

Isaiah 66 True Worship

The last statement in our church confession says: *“Of the World to Come We believe that the end of the world is approaching; that at the last day Christ will descend from heaven, and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution; that a solemn separation will then take place; that the wicked will be adjudged to endless punishment, and the righteous to endless joy and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell, on principles of righteousness.* It is interesting that Isaiah’s ends his words with such a separation between those who worship God and those who do not! Worship, True Worship: What a beautiful way to end the book of Isaiah! (which is very similar to how he begins the book in cp. 1) This chapter continues the truths of cp. 65 with God’s new creation but with a very specific emphasis on true worship, particularly comparing true and false worshipers. With this in mind, I have 2 truths about true worship. And, I will follow this up with some applications from the text.

1. True Worshipers know WHO the Lord is. God is the Sovereign Lord who controls all things! Look at vv. 1-2b: **“Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD.”** In these words, heaven and earth are put into perspective. And they are merely pictures of his greatness. Heaven is described as a “throne.” Earth is described as a “footstool.” When I picture a throne and a footstool, though it may be grandeur, these things still go together in a small place. And how big is heaven? We do not know. Yet, heaven is merely his throne. And as big as this earth is, our home, is merely his footstool. These words echo the words of Solomon after he built the Great Temple in Jerusalem. In 2 Chr. 6:18 Solomon says, **“But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!”** Here we see the words and the heart of a true worshipper. He is saying, *“Yes, God dwells with man. And He does appear in glory in this place. But, heaven, even the highest heaven cannot contain him!”*

Listen to some verses that express this truth. Ps. 113:5-6: **“Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?”** Is. 57:15: **“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place . . .”** In Paul’s sermon to the Gentiles in Athens he says, **“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man . . .”** In Calvin’s Institutes, he begins with this truth, saying, *“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”* And this chapter reveals a lot about both. But, concerning worship, I ask, **“How will we worship as we ought if we do not know WHO HE IS: namely the Sovereign Lord of the Universe?”** Brothers and sisters, this truth dictates everything in our lives. For we are his creation. He is the potter. We are the clay.

This means that ultimate purpose in this creation and in this life is not about me, not about us! It is about the glory of God as Sovereign Lord! I really believe this is the main point and focus of Isaiah in his writings and teachings. As I think back over our time, I recall over and over the times we read that God is the one who does all the work and deserves all our worship. Concerning creation, Is. 40:12-13: **“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand**

and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel.” Concerning our salvation as we consider our sin, Is. 1:9: **“If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.”** And Is. 41:8-9: **“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off . . .’** Concerning his help for us: v. 10: **“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

So what does this mean for your life this week? This means that as fathers and mothers, this truth should be at the top of your teaching. Our kids must know God is the sovereign Lord. This means that when we witness and share with our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and those on the street, we begin with his sovereignty. I am not of the opinion that we should begin our conversations with *“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for you life.”* This shifts the focus from God to man. This also means that making God and his works GREAT in my preaching and the preaching from this pulpit. This also means that the sovereignty of God is still our greatest comfort . . . even in the midst of suffering, especially in the midst of suffering!

Brothers and sisters, this knowledge of God changes our lives. If we think RIGHTLY, we will act accordingly! With this truth, we must begin, as consider true worship!

2. True Worshipers fear God. There are other ways we can express this truth. But, the Bible often speaks about the fear of God. In fact, the Bible often says that the **“beginning of wisdom is the Fear of God . . .”** (Prov. 9:10). There is only one heart attitude for the one who worships rightly. Look at v. 2b: **“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”** Brothers and sisters, right knowledge of God leads to right worship. And, a proper knowledge of self is also necessary for true worship. To fear God means to know WHO HE IS as the Sovereign Lord. To fear God means to know God as holy. AND, as we contemplate who God is, we then move our attention to ourselves. Who are we? We are his creatures. We have NOTHING without Him! He decides what we get! He decides our lot. He decides where we are born and where we live. In Acts 17 Paul tells the men of Athens: **“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place”** (vv. 24-26).

And once we are faced with WHO He is, we must know that we are not holy. Because of Adam’s sin, we also are sinners; our nature is sinful. In Ps. 51:5 David says, **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”** Job realizes the same and says: **“What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt . . .”** (Job 15:14-116). Let me give two examples of what it means to fear God. First, Isaiah’s encounter with God. In Isaiah 6:1-5

we read: **“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”**”

Second is the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector where Jesus teaches the people what it means to fear God (Luke 18). In vv. 10-14 we read: **“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’”**

Only when we see God for WHO He is and then see ourselves for WHO we are can we worship rightly. Beloved, we can NEVER overlook this truth. **“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** So how do we know if we worship God rightly? Look again at v. 2. Are you humble and contrite in spirit? Do you tremble at his word? The fear of God is displayed in repentance and faith. With these two truths before us I would like to finish this text, and the Book of Isaiah with some applications.

Application: True Worshipers love the ways of God to accomplish his great plan of redemption. In this chapter Isaiah reminds those who truly worship God that He has a great plan of redemption. This is pictured in the new Jerusalem. And in these things, we find great, great, reason to rejoice. Look at vv. 7-11: **“Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?”** says the LORD; **“shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?”** says your God. **“Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.”** This is huge! But it simply follows from truth #1. If God is sovereign over all things, even this evil world, and He has a plan to create anew this earth and make things right, it simply follows that we love his ways in order to accomplish this great plan. Brothers and sisters, only true worshippers see the plan of God in this world and rejoice. Others blame and get angry and doubt his ways. But not us! Therefore rejoice in the ways of God, even in his judgments!

Application: Trials, troubles, and persecutions await true worshippers. Look at the first part of v. 5: **“Hear the word of the lord, you who tremble at his word; Your brothers who hate you**

and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy . . .'

Application: Trusting the plan of God brings great comfort. We must not forget that Isaiah's words were meant to bring great comfort to God's people under trials and tribulations. Look at vv. 13-14a: **"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. 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 . . ."**

Application: True Worshipers love God's promise to make all things right. This is really the faithfulness of God. Look at v. 22: **"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."** Isaiah is reminding everyone who reads these words that God is faithful through it all.

Application: Do not forget the judgment of God upon the wicked. Look at v. 24: **"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."** Outside the holy city, there is a cemetery. This trust must remind us of the holiness of God and of his judgment.

Final Truth: Here, at the end of the book, we see God gathering true worshippers from the entire world as they are united in Christ. Look at vv. 18-21: **"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, 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. 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. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD."**

One of the first things Jesus did when he began his ministry to take the gospel to the nations. Do you remember the Samaritan woman at the well? Jesus met her, and as they drew water, Jesus told her that if she drank the water that he would give, she would never thirst again. And he confronted her sin. And then she started to talk about where the Jews worship and where the Samaritans worship (different mountains). And Jesus says to her, **"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . But the hour is coming, and is NOW HERE, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him."** And then he goes on to tell her that He is the Messiah. Today, God is drawing the nations. And we look back knowing Isaiah's sign among the nations is the cross of Christ. And if you are in Christ, you are one of Isaiah's "priests" or "Levites." And you make up those who WORSHIP the living God "in Jerusalem." Therefore rejoice. If not, God commands you to repent and trust Christ!