Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Nation in Crisis
Scripture: Isaiah 5
Code: 80-228

The current election indicates a division in our country, and we have been hearing that repeatedly through the media, television and radio and in print, that our country is greatly divided. Our country is greatly divided. We can see how...how severe the division is, because of the closeness of the vote and the inability to...to borrow the words of Peter...make our calling an election sure. If you're looking for that, it's 2 Peter 1:10.

But the current election, with all of the pundits and all of the commentators and all of the words that have been offered toward this particular event, is not really properly understood. I haven't heard anything that really properly grasps what's going on. And I'm gonna tell you what I think is going on from a Biblical perspective and from a Christian perspective. And I'm gonna point out what I think is the real division. This is the division that is so disturbing to Christians...And it's not about economics, and it's not about taxes, and it's not about deficits, and it's not about surpluses, and it's not about prescription drugs, and it's not about entitlements. And the division is really not about anything that is political or that is social. The fact of the matter is both candidates in this time in American history...are in an environment where socialized economics, reallocation of wealth, big government, excessive taxation, are firmly established...and can only be slightly altered by either party, if at all.

And, frankly, in those areas, it doesn't matter who is president. There just isn't that much difference...The division that disturbs us is not about any of that. The division that disturbs us is about...the Bible. It's about morality as defined by the Scripture. It's about Christianity and its place in American society. And to be honest, the current Democratic agenda is pro-abortion...pro-homosexual, pro-lesbian, pro-feminist, anti-Christian, and exclusive of Biblical standards. Essentially, no true Christian can support that agenda. It's a new day in America.

What we have is a division about the Bible, about morality, about Biblical standards...and that is what is so disturbing to us. When Bill Clinton was elected the first time back in 1992, most Americans, 63 percent, didn't want him as president. It was known at that time that he was an immoral man. It was later confirmed...time and time again. But you could see during the eight years of his presidency his popularity growing, and his rate of acceptance and satisfaction getting higher and higher. The people more and more began to approve of him.

In this election, there is a larger number than 37 percent. There is a larger number of the non-moral, non-Christian population. And now his partner for all those years and one who holds essentially to

his standards and his ethics and values and morality has 50 percent of the popular vote. I'm convinced that, by the next election four years from now, another generation of young people will have entered into voting age, and they will carry the attitudes that are pervasive in the culture today. And what was a 37 percent vote eight years ago and is now a 50 percent vote could well be a 60 percent vote. For the non-Christian, non-Biblical, non-moral position.

This was confirmed to me in one interview I heard where a television commentator was interviewing Dick Morris, who was the White House Secretary with the Clintons for a number of years before he was discredited by his own immorality. And he was asked by the commentator when Hillary Clinton won the state of New York, if he could define her in one word. And he, without hesitation, answered amoral. What we're seeing in America is the death of morality. What we're seeing in America is the death of Biblical standards. What we're seeing is the displacement of Christianity. Morality and Biblical commitment are fading in our nation, and fading before our very eyes. And Christians, frankly, I think, are disturbed. Not so much because we want George Bush to win, but because we want Al Gore to lose. And it isn't personal...We really would prefer one last hurrah for what is moral...one last hurrah for what is right and righteous and Biblical. We would like to believe that we can hold on...for a place in our society for God's Word...But it's a losing battle...It's a losing battle.

I want you to turn Acts chapter 14 for a moment...and I just wanna make a couple of comments about a...a text there. In Acts 14, we get a perspective that I think is important...The Apostle Paul, along with Barnabas in this case, and anybody else who does what Paul did, describes himself as a preacher of the Gospel. Verse 15 of Acts 14, about a third way into the verse, he says, "We are also men of the same nature as you and preach the Gospel. We preach the Gospel to you in order that you may turn from these vain things...that is idols, false religion...to the living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." Paul says, "We are preachers, and we preach about the one and only God. The true and living God. And we preach to you the Good News of that true and living God, that sinners can be reconciled to Him.

And in verse 16, he says, "In the generations gone by, He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness." And that's the story of human society, folks. All the nations rise and fall. All the nations come and go. In the midst of all of that, God always has His preachers who are preaching the Gospel. He is never without witness. But the cycle is always the same...

Verse 16 says that, "In the generations gone by," He can look at all of human history, "God permits all the nations to go their own way." There is no way to stop the cycle...

Someone well said, "If men have learned anything from history, it is that men never learn anything from history." And so you have people today working feverishly to save America. To save America. And that's very normal, and it...it pains us greatly to see the declining interest in the Bible, the

massive effort to get the Bible out of the public discourse. To get the Bible removed as the standard for conduct and behavior and law...

But, folks, this is history, and history inexorably repeats itself. And the cynicism of the preacher in Ecclesiastes is justified when he said there is nothing new under the sun. And he went on to say that history is an endless cycle of repetition. "That which has been is now; that which is to be has already been," he said.

And we are now in the cycle. Men and nations follow the same path from glory to dust...from the heights to the depths...from great achievement to destruction...The beginnings are bright, and the beginnings are hopeful and filled with promise. But there's always the slide and the drift, the spiritual entropy that takes over in a fallen world and catapults nations downward and downward into destruction. In fact, every baby born is a living illustration of the inevitable course of men and nations. Every baby is a single illustration, beginning in the loveliness of innocence and infancy, and moving through childhood and all of its bright, shining hope and, finally, to adulthood and decline through maturity to the sad reality of death.

Our own nation is on that same path. America is caught in the doomsday cycle that has caught every nation and will until the Lord comes and establishes the glory of His own Kingdom. We are a dying nation in a world of dying nations and dying people.

And for us, in America, it's hard to swallow, because we had a particularly bright infancy. It all began with such a primitive beauty. It all began with people coming here to this great land to seek out freedom. Freedom to express their love to Christ in a community of people who were devoted to the Word of God. It was in that context that we established our Constitution. It was in that context that we established our Bill of Rights. It was in that context that we designed our government with all of its wonderful freedoms. It was in that context that we established our churches and our schools and our legal system.

The Bible was held high, and the Bible was the source of all truth and authority for life, both private and public. And God was at the center of our activity, and His name is even on our coinage. Worshiping God was a way of life, and churches was the...churches were the hub of communities. There were great preachers and wonderful schools for teaching Scripture. And they all had a...a central place in the life of this nation. There was a standard, and there was a norm, and there was an absolute. And it was the Word of God...

But that was the time of America's infancy. And as maturity came, we began to drift into a degraded adulthood. It was evident. There were some voices that tried to call us back. The...the Edwards and Whitfield and...Moody and others. There were preachers here and there, and churches here and there were crying out to try to stem the tide. But evil has prevailed, and we face the inevitable

judgment of God.

And decline is measurable. It...it may take an election to show us how really measurable it is...We would've hoped for a triumph of morality, even if it was only a 1 percent triumph. Here we are days after an election, and the country is so divided we can't even decide...who the victor is. Immorality has taken us over. And if we do survive this election hanging by a thread in one last hurrah, it's unlikely that we'll make it through the next one...

Where do we go to understand this? Where do we go to understand this cycle and what it all means? Where do we go to get a definition of it? Well, amazingly, I think we go back. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, the Apostle Paul said that the Old Testament was written to give us examples. To give us examples. And if you go back into history and you see the history of the past nations unfolded in the Bible, and the Bible is the truest history ever recorded, because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. If you go back to Bible and watch the rise and fall of nations in the Scripture, you see the fulfillment of Acts 14:16. God, indeed, did permit the nations to go their own ways. And most notably, of all nations, God even saw His own covenant people, Israel, go that same way. There was a people whose beginnings were glorious. Whose beginnings were with the covenants and the promises of God. And with the law of God and the Word of God. And there was a people who were given prophets and priests. There was a people given the law of God in all its definitive manner. There was a people given everything by God to assure a glorious future. But they, too, followed the same cycle and ended up in tragic judgment.

America is not Israel. We do not have a covenant. We don't have divine promises as a nation. The law was not given to us originally. But, though we are not a covenant people, we are not a Christian nation, we are not God's chosen people as was the nation Israel. It is still true that we had amazingly privileged beginnings...We had a freedom here to take the Word of God and to build a nation on the Word of God. Really, that is unique to the world...

Even England, we think about us having such Christian influences in its beginnings. I've been reading an awful lot about that. I'm reading the biography of William Tyndale. While England called itself a Christian country in the 15th and 16 century when William Tyndale endeavored to get the Bible translated into English, the church executed him...because they knew that if the Scripture was ever in the language of the people, the people would read the truth in the Bible, and the entire religious system would come crashing down...

And so while they would be called Christian, they didn't have any of that pristine, pure devotion to the Word of God in their beginnings that we experience in our nation. We have been a privileged people. And, yet, we have followed the cycle of all the other nations. And Israel provides for us a good pattern because of the parallel of privileges.

To see that pattern unfold, I wanna take you back to the Prophet Isaiah in chapter 5 of his great prophecy. Isaiah chapter 5. What I'm going to do this morning is take your through Isaiah 5, and tonight Isaiah 6. and I'm gonna show you the picture of a nation in crisis this morning and why we are subject to this judgment of God. And then tonight I'm gonna show you the kind of person God is looking for...

We come to Isaiah chapter 5, and we come to a huge billboard from the past showing us what to expect, giving us a truest picture, a divine insight to understand what's going on in our country. A model of glorious beginnings and disastrous ending. A model of apostasy. A model of decline. A model of starting with the glorious truth of God and ending up in the judgment of God...

Isaiah begins this chapter with what we'll call the parable. The parable. Isaiah 5. Now Isaiah is prophesying to Judah, the southern kingdom, the judgment of God. The judgment of God is gonna fall on Judah, and it did...in the Babylonian captivity. The Babylonians eventually came and destroyed the land, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, massacred the people, and carried the remaining people who were still alive off into captivity in Babylon...This was the judgment of God, and this is what Isaiah is predicting here.

But the imagery is so graphic and so clear and so parallel to us that it serves us very well. Let's begin with the parable in chapter 5. "Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill, and He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. Then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only boo-oo-sheem, sour berries." Rightly translated by the NAS "worthless ones."

Now this is a song. Verse 1 says, "Let me sing." You can see that it is even written in the text of Scripture in a poetic fashion. This is a song. It is a song from one person to another. From one to the well-beloved. And it is a plaintive song. It is an exquisite elegy. It is a death song, a weeping song, a sad song, a dirge, a requiem. This is the saddest thing that could happen in the life of an individual in an agrarian society. Takes all of his life savings and makes the massive effort to...to put together a vineyard, and does everything that is necessary to guarantee the success of that vineyard, and ends up with worthless, sour berries, inedible. And, literally, this is the story of personal bankruptcy. This is the story of personal disaster. In that culture, as in any agrarian culture, one's complete fortune is tied up into the land and the crops. This is the ultimate disaster. When a man lost his crop, he lost everything. His family lost everything.

Consequently, in ancient times, if you wanted to destroy your enemy...you burned his crop. Like Sampson who destroyed the crops of Philistines by setting the...the tails of the foxes on fire and sending them through the fields, this is the ultimate disaster. If you destroyed a man's crop, you

destroyed the man's life...

On the contrary, when you wanted to guarantee your future, you saved and saved and saved, and you took your money, and you bought a piece of land, and you put grain in it if it was in the valley. Or if it was on the hill, you terraced it and put a...a vineyard there, and you hoped for the success of that, because everything you had was in it. In the days of Isaiah, the stony hills of Judah were...were beautifully terraced for the vineyards. That's true today. The...the grain is in the valleys and the...and the vines are on the hillsides. And this is one of those kinds of stories. The citizens of Judah were very familiar with vineyards, which produced very luscious grapes, and they knew how much toil and how much love and how much care and how much investment had gone into making these vineyards production and how hard people worked to produce it and how great was the hope for a rich return of such an effort and investment. Everybody would understand the horrible, horrible feeling and the devastating result of one who came out and found only small, sour, misshapen boo-oo-sheem. Inferior little berries, inedible, and absolutely useless. Frustration, heartache, sorrow... poverty.

That's the sad song that starts this chapter. In fact, in verse 3, the song is added to with a further explanation. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I haven't done in it?" The question comes, the rhetorical question comes from the...the...the...the vineyard owner. And his question is, "What could I have done that I didn't do? I...I...I...I found the best fertile hill. I...I dug around it, and that would've been a hedge or a moat, a...a...a protection in order that small animals wouldn't come in and destroy the crop or small reptiles or...or insects. I...I did what I could do to protect it. I...I removed the stones which were plentiful." In fact, the old rabbis used to say when God delivered the rocks to the earth, He made a mistake and dumped them all in Israel. There are rocks everywhere in Israel. But he had to clean out all of those and get 'em out of the soil so that the roots could go down to the nutrients and the water there. And you took the soil, and you cleaned all the rocks out. And with those rocks that came out of the soil, you created the terraces which ple--created the flat, level place for the vine to be planted. He did that. He removed all the stones. He planted the choicest vine. He went and found the best bread stalk to put in the ground to guarantee the best result. He put a tower in the middle.

They built a tower so that someone could sit on top of the tower and make sure there weren't any larger animals that were encroaching or...or there weren't people coming in as an enemy to destroy the crop or strangers passing by and eating the crop. They protected it. They also stored all their implements in that tower. They produced an...a...a wine vat, hewing it out of rock, where they could stamp out the grapes and produce the wine. Everything that could have been done was done. He had every right to expect good grapes. And so verse 4 says, "What more was there to do for My vineyard?" The answer is nothing. Nothing.

"Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes, did it produce worthless ones? How did this happen? How did we get to this place? Was it something I did?" No. "Was there something wrong with the soil?" No. There was something wrong in that vine. It may have been the choicest vine. It may have been the best available, but there was something in it that was wrong. That's the implication here.

In verse 5, sad. "So now let Me tell you what I'm gonna to do to My vineyard. I'll remove its hedge or its moat or its protection, its dugout protection, and it'll be consumed. All the animals and all the reptiles, all the insects, everything, all the strangers can come in, trample all over it. I'll break down its wall. I don't care about the terraces anymore. I don't care about the border that surrounds it. I'll lay it waste. I won't prune it or hoe it. Briars and thorns will come up. I'll charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."

This is a curse. This is a curse on an unproductive vineyard. Everything that could've been done was done. And the product was useless. The product was disappointing. The product brings judgment...

What's this all about? Who...who is he talking about? Verse 7. Here is the definition of the vineyard. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, also called the men of Judah." They are His pleasant or delightful plant. He's talking about Israel. He's talking about Judah here. He says, "I put Judah in the fertile hill. I put Judah in Canaan land. The land that flows with...what?...milk and honey. There isn't any more fertile piece of land on the planet...I put 'em there. I put 'em in there in that strategic place with the Mediterranean Sea and with three continents surrounding them, so that they could produce the greatest of products, and they could be disseminated all over the world. I put them in the most magnificent, fertile piece of land there is. Couldn't have been better. I put 'em in a land that has so much, that yields so much. A land of great wealth and promise."

In fact, the original land, as you know, the original covenant to Abraham, the land goes all the way to the east and covers all of the massive fields of oil that the whole world is dependent upon that have made the Arab world so rich. He gave them an incredible place. And he says, "They dug all around, or put a hedge." What is that? That's the ceremonial law. All of the structure of the ceremonial law indicated in Exodus and defined in Leviticus that made it difficult for the Jews to have easy social interchange with the Gentiles. The Lord knew that He had to protect His people from the encroachment of idolaters. Those who worshipped false gods. Those who were immoral. He had to protect them. And so He created a life pattern, dietary laws, laws of clothing, Sabbath laws, festival laws, feast laws, all kinds of laws that had to do with how they dealt with animals, how they dealt with birds and birds' nests, and how they dealt with every area of life. There was this constant defined life that was so different than anybody around them, that it almost demanded their isolation. And that was to protect them from the encroachment of idolatry. And every time they...they began to mingle with idolaters, you remember God warned 'em and warned 'em and warned 'em and warned 'em...

He said, "I removed the stones." What is that? That's very likely that God cleaned out the Canaanites. God told 'em, "When you go into the land, destroy the Canaanites. If you don't get the stones outta there, the nation can't grow and become fertile and productive." Then He says, "I...I planted the choicest vine." Nobody's gonna argue that the Jewish people are a noble part of humanity. And they still are with us today. That same pure strain of Jewish people from the past, from the time of Isaiah. God has preserved the people of Israel. And even in the modern world, in the 20th century, the Jewish people have made massive contribution. For being so small in number, 10 to 15 million people throughout this century, and they have made a massive contribution to the world in science and the arts, medicine. You name it...They're a...a wonderful part of humanity. The choice vine.

He built a tower in the middle of it. No doubt refers to Jerusalem, the parapet, the...the high place from...from which the...the...the rule took place of the kings and...and where the priests and the prophets watched for the protection of Israel...and there is a wine vat. And, perhaps, we know a wine vat is where grapes are crushed and the juice flows out. And it may be a reference to the sacrificial system. "I provided a sacrificial system where blood could be poured out to deal with your sins. I did everything I could do. I gave you the best land, and I gave you the best way to be protected from the encroachment of your pagan neighbors. And I...and I...I even took nations and...and judged them and destroyed them to protect you. And I...I gave you Jerusalem with the prophets and the priests as the watchmen on...on the tower, protecting you. And I...I gave you a sacrificial system to deal with your sins. And I expected good grapes. And I got sour berries. Could I have done anything else? No. And so I'm gonna judge you...verses 5 and 6...I'm not gonna protect you anymore. You're gonna be consumed. Your wall is gonna be destroyed, and you're gon...your ground is gonna be trampled over, laid waste, and so forth."

Specifically, at the end of verse 7, there's a play on words that defines what Israel had done. He said, "I expected, I looked for justice. I expected honesty." That's what that word means. "I expected honesty and integrity and what was right. Instead I got bloodshed." Oppression is another term here. "I expected you to do what's right, but you oppressed people. And I looked for righteousness, and all I heard was the cry of people who were being abused, misused, and oppressed."

They were taking money from people they didn't deserve. They were oppressing the poor and the widow and the orphan...They were not carrying out justice. They were not punishing the criminals. There's a play on words in the Hebrew, by the way. He looked for mishpothbut behold mispock. He looked for settacahbut behold se'ecah...

This is sad, because God says, "I'm gonna judge you. I gave you everything to produce justice and righteousness, honesty and goodness, but got the opposite."...And that's a sad song. And it's the same sad song in America. As I said, we're not the covenant people. We don't have the promise of

God's covenant, and if God's own covenant people could not avoid His judgment, why would we think we will?...God did everything for them. And, frankly, did everything for us...Couldn't have done anymore than He did...But judgment is gonna come...

He gave to Israel the law, the prophets, the covenants, His promises, and He gave that all to us...Same pattern. Israel on whom God lavished so much love and so much labor and so much blessing. And now there's nothing left, Isaiah's says, speaking for God, "There's nothing left. Just tear it down. Let it be trampled and destroyed until the purging is complete."...

At the time, by the way, a man named Uzziah was king. Been king for, well, his total reign was 52 years. And there was great prosperity in Israel. Economically, great prosperity. Strength in the cold war. They had literally kept their enemies from attacking them, because they had such military strength. They had a strong cold war position, and they had tremendous prosperity. And that superficiality of prosperity and power in the world brought a false sense of security...Underneath...they were rotten...and on the brink of judgment.

So we go from the parable to the penetration. Look at verse 8. From the general assessment...to a more particular look at the cancer that was eating the life of the nation. On the surface, Uzziah was a good king, strong, capable. And God had helped him in war so that, as I said, they had kept their enemies at bay. The defenses of Judah and Jerusalem were strong. They had a large and well-disciplined army furnished with the best weapons, according to 2 Chronicles chapter 26. But underneath, there was this...wretched iniquity...and the sour berries of Sodom were abundant in the Lord's vineyard.

God could see what men couldn't see, and He saw the truth. And He tells Isaiah in a series of woes that I'll call the penetration as God goes behind the parable and penetrates the specific sins. Look at verse 8, "woe." Verse 11, "woe." And verse 18, "woe." Verse 20, "woe." Verse 21, "woe." Verse 22, "woe." You have six woes. Woe means cursed, damned, sentenced to judgment. This is a final word of execution. It's never God's way to denounce evil in general and stop. God wants to go behind the general denunciation to the specific sin and say, "This is the sin." That's what He does here. Six specific sins are indicated here.

The first one is in verse 8. "Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there is no more room, so that you have to live alone in the midst of the land!" Let's call this grasping materialism. Grasping materialism. Avarice, greed, the sin that corrupted Judas was true of Israel. Insatiable greed of land owners accumulating land and more land and fields and more field and houses and more houses. Wealthy men ruthlessly acquiring all the property, squeezing out the poor and the helpless and making them buy things at an inflated price. That's what drives inflation. Did you know that? It's materialism that...that drives inflation. And you remember, don't you, that every seventh year, they were supposed to let the land rest? And every 50th year, everything that they had

acquired went back to its original owner. That was called the year of jubilee. And that started the economy all over again and prevented continual amassing and passing on and squeezing out everybody, and so every 50th year, everything went back to the original owner. If you knew that, you wouldn't pay too much for something if you had to give it back in a few years...

God had designed that. But sad to say, they violated those Sabbath years. They continued that grasping materialism. They didn't let the land rest. They didn't free the...the servants. They didn't give back the property, and God sent them into captivity for 70 years. And they were a year in captivity for every one of those years they violated...Grasping materialism.

But what's going to happen, verse 9, "In my ears the Lord of hosts has sworn, 'Surely, many houses shall become desolate, these great and fine houses, these great massive estates that you're building, are gonna be empty, because what's gonna happen is the Babylonians are coming in here, and they're gonna destroy and they're gonna kill, and then they're gonna take captive everybody who remains, and these houses are going to be empty. And not only that, those wonderful fields that you've been adding are going to be non-productive. Ten acres of vineyard will yield only one bath of wine.'" That's four gallons. "You're gonna have ten acres producing four gallons. And a homer of seed...that's 48 gallons of seed...would only yield a crop of grain of an ephah...4.8 gallons." That is a non-productive fee--production. You're gonna go into the vineyards. You're gonna get a tiny, little famine-condition kind of product. The same is gonna happen in the fields. The fields are gonna be untended, uncared for, and unproductive...God is gonna take you out, because you stockpiled wealth, and it's all gonna be deserted...

Certainly, in our own country, we can see a parallel with grasping materialism. That's what's driving this economy. And people today seem to be more concerned about how much money they have than truth and morality, don't they?...I...I read an article one time that said America is like an unloved child with an ice cream cone - fat, full of pimples, and screaming for more...

Materialistic grasping, greedy, indulgent, possessive, and there's some quote unquote Christians who join in this materialism by preaching the false prosperity Gospel that Jesus wants you rich, and they're getting rich in the process. We are worshipping the golden calf...and the church is like Aaron, aiding and abetting it...We're not called to stockpile. We are called to share and to give. We can enjoy the riches of what God gives us as long as we have an open hand and an open heart to those in need. And to give to God Himself.

Second sin is drunken pleasure seeking. This was true in Israel. Look at verse 11. "Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink." Characteristic of an alcoholic. They start drinking when? In the morning. People who are consumed with drinking, they stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them. And it's just...it's not just drunkenness. It's the pleasure seeking. Their banquets, their parties is their word, a drunken pleasure seeking is...is the

combination of drinking and partying, accompanied by lyre and harp and tambourine and flute and wine. This is the good time Charlies. This is the night club. This is the dance club. This is the singles bars, etc., etc. It's just the party crowd.

And verse 12 says, "They do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord." They don't have any interest in the things of God. They don't even consider the work of His hand. That's a phrase used in Amos 6 to refer to the physical body. The body is the creation of God, and they don't even think about the body. They dissipate. It's a...it's a funny culture.

On the one hand, our culture in American, preoccupied with the body, preoccupied with looks, preoccupied with the cosmetics and cosmetic surgeries and...and the body beautiful and gyms and workouts and all of that at the same time plunging that same generation into a life of dissipation that attacks the very body they're trying to preserve.

Drunken pleasure seeking...and he says in verse 13, "My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge." This mindless merrymaking. "The honorable men are truly famished. The multitude is parched with thirst." Here they are, and they're running at the party as fast as they can run, and they're filling it up as fast as they can fill it up. And when they're done, they're hungry and thirsty. They have nothing. Verse 14 says, "The grave has enlarged its throat, opened its mouth without measure. And death swallows the mindless merrymakers. And Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry." That's the party again. "And the jubilant within her descend into it." The party goes right into hell, and "the common man will be humbled, and the man of importance abased." Doesn't matter whether you're a nobody or a somebody, they all go down together. "The eyes of the proud will be abased, but the Lord of host will be exalted in judgment, and the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness."

You can't live like that against the law of God, against the truth of God, against the Word of God, and expect God to prosper the nation. Didn't do it in Israel, and He won't do it in America. He tells 'em in verse 17, "Your...your pastures you have spent so much money and time acquiring would be a place for lambs to graze and strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy." All those empty houses are gonna be occupied by the strangers. And this actually took place. Arabs moved in after Israel was taken into Babylon and occupied the land and the houses.

There's a third sin here that's shocking. Defiant sinfulness. Grasping materialism characterized Israel. Drunken pleasure seeking characterized Israel. And defiant sinfulness. Now, remember, on the surface, everything looked fine. There was prosperity. But underneath, this was what's going on. Defiant sinfulness. This is so graphic. Look at verse 18. "Woe...that's another curse, of course...damnation to those...this is a category of sinners...who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, and sin as if with cart ropes."

Lemme give you the imagery. So much sin, so much iniquity they can't carry it. So they have to get a wagon to put it in and pull it around like a...like an ox. And the cords that they pull with are the cords of deception, or the cords of falsehood. They are liars dragging around a wagonload of iniquity like a brute beast. Filled with sin.

And, again, you look at our country, and you look at the sin, and it's just absolutely staggering. Peoples' lives so full of sin they can't carry it themselves. They have to put it in a wagon and hitch themselves up to it and drag it around. It is promoted in every avenue of media. It is promoted in every realm of education. This massive burden of iniquity. But it's not just sin. It's defiant.

Verse 19, one of the most powerful statements in the chapter. And what do they say? They say, "Let Him...being God...make speed. Let Him hasten His work, that we may see it. And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come to pass, that we may know it!" This is mockery. This is sarcasm. This is saying, "Well, let's see God do something about it if he doesn't like it. Let's see God act. Let's see God hurry up. Let's see His purpose unfold. Let's see it come to pass, that we may know it." And they are mocking God with sarcasm. This is a defiant sinfulness. Open, flagrant, mocking, cursing God, blatant.

There have been some articles written about me recently in the paper in which God is mocked, and it causes me to just shudder when I read the people mocking God. Taunting God. "If You don't like it, do something about it. Let's see You stop it." That's the kind of sin. Flagrant, blatant, mocking God. This is a form, a serious form of taking God's name in vain, taunting God defiantly.

I always think about Ernest Hemingway. I remember reading about him. He...he said that he had proven there was no God, because he had tumbled women anytime he wanted. He had fought in revolutions, and he had lived his life exactly the way he wanted to live it, and nobody had told him that he had to live by some restrained Victorian law or code. And he had defied God all the way along. Fine, that all ended one day when he put a shotgun in his mouth and blew the back of his head off. "Be not deceived," the Bible says, "God is not...what?...mocked." Whatever you sow, you reap.

Then there was Sinclair Lewis, who was the toast of the literary world when he wrote Elmer Gantry. Elmer Gantrywas an assault on Christianity. It had a preacher as the main character who was a...a drunken sot, and who was engaged with prostitutes, and who was taking money from people under the guise of preaching the Gospel. And this was hailed as a great work, and it was ultimately made into a very famous movie. And Sinclair Lewis was toasted around the literary world for his brilliance as a writer. And very few people know how he died. He died as a drooling alcoholic in a third-rate clinic somewhere outside Rome in absolute obscurity...This is characteristic of our world. It's a kind of sin that laughs at God and mocks God and curses God and defies God.

The fourth in these penetrations is to see the sin of moral perversion. Look at verse 20. "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" This is that sin of overturning everything...And we're living in that society. Fornication is good. Restraint is bad. Homosexuality is good. Lesbianism is good. Divorce is good... The reversal of everything. Doesn't even matter that you tell the truth anymore. Lying is better if it achieves your goal...Loving God is bad, because it's politically incorrect... Believing in Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation is bad, because it's unloving and narrow. Subversion of everything. Twisting and perverting of everything. Lifting up the wrong standards, exalting adultery, manipulating the truth, or even setting it aside for the sake of lies, fornication, homosexuality, lust, mocking faithfulness, mocking purity, mocking marriage, moral disintegration, dirty movies, dirty books, dirty television, twisting, perverting, trying to establish a whole new morality...

The fifth sin is arrogant conceit. Verse 21, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!" Are you sick of opinions? Boy, I get sick of opinions. I remember having lunch in my office upstairs one day with the owner of the Los Angeles Times, who also owns a number of other newspapers across America. Very prominent newspapers. And owns a number of network affiliate television stations. And, curiously, he had been coming to the church to hear me preach, and he wanted to meet with me. And so we sat at the table and...and we were having lunch up there. And he said to me, "You know, John," he said, "you have a lot of influence." And he said, "I wanna ask you a question. Why don't you give your opinion on the issues that face our society?"

And I said to him, I said, "I appreciate the asking that," I said, "but do you really want another opinion? You need another one in your newspaper?"

And he kinds smiled. I said, "Really, I...I don't ever wanna offer my opinion. That's not my calling. My calling is...not to give an opinion, but to tell people what God has said. That's what I do. Now, if you have any space for a column like that...let me know." That was the last time I heard from him...

Well, we've rejected the Bible. Now what have we got left? Polls...surveys. Everybody is clever in their own sight. Wise in their own eyes. Giving their own opinion. We're left to that, aren't we?...The only right or wrong we understand is whatever the poll tells us. So it was in Israel. Can you imagine after all that Israel had, this is where they ended up? Well, this is where we ended up after all we had. And arrogant conceit marks us. We sit around with a smirk of self-congratulation as conceited fools who don't know how stupid we are. And then we have the polls that give us the sum of collective fools...

Finally, number six, a corrupt leadership. Corrupt leadership. Don't you wish we could trust leaders?...Well, it was that way in Israel. Verse 22, "Woe to those who are heroes." The word

"heroes" in the Hebrew means leader. "The leaders were drinking wine, and the valiant men...a different Hebrew word for leaders...were mixing strong drink." They were drunk. And, in addition, verse 23, "They were justifying wicked people for a bribe." In other words, they could be bought. "And they take away the rights of the ones who are in the right." They abuse people. There was no equity. There was no true justice...People were buying offices, buying positions, taking bribes. They weren't even in control of themselves, because they were drunk. Perverse leaders...

Drunkenness, bribery, corruption, perverting of justice, and these were the leaders. That leads us to the third point, the punishment. And this is just a brief, clear point. The punishment, verse 24. Therefore...and you can know a transition coming because therefore makes that transition...therefore, it's gonna be...and I'll just give you the kind of the broad sweep here. "Like a tongue of fire consumes stubble, and like dry grass collapses into a flame, like a rotted root disintegrates or a dead blossom blows away like dust." That's what's gonna happen. This nation is finished.

Isaiah says, speaking for God, "It's the end. It's the end." And here's the problem. End of verse 24, mark it, folks, underline it, circle it. It will always be this way, "For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." That's the problem...That is what brings it all about. You reject the word of the law, Lord of hosts, the law of the Lord of the hosts, and the Word of the Holy One of Israel, and God's judgment will fall. And you may be shocked at how fast it comes...because, on the surface, everything looks like it's okay, as it did in Israel...

And verse 25 says, "On this account," that is, on the account of having rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despising the Word of the Holy One of Israel, and, folks, look, it's greater for the nation who has that than it is for the one who doesn't. There are some nations in the world that never did have the law of the Lord and the Word of the Holy One of Israel. We did...We have...

"And on this account of rejecting it, the anger of the Lord has burned against His people." And if it burned against His covenant people with whom He had made eternal promises, you can imagine how it burns against the nation that has no such covenant. "And He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down, and the mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the street." And He's looking ahead at what the Babylonian hordes are gonna do when they arrive. "For all His anger is not spent, but His hand is still stretched out." And it not only went through the slaughter but it...it ended in the captivity of 70 years...

How's He gonna do this? It's gonna be a hostile army led by God. The Babylonians. He's gonna list up a standard to the distant nation. The Lord's gonna be the general. The Lord's gonna lead the Babylonians. That bitter and hasty nation, as Sebekacalled 'em. That Chaldean nation, that pagan nation is gonna be the judge of Israel, God's people. Amazing...

"And God's gonna whistle, send out a whistle to call that army, and it's gonna come with speed swiftly, and the...the language has the image of speed and...and unimpeded motion. No one in it is gonna be weary or stumble. Nobody's gonna slumber or sleep. The army's not gonna have to rest. They're not gonna get tired. They're just gonna come rapidly. The...the belt at the waist is not undone. When a soldier's finished with his day, he takes his belt off because attached to his belt is the apparatus with which he fights. And he unloosens his belt, and...and his garment falls, and he's at rest. But they're never gonna take the belt off. No sandal strap will ever break. The arrows will all be sharp. The bows will all be bent. The hoofs of the horses are gonna be like flint. That's like shining metal. The chariot wheels like a whirlwind. It's gonna roar like a lioness, like a young lion, growl...growls when it seizes the prey and carries it off with no one to deliver it. So much power and so much force, it can't be restrained. It'll growl over it in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land, behold, there is darkness and distress; even the light is darkened by its clouds." The smoke that goes up from the holocaust is gonna blacken the clouds in the desolate land of Israel. That's the judgment...and that comes on a people who are a vineyard, planted with blessing, that produces sour berries...

As we close, go back to verse 24...Superficial prosperity...but rotten roots, dead blossoms. Why?...Grasping materialism, drunken pleasure seeking, defiant sinfulness, moral perversion, arrogant conceit, and corrupt leadership were all indicators that they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel.

And, folks, back to where I started. That is what is so painful about what we're seeing in America today. We are holding on in the hopes that there is still a majority of people...who believe in the Biblical morality, and a place with a Christian faith. But it's hanging by a thread...and it's in decline...I don't know how it's all gonna turn out this election, but I know precisely where it's going, because the judgment of God has already begun.

Our Father, as we look at the Word, we are again amazed at its relevance, at its impact...It gives us the clearest understanding of what we're seeing today, and we watch the politicians, and we listen to the commentators and the lawyers, and we're struck by how little they understand what's going on. This nation is in the throes of its death...We've come through the brightness of our infancy, and now we're in the death struggle...We're going down...And it's not political and economic, and it's not partisan...It's the rise of sin, defiant sin...and the disregard for Your Word that is taking us down...

We see that, and we know that You are honored and glorified, even in Your judgment. But we pray that at a crucial time like this, critical time, we might understand our responsibility...and be used by You as was the Prophet Isaiah...to bring about salvation...even in this great time of crises. We look forward to what You will say to us again tonight. In your Son's name. Amen.

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