

The Smell of Apostasy

by Scott T. Brown

The sermon 'The Smell of Apostasy' explores the consequences of rejecting God's love and grace, and the dangers of apostasy, using the example of the vineyard in Isaiah 5.

Duration: 1:09:44

Scripture: Job 21:12, Isaiah 5:8-30, Ephesians 2:1-3

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Isaiah chapter 5 and the judgment of God. He describes the judgment using three images: fire, a rotten root, and a blossom that vanishes. The preacher emphasizes that there is no salvation in this passage, only judgment. He urges the listeners to flee from the wrath to come and to believe in the gospel, asking God to help them learn how to sing and to see His loving kindness. The sermon also highlights that God's love sometimes expresses itself through judgment.

Transcript

Isaiah chapter 5, I'll be reading verses 8 through 30. Woe to those who join house to house, they add field to field, till there is no place, where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land. In my hearing the Lord of hosts said, Truly many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant.

For ten acres of vineyards shall yield one bath, and a home of sea shall yield one ephah. Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink, who continue until night, till wine inflames them. The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts, that they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hands.

Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge. Their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself, and opened its mouth beyond measure.

Their glory and their multitude in their pomp, and he who is jubilant shall descend into it. People shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled. But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God, who is holy, shall be hallowed in righteousness.

Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat, ones strangers shall eat. Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart-rope, that say, Let him make

speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it. And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it.

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. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man.

Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust, because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of the Lord was aroused against his people. He has stretched out his hand against them, and stricken them, and the hills trembled.

Their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, and will whistle to them from the end of the earth.

Surely they shall come with speed swiftly. No one will be weary or stumble among them. No one will slumber or sleep, nor will the belt on their loins be loosed, nor the strap of their sandals be broken, whose arrows are sharp and all their bows bent.

Their horses' hooves will seem like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. Their roaring will be like a lion. They will roar like young lions.

Yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey, and will carry it away safely, and no one will deliver. In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened by the clouds.

Heavenly Father, this is your word. We know that every word is true. Please help our Elder Scott cover this ground.

Lord, there is a lot of ground to cover today. Help him to be wise and diligent. Help him to say the words that you wish us to hear today.

In Jesus' name, Amen. As we continue our studies in the book of Isaiah, just by way of reminder, in chapter 1 what we find there is the witnesses are called and Isaiah delivers his first sermon. And then the second sermon begins in chapter 2 and runs to the end of chapter 4. And this sermon is described by bookends of grace.

There are visions of heaven on each end of the sermon. And the middle is really a picture of a society that's been collapsed. And now as we've entered into chapter 5, it's a song.

So far we've had two sermons and now a song here in Isaiah. And Isaiah 5, 8 through 30, we learn what it looks like and what apostasy smells like. In terms of these clusters of smelly grapes, Isaiah has already introduced this idea.

He calls them wild grapes, literally stinky grapes. And he's explaining what that means and what it really looks like. And so this chapter is actually a song.

It begins with Isaiah saying, Now let me sing to my well-beloved, a song to my beloved regarding his vineyard. My well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. So he introduces chapter 5 by saying, this is a song that he's going to sing.

And it is a song about his beloved and his vineyard. It's really a love song. And in the song, there's care and concern about the owner of the vineyard.

It's a song of sorrow. It's a song of unreturned love. And so Isaiah is actually singing the song himself and he says, My well-beloved has a vineyard.

Let me sing about the vineyard. I don't know how he would have sung this in some kind of rhythmic manner, but the truth is this is a song and it is a song of love to his father. And it tells of his father's love for the vineyard.

It shows how beautifully he appointed the vineyard. It shows how wonderfully he made life for those who would love him and how he would give them everything that they would need. And Isaiah is really saying what a kind father he is.

He's saying what a good shepherd he is. He's praising his father in this song. And at the same time, he's also bringing the word of judgment that God Himself has.

So it's an explanation of the love of God in appointing such a vineyard with so many opportunities. And it really speaks of the ways that God has dealt with His people, how He gives His people so many blessings. He gives them His Word.

He gives them His Spirit. He gives them His world that every single thing in it declares His glory. He gives His people.

He gives so many things, so many opportunities for His people to be lavished with His own love, with direction, with help, with comfort. All these things. This is God.

And Isaiah starts out this song by saying, look at my God, He's so wonderful. Behold my Beloved. He's made such a well-appointed vineyard.

So it really begins with the love of God. And you can never get too much of the love of God. And Isaiah begins that way.

And we also learn from this that God's love expresses itself sometimes in judgment. And so in verses 8-24, Isaiah is describing what has happened to this vineyard that the people have been living in rebellion. They've rejected the law of the Lord.

And they've been insensibly just walking in their sin. Oblivious to God. And so he explains it in really graphic terms by speaking of these grapes, these wild grapes, or these literally stinky grapes that are reflective of what His people have actually become.

And so in verses 8-24 is this description of these wild, stinky grapes. And he does it in the form of six woes. And if you see your outline here in front of you, you'll see that there are six woes that are communicated here.

First in verse 8, and then verse 18, and verse 20, verse 21, and verse 22. So the structure of this testimony of Isaiah hangs on these grapes that are there. There are also four appearances of the word therefore.

And that's critical to understand what Isaiah is saying. There is verse 13, a clause introduced by the word therefore. There's verse 14, introduced with the same term.

And also in verse 24 and in verse 25. So what you find here is this explanation and then these places in the chapter that explain what God is going to do about the stinky grapes. So that's the basic logic and structure of the chapter.

And then it ends with this announcement of judgment in verses 25-30. And it really is an explanation of what happens when you reject the grace of God. When you've been given so much and yet you spurn it.

You turn a blind eye. You act as if God is not there. There are such grave consequences for this.

And in the midst of this, Isaiah really shows the failed promises of sin, how underperforming sin always is, and how destructive it is, how untenable, how fraudulent the promises of sin always are, and how dangerous it is to turn away from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the beautiful things that He has put in His vineyard. All of His blessings in this well-appointed vineyard. That's what this is all about.

And it's really the story of God's love for His people. They're rejecting His grace and finding themselves caught in the entrapments of sin. And then the absolute withering, fiery destruction that results from rejecting the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what this chapter is all about. So it begins with woes in verse 8. And you'll see in your outline I've itemized these woes by number. The first woe is in verses 8-10.

It's the woe of covetous greed. Woe to those who join house to house. They add field to field till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land.

This is the first woe. But we should pause on this word woe for a moment, because there are two ways that the word woe is used in the Bible. The woe that is used here, I want to submit, is primarily the woe of anguish.

It's often translated, It's a cry of, oh no! Look at the danger! Look at the sorrow! Oh no! When you hear the worst news you've ever heard in your life, and you say, oh, oh! It's that kind of oh. It's very different than the kind of woe that we see in other places in the Bible. When the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 11 says, Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! And He's saying, Woe to you because of the punishment, the danger that you're in.

It's different than the... The same kind that Jesus uses in Matthew 11 is consistent with Revelation 9. And also in Matthew 23, the woe against the Pharisees. But woe is not necessarily indicating judgment. It can indicate sorrow and pain for the situation.

I believe that is at least what is here at minimum. Of course, there is the specter of judgment that's coming. But from the context, it seems to me that primarily the use of this word woe is a cry of sorrow and anguish of such disheartening disappointment for what has happened to His people because something terrible has happened to His vineyard.

It's a little bit more like Proverbs 23, verse 29 where it says, Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? He's talking about those who just satiate themselves with alcohol. It causes so much woe in your soul. It's like the woe in Ecclesiastes 10 where Solomon says, Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child and your princes feast in the morning.

Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles and your princes feast at the proper time for strength and not for drunkenness. He's using it in terms of how sad it is when your king is a child. How sad it is when your princes care only for their own self-indulgence and their pleasures.

That's the only thing they're thinking about when they're ruling. How sad it is for a people like that. And when Isaiah says here, Woe, woe to you, it's that kind of woe.

It is possible that there is a double meaning, but I would just want to suggest that it's a great sadness that God is bringing out by saying woe, woe. And He's condemning here men who are in search of wealth, who buy up the land so that no one else can own it. So much so that their houses are touching one another.

They want to amass as much as they can and He's saying woe to you when this happens. The condemnation is not in the acquiring of land, but the intent of buying the land. And their intent is really to depart from God's use of land.

That God has established land for a particular use and they had perverted God's purpose for the land, and they were not viewing it in the way that God had intended it. And they're rejecting the idea that God intended the land to be used as a gift for family blessing that would be passed on to families. But now the land speculators are changing the way that they view the land in Israel.

And they had no care for the principle in Numbers 25 that spoke of God's heart that the land would not be sold permanently, but it would belong to families, that it would stay in families. This is pictured in a number of places in the Old Testament regarding the view of land for Israel. In Numbers 27, there's the story of the daughters of Zelophehad who had no sons in their family.

And they went to Moses and they said, what do we do? We have no land. We have no inheritance. And Moses says, no, you will have an inheritance.

You will have land. And so the daughters were given inheritance in the land. And it's consistent with Deuteronomy 19, 17 where Moses says, cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.

And all the people say amen. It has to do with the blessing of being able to live in peace on a piece of land. It's reminiscent of 1 Kings 21 where Naboth said to Ahab who wanted his land, covetous Ahab, desired to use the land for his own purposes.

And Naboth said, the Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you. And then we know the story that Ahab became sullen. He became so depressed because he couldn't have what he wanted.

And then his wife came and fortified him. And they conceived a wicked plan to destroy this man. And Naboth remains firm in his position and he says, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.

And then Ahab would not eat any food and he went into a pity party that ended up in terrible consequences. But this view of land was being rejected by the land speculators. They had rejected the law

of Jubilee.

But in God's scheme, the land would be returned. And they rejected the law of God. They were driven by an unbridled desire to expand their holdings.

And their happiness was only in the expansion of their holdings. That was their sin. And the result is that there were people who could not have a house of their own because they just continued to expand their houses until there was no room except for their own.

And it was perverting the use of that land. And they were expanding their land beyond what they needed. And they were just living for the here and now.

Ecclesiastes 5.10 explains it. He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity.

When goods increase, they increase who eat them. It's just this desire to have more and more and more and to set aside the intentions of God. Maybe it's the setting aside of the intentions of God for your family because all you care about is expanding what you have and becoming bigger and bigger and a bigger of a big shot in whatever you're doing.

But what it means is that it's people who have set aside something sacred and holy in order to spend that energy that God's given them to do something that would actually subvert what God has loved. And this is a very public sin. And the truth is that every public sin is a private sin for a long time.

Nobody just does that on a whim. It happens because they feed a certain kind of covetousness to set aside the uses of God for different things for their own purposes. And then we see how God speaks in judgment in verses 9 and 10 in Isaiah 5. He says, This is a curse that's pronounced.

And He's saying there just won't be any way to even sustain the people in these houses. The land won't sustain them because God is going to curse the land so that the people in these houses only one out of ten seeds produces, that 90% of the crop will fail. And they'll have ten acres of vineyard and it will only yield eight gallons of wine.

God will make it so that there will be no way to survive. This is what God is going to do to those who have set aside His use of land for their own purposes. And their houses will actually be abandoned It's just a picture that God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

He frustrates the work. Greed is its own devourer. When the world is your portion, you may think that by amassing, you're increasing, but in reality, it will absolutely be destroyed.

Many of us have gone to magnificent castles around the world. There's one in Asheville, North Carolina that some of us saw even this last week. And what's interesting about these places is that they really aren't inhabited for a very long time.

And how many of the magnificent castles around the world are still inhabited by those who built them? Well, they're all museums now or they're just falling away. But God does judge. And what was happening here though was that the people could not see how good God was.

They could not see what a beautiful vineyard He'd made. They could not sing like Isaiah who said, let me sing of my well-beloved. They could not sing that way.

They could not see God like that. That was their problem. And then the second woe is in verses 11 and 12.

It was insatiable self-indulgence. Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may follow intoxicating drink, who continue until night, till wine inflames them. The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, the wine are in their feasts, but they do not regard the work of the Lord nor consider the operation of their hands.

This explains what exists in the hearts of men and women who have a gravitation towards self-indulgence. And He lists certain representative things. Wine.

To be inflamed by wine. To have music and parties and feasts. To have a life of self-indulgence.

To long for the thing that would just gratify your senses. And they rise early in the morning to seek that pleasure. There's commitment to this, but what is it a commitment to? Escapism.

Stimulating the senses, dedicated to excess in order to intoxicate the senses, to be stimulated and helped from the outside. Notice the word inflamed. Now, the way that the Hebrew sentence reads, inflamed is not the result of the wine, but it was the purpose of the wine.

It was the desired purpose. The purpose of the heart was to be inflamed. To be helped along.

To be brought along by this thing. They wanted to be inflamed. They wanted to feel something.

And they were misusing the wine. They were feasting without thanksgiving. They were celebrating, but it was a hollow celebration.

It was a mockery of the kinds of celebrations and feastings that God has ordained for His people. They took the gift of God and they just used it on themselves in order to stimulate, to satisfy themselves. They did it for themselves and for themselves alone.

They were always wanting a buzz. They were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage as it was in the days of Noah. And so they were always wanting this buzz of outside stimulus.

And they would rise early in the morning. They would follow it. They would pursue it.

They wanted the harp and the strings and the tambourine, the percussion instruments and the wind. The wind instruments. Isaiah is not condemning music.

He's just condemning just being so absorbed in music for that one purpose. To satisfy yourself when only God really can satisfy you. Music can be used to silence your conscience, to drown out your sorrows, to bring you to feelings that you can't have on your own because you're so empty of God.

That's the problem. They wanted to satisfy their senses and it was a life of seeking one thrill after another. And like I said before, every public sin is a private sin for a long time before.

That inclination of the heart can be so destructive when it's nourished and brought about in invisible and public ways. But they desired pleasure. That's what it was.

There's so many ways that we do that. Everybody's different. Everybody has a different way that they seek pleasure, that they try to gratify themselves.

They try to fill up their senses with something not of God. I was thinking the other day of how often it is that people are seeking their own pleasure during their work day. Instead of working during the day, they're satiating themselves by surfing the Internet and going to places they shouldn't go.

People do this all the time. 70% of all web traffic on the Internet during work hours is to pornographic websites. How about that? This is people at work in the day, but they're actually doing something else.

They're gratifying themselves. This whole woe here, this second woe of insatiable self-indulgence, it speaks of all the different ways that we long for something that we'll never satisfy. The great lie of sin is that it will satisfy, but it never ever does.

And we use all kinds of things to fill it up. It may be extreme sports for someone. It might be some hobby or some interest for another.

Who knows what it could be? But what is it for us? What is it for you? What is it for me? The thing that is used to satisfy that can never ever satisfy. Peter speaks of this pleasure-seeking. He speaks of those who carouse in the daytime their spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you.

Having eyes full of adultery, they cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. And he speaks of their covetous practices. That's the whole idea here.

Doing something in the world and yet being driven by this insatiable self-indulgence. It's such a great tragedy. Solomon spoke of it in Ecclesiastes 2. He speaks of his own self-indulgence and how absolutely empty it was.

And he says vanity, vanity. All was vanity. All of his accumulation, all of his experiences, all of the things he experimented with.

And the tragedy here is that they've actually silenced the voice of God. It says it right here in the text. But they do not regard the work of the Lord nor consider the operation of His hands.

What this means is that they're just living as if there was no God. God was completely out of their mind. The only thing they cared about was their own self-indulgence.

God was out of their view. And they did not acknowledge the work of the Lord. Do you see those words? They did not acknowledge the work of the Lord.

In other words, they could not see what God was doing. And they were so trapped in their sin that they didn't see what was happening around them. The seeking of self-indulgence may be the secret of every sin.

And the sinner is so convinced that it will bring him happiness, that it will bring him delight, that it will bring him joy, that he just doesn't care where it ends. But God tells where it ends. And so, instead of the abundance that they expected to get out of their activity and their strategy for increase and their desire for pleasure, what did they get? Verse 13.

This is the first therefore. Therefore, verse 13, my people have gone into captivity because they have no knowledge. Their honorable men are famished and their multitude dried up with thirst.

Now notice first, it affected everyone. My people. And notice that they did not regard, they did not recognize God.

There are many examples of this in the Bible. You could go to Job 21.12 and read there. You could go to Romans 1. You could speak of Ephesians 2.1-3, which speaks of this very same mark.

It's really a mark of the unregenerate. And then in verse 14 is the second therefore. This is very important to understand.

That while God does have patience, while God does wait in His vineyard, there is a time when He does completely put an end to it. And verse 14 gives us that next therefore. Therefore, Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure.

Their glory and their multitude and their pomp and He who is jubilant shall descend into it. People shall be brought down. Each man shall be humbled and the eyes of the lofty will be humbled.

So, Isaiah speaks of this gaping monster, this massive cavern, this Sheol that has opened its mouth beyond measure. It's like the gaping of a monster waiting to swallow them alive. On a small scale, it happened to the sons of Korah.

The ground opened up and they were swallowed up in the ground. But Sheol, or hell, is described in the same way as this gaping mouth open, ready to just devour everything in its way. And they're smiling with all these things that they sought pleasure for.

They go from their revelry and now they're thirsty and they're famished. And they're being sucked into the vortex of this abyss of this gaping mouth of Sheol. That's the tragedy that Isaiah is playing before the people.

Why is he saying this to people? To get them to return to the Lord, to repent, to recognize the grave danger that they're in. To believe in the Gospel. To trust in the sacrificial Lamb.

And then verse 16, he gives the reason for the judgment. You know, God is so kind, He gives us the reasons for things. And here the Lord gives us with such dense precision exactly what was the problem.

Verse 16, But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness. God is doing this in order to exalt Himself. He exalts Himself in judgment.

It pleases God to judge the wicked. This is such a difficult thing for modern ears to hear because we think that judgment is bad, that judgment is harsh. But not in God's kingdom.

In God's kingdom, He destroys the works of the devil. He destroys the things that have been so harmful to people. The immoralities, the abuses, the thefts.

All the things that are so harmful, so horrible for mankind. God will finally destroy. How does He wipe every tear from the eyes? One way is that He is exalted in judgment.

And He comes and He writes every wrong that's ever been committed. Maybe there are wrongs that have been committed against you. Maybe grievous wrongs.

Maybe someone has hurt you terribly in some way. Know this, God will write every wrong that's ever been committed. And you don't have to worry about it.

God has said, vengeance is Mine. I will repay, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, give him food to drink.

If he's thirsty, give him water to drink. Vengeance is Mine. Just recognize that God will bring everything to justice.

And the language here is so vivid and really beautiful. The Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment. Why does God judge the wicked? He does it to exalt His goodness.

He does it to praise His own lovingkindness. He does it to lift Himself up as the supreme source of all love and all goodness and all justice. This is His purpose in judgment.

And this is the reason that He has opened wide the mouth of Sheol so that He would be exalted. And then also the people will be wandering without care in verse 17. Then the lambs will feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat one stranger shall eat.

This is just an image of the lambs just wandering wherever. And then this is the fate of those who will seek to be satisfied by their thrills and their experiences and their stimulants and their external influences. And the problem is they could not see how good God was.

They could not sing, Let Me Tell You of My Beloved. They could not sing of the lovingkindness of God. They did not know His love.

And as a result, they sought pleasure from the place where it never existed. And they ended up being destroyed. And then the third woe is in verses 18 and 19 in their keeping sin in hand, keeping their sin close to them.

Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin as if with a cart rope that say, Let Him make speed and hasten His work that we may see it. Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come that we may know it. So this is a really remarkable picture.

He's saying that there's iniquity. The iniquity is the cart. And they're pulling a cart of iniquity.

And they're pulling it along wherever they go. The iniquity is always with them. They like it.

They want to keep it near them. And so they attach a cord, a cord of vanity to it. But who's doing the pulling? Not oxen.

Not a donkey. But men. Men are pulling their own iniquity behind them.

That's the picture. And these men are roped to this heavy wagon, heavy with sin. And it's interesting that they're not overtaken by the sin.

They're drawing the sin after them to be near it. They want the sin near it. It's not like they're just passive victims.

They desire it to be near them. They like the sin. And it should cause us to ask, is there any sin that we like that we should hate? That we should mortify? That we should say like John Owen, do you mortify? Do you

make it your daily work? Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.

Or have you kept those cords of vanity to draw the cart of iniquity? Because you like it. Because it seems to feel good to you now. Recognize it will not feel good.

In fact, it's actually destroying you from within. This is the nature of sin. It comes with so many false promises.

It comes with so many fraudulent allurements. And they never satisfy. They only kill.

And we'll learn later what it looks like with greater and even more vivid language. But remember, every public sin is a private sin for a long time before. And if you would keep yourself from this, recognize that.

One of my dear friends has fallen into a great sin. And there are many people who say, oh, that could have been me. It could have been me.

Well, the truth is, I hope that's not. Because one falls into a sin like that after many, many small compromises before. No one just immediately falls into a sin.

They fall because they have been falling. My friend Paul Washer says, you don't fall into sin, you slide into it. Because every public sin is a private sin beforehand.

I was telling our interns the other day that I could absolutely destroy all the work that I've done in 40 years in one second of time. All I would have to do is take one second and kiss a girl and everything would be over. Everything.

It would all be burned to the ground. But I want to just make this point. You do not kiss a girl without doing many other things beforehand.

You do not fall into sin. You slide. You make one compromise after another.

Every public sin is a private sin for a very long time before. Recognize that. Every person in this room is in danger of these sins, particularly sins of morality, because of the opportunities that are before us.

Brothers, expunge, mortify, destroy every vestige of lust, everything that would inflame it. Kill that dragon. Starve him.

Lest you find yourself in that moment when you would do that. But you would not do it if you had not cultivated it. So do not cultivate it.

Please do not cultivate it. Please do not end where everything burns to the ground. Please do not find yourself in a place where everything will be destroyed that you've worked for your whole life.

And every relationship will be compromised. And everything you ever have done will be burned to the ground. It's a very real problem.

But recognize every public sin is a private sin for a long time before. We could speak about how burdensome this cart is, how inefficient it is, how you're trying to pull this cart by a rope, and how hard sin makes your life. It keeps you in bondage.

But yet, you hang on to it. It's like your stash. You're dragging your stash along with you because you like it so much.

Because it seems to bless you. It's your bag of tricks. It's your game.

It's your shtick. It informs everything that you do. Cut the cord.

Mortify. Destroy it. Let that cart go.

Let it go today. If there's anything you're dragging along behind you, cut the cord. It's a cord of vanity.

And it will destroy you. The word vanity is the same word for nothingness. It's often translated idolatry, emptiness.

Sin brings such bondage. But the truth will make you free. Purity will bring you peace.

Holiness will bring you happiness. Obedience will bring you blessing. But these people here in verse 19, they act as if God is not even there.

Like He doesn't even see that cart. They act like God is blind and they say in verse 19, Let Him make speed and hasten His work that we may see it. And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come that we may know it.

They're testing God. They're acting like God isn't there. They're acting like God doesn't see.

They're acting like God won't punish them for dragging along that cart. Psalm 14 says, The fool says in his heart there is no God. That's exactly what they were doing.

They misunderstood what was going on. That God does not always judge immediately. They're experiencing His long-suffering.

He waits. He waits and they're experiencing the mercy of God. He's showing the utter absurdity of rejecting God.

Because it's mercy that has kept His judgment from coming down. And then He shows the result later on. The fourth woe.

The redefinition of truth and beauty. Verse 20, Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight.

This just shows us relativism is not new. Abandoning moral distinctions is an old thing. It just helps us to see how you measure decline in a culture.

You look for the things that people love, the things that people say that are true, and you'll find what that culture is all about. It says they put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Does anybody really wonder why people feel so bored in our society? Why they feel so sick? Why they feel so frustrated and unsatisfied? So discouraged, so disappointed, so angry? It's because of this very thing here.

It's because of calling good evil and evil good and putting darkness for light and light for darkness and bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. That's why. We've exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

We've exchanged beauty for ugliness. And notice, they call it. They call good evil and evil good.

It's what you call something. It's your judgment. It's the judgment call that you make about something.

We call so many things good that are evil. We call sodomy being gay. We call murder of a baby a choice.

We call civil unions something that it isn't. We live in a world where we call things the wrong things. And it says they call and they put.

Do you notice that? They call and they put. And that means that they are appointing one thing and replacing it for another. And it takes us back to the fall where Eve rejected the goodness of God and traded it for evil.

Where ugliness ends up passing for beauty. And you can see it in so many areas. The perversions of manhood and womanhood and sexuality and moral rebellion.

Even in our schools today, it's illegal to say that man is made in the image of God and Jesus Christ is Lord. It's the spirit of the Antichrist, literally what the Apostle John says. The spirit of the Antichrist is those who say that Jesus is not the Son of God.

And why did this happen? Well, they couldn't see that God was good. They couldn't sing that song of Isaiah. They just couldn't sing it.

They couldn't sing, Oh, my Beloved! My Beloved has made such a wonderful vineyard. They couldn't see the value and the beauty of the Word of God. They couldn't see the help of the Holy Spirit.

They couldn't see the love of God and the fellowship of the saints. They just couldn't see it. And because of that, they couldn't sing.

Woe number five, their self-congratulatory pride. Verse 21, Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight. They are impressed with themselves.

They are self-congratulatory. This is one of the great problems of all people is our self-talk is so self-congratulatory. We think better of ourselves than other people think of ourselves.

Do you realize that? Just wait a second. Do you understand that? That you actually think better of yourself than most people think of you. Maybe you would argue with that, but that's my view.

Most people think that they are prudent. Most people have such a great self-image in the sense that they talk to themselves and they praise themselves for what they say to themselves. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes.

Solomon said in Proverbs 3, Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil. It will be hell to your body.

And nourishment to your bones. And later he says, Do not lean on your own understanding. Fear the Lord and shun evil.

But we think we're so wise and we think we're so discerning and we exalt our insight. We think we know so much and we speak about it. We shoot our mouths off about what we think we know when the truth is we don't know it at all.

And how did this happen? It happened because these people could not sing of their Beloved. They could not see that God was so good. And then there's arrogant bravado, the sixth woe and final woe.

Verse 22, Woe to men mighty at drinking wine! Woe to men valiant in intoxicating drink! So this is the male Epicureanism of the man cave. This is the man who's exalting in all the wrong things. He's boasting in all the most ridiculous things.

And he acts like he's such a strong man, but in reality, it makes him nothing. He's boasting of ridiculous things as if somehow drinking a lot could make you a man. How ridiculous is that? It's the disfigurement of man.

The men of Judah spent their strength and their virility on wine and drinking bravado. Wine was mentioned in verse 8, but in verse 22 it's a different issue. It's boastfulness and bravado.

It's building your image as a strong man on something that's absolutely stupid. On bravado. That's the idea that's there.

It's tragic to see manhood wasted. Measuring your manhood on the wrong standard. Acting like manhood is one thing with your bravado when it's actually something else.

Your humility. It's humility that makes a man great, not bravado. And we have this vision of manhood that is so messed up.

Manhood defined on how many toys you have or how good you look or how strong you are or how many women you can allure. It's nothing but escapism. The play, the sports, the alcohol.

It's ridiculous. And the men of Judah are acting like big shots because they can drink alcohol. But Scripture paints a very different picture of manhood.

And remember, every public sin was a private sin for a long time. And how men end up getting their lives so disfigured in their manhood happens by degrees. It happens by accepting an idea that's wrong and then continuing to go down that line.

We've seen what happens when manhood dies. We saw it in chapter 3. And it's brought up again right here in verse 23. When manhood dies, you have a corrupt judicial system.

Government is supposed to assure partiality. They justify the wicked for a bribe and take away justice from the righteous man. You lose your men on the altar of bravado.

William Penn said it's better to have good men and bad laws rather than bad men and good laws. But this happens because they cannot sing. They cannot sing of their beloved.

They cannot see that God is good. And then after these six woes, now comes the judgment. The news of the judgment begins in verse 24 as you can see on your outline.

The judgment is described. Again, this is the second to the last therefore. There's another therefore in verse 25.

And there are three images here that show the effect of the judgment of God. And he says the judgment is like three things. And he's giving you images to get your mind wrapped around what is going to happen if you reject the grace of Jesus Christ.

And when you can't sing to Him and say He's your beloved, what will happen? And he gives you three images. There's a fire. There's a rotten root.

And there's a blossom that vanishes into thin air. Those are the three images. He's trying to help you get it.

God is so kind. Think of the graphic ways that He's given us to understand His thoughts and His intentions of His heart. Well, here they are.

First of all, they're devoured by fire. Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble and the flame consumes the chaff, the sin is like the fire and it just consumes. It consumes and it consumes itself.

This is the great tragedy of nursing sin in your heart. Remember, every public sin was a private sin for a very long time. Recognize what will happen.

It will burn to the ground. And then a rotten root. So their root will be rottenness, verse 24.

There are two things you can picture here. The falling apart of rottenness. But that's not the image.

It's the stink of rottenness. It's a stinking, rotten, foul-smelling root. Just like those stinky grapes.

And then their blossom is destroyed into thin air. And their blossom will ascend like dust. The blossom in this context, using the word that Isaiah has chosen, is the word of a flower.

You can picture the beauty of a flower. You can think of how remarkable flowers are when you look at them closely. How intricate, how stunningly beautiful they are.

And it makes you desire to partake in its aroma, to smell it. But what this says here is that the blessings of God will fly away. They'll be like dust, like powder.

They'll blow away as nothing. And their temporal glory will fade. They will fade.

So these three images, the fire, the rotten root, and the blossom that goes away into thin air. That's probably why the word for idol is the word for nothing. Because it will all go away.

Everything you trusted in that was worldly will go away. Isaiah already said you'll be embarrassed that you served that idol. Isaiah already said that you'll actually despise your idols and you'll throw them to the ground into the mole hole.

You'll throw them to the bats. You won't care about them anymore because they'll be destroyed. And then the reason for the judgment, again, is at the end of verse 24.

Notice the remarkable clarity here. Because they rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel. It was because they did not love the Word of God.

They could not sing of their Beloved. They despised Him. They rejected the law of the Lord.

It's such a tragedy when a people reject the law of the Lord. They regarded it as inadequate. They dismissed it.

And I would just say again, when you think about dismissing the Word of God, about not taking it seriously, recognize this principle again that every public sin is private for a very long time before. And when one does not love the Word of God, they need to recognize the danger that they're in. And then it says in verse 25, we begin an explanation of the destruction.

And I've listed them here in your outline. First of all, His anger, His hand, and so forth. His anger.

The anger of the Lord is aroused against His people. The word that He uses is like the nostrils of your nose being inflamed. It's outrage.

After He's done everything He could, after He so well appointed His vineyard, His love was spurned. His grace was rejected. And they could not sing to their Beloved.

And they could not appreciate His gifts of grace that He had given. And they set them aside. They set aside the truth of God for a lie.

And God was angry. And then His hand, verse 25, He stretched out His hand against them and stricken them. And the hills trembled.

And then the carcasses are in the streets, in verse 25. Their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.

There's no one there to bury. We notice again here that natural forces, as we call them, are deployed by God. Again, Isaiah is showing us how to understand the uprisings of nature.

Nature is not always operating according to consistent laws that bind it. God controls nature. There's this gigantic storm that we've been seeing on the news recently.

Recognize where that came from. God rules the winds and the waves. He does what He pleases in the world.

And this is another picture of it here. Nature is wired by the impulses of God. And He stretches out His hand and He does what He wishes.

We've already seen that God controls the productivity of the land earlier. That 90% of the seed fails. How did that happen? It happened because of God.

God controls nature. God blesses the land and He curses the land. And then there's summons.

There's summons. He will lift up a banner to the nations and whistle to them from the end of the earth. He'll hiss at them.

He'll whistle and they'll come. The nations will come. And notice there's speed in their diligence.

They'll come with speed swiftly. No one will be weary or stumble among them, nor will they slumber or sleep. Well, these are very speedy and diligent soldiers.

This is a prophecy of Sennacherib's army coming. And he's telling them what this army will be like. Again, Sennacherib and his destruction of Judah is a picture of God's destruction of evil in the last day.

All the various judgments and destructions are types of the coming judgment. And here we see the swiftness and the diligence of it. We see the superiority of their weapons.

In verse 27, "...nor will the belt on their loins be loose, nor the strap of their sandals be broken. Their arrows are sharp and their bows are bent. Their horses have seemed like flint and their wheels like a whirlwind." Their weapons are superior.

They're powerful. They're vanquishing. You cannot stand against them.

Again, this is a type of the judgment of God. And then you see their fury in verse 29 and 30. "...their roaring will be like a lion." They will roar like young lions.

Yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey. They will carry it away safely and no one will deliver. In that day, they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea, as if one looks to the land.

"...Behold, darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened by the clouds." So, God will judge. And He has explained exactly how He will do it. All of these are pictures of the final judgment.

But they are absolute descriptions of the destruction that Sennacherib will come in a moment of time to come and destroy Judah. You know, God is the God of history. He raises up nations for a particular purpose.

And He has raised up Sennacherib and the Assyrian armies to swoop in and come and be the hand of His own judgment upon the people. You know, when you think about the way God judges, recognize this. You may think some evil person is hurting you, but actually you might think again that God is bringing some discipline for His own purposes.

Well, let's move to some applications here. First of all, in this passage, at least in the last three-fourths of this passage, there's no salvation here. There's only judgment.

All you see is a dead end. You see a box canyon. You see a cliff.

You see a buzzsaw. You see the things that will cause destruction. That is all that is here.

And I think the message is flee from the wrath to come. Believe in the Gospel. Cry out to God and ask Him to help you learn how to sing.

Ask Him to show you His loving kindness. That you would see it. That you would see the beauty and the power of His Word.

That you would love it. And that you could be like Isaiah and say, I will sing of my Beloved. My Beloved has made such a well-appointed vineyard.

Pray that God would give that to you. If you're not in that place, it is true that we can be destroyed. Also, notice what happens to those who reject God.

Notice what you're dragging behind you. The heavy weight of worldliness. This cart that you're pulling.

An animal should be pulling it, but now you've become the animal. And just recognize where independence and self-sufficiency and the flesh gets you. Well, in this passage, here's what it gets you.

Your fruit-bearing ends. There's no fruit-bearing. You throw out ten seeds, 90% of them die.

Just recognize what happens with sin. It's so destructive. And let's talk more about sin.

These woes are identified as very public sins. And again, I want to say it one more time. Every public sin is a private sin for a long time before.

Men are afraid of others knowing about their sin. But the Bible says, confess your sins one to another. This is where healing begins.

Secret sins that ought to be confessed should be confessed so that the wrath and the judgment and the fire and the horse's hooves and the fury will not come upon you. That everything might be burned to the ground. You cannot play with sin.

Be killing sin or sin will be killing you. You know, the lie is so exposed here. The lie, the false promises of sin are so clearly laid out here.

So, who are you in the story? Who are you in the story? Are you Isaiah who says, let me sing of my Beloved? Where your heart says, I love You, Lord. Your heart says, I've known Your love. I've known Your mercy.

I love Your Word. I cherish Your presence. Like David who said, when You said, seek my face, my heart said to You, Your face, Lord, will I seek.

Are you Isaiah in the story? Or are you like the men of Judah, upon which such a sad story is played? So many woes. So many sorrowful things. Is God saying of you, Ah! Oh! Oh, the pain and suffering that that child is receiving because of his rejecting the law of God.

So, who are you in the story? There really are only two kinds of people in this room. There are those who love to sing and there are those who love to sin. Those are the only two.

How marvelous it is to be able to sing. To be able to thank God for His loving kindness. How marvelous it is to speak of His love.

Would you pray with me? Lord, oh Lord, that You would give us such love for You, that You would make us a people with such capacity to sing of Your loving kindness. To sing of Your love forever, to sing it in the morning, in the midday, at the end of the day, and now together as we're here on the Sabbath day. Oh Lord, that You would give us voices to sing with all of our hearts toward You, that we would sing to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to You today.

A whole day dedicated to it. Oh Lord, I pray that You would give the gift of song to us, to all of us, that You would not leave one behind. And Lord, that You would have mercy on anyone who is still carrying that cart rope, that You would give them strength to cut the cord and to mortify and to sing.

Amen.

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