under control.

It's nonsense, and it's rubbish, but people will not actually practice discernment, and the reason that they won't practice any kind of critical thinking is they have no foundation from which to practice that thinking. They have no basis by which to judge, no permanent unchanging standard. They don't have God's word. They don't submit to God's word. They don't know God's word. They're refusing the knowledge of God, and so they're fools, blown around by every breeze of doctrine, every breeze of false demonic teaching that blows their way, they just swallow it.

Think of the destruction that we've made of sexuality and marriage. How many people have you heard tell you that it's better these days, because the young people sleep around and they work out what they like before they get married? And that's supposedly better. I've heard that so many times, I just about want to vomit. You know, “It's better.” It's not better, it's worse. They can't form a lasting relationship because they won't do anything right. They can't form a lasting relationship because they've turned their backs on God's way of forming that relationship, which is through a covenant bond, in holiness and in righteousness.

And so they're miserable, they have multiple marriages, and you've got all of these children out there that don't have a together family, and everyone's trying to form the Brady Bunch. But what do you know? Mark and Carol in the modern day don't really like each other, and their kids don't get on, and it just doesn't work. You can't live that way. We know you can't live that way. We know what the word tells us. But, oh no, the world is wise. And you know, some stupid woman tried to tell us that we should have our daughter go out with a bad boy, and then

she'll appreciate the good boys. Yeah? Really? Honestly? I walked out of the house at that moment, because I was on the edge of an explosion at that time.

But the stupidity of the world, swallowing all the dribble and nonsense that comes their way. They just swallow it, wash it down with a beer, settle it down with a bon—She'll be right, mate. And they do it. And they just accept the rubbish that comes their way, and we end up with a world that looks the way it looks today—a world where foreigners are pouring into our nation and they hate us, and they want to destroy us.

And it's actually in writing. You know, they've got a book too. It's called the Koran. And in that book, it says they should do anything they can to bring forward an Islamic theocracy. If that means lie, lie. If that means cheat, cheat. If that means live at peace with the people around you until you've got the power to no longer live at peace, well then live at peace with them until you've got the power to try and subjugate them. And we let them come in. They say, "We're peaceful. It's a religion of peace." And they hate us, and they hate our laws. And the way they live and the things they say tell us that they hate us and they hate our laws, and we will not see it.

You know, the whole world was surprised when Hitler turned out to be a murderous madman. When Hitler was killing his millions, the whole world was surprised. But here's the thing, he put it in writing. He wrote a book. It was called *Mein Kampf*, a horrible little narcissistic piece of trash. But he actually spelled out his agenda in writing. He planned to conquer Europe. He planned to kill what he considered to be the inferior people. He planned to carry out a program of eugenics, a breeding program to produce a master race. And everyone was surprised when he did what he said he was going to do. And everyone in the West sits there and they're surprised when the Islamists do what they said they're going to do. Oh, how surprising! We thought that was a religion of peace.

That tells me God is still judging. God is still judging the nations of the world. He's still judging the nations that would presume to be Christian nations, nations like ours, nations which once we could say were "Christian" nations. And every time I say it, I've got to qualify it—Yes, I know, never a perfect nation and never was everybody in this nation truly regenerate. I know that. But still, there was time when Australia could be said to have been a Christian nation.

And we as a nation have turned our back upon God, and we as a nation have produced the same stinking, sour, good-for-nothing grapes, and a foreign people is coming towards us. A foreign people have been whistled up. Repentance! Repentance! And where does that start? It starts in the church. It starts in the churches. Let the churches practice discernment. Let the churches submit to the word of God. Let the churches that will not submit to the word of God be silenced and destroyed. And I mean it. I mean it.

The worst thing for Christianity in Australia today is not that we're small, it's that we are so impure; it's that there are so many churches teaching false doctrines, and the doctrines of demons and devils. And the picture that the world gets of Christianity is what they see in false churches. It's going to start—the correction is going to start, if it starts by the grace of God, and it's my prayer that it does—it's going to start in the churches. It's going to start among the Christians. It's going to start with repentance. It's going to start with a people who bring themselves under

the word of God and take God's word as their only guide for discernment, and for wisdom, and for faith, and for practice, and for worship. That's it. That's what it's going to take. That's what would turn the nation around.

We're all worried. In a way, we don't like to see what's happening. I don't like to see it, none of you like to see it, I know that. Well, my friends, our only hope and our only help is God. And if God is judging our nation, it's because God's people in this nation have not proclaimed the truth as we ought. We have not been obedient as we should. We have not prayed and had trust as we should have it. We must accept that we are, in some way, at least partially responsible for what is being done to us. We must accept it.

We're not the pure people who are isolated from all of this, and it's not as though we had nothing to do with what's being done to us. We've failed to live a life that we've been called to live. We've failed to uphold the gospel. We've failed to denounce false teaching. We've failed to put forward true teaching. We've failed to be faithful in prayer. We've failed to be faithful in our witness. The only turnaround, the only possible turnaround, comes from repentance, and you can't preach the message of repentance unless you yourself are a repentant person; unless you yourself have been broken down and humbled. You can't give that message out unless it's coming from a heart that's been broken open. The sacrifices of God are a contrite and humble heart, a broken spirit, O Lord, you will not despise.

And the church became proud, and confident, and relaxed. And the church decided that it knew better, and it had the methods, and the means, and the wisdom, and that from the teaching of such wonderful and intelligent men, the word of God was no longer the word of God, and it no longer meant what it meant. Half the commentaries I've read on our passage today have tried to give me a hundred different reasons why this chapter does not belong in the book of Isaiah. There are three different Isaiahs, and the third one wrote after the people had gone into captivity, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

All right. And that attitude infected the churches, and godly people did not stand up against it. And they sat under ministers who were not preaching the truth and were compromised. And they did not stand up against it, and they accepted it, and they allowed their children to be fed to the world's mill through the corruption of God's word. They allowed their children to become cannon fodder for the Devil's battleground because they were not being fed on the pure word of God from faithful men—true preachers of the gospel.

But God has never been without His witness, I will say that. I'm not saying there's never been a true gospel preacher in Australia. God has always had His true gospel preachers in Australia. Always. And as long as this world continues, He will continue to do so, because He will not allow His church to become extinct.

But my friends, if we want to preach the message of repentance, if we want to see our nation come to repentance, we must be a repentant people. You want to preach to people about having their hearts broken by the Spirit of God, you can't do it if your heart hasn't been broken by the Spirit of God. You want to preach to people about being worshippers in Spirit and truth, you can't do it if you yourself are not a worshipper in Spirit and in truth. You just can't do it.

Your testimony, your life, must back up your words. When we are Christian in both word and deed, the church is a force unstoppable. It's a power that cannot be brooked. But when word and deed are separated, and when we don't bring ourselves under God's word, we're nothing. We're nothing. We're just dry autumn leaves blowing in the wind.

You know, you drive out past that hillside just north of Cooma on the western side of the road there, where the fire went through—bare dirt. Just black nothingness. And that's what we will be in the church until we put ourselves under the authority of the word of God, and until we become a broken-hearted repentant people, practicing discernment according to the word of God, discerning everything, rejecting that which is not good, and only living upon and swallowing down Christ. He's our food. He's our food. He's our food. We've got to feed upon Christ.

Our thoughts, our words, our deeds, our life, have to be Christian. And when that's the case, the church will be powerful and victorious, and the gospel will go forth with power. So, my friends, be discerning. Be repentant. Hold on to that which is good. Abstain from that which is evil. Filter, filter carefully the things that you swallow, the things that you accept—I mean the things up here, the things in your head—things that come to you by the news and the Internet. Think carefully. Practice discernment. Don't water down the truth, and don't accept water-downed truth.

There's one author of Scripture—God the Holy Spirit. There are 40-odd human authors of Scripture, and they spoke and they wrote by God the Holy Spirit. This is our foundation. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I do pray that you would be merciful to us and to our nation. I do pray that you would visit your people with power. Forgive us our sins. Restore unto us the joy of your salvation. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.