

Astonishing Behavior!

Isaiah 24:5-6

John L. Kachelman, Jr.

Sermon preached at Rivergate Church of Christ, Goodlettsville, TN 21 March 2004

Introduction:

I. Every day there seems to be some news report that shocks our sensitivities even beyond what we have come to expect. There are incredible incidents that indicate the very moral fiber of society is unraveling. Human life has lost its value. Moral decency has become "old fashion." Vulgarisms in speech were once shunned but now are encouraged. At times it seems that everything that gave our society value has become the subject of ridicule.

I well recall sister Lora Laycook's expression regarding those students returning from a date. (Miss Lora was a dorm mother of Dixon Hall at Freed-Hardeman University when I was a student there and later my neighbor.) Miss Lora would talk about the various antics that went on when a young man would bring his date back from a night's outing. With curt words and indignant expression she would say, *"Such ought to shock their modesty! Why I cannot believe they do such things in front of God and everybody!"* Astonishing behavior is not limited to our times. The illustrations are easy to find.

1. The prophet Jeremiah witnessed a greater degeneracy in Judah and lamented, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (6:15).
2. Behavior in the time of Noah astonished the Lord (Gn 6:5-7).
3. Behavior in the time of the Judges was appalling (Judges 19:30).
4. Behavior in the Gentile world was disgusting (Romans 1:28).

II. The prophet Isaiah spoke to a nation whose behavior was astonishing. The people believed in God but they wanted a religion of convenience not commitment. They wanted comfort instead of conviction. They sought pleasure not perseverance. As a whole, they were consumed with sacrificing God for self instead of sacrificing self for God.

Isaiah was commissioned by God to speak to these people and to stir them to repentance. They needed to return to their commitment to respect, obey, and honor God's commands that had been discarded in favor of their selfish desires.

The prophet's message addressed this problem by discussing a number of points. One of the prophet's talking points was that Judah should obey God because the disobedient will face the divine "woe" (5:8ff; 10:3; 14:5ff; 15:1ff; 22:5; 29:15-16; 30:1ff; 33:8; 42:20-25; 43:22ff; 44:20; 50:11).

1. Isaiah presents the truth that all mankind is guilty of sin and will face divine wrath

unless they obey God's will.

2. The reality of punishment causes great sorrow to God because He does not want anyone to suffer (Ezekiel 18:23). It is tragic when the tears of God for the lost are forgotten. It is heart-breaking when the compassion of the LORD God Almighty is refused to the dying sinner and focused upon those in spiritual abundance. Some seem to delight in hearing "hell-fire and brimstone" sermons because they enjoy sermons that "do not apply" to themselves. No one should talk about the eternal punishment of the wicked unless they have a tear in their eye that arises because of the great tragedy facing those lost and an acute sensitivity that "lost" may be applied to me. It is also tragic for many to wishfully ignore and treat with unconcern the eternal destiny awaiting those who fail to obey God.
3. Eternal punishment should neither be ignored nor applauded! The eternal punishment of the wicked should be viewed with the sorrow that breaks the heart of the Almighty God whose righteousness must issue the judgment and consign the rebellious souls to an eternity of torment.
4. God had urged Judah to repent and turn to Him in trust. This divine offer was met with astonishing behavior prodded by stubbornness.
5. Can you sense the heavenly Father's heart breaking when He commented upon their rebellion by saying, "But you were not willing" (Isaiah 30:15b).

III. Look at the words of this ancient prophet and examine how that message spoken to an ancient society communicates a critical lesson for today.

Body:

I. The Description of astonishing behavior

What is the true motivation prompting such behavior? How would Isaiah describe those who display such behavior? From the many traits of this kind of person, note two.

A. Mortal reasoning is placed superior to Immortal reasoning! (Isaiah 14:13,14,20; 17:10; 55:8-9)

B. Profession of spirituality is profitless (Isaiah 22:12-14; 29:13)

II. The Depiction of astonishing behavior

The prophet identifies three actions that result when people begin to think they are superior to the Almighty God. The attitude plus these actions all contribute to a sober condemnation of souls on the Judgment Day. Those guilty and facing eternal torment are charged with: "transgressing laws," "violating statutes," and "breaking covenants" (24:5-6). By practicing these three acts people place themselves "above" God thinking that their sins are not wrong. Incredibly these believe they can deliberately break God's laws and not be judged wrong.

Each phrase reveals a heart of rebellion toward the Almighty God. These "profess" to know God but their actions demonstrate their profession is worthless.

- A. The "***transgressing of laws***" reveals they have no respect for the basic guidelines of life.
1. God has ordained "law" to govern life. Thus there is a "rule of law" that governs society so that it is orderly and gives security. This "rule of law" is universal and binds everyone to what is "right" and requires them to avoid what is "wrong."
 2. The self-centered act arrogantly toward this rule of law and transgress its restrictions. They think they are not bound by the law.
 3. The Hebrew term translated as "transgress" literally refers to one "crossing over the line" of what is right. In English we still use that meaning in our idiom "You have now crossed the line!" The meaning is that one has arrogantly gone beyond that which is recognized as right (arrogance has "moved the line" just a little).
 4. The tragic reality is that even in our times there are some who think they can "move the lines" of God's revelation to accommodate their personal desires. These are more interested in what they want rather than what God requires.
- B. The "***violating of statutes***" refers to a deliberate change.
1. These arrogantly thought they were capable of modifying God's commandments (Isaiah 29:16).
 2. Thus what was once "wrong" is now called "right." These re-define the "statutes" (commands; ordinances) of God so that what was being taught was the exact

previously only what God had decided.

THIRD STEP: Once man becomes the "Decider of his path" then the covenant with God is broken.

THE INEVITABLE END: Man is religious but religiously corrupt! (Tit 1:16). The most astonishing thing in this entire process is that those in error think they are really spiritual (Isaiah 29:13-16a). It all began by one thinking God's "lines" do not matter!

III. The Deception of astonishing behavior

One universal fact is illustrated:

When men commit astonishing actions they never realize they are offending God (Isaiah 28:15). The inspired comment on such arrogance is blunt – "You turn things around!" (Isaiah 29:15-16). God's anger burned hot because they violated every command He had given to them BUT *they thought* they were "spiritual." They looked at God's commands and decided they did not like the restrictions, or the meanings, or the relationship. So they changed everything. They "called evil good, and good evil" they "substituted darkness for light and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20).

The tragedy of this attitude is not confined to ancient Judah in Isaiah's time. Many do exactly today what Judah did so long ago. *These decide* that God's limits are not right so they "move the line" just a little. *These decide* that God's statutes are not "relevant" so they change God's commands (Isaiah 30:9-11). *These decide* that God's covenant relationship is too restrictive and should be more "inclusive," so they break the covenant of God and devise their own covenant.

Many in today's religious world have "turned things around" and are contrary to God's revealed will. This is a great tragedy but an even greater tragedy is that these do not realize they have "despised the Holy One of Israel" and have "turned away from Him" (Isaiah 5:24-25).

- A. History is filled with illustrations showing how man desensitizes his conscience so he approves the evil and condemns the good. One such illustration is found in the words of a former Nixon Presidential aide commenting upon the Watergate scandal. Jeb Stuart Magruder said, "We had conned ourselves into thinking we weren't doing anything really wrong, and by the time we were doing things that were illegal, we had lost control. We had gone from poor ethical behavior into illegal activities without even realizing it." This was the problem with the society of Isaiah's day and tragically it is the problem that has deluded our modern society.
- B. Closer to our situation in life is the fact that one can often attend Bible classes and hear expressions that reveal a tragic erosion of belief in the absolute Truth of Holy Scripture. In many places those attending classes are invited to share opinions on "what this verse means to me." Thus it is subtly taught the message and meaning

of Scripture is different to every individual. We are thus urged to discover what the Scriptures mean to "us." Some are too eager to grant, "Well that is what THAT Scripture means to you but it does not mean the same thing to me!" Rare is the teacher who is concerned with what Holy Scriptures means to God! (Isaiah 47:10-11; 48:1b, 17, 18). Just as troubling are congregations where members, not elders, decide that a study of the Bible is "not meaningful" and so the class decides that it will study a "personally meaningful" subject that does not provide proper spiritual nourishment (read again Isaiah 30:9-11 and see how Inspiration describes such people).

Conclusion:

- I. As Inspiration looked at the astonishing behavior of those in Isaiah's day, there was great concern. How could anyone allow themselves to become so deluded and begin thinking that any kind of religion is "OK" with God as long as it is "sincere"? (See Matthew 7:21ff on how sincerity alone is not sufficient but one must sincerely do "all" of God's will).

The prophet urged his audience to do four things in order to escape the sure condemnation. These four things also need to be done today.

Repent of your desertion from revealed Truth – Isaiah 31:6

Rely upon the strength of God for understanding – Isaiah 33:2, 6

Resolve to conform to God's standards and not the world's – Isaiah 33:14b-15

Read the Bible and follow its directives – Isaiah 34:16a

- II. Let us take heed to the tragedy of a self-directed religion that is revealed in Isaiah. Let us make sure we *honor* God's absolutes, *follow* God's commands, and *maintain* integrity in God's Church. Let us read the Scriptures and obey their simple commands. Remember, and avoid, the three-phase process of apostasy:
1. God's absolutes are "re-drawn."
 2. God's commands are "re-defined."
 3. God's covenant is "rejected."