

## **God's Glorious Victory** **Isaiah 66: 15 – 24**

Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah 66, verses 15 to 24—the end of the book. We will start reading from verse 12, because verse 15 sort of springs immediately from the context of verse 14. So we'll try and give it a little context and connect it with what we heard last week. Isaiah 66—the sermon text, as I said, verse 15 through to verse 24, which is the end of the chapter and the end of the book. And we read from verse 12. Hear the word of God.

“<sup>12</sup> For thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. <sup>13</sup> As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.’”

Verse 15: “‘For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. <sup>16</sup> For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

“<sup>17</sup> ‘Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig’s flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD.

“<sup>18</sup> ‘For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, <sup>19</sup> and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. <sup>20</sup> And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.<sup>21</sup> And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

“<sup>22</sup> ‘For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. <sup>23</sup> From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.

“<sup>24</sup> ‘And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.’” Amen. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do pray that you would now speak to us concerning the word that we have just read. Please help me as I speak. Please help us all as we listen. May we be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Often in a sermon, I like to start from the 30,000-foot overhead view, and then work our way down into it and get to the specifics. But today, because this is our final portion from the book of Isaiah, and because the vision is, in many ways, cosmic—it's worldwide, it's enormous—well, what I want to do is I'll start down in the forest. We're going to start down in the text and very quickly look at a few of the main points to be found in our text, and then we're actually going to try and get up there for that 30,000-foot overview—where this book fits in all of Scripture, and what it connects to in all of Scripture. And I hope and I pray that we'll do it justice in that way.

It's a fitting close to the book of Isaiah. Isaiah has told us about both the problems with Israel, with Judah, with those who are the covenant people—and not only that, but the problem with all of humanity. It seems that those of Judah were not really that different to the world around them. And he has told us the solution—both for the people of Judah and for all the nations of the world, the solution for you and me. And he's given us this, as I've already said, this enormous cosmic vision of the end of all things, of God's final acts of redemptive salvation, of His final acts of redemption.

If we remember back in Isaiah chapter 1, there we read in verses 10 to 15—and we'll look at that a little later—of God's rejection of the false worship of the people of Judah. He actually says He hates and abominates their church services. Their worship services, He says, "are a stench in my nostrils." He hates false worship. And I so I guess, if that's where the book started, it's a fair question to say, Where does it end? And it ends with pure worship, true worship. It ends with worship that is acceptable to God. So we might almost say that the problem with all of humanity is a worship problem. Mankind was created to worship the one true living God, and to worship the one true living God, according to His word, according to His revelation of Himself. He is God. He says, "I am to be worshiped." Not only that, He says, "I am to be worshiped in this particular way. I am God."

All of mankind worships some kind of God, in some way or other. Even atheists, as I've said to you many a time, atheists are little more than self-worshippers. They deny any god external to themselves. Their own conscious, their own thoughts, their own abilities—those things are their gods, and those things are nothing more or less than useless, empty idols. They lead them only to hell. They lead them only to destruction. They blind their eyes. And so, all the world worships, and God says, "All the world *should* and must worship me."

And it's interesting in our passage—and once again, we'll look at this in more details, but basically God says, "Everyone, every sentient being is going to appear before me and acknowledge that I am the one true living God." For those of us who are saved, that's the

greatest thing ever. We look forward to that. We look forward to hearing untold millions and billions of people acknowledging that our God is the one true living God.

For those who are not saved, that's the moment of abject defeat. That's the moment of complete and utter rejection, for they know that even as they acknowledge that there is one true living God—the very thing that Scripture tells us that they have known all along, but have suppressed in unrighteousness—even as they acknowledge that one thing that they've known all along, they also know that that one thing is the cause of their condemnation, because they have refused, they have utterly refused, to give God the glory when God was calling for faith and repentance.

Let's get down into the text. As I've said, we'll try and look at some of the trees, and then we'll try and get above the trees and look at the forest. The first thing I want us to look at is the concept of judgment by fire. We see it in verses 15, 16, and 24. So let's just quickly refresh that.

Verse 15: “‘For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. <sup>16</sup>For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.’”

And then at verse 24, “‘And they,’” this time speaking of those who are saved, “‘shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.’”

Turn now please to Isaiah chapter 33. We're going to refresh a few things from the book of Isaiah this morning, as we just see how Isaiah has led us to his ultimate finale. So Isaiah 33. We'll look particularly at verses 13 to 14, God speaking through Isaiah:

“<sup>13</sup>Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might. <sup>14</sup>The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: ‘Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?’” Verse 15: “‘He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil, <sup>16</sup>he will dwell on the heights.’”

God has spoken to the people of Judah and told them they should fear Him. And the reason that they should fear Him is that He is a consuming fire. Isaiah chapter 33 speaks of the fact that God is Judge, King, and Lawgiver. Therefore, no one can escape the burning. God is all of these things. The one who actually gave and authored the law is the one who applies the law, the one who executes the law, the King—and that's the role of a king. In Jewish law, the execution of God's law, the application of God's law—that's what a king is supposed to do. He's supposed to shepherd the people and apply the law. He bears the sword for that purpose.

God who is Judge, King, and Lawgiver is coming to burn sinners. That's the threat. We found it back there in Isaiah 33; we find it again in Isaiah 66, as Isaiah leads us towards His inevitable

judgment. And we always think, don't we, of this concept of judgment by fire. We know, for example, that in Second Peter chapter 3, verses 7 to 10, Peter speaks of the fact that once the world was destroyed by water. That will not happen again. In future, the world will be destroyed by fire. It will be destroyed, it will be purified. That which survives the fire is that which is founded upon the glory of God alone, that which God Himself preserves—everything else, consigned to destruction by fire. The funny thing is that Scripture also speaks of the coming of our Savior, Jesus Himself, in His incarnation—it speaks of that as being, in some ways, a fiery judgment.

Turn to the book of Malachi, chapter 3. There we're going to look at verses 1 and 2. Now as soon as we read this, it will be very familiar to you. Why? Because it's quoted in all three synoptic gospels—in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is quoted, and it's applied to Jesus in His first coming. It speaks initially of John the Baptist.

Malachi chapter 3, verse 1: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.” He is like a refiner's fire.

The coming of Jesus, spoken of by John, is spoken of there as a fiery coming—a refining coming. And we ask, and we wonder, “Well, how can that be?” And I simply remind you, What happened to Jerusalem? What happened to that temple where the old covenant worship was conducted? What happened in AD 70? The armies of Rome attacked and destroyed the whole city. The temple was stripped of everything of value, an incredible amount of gold and silver was shipped back to Rome, and the temple was burnt to the ground. They destroyed the major stones of the temple by setting fires over them, and then cooling them with water so that they cracked. The whole place was judged with fire. When Jesus came, He was rejected by those to whom He came. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” And His own, instead, received His judgment.

And so, in a way, in a manner of speaking, mercy and judgment walk side by side, from the time of the incarnation until now. God saves whom He will save. That's mercy. God saves all who will come to Him in faith and repentance. That's mercy. And even at the same time, God judges and hardens those who will not seek His forgiveness. God is refining, even now. And churches are being refined. *The church*, the living church, the one true church that's found all over the world, is even now being refined. God is always purifying—and one of the means in Scripture by which God brings purity is fire.

Turn to Second Thessalonians now, chapter 1. In Scripture, the first coming of our Lord is spoken of as a fire judgment; and yet, we know that His second coming is spoken of as a fire judgment. Second Thessalonians chapter 1, and we'll read verses 5 to 8:

“<sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— <sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,”—notice the note of judgment—“<sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

Inflicting judgment, the Lord Jesus coming in flaming fire, this purity, this final judgment of God—it’s always, and almost always in Scripture, pictured as the judgment by fire. And I’ve already mentioned it, but let’s turn to it and get it fresh in our minds. Second Peter, chapter 3. We’ll start reading at verse 1:

“<sup>1</sup> This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’ <sup>5</sup> For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, <sup>6</sup> and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

“<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

Fire—the judgment of fire, things destroyed, things purified. That which is not of God will be burnt. Fire and brimstone. It often surprises people. They’d like to speak as though God the Father is the God of anger and judgment, and God the Son is the God of love and peace and happiness and joy. You know who said more about hell than anyone else? And you can prove this by simply getting out for yourself any kind of concordance or Bible software, and just doing a simple word count and some searches and count some words. You know who spoke the most about hellfire and judgment? Jesus Himself. That’s right.

Jesus Himself spoke most about hellfire and judgment. Jesus Himself spoke of the fact that all who do not submit to His word come eventually to hell. They come eventually to eternal fire. In Mark chapter 9, Jesus speaks of the fact that it is eternal. He quotes our passage from Isaiah 66,

and speaks of the fact that this punishment is eternal. And it all revolves around Him, Himself. In Isaiah's vision, Isaiah, speaking as an old covenant prophet, speaks of YAHWEH.

Well, my friends, who is Jesus? Who does the gospel of John tell us that Jesus is? What does the book of Revelation tell us about Jesus? Who is Jesus? One of the things that we can call Jesus is YAHWEH incarnate; YAHWEH, God the Son; Jehovah the Son; the one who said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." And He speaks of the simple fact that those who do not submit to His word and His teaching are destined for the fire. And He speaks unapologetically of that fact.

Jesus was the most divisive figure in all of history. And the thing about the division that He makes is that it's a permanent and an eternal division. We should fear Him! Yes, we love Him. Yes, He's our shepherd. Yes, He said that He's our friend. Yes, He laid down His life for us. But don't ever forget just how condescending that is on the part of God, that YAHWEH, the Son of God, should take upon Himself flesh for our benefit, for His glory, for the glory of God the Father, and for our benefit—that He should make us His own, and that our relationship with Him is an eternal relationship.

Everybody upon this earth has a relationship with Jesus. Furthermore, I warn you, for everybody upon this earth, that relationship is a relationship of eternal consequence. Our relationship with Jesus is either that we are in Christ, or we are against Christ. And those who are in Christ are in Christ for all of eternity. And just as He reigns for all of eternity in paradise, we will reign with Him for all of eternity in paradise.

And just as those who are now in a relationship of enmity, of warfare, with Christ, just as they now know no peace, just as they now know no rest, just as they even now are being judged and being hardened in their sins, that is of eternal consequence. They will never know the peace of God. They will never know the joy of God, except as something that they can never have. All based around Jesus. All based around the words of Jesus. God has spoken by His Son.

In that God has spoken by His Son, He expects us to hear Him from and through His Son. And those who reject His words pay the price—eternal burning. And that seems bad, doesn't it? We can't imagine that—eternal burning. It seems bad, fearful, hard to understand.

Have you ever thought of this? Do you ever think of the fact that we don't really understand just how good paradise will be, living in the presence of God through Jesus Christ our Lord for all of eternity? The Bible gives us pictures, and it's a paradise; it's like a garden, and it's beautiful, and there's pure clear water, and the river that just gets broader and broader. And all of these pictures—there are trees of life, and it's wonderful, and the walls are like precious jewels, and the streets are like gold, and it's wonderful! All of these pictures of just how great eternal life is.

Well, think about hell. Wouldn't the parallel apply? Scripture says that hell is a place of eternal punishment and suffering, of an eternal burning. Is that just a picture? Is that just a picture? Is it actually more than we can conceive, though the picture itself is terrifying enough? I think so.

There's more to it than that. There's more to it than just simple eternal burning and hellfire. But that's the picture that Scripture gives us, because it most readily helps us to understand just how bad the punishment is.

My friends, we're supposed to fear God. Plenty of people are converted because they realize they don't want to go to hell. And the church pulls the teeth of its message when it refuses to speak of the judgments of God. He is a God to be feared.

Okay, moving on. Second point that I want us to see in our passage is that of worship. I've already mentioned it a little in the introductory words. The concept of worship—pure worship, false worship. Let's look first of all at the false worship. Look at Isaiah 66, verses 17 and 18. Isaiah, speaking to the covenant people of God, verse 17:

“<sup>17</sup> Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup> For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues.” And we stop there.

“For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues,” verse 17. They sanctify themselves, they purify themselves. And then after the temple worship is over, after the service is over—off they go, into the gardens, into the high places, into the manmade sanctuaries. You see, humanity was placed in a garden at the beginning. Remember? The Garden of Eden. Humanity is promised a garden at the ending. That word “paradise,” if you go back through the Hebrew and trace the words in their roots, it all speaks of a garden—a wonderful place, a cultivated place, a beautiful place. A garden in the beginning, a garden at the end.

What would you do if you're a false worshiper? What would you do if you're setting up a false religion? What would you associate it with? Well one of the things that you can do is you can set it up with the concept of a garden, a grove, a sanctified and purified place. And so the people go to temple worship. And then after temple worship, they go to these gardens, these places, these mockeries of the paradise of God. And Isaiah uses the picture of eating unclean things, eating pig's flesh, and the abomination, and mice.

Now what's the abomination that they're eating? I don't know, although the abomination, that word “abomination,” is basically used in the law in Leviticus mainly of impure sexual practices, of evil sexuality, of homosexuality for example, of bestiality for example. And we do know that pagan idolatrous worship was also, in many ways, based around the idea of a sexual cult. That might be what he's getting at here. They go to these gardens, and there their practices are unclean, they eat unclean foods, they do evil things, they commit acts that are abominable.

“They shall come to an end together,” declares the Lord. What's He saying? What's the Lord saying? “Don't think—don't think that because you're turning up at a church service that the

rest of your life can be lived in the service of Satan. Don't think that because you're turning up at a church service that you're putting, as it were, weights on the scales of justice." That's the picture that is most common to humanity—salvation is a matter of weights on the scale of justice. If the good outweighs the bad, and if God's in a good mood on the day you meet Him, you just might get through. That's the picture.

They imagine that they're balancing the scales. "We went to the temple, we offered the money, we offered the sacrifices, we did the things we ought to do. 'Good' has now got plenty of stuff on it. Now we can go and just make sure the other gods are happy. Just make sure the gods are happy. You don't want bad luck in your life, do you? You don't want bad luck." So impure worship is rejected. If your heart's not in it, it's not worship. If it's not what God's looking for, it's not worship.

Let's turn now to Isaiah chapter 1, and we'll read verses 10 to 15. Isaiah, speaking to the people of Judah, calls them the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. That must give you some idea of how God feels about false worship. Isaiah chapter 1, verse 10:

"<sup>10</sup> 'Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! <sup>11</sup> What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

"<sup>12</sup> 'When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? <sup>13</sup> Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

"<sup>14</sup> 'Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup> When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.'"

As I said, spoken to the people of Judah—where the temple was, where the priesthood was, where the word of God was. Citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. They might have lived in Zion, but using that picture that we looked at last year, they weren't born in Zion. They weren't accounted as having been born in Zion. Their birthplace was somewhere else. Their birthplace was the same place that the demons come from—Sodom and Gomorrah, that place of wickedness, that abominable place. God rejects impure and evil worship.

Turn in your Bibles back to Isaiah 66, and look at verse 21 to 23, and get the contrast. Now this is speaking of the people that God will bring in from all over the world. Let's read it at verse 20. After speaking of sending His people out into the world, He says:

"<sup>20</sup> 'And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD.'" That line in itself is actually worthy of a sermon. We're not going to get it, but that line itself is

worthy of a sermon. Isaiah, speaking to the people of Judah, telling them that God has their brothers out in the world in all the nations. Shocking. Shocking. To a Jew, that's shocking, because as far as a Jew is concerned, their only brother is the offspring of Abraham by blood. And God says, No.

“‘And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD,’”—an offering—that's the word of sacrifice, worship—“‘on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering’”—a reference back to Levitical worship—“‘ in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.’”

And hear this: “<sup>21</sup> And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.” A priesthood not descended from Aaron. From these brothers in the nations, there will be a priesthood who make offerings that are accepted. Their worship is accepted. It's pure worship.

Let's read on, verses 22 and 23: “<sup>22</sup> ‘For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. <sup>23</sup> From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.’”

“Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly,” is what we read in Isaiah chapter 1. And yet here at the end of the book of Isaiah, God is now talking once again about Sabbath to Sabbath, new moons, and all flesh coming to worship before God—God accepting worship, pure worship, true worship.

How would you be a true worshiper? You'd be a worshiper in spirit and truth, as Jesus said in John chapter 4. How is one a worshiper in spirit and truth? Well, what did Jesus say to the woman to whom He was speaking? “If you had known to whom you were speaking, you could have asked of me, and I could have given you the gift of water that springs up to eternal life”—that gift that never ceases giving. True worship comes through Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

These nations that are drawn to this Jerusalem, they're the nations, they're the people, that are saved through Jesus Christ. Verse 22 speaks of offspring. Remember we looked last week at this concept of the church's offspring, the church's generations. They're those who are born by the preaching of the word. They are those who are born by the Spirit of God, be they Jew, be they Gentile. The offspring of the church are those who are led to the worship of the true God by the preaching of the church. And God speaks of the fact that He finds their worship acceptable.

Let's just have a look at how this might play out in the New Testament. We'll turn to Romans chapter 12, Paul writing to the church in Rome, verse 1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,

which is your spiritual worship”—to Roman Gentiles. Their bodies are now presentable as a living sacrifice, which is holy and acceptable to God. Pure worship. What did Isaiah speak of? Pure worship, nations being brought into the kingdom of God, and offering true and pure worship.

Turn to Philippians chapter 3, and there we'll read verses 2 and 3. Paul, speaking to the church in Philippi. Philippians 3, verse 2: “Look out for the dogs, look out the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

Now, there's one—the circumcision. Who is the circumcision, to any Jewish mind? The offspring of Abraham, the blood-born children of Abraham, those who are of the genetic family of Abraham. And what does Paul say concerning Christians in Philippi? “*We* are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” Think back there to Isaiah 66:20: “And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD.”

We are the people of God. We are the sons of Israel, the sons of Abraham. We are the fulfillment of God's promises made to Abraham. We are the true circumcision. God gave circumcision to Abraham as a sign of the covenant, and we who worship in spirit and truth through Jesus Christ our Lord and put no confidence in the flesh, we're the true circumcision. We're the circumcision that God was always seeking.

Turn to Revelation 5 now. We'll look there at one verse, verse 13. Another one of those “all” statements. Let's just read it: “<sup>13</sup> And I heard *every* creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and *all* that is in them,” every creature, all that is in them saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!””

All—from all over the world. Every creature. Just make sure we don't misunderstand this. Every sentient being that can give glory to God, whether they're in heaven, whether they're on the earth, whether they're under the earth—which in the Scripture is always a picture of the dead, in the waiting place of judgment. Every creature that is sentient and can do this does this. Every creature that is in the sea, *all* say “to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

Now turn in your Bibles back to Isaiah 66, the last part of Isaiah 66, verse 23: “All flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.” All flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. And that's why I said to you earlier, as far as I can tell, in that instance Isaiah is speaking of every person that can speak. Every created being that has the ability to speak the words that God requires of them, whether they speak these words springing from salvation, or whether they speak these words springing from sinful, subjective humility, they have been told that they must say these things, and the power of the command is such that they cannot deny it—

they come, and they give glory to God through the Lamb. “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” Forever. True worship, coming from all the nations, acceptable to God.

And let’s look then at the third and final point that I just want us to get out of our passage: Eternal punishment. Once again, it’s already been mentioned, but let’s look at verse 24 of Isaiah 66: “ ‘And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.’ ”

Notice, the people who are saved are going to witness the judgment of the people who are judged. We’re going to see our enemies judged. That’s important. That’s actually part of God’s salvation of His church. Those who are your enemies, those who have afflicted you, it will not happen again. They will never do that to you again. They will never come near to you again. We will see it. We will rejoice in it.

What if there are people there whom we now love, members of our families, friends, etc., and they are the ones receiving the judgment? You’ve got to understand, by this point in time we will be in the presence of Jesus. We will have seen Him face to face. Nothing, nothing can detract from our love for Him. Those who are separate from Him will not be part of our family anymore. We won’t think of them that way. Our family is Christ.

What did Jesus say, for example, in the gospel of Mark? “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers and sisters? All who hear the word of God and obey it. *They’re* my family.” That separation will occur. It’s not perfect yet. I mean, the sword is cutting even now. Jesus said He brings a sword, and it will divide whole families. He said that. And it’s happening now.

Many of us know that we’re being divided off from our families now, though we pray for their salvation. Yet, in that day, if they do not repent, they will come to eternal punishment, and such will be our love for Jesus, and such will be our connection to our heavenly family, we’re not going to be troubled by their punishment. We’re going to give God the glory for it.

That’s not for us now. At this moment, we’re vessels of mercy, preaching the gospel of God. We’re not to condemn people. We don’t get to enact the judgments of God against people in this earth. We don’t, unless we’re appointed as judicial judges. They’re the only ones who can rightfully enact the judgments of God. But the day will come when we will see that they will suffer eternal fire. In Mark chapter 9, verse 48, which we read earlier, Jesus speaks of the fact that this is eternal. He’s not just trying to scare people, He’s telling the truth. You can’t say that Jesus said something that He didn’t know was true. And as I’ve already said to you, I think that the picture He gave can’t communicate to us actually how bad it will be.

One other passage I want you to look at, Revelation chapter 21, verse 8: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers,

idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” And this is given to us in the context that those who have come into the very dwelling place of God will rejoice, for “every tear will be wiped from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

And yet even as we’re given that glorious picture of our eternal life in the presence of God, we’re given the picture of God judging those whom He rejects, and “their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” So Isaiah closes with judgment by fire, the purification of worship, and the eternal punishment of sinners. It’s a good closing for the book. It’s a good closing for the book of Isaiah.

Okay, now as I said earlier, let’s just try and step back and put this all into a big picture, one big biblical picture. I’ve already spoken of the fact that in AD 70, old covenant worship came to its final end. It was rejected. The temple was destroyed. The Romans made a complete and thorough job of it. They enslaved the Jews, they dispersed them around all the earth, and they stripped the temple of its glory and of its gold.

Yet I want you to turn now to the gospel of Mark chapter 13, to note just one small point here. Mark chapter 13, verse 14. Now overall, how do I understand the Olivet Discourse in Mark chapter 13? In the immediate context, Jesus was speaking of the judgment upon Jerusalem which was to come. He did say in this discourse that before this generation passes, these things will happen.

Mark chapter 13, verse 14: “But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>15</sup> Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, <sup>16</sup> and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. <sup>17</sup> And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! <sup>18</sup> Pray that it may not happen in winter.”

Okay, what’s happening there? What’s this saying? Well, it’s Jesus speaking to those who hear His word, and it’s a warning. If the primary purpose of the Olivet Discourse concerning the destruction of Jerusalem is to speak to His own people, well, what’s He saying to His own people who are alive and are in Jerusalem at that time? “If you get the opportunity, flee! If you get the opportunity, get out of this city. It’s marked down for destruction. Get out of the city!”

Now a number of ancient historians speak of the fact that the Christians did actually abandon Jerusalem when Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans. They did get opportunity to leave Jerusalem, and they did. And they did flee to places that were in the mountains. They heard the word of God. Think about this. What’s the impact of this? What’s the impact of this? What difference does this make to the preaching of the gospel? Till that moment, till that time, the church was born in Jerusalem.

As we read the book of Acts, and for example a reference the Apostle Paul makes in the book of Galatians, the most important church was the church in Jerusalem. That was where the apostles held greatest authority over the church. When the Apostle Paul speaks of the fact that when he wanted approval to minister to the church in a greater field, or a wider extent, where did he go? He went to Jerusalem, To do what? To meet the apostles who were in Jerusalem, to have from them the stamp of approval, to receive from them the right hand of fellowship.

What would the situation be if Jerusalem were not destroyed, and the church leadership was concentrated in Jerusalem? The church would be a Jerusalem-centered church, wouldn't it? Everything would keep going back to Jerusalem. You would actually have that thing some people speak of, the descent of the authority from the apostles down through the ages—you know, the thing that the pope likes to claim for himself. He likes to claim that Peter was the first pope, and he has the authority of Peter. It would've actually happened there in Jerusalem.

But what happens? Jerusalem is destroyed. The Christians leave Jerusalem. The Christians are scattered throughout the world, throughout the Roman Empire. Where does the gospel go? Well we know where the gospel goes. The gospel goes wherever Christians go. It took four hundred years for there to become another centralized church, another sort of, you know, Rome and Constantinople, two churches to take authority over vast regions. The church was spread out into all the earth. The gospel was spread out into all the earth. Jerusalem was destroyed. The Christians left Jerusalem.

Okay, now come back here to Isaiah chapter 66. We read verse 18 earlier, "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues." So God is judging those with false worship, even as He gathers all nations and tongues. "And they shall come and shall see my glory." Who's that? All nations and tongues.

"<sup>19</sup> And I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away." Now that concept of the coastlands, it's basically everywhere the ocean touches. In other words, the whole world. "I will send them" where? To the whole world, "that have not heard my fame or seen my glory." What's He saying? "I will send people with my words, out into all the world, everywhere that has not heard of my fame or seen my glory, my people are going to those places." To what purpose? Verse 20: "And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. <sup>21</sup> And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites."

You see what Isaiah has done, and you see how this comes to us in the New Testament. God sends the gospel out into all the world, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the escape of

Christians from Jerusalem is the means by which the gospel is sent into all the world. They escape from earthly Jerusalem.

Now it says here in Isaiah that they bring them to His holy mountain, Jerusalem. But I'm telling you that we're not taking them to Jerusalem in Palestine. When we preach the gospel and we bring people into the kingdom of God, we're not taking them to Jerusalem in Palestine. We're taking them to heavenly Jerusalem. We're taking them to this Jerusalem that Isaiah sees, this Jerusalem where eternal worship reigns, where God Himself dwells, where we see the judgments of God enacted for all of eternity.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 12. I just want you to understand that this idea of an eternal and heavenly Jerusalem is not something that I've made up. It's a concept of Scripture. Hebrews chapter 12, and there we'll read verses 18 to 24. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 18:

“<sup>18</sup> For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest <sup>19</sup> and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup> For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ <sup>21</sup> Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’ <sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

“The heavenly Jerusalem,” where the people of God dwell, where the Lamb dwells. The church was sent out of Jerusalem to preach the gospel and to lead people, not back to earthly Jerusalem, to lead people to heavenly Jerusalem. Those who are born by the Spirit of God are born into the citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem.

We my friends, here, worshipping here this morning, we're in the presence of God. This is a farflung suburb of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is God, staking the heavenly Jerusalem's claim upon all the earth—feeble little you and me, nobodies. Nobodies. We're not the mighty in the world, we're not the powerful, we're not the much-respected. Feeble little you and I are in the presence of God, in the presence of His innumerable angels. We are already citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. We are already worshipers on Mount Zion. We are already members of the city of the living of God. We've been born, or accounted as having been born, in Zion, and into Zion we are destined.

That's the big picture that Isaiah closes with—the birth of the church, the church going out into all the world, the church leading people back to the heavenly Zion, the church preaching the gospel, giving the gift of eternal life to all the world—to all who will hear it, calling forth people to salvation and faith and repentance, calling people to pure and true worship, calling people to live in the presence of God forever and ever and ever! And, of the end—Isaiah knows there's a

present evil age. He knows that this is a present evil age. He knows that it will be closed off with judgment with fire.

So what's our message? What's our message to all the world? Repent, put your faith in salvation through Jesus Christ, seek forgiveness of sins—judgment is coming. Judgment is coming. If you will not bend the knee now and receive citizenship in heavenly Jerusalem, you will receive the judgment of fire, and it is an eternal judgment. Your worm shall not die, the fire shall not be quenched, and you shall be an abhorrence to all who live in the presence of God.

And that's where Isaiah closes his book. He started at worshipping, he finishes with worshipping, he speaks of the fact along the way that God is gathering worshipers to Mount Zion. He's gathering through the work of the one who is the son of David. He's gathering through the work of the one who is His servant. He's gathering them through the work of His word, the gospel.

My friends, we're part of it. We're part of it. What a privilege. I say it again, we're nobodies. None of us are VIPs. You know, people don't run and open doors for us. People don't line up to get approval from us. But we're citizens of heaven. We're citizens of the heavenly Zion. We've been saved by the blood of the Lamb. We're children of God. We're the true worshipers. We're the true circumcision.

Everything that God was looking for, He finds in His church, and He loves His church. And though we live in this present evil age, and though this present evil age is often troubled, and we're often tested, and we're often trialed—we are the most blessed of all people on the face of the earth. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for your mercy, for your goodness, for your grace, for your word, the Holy Scriptures. Our Father, we pray for the salvation of any who do not believe. Father, we pray for the salvation for those in our family who do not believe. We pray for the salvation of those amongst our friends who do not believe. We pray for the salvation of people the world over, everywhere that the gospel is preached. We pray that it would be fruitful, and that we would see many, many people added to the kingdom.

Our Father, we praise you and we rejoice in your goodness to us, in your promises to us as they are found in the Scripture. We praise you and we thank you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.