

Here we are the last Sunday of 2019 and the last installment of our study of Isaiah. What a ride it has been!

It is also the time of year that we begin thinking and strategizing for New Years resolutions. Many of us are fully acquainted with resolutions, but for those of you young enough to not be tainted by such silliness, resolutions are goals to start or end habits, usually to live better and be happier than the year before. Have you been thinking about yours?!

According to INC magazine, who did a recent poll on resolutions, here are the most common: Diet or eat healthier; exercise more; lose weight; save more and spend less; learn a new skill or hobby; quit smoking; read more; spend more time with family and friends...

While committing can be hard, and with many of these we are likely to quit, I think there is some good in the idea of resolutions. Taking on life-shaping challenges that get us closer to the ideal. Maintaining an orientation toward healthy things that help us experience life the way it is meant to be? A deeper question still, is there actually a way life's meant to be?

Yes.

Isaiah, in its final poem gives just such a posture living under God. It is ours for the taking and it is really good.

**The way to life is surrender to Christ.**

### **Isaiah 66:1-24**

We arrive at the destination, the final poetic warning and invitation in Isaiah. It has been quite the journey, and still it beckons us onward, to more of God, more of his promise, more of his purpose for the faithful remnant, those that don't merely claim faith but live it.

In these verses we see the destiny of those that are found and kept by God. We see the posture that best shapes those that profess faith in Jesus and the posture that should strengthen our resolve for life.

Three movements in the text that begin with the greatness of God.

### **1) God is bigger than you think**

**Isaiah 66:1–2** “Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? [2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD.” (ESV)

The foundation of the description of the faithful remnant starts with who God is.

There is a human tendency to box God in, to put him in a place we can manage his reach, or fence in his power. Here we have what is a warning to Judah for their return from exile to not be so “temple centric” in their pursuit of Yahweh. His presence is known in the temple but he is too big to reside only there.

Regular tendency for us - to dilute God to a pocket charm that approves of our ways of thinking and living. To that Isaiah says “whoa! God is bigger than you think!”

His fullness fills heaven and earth and it is before him that all of humanity must stand and give an account of following his way or disregarding him.

*It's A Wonderful Life* - opening scene has God as just once swirling galaxy in the sky when in reality he holds the cosmos, all of it made by his hand, all of it under his direction.

This is the punctuation of everything Isaiah has revealed of God. His ways are higher, his thoughts higher. He is perfect, powerful and purposeful. He is holy, in him there is no corruption.

The transcendence of God... God is above, other than, and distinct from all he has made - he transcends it all. Paul says that there is "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**Ephesians 4:6**). Scripture says elsewhere, "For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods (**Psalms 97:9**; cf. 108:5).

We are then meant to feel our smallness before him. We have to start there to understand him. It means he is not to be messed with. We stand as a gnat before the vastest of oceans.

Life under God leaves us longing for mercy and grace. It keeps us low. But when we ignore God or keep trying to put him in a manageable little box, things can go sideways... and Isaiah gives us a picture of that.

## **2) Idolatry Won't Stand**

Idolatry is giving divine honor or respect to anything other than God. Making something else the most important thing in life. It is living like the things we have or people we meet are gods... worse still that we are god.

The longing for grace before the bigness of God is meant to humble us, but lost in our pursuit of self, we trigger judgment.

Many in Judah were guilty of that. They turned to other sources of protection, they were influenced by other cultures and mixed worship of Yahweh with worship of self. And that's no beuno.

**Isaiah 66:3–4** “But those who choose their own ways— delighting in their detestable sins— will not have their offerings accepted. When such people sacrifice a bull, it is no more acceptable than a human sacrifice. When they sacrifice a lamb, it's as though they had sacrificed a dog! When they bring an offering of grain, they might as well offer the blood of a pig. When they burn frankincense, it's as if they had blessed an idol. 4 I will send them great trouble— all the things they feared. For when I called, they did not answer. When I spoke, they did not listen. They deliberately sinned before my very eyes and chose to do what they know I despise.” (NLT)

“They did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.”

Because God is big, and holy, and true, the people are supposed to follow him, worship him but instead they are set on their own way, their impulse, their inclination. And it brings judgment.

The writer of Hebrews rightly exhorts believers to offer acceptable worship because “God is a consuming fire.”

**Isaiah 66:15–17** “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. [16] 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. [17] “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.” (ESV)

When faced with this big God, if we think we are bigger, we are destined for destruction. And this rightly adds gravity to our existence. Life is not a whim, flitting from one moment to the next, but under our Creator, the holy God.

“Every one of us is constantly reaching out for one or the other – for our self-salvation for our glory or for God’s salvation for his glory. Everyone of us is living a life that reveals the true tilt of our souls, one way or the other.” RO

We resolve either to live for self and false promises of the things we prop up as gods, or we let the longing for grace before a huge God do something else in us. What it is supposed to do.

### **3) Surrender is the Way**

There is good news here. God not only judges those that reject him and run after idols, he also claims those that are faithful to him above all things.

**Isaiah 66:2b** “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” (ESV)

Before God we realize we can't live up, we can't be good enough, perfect... and we seek help from him. We embrace our unworthiness. And revere his word.

Where there might be an inclination to say "God wants me because I am so great!" The contrite know the truth of their situation. They are brought low by the weight of it, bowing humbly under the awe-inducing glory of God. (*Luke 18, Pharisee Sinner*).

"God does not "look" to the super-spiritual ,the hard workers, the insiders, those esteemed in the world's eyes. He looks to those who humble themselves. Qualification for God's attention comes in this strange way: by admitting our disqualification. This is the nature of the God whose grace is displayed throughout the Bible. This is the God of Isaiah." GTB

Surrendering to his care, to his grace toward us.

These are the ones he claims. These are the remnant that hopes in the end of the story. Who sets their resolutions from this position.

Of course it will be a hard journey - even for Judah there is a sense that those who should support them will mock. **Isaiah 66:5** "Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: "Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame." (ESV)

Those that claim a biblical faith but lack the humility and a contrite spirit actually mock the remnant for living surrendered to God.

"If you long for renewal, if you're willing to sacrifice your religious culture for the sake of the new creation, you will be persecuted. Count on it. There is no easy way for God's kingdom to come into this world, including the religious world." R O

What it delivers is glorious, fruitfulness, comfort, peace... Headed to Zion - to Jerusalem - a picture of the church now and the place of dwelling with God forever.

**Isaiah 66:14a** “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...” (ESV)

This is where the humble are led... this is what they are destined for. And it's not just a rescue from hell but an invitation to belonging, to new purpose.

We are made part of his family and made to rejoice with her and be glad for her...

“In the ways of God, his church provides the whole world with the only true comfort that exist, and it is the very comfort of God himself. That's why in verse 10, Isaiah caused us to stand up and cheer for the church. He saying, “identify with your church let your loyalty be obvious through thick and thin. Why? Your life depends upon it. It is Zions children who will drink deeply with the light from her glorious abundance forever.” RO

And it means living on purpose together.

**Isaiah 66:18** “...the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory,” (ESV)

Bringing in those that the Lord claims from all nations, the humble and contrite spreading the gracious salvation of God. Living under God's smile as we happily bear witness to his worth, come what may!

“All flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord.” Holy delight will triumph forever. And oh how glorious it will be!

So then we endeavor to own for ourselves this humble and contrite spirit, this reverence for his word.

But here is where the news gets all the better... we can only do so because Jesus, the Servant promised in Isaiah, the Messiah, has been humble and contrite in spirit for us.

He humbled himself to enter into human brokenness and undo every sadness. He became God with Us. More than that he knew of our inability to perfectly obey and did so for us in all of his life. He knew of our inability to atone for our sin, to make things right, and he did so for us through his cross. He knew of our need for life and he gave it to us in his resurrection.

Now we live humble and contrite by saying yes to him... with all of who we are. Even when the idols clammer and lure us to some other shiny existence, a way that gives God just a little bit of us, we say yes to the better way in Jesus.

Has anyone seen Frozen II? I won't give any spoilers... but at the outset Elsa is called to something more... *into the unknown*. It seems unreasonable, maybe dangerous, but it is what she was made for... and eventually she says yes.

The road is long and while we know the destination we might be unsure of the scenery on the path, the bumps along the way. But we can still say yes because it is what we were made for.

“Not that by myself I can save anyone, but that I am an integral part of God’s story here on earth. And learning this: that my whole self, and all the gifts and talents God had placed in me—they weren’t in opposition to the plan of God for my life. To interpret that saying attributed to St. Iranaeus, the glory of God is [me] fully alive. It’s my destiny to say yes... And so, whether the voice of God comes in the delicate whisper of the wind or in angelic visitation, may the Holy Spirit give me the boldness to overcome being “afraid of what I’m risking if I follow” and choose to go, one foot in front of the other, into the unknown.” Amanda Martinez Beck

**The way to life is surrender to Christ.**

Let’s resolve to live this way and return when we slip, receive the grace we long for before a holy God.

**Say yes.** Surrender all of who you are to Jesus. Leave the idolatry of lesser things behind and step into the purpose he has for you, as part of his family. You won't be alone. We will walk together.

**Be in the Word.** Endeavor to meet Jesus on every page, to see the life he has for us and the way he brings us home with him. Study it together, consume it like a meal (best dietary change you can make!)

**Tell somebody.** Share the grace of Christ - who was humble for us and shows us that the way up is lower than we think.

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May this be our defining resolution and may Jesus empower us to keep it! Together we can do the next right thing - look forward to this glorious end, home with Christ, live through the journey comforted by his Spirit and community, and invite others into the worship of our King.

Let's live!