

Isaiah 2:

¹² For the day of the LORD of hosts *Shall come* upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up-- And it shall be brought low-- ¹³ Upon all the cedars of Lebanon *that are* high and lifted up, And upon all the oaks of Bashan; ¹⁴ Upon all the high mountains, And upon all the hills *that are* lifted up; ¹⁵ Upon every high tower, And upon every fortified wall; ¹⁶ Upon all the ships of Tarshish, And upon all the beautiful sloops. ¹⁷ The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, And the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; The LORD alone will be exalted in that day,/

¹⁸ But the idols He shall utterly abolish. ¹⁹ They shall go into the holes of the rocks, And into the caves of the earth, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily. ²⁰ In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver And his idols of gold, Which they made, *each* for himself to worship, To the moles and bats, ²¹ To go into the clefts of the rocks, And into the crags of the rugged rocks, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily.

²² Sever yourselves from such a man, Whose breath *is* in his nostrils; For of what account is he?

The topic for this morning is the destiny of our false gods and alternative loves. We have been talking a lot about idolatry. We pretty well **have to** if we are going to have this word from God through Isaiah change us.

I hope we are becoming very uncomfortable with ourselves. We are tricky. And our hearts naturally are wayward. We are so much like sheep that see that wonderful green grass **that we don't have** and we lose all perspective of what our Shepherd **has graciously given us for our good**. I read this week that all of our hearts are idol factories. We are continually coming up with worship alternatives. I hope we are coming to grips with our own favorite idolatry. I have been seeing a life trend toward my idol. It explains a lot of the trouble I have created for myself. In fact, it explains the trouble I still create for myself. Maybe it explains to us the sin that so easily besets us. I don't know. But it sure helps us understand our histories.

What Isaiah is about to show us is where **all our false gods will end up**. He is about to show us what false worship will accomplish. And we don't even need to guess. We already know. It isn't good.

So again, what are you worshipping? What steals your attention from the worship of God? What do you daydream about? What is the fulfillment or your mental fantasies? What must you have in order to have happiness or fulfillment or meaning? What do you long for humans to say **to you** or **about you**? What

will we **sin in order to get it** or **sin if we cannot have it**? Where do we excuse our disobedience to God?

Idolatry of our hearts is not **our only problem**. But it could be our **most serious one**. Maybe it even lurks behind all the lust of our flesh, the lust of our eyes, and our pride of life. What we covet functions for us as an idol, as surely as if we carve it and put it on our mantelpiece. And oh how good we are at explaining away how the pursuit of our favorite false gods is not really a problem.

¹² For the day of the LORD of hosts *Shall come upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up-- And it shall be brought low--*

Isaiah's audience probably saw the day of the Lord as something positive. They probably thought it would be the day when God would punish all the enemies of Israel and make everything right. And they figured they would sit in **the blessed spot, the box seats**, as God did all this **for them**. So what Isaiah is saying to these people would be received as a surprise. It would probably anger his audience. We see Amos deal with the same topic later.

Amos 5:17-20

¹⁷ In all vineyards *there shall be wailing, For I will pass through you,*" Says the LORD. ¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good *is* the day of the LORD to you? It *will be* darkness, and not light. ¹⁹ It *will be* as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or *as though* he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him! ²⁰ *Is not* the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? *Is it not* very dark, with no brightness in it?

Amos is addressing his audience's wrong conception of what the day of the Lord will really bring. Things will be bad for the Israelites. God will show up. Then things will get worse. The imagery creates an impression that nightmares are made of. It is easy for us to imagine the fear we would have if our lives were threatened by a lion. Then we finally get to where we know the lion cannot get us, and a bear attacks us.

Israel got to this place because they did not love and fear their God. They thought they were God's spiritual children, but they weren't. Isaiah gives us more insight as to why? What was the problem?

12 Shall come upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up-- And it shall be brought low--

This day of the Lord, this day when God settles the account, is going to be a bad day for everything that is proud and lofty. What Isaiah is using is poetry. And poetry is different than normal speech. The writers sometimes take liberties they wouldn't if they were just writing a paragraph.

Now, this day of the Lord, what is it referring to? It is kind of funny but no matter **what stand we take on this** we will find that there is another camp that finds these to be fighting words. The reformed camp is likely to view this as an event

that will happen in the near future. They say it is described in figurative terms, in poetic terms. So the descriptions don't really need to be taken literally. Maybe it is describing the conquering of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The folks that take this literally will ascribe this time to the Lord taking control of the earth at some future time. And then there are those who say it is a little of both. It may be something that happens once figuratively and then has a more literal fulfillment later. I will probably take that approach until I am convinced otherwise.

For our purposes we can see a principle that is very good for us to focus on. In that day the focus will be on the proud and lofty. Anything proud and lofty must go. Then Isaiah will make a list of either figurative or literal things that he is talking about.

The word for proud is the opposite of humble. Lofty simply means to lift something up. Now let's look at Isaiah's list.

¹³ Upon all the cedars of Lebanon *that are high and lifted up*, And upon all the oaks of Bashan; ¹⁴ Upon all the high mountains, And upon all the hills *that are lifted up*; ¹⁵ Upon every high tower, And upon every fortified wall; ¹⁶ Upon all the ships of Tarshish, And upon all the beautiful sloops.

Isaiah is describing all the things that inspire awe. They are things that are impressive to humans. The cedars and oaks are the largest trees. The high mountains are the highest spots. The high towers are man's highest buildings. The fortified walls are the safest places that man can create. The ships of Tarshish are the best ships.

Now idols are usually also placed on these highest points. Also a person hearing this may have instantly identified that Isaiah was talking about Phoenicia. It had all of the things described. It had the highest mountains, the biggest trees, and the nicest ships. Phoenicia also was a constant source of idolatrous worship. Jezebel had ties with Phoenicia's royal stock.

The danger of Phoenicia's idolatry is that it encouraged adding the new idols with the old idols. It didn't demand that a person worship only their idols. Their idols can slide right in with what they currently worship. This would have made it far more seductive to these Judeans. They didn't have to abandon the worship of their God. They could just do something that seemed to add to it. They could have the best of both worlds.

But God didn't see it that way. God is very jealous. One of the commentaries said this.

Everything in the world that exalts itself against God is brought low when his kingdom comes.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

I think that pretty well describes the intent of this passage. Have we ever considered how our idols will fare when we die? In fact, simply aging removes

many of the promised blessings of our idols. No one takes money, sex or power to the grave. And Proverbs describes the process we go through that steals our enjoyment of much of what life has to offer.

What high and lofty things have we directed our lives to? What have we been willing to spend our time and resources for apart from the things of God? For what purpose?

Isaiah describes to the Judeans how God is going to wipe out all the things that are most admired by man. All the things we are so prone to be impressed with will be leveled. All the high things will be brought low. All the impressive things will be destroyed. All the things we are so tempted to worship will become humbled.

The point? Nothing is worth worshipping that is going to be destroyed. Nothing is worth worshipping that cannot withstand the wrath of the Creator. And ultimately the conclusion any wise person must come to is that God, Himself, is the only fitting object of worship.

¹⁷ **The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, And the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; The LORD alone will be exalted in that day**

Here is the point. Now, let's think about the wicked. Doesn't it just get our goat when they are allowed to enjoy those things we secretly want? Is it not true that they seem to get the lion's share of money, sex and power, the things our human hearts seem inclined to want to have? Isn't it easy to envy them? I know I have certainly fallen into that trap. Sometimes our anger against wickedness isn't motivated by our love for God and our desire for God's glory. Often it is motivated by the fact that the wicked get what we wish we could get. What we are really exhibiting is envy and coveting.

Well, here is a truth that puts everything into perspective. But we have to **have faith in God** to believe Him and trust Him. We have to be mature enough to wait for that which we most want. The loftiness of men, the heights men have reached in success and achievement and their pursuit of pleasure and their pursuit of money and anything else we can think of, the heights that they have reached will be ultimately altered. **They are coming down.** They are coming down. They are not to be envied. It doesn't matter how much money they have. It doesn't matter how many conquests they can brag about, it does not matter how many lives they control. They are coming down.

All of the gods that they served will not deliver them. Their gods will not come through in the end. And the devil will jeer at them for being such fools as to believe anything he would provide would satisfy them.

Now tell me, do we really want to be them? Do we really want to have **what they have had** and **pay the price they paid to get it**? Do we really think their gods will **treat us** any better than **they have been treated**.

Think about any non believers that you catch yourself envying. Apply this truth to them this week. It will help you wean yourself of envying them.

¹⁷ The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, And the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; The LORD alone will be exalted in that day

We see here that in the battle of idols, there is only one **last one standing**. He is the Lord alone. That which has been true all along will finally be seen with great clarity. There really only ever was **one true God**. There was only ever one true source of everything that our soul needs. There was ever only **one true spring** to quench the thirsts of our greatest desires. There was only ever **one true thing** that we really needed. The Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

Christ will stand on that day with no competitors. All of those who had lofted up anything but God will lie in a heap. That which has always been true that believers believe by faith, that will finally be seen clearly by all onlookers. Faith will no longer be required on this day. Sight will be enough.

Notice here too what is in focus. Isaiah was first talking about **physical things**. But he eventually summarizes the **real problem**. He says the **haughtiness of man**. You see there is no problem with the trees or the mountains or even nice ships. The problem is that the heart of mankind will always find some alternative to worshipping God. The heart of mankind will always find some way to remove the bonds of God from their lives. **The problem with stuff isn't stuff**. The problem with stuff is **the human heart**. So where Isaiah goes next makes perfect sense.

¹⁸ But the idols He shall utterly abolish.

Remote tribes have a sense about them that often proves to be much wiser than us western civilization sophisticates. To most tribal people, power wins. They will pick their god based on who has the most power. And when they encounter Christ, they sometimes see that all their other imposters have met their match. But we often choose our gods much more foolishly. We can see that this god has **never delivered** what the worshipper longs for, but somehow we think this god will deliver what **we** long for. So we chase after success, money, popularity, praise, admiration, adoration, and on and on the list goes. We think a Mr or Ms right will fulfill all our longings. We think the next entertainment opportunity will satisfy our soul. We think the next pleasurable image will somehow satisfy us. And we are dumber than the most ignorant tribe in our reasoning. The gods we are trying to worship have never had any power.

Now the only true God says what He will do with all his imaginary competitors. He will utterly abolish them. Now, what is the setting in which he will do this?

¹⁹ They shall go into the holes of the rocks, And into the caves of the earth, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily. ²⁰ In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver And his idols of gold, Which they made, each for himself to worship, To the

moles and bats,²¹ To go into the clefts of the rocks, And into the crags of the rugged rocks, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily.

God is going to express His displeasure in His mighty power. Whether this happened in the past or will happen in the future or both doesn't really matter. What does matter is the principle of how God always approaches idols.

God is going to display His power against humanity that is making a stand against Him and true worship of Him. And what will be man's response? Run and hide. To put this in perspective we need to consider who these people are who are left running for the hills.

These are the people who so confidently talked about what their gods could do. They are the people who tried to win others to their own false worship, voicing with great effect that their gods would appease the human soul.

In our day we would imagine all the humanists and the atheists and the hedonists and the leaders of all other religions. We would imagine those who have made a name and a living by selling their false wisdom. The Hugh Hefners and the Bill Nies and the Stephen Hawkings and the Bill Mahers. I only pick these guys because their ideologies are well known. As humans I hope they repent, but it will be hawkers of similar wares who will be running for the hills to get away from the sheer power of God almighty. It doesn't matter how confident they had been earlier. It doesn't matter how confident they were when they smirked against God. Their gods cannot stand up to the true God.

From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty

Over the last century we have done our God a great disservice. Evangelical Christianity, in our effort to win souls has focused on only one side of God. It is the side of the benefits received by those who follow Him. And those benefits are so wonderful they are worth speaking of long and often.

But we have created an impression on our world that God is holding an option out to them where they can **either have things as they are now, or they can have something better**. It is like offering them an exercise plan where they can lose a few pounds and have a better life, or they can go along like they are if they like. We have worked so hard to create a positive and appealing image of God that we have destroyed the real understanding of God.

Our God is a terror. There is nothing more frightening than for a sinner to fall into the hands of an angry God. Human beings apart from God are sitting on the precipice of His wrath with only time standing between them and it.

This is one of the ways that Jonathan Edwards described it.

The Wicked must not think, simply because they are not physically in Hell, that God (in Whose hand the Wicked now reside) is not - at this very moment - as angry with *them* as He is with those miserable creatures He is *now* tormenting

in hell, and who - at this very moment - do feel and bear the fierceness of His wrath.

Our God is a terror to those who will not call upon Him in faith. We are not fundamentally calling out to humans with a plan for self improvement.. We are offering them an escape from certain wrath to come. And we are offering them eternal life in a blessed state, living in gratitude for the one who gave His own life to save them.

Now, let's look at where all these false Gods will end up.

.²⁰ In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver And his idols of gold, Which they made, each for himself to worship, To the moles and bats,

Moles and bats were unclean to the Jews. So were idols. So the unclean goes to rest with the unclean.

Now look at the image here. These people can't get rid of their idols fast enough. They are tossing away gold and silver. Why? There is only one concern at this point, dodging the terror of the one true God. You see, we can float all kinds of alternative worships when God is not displaying His power. We can imagine anything. We can do anything. We can peddle all our secrets to happiness, or whatever. But when the true God shows up, every idol, every imagination of man, every alternative god will be seen for exactly what it is. Worthless. Utterly worthless.

We have got to examine this question. Why do we allow a false god to take any of our time or energy or focus at all? We, of all people, know how utterly foolish it is to look to anything apart from God for the satisfaction of our soul. Only He has the secret to how to live this human existence. Only He has ultimate wisdom. Only He knows what are lives are for. He created us. Why would we, for a moment, give ourselves to the worship of any of our self created idols? Why? Now look at the verdict.

Again, we see the issue. The problem isn't with the idol. The problem is with the man.

²² Sever yourselves from such a man, Whose breath is in his nostrils; For of what account is he?

What kind of man? The idolator. The proud and lofty and haughty man. The one who thinks that He will not answer to God. The one that proposes an alternative, any alternative to the true God. The one that appeals to us with an alternative way to worship.

Now look at how he describes these peddlers. His breath is in his nostrils. That looks to me like the picture of vulnerability. How much difference is there between a person who has breath in his nostrils and one who doesn't? One

breath. One heartbeat. This is the perspective we should have of any man selling any ideology. He is a frail human being close to death.

The comparison must be drawn here between the terror of God and a man with breath. When we look at the comparison we can only have one conclusion. What account is a man when contrasted with God? He is less than nothing. He is not ever worthy of consideration.

What sources are we listening to? Who has our ear? Who do we allow to sell us their false gods? We should respond like instructed here. We need to sever contact from the sources of false worship.

If it is an external source we need to protect our souls. We need to run from it. If it is an internal source, an internal thought pattern we must sever that tie. We must take that thought captive and replace it with truth. Sometimes we need help doing this. But we must do it. It must be done. We must sever any tie that we have with an alternative worship.

I want to close with a good quote.

We think of ourselves as sophisticated, but the fact is, we are too easily impressed. Our self-confidence keeps us from walking in the light of the Lord. So God is calling us to take a bold step. "The greatest need of man is to reject man" and humbly to live for the glory of God alone.

Do you believe that there is enough glory in God to make you happy forever? If you don't, why? What failing have you found in God? The gospel promises that his glory will remake the whole world. Stop valuing the idols you not only **might** lose but inevitably **must** lose. Learn to enjoy God. The triumph of his glory is enough to make your complete happiness forever invincible.

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