

True Worshippers – Isaiah 66:1-14

Introduction – When Jesus met the woman at the well, He told her that the hour was coming, “*and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth...*” (John 4:23-24). Stephen, in his last address before his martyrdom, quoted Isaiah 66 and applied it to the stiff-necked Jews of that generation (Acts 7:44-53). The promises of Isaiah were coming and had come, as were the judgments upon unbelieving Israel. A new worship place and practice had come because there was a new covenant, a new temple and a new Israel for the new creation. Isaiah preaches his final message about these true worshippers, who they are, what they will experience, and what God was and is doing.

True Worshippers are Those Who are Poor and of a Contrite Spirit and Tremble at God’s Word (vv1-4) – Idolaters create a god that can be put in a box of their own making. But God is beyond all we can imagine; He stands apart from, above, over and outside all of the reality of which we are conscious. And yet, when we see Jesus, we see the Father (John 14:9). Jesus is fully God and He is the Creator-God (Col 1:16-17, Heb 1:2-3). We worship God, the Triune-God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can’t build a temple for Him to dwell in; He is the temple and He is building that temple. Who worships there? Only those who are spiritually poor (v2, Matt 5:3-5) and of a contrite spirit (v2, Psalm 34:18, 138:6, Luke 18:13-14). And only those who tremble at His Word. True worship is not only our singing and our prayers. True worship is also deep, reverent listening to the Word declared and preached (1 Thess 2:13). The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 states, “*...when today this Word of God is proclaimed in church through lawfully called preachers, we believe that the very Word of God is being proclaimed and received by believers.*” Every preacher is imperfect and every sermon is as well. But God, by His Holy Spirit speaks the Word to (also imperfect) believers, and accomplishes His perfect ends. Preachers should tremble at the idea of playing loose with God’s Word, adding to it or subtracting from it, twisting it to their own destruction. And all of us should tremble at what is brought to us in the preaching – with an eye to the text receiving it as God’s Word to and for us. One mark of revival is a people with a ravenous hunger for the truth of God’s Word (Matt 5:6). By that Word we work out our salvation with fear and trembling as He works that Word into us (Phil 2:12).

As Opposed To (vv3-4) – Just as Isaiah warned at the beginning of his book (1:11-15), He despises hypocritical worship even if it checks off the boxes He gave as to the externals. This judgment rests upon disobedient Israel as it does upon any in the covenant who in fact refuse to listen to what God clearly says. He sends those hypocrites into a deep, dark delusion (v4, 2 Thess 2:10-12). Jesus was talking about just this in His parable of the invitation to the wedding feast (Matt 22:2-7). In every generation we must ask ourselves as well, which kind of worshippers are we?

True Worshippers are Those Who See God’s Victory and Hear God’s Voice Even in the Face of Present Trials and Persecutions (vv5-6) – The world and the hypocrites will hate those who are the true worshippers, who tremble at the Word. Let me say it again: they will hate you. This is exactly what Jesus warned the new worshippers (John 15:18-21, 16:2-3) and it is exactly what happened to the new worshippers (i.e. Acts 8:1-3). They will mock you (v5) just as they did Jesus (Luke 23:35), and the first generation who believed Christ was coming in judgment (2 Pet 3:3-4). But the voice of the Lord will be heard and those who tremble at His Word will rejoice for He “*fully repays His enemies*” (v6, Luke 6:22-23, Acts 5:41, 2 Thess 1:6-10). Those who tremble at God’s Word will be the ones who truly know what it is to rejoice God’s Word, for one little Word shall fell them (Psalm 46:1-7).

True Worshippers are Those Who Find and Cultivate True Solace in the Community of Mother Kirk (vv7-14) – Throughout Isaiah we have seen how these prophecies find their fulfillment in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the judgment upon Israel for their rejection of the Messiah. And so it is here as well. Vv7-9, along with Rev 12:1-5, conflate Christ’s birth up until His ascension, and the birth of a new nation, all at once. The church is our mother (Gal 4:26) and Pentecost was the birth of a new nations from all nations (Acts 2:41, then also Acts 4:4, 21:20) bringing forth this new creation. It is in the community of the Church (Mother Kirk) that we are promised deep satisfaction in the Lord (vv10-14). Now if this is true, then we should strive all the more to cultivate this rejoicing, feeding, satisfaction, consolation, delight, abundance, peace, glory, dandling, flourishing, and knowledge of the Lord in and among the culture and community of the church (and not first of all in our own little individualistic, atomistic, just “me-n-my-bible” ways).

So where is this New Creation heading? “*Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream*” (Isaiah 66:12). This has come in Jesus Christ and is flowing out from the church to the world in victorious recreative power. This is the river of life Jesus also promised the woman at the well: “*...whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But...will become in him a fountain of water springing up to everlasting life*” (John 4:14). Welcome to the church of our Lord Jesus.