

The Real Worship Center
Isaiah 66:1-2
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Obviously today is an important milestone in the life of our church. We are here to dedicate this building to the Lord - not the concrete and steel, but rather how it will be used in the future.

From the beginning, we have called this building the new worship center, and more specifically in the days to come we will call this specific room in which we sit, the worship center. That's not because I admit to you it's a perfect label. It's certainly not. But there is no better name. This is not a tabernacle. This is not a temple. This is not a sanctuary like the Holy of Holies was in Jerusalem. Although some who grew up in Baptist churches may use this name, this isn't even God's house, as if this is where God lived. Technically it's not even the church because you see we are the church. This building now is simply the place where we, the church, come to meet.

So, there's not really a better label for this room than worship center and that is in fact what we will call it. But in one sense, let's admit that even that's not entirely accurate. Because a physical place is never technically a place of worship. Worship doesn't happen in a place. Worship happens in each human heart. There is only corporate worship in a place like this when there are individuals who are truly worshipping God. But you know when I say that, it immediately raises a crucial question, and that is exactly what kind of worship is it that God accepts? What is the worship that God receives? It's really where I want us to spend the next few minutes together reflecting on what the prophet Isaiah has to teach us about this in Isaiah chapter 66, if you'd turn there with me. Isaiah 66. Isaiah begins what is really the final summary of his entire prophecy in this chapter by reminding us that God's focus when it comes to worship is not on buildings. Instead, God is looking for true worshipers. Let's read it together, Isaiah 66. You follow along as I read beginning in verse 1. Just the first two verses:

Thus says the LORD,

“Heaven is My throne . . . the earth is My footstool.

Where then is a house you could build for Me?

And where is a place that I may rest?

For My hand made all these things,

Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD.

“But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

It really is a remarkable statement from the prophet Isaiah as he gives us the Lord’s own words. God tells us that he does not accept all of the worship that is offered to Him, even from those who think themselves sincere. Instead, God has established certain requirements for those who desire to come into His presence to worship.

What exactly does God require of you? Even this morning as we worship, what does He require of you in order to receive your worship? Well in these two verses God identifies for us two requirements of all who worship Him. Nothing could be more important this morning as we meet for the first time and dedicate this new worship center than understanding what God expects of worship. Let’s look at it together.

The first requirement that God demands of those who come to worship Him is that they must offer the worship that He requires. We see this in verse 1 and the first part of verse 2. *Worship*. Let’s start by making sure we even know what we’re talking about. The English word worship comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word *worth scipe* which means literally to recognize the worth of someone. That’s what worship is. It’s to recognize the worthiness, the dignity, the merit of a person and then to pay them the respect or homage that they deserve. Worship then in a biblical sense is seeing and savoring the supreme value and worthiness of God and responding to Him as He deserves. But what does that look like? Well Isaiah explains here in this very passage what constitutes acceptable worship.

First of all, I want you to notice that acceptable worship is exclusive. Notice how verse 1 begins: “Thus says the LORD.” You’ll notice the word *LORD* is in all capitals in our English Bibles. This name for God is the most frequent name in the Old Testament. It’s used some 6,000 times. It is actually not the word *Lord*, that’s not what it means. That’s what the translators chose to do because of the history of doing that. But in reality, this is God’s personal name. It consists in Hebrew of four consonants, four letters YHWH. It’s pronounced something like Yahweh. In most English translations when you see the word *LORD* in all caps you can know that this is the Hebrew word we’re talking about. But what exactly does this word Yahweh mean?

Well, you remember back in Exodus 3 Moses asked God what His name was, and God responded to that in chapter 3 of Exodus verse 14, call me “I AM.” You remember that magnificent statement of our God. He is “I AM.” But that’s how He says His name. When you and I refer to God we use the third person form of the verb, the word *Yahweh*, which is this word and it doesn’t mean “I AM,” it means *HE IS*. In other words, *Yahweh* is simply the one who is. He is the one responsible for all existence including His own. He depends on nothing. He depends on no one. *HE IS*. You know we live in a pluralistic age, when it is politically incorrect, when it is narrow-minded, when it is even perceived as bigoted to say that there is only one true God. But Scripture could not be clearer. That is the reality. Go back to chapter 44. Chapter 44 of Isaiah and notice verse 6:

Thus, says the Lord [*Yahweh*], the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord [*Yahweh*] of hosts [*Yahweh* of armies is the idea]:

“I am the first [in other words, there was nobody there before me] and I am the last, [there’s nobody after me]
And there is no God besides Me.
Who is like me? Let him proclaim and declare it;
Yes, let him recount it to Me in order,
From the time that I established the ancient nation.
And let them declare it to them the things that are coming
And the events that are going to take place.”

In other words, God says, “Listen I am the only God and here’s part of what makes me unique, and that is I am in control of history. I tell you what’s coming. And that’s what comes to pass.” He goes on at the end of verse 8 to say,

“You are my witnesses.
Is there any God besides Me,
Or is there any other Rock?
I know of none.”

That is not only a clear statement of monotheism, it is a confession of God's uniqueness. There is only one God and His personal name is Yahweh. He eternally exists, Scripture teaches us, in three persons that Jesus taught us to refer to as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, there's a push in modern evangelicalism to allow for the possibility that Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, others might be in heaven; that in fact, it's told, they're just worshipping the same God under another name. Well, listen to God in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the Lord [Yahweh]. That is My name. I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images." Understand this, all gods by other names are idols, pretenders, and blasphemies. May the worship that takes place in our hearts and in this place always be of the one true and living God. The one who simply *IS*.

Secondly, Isaiah teaches us back in chapter 66 that acceptable worship is transcendent. People are always trying to put God in a box. In fact, in many people's minds, he lives in church buildings like this one. But the true and living God can't be manipulated. He can't be safely managed. Acceptable worship must be transcendent because God is transcendent. Now what do we mean by transcendent? We mean that God is unequal, incomparable, utterly unique. He is transcendent. He transcends everything else and everyone else. Now verse 1 identifies two aspects of God's transcendence. He is completely sovereign. Notice it says, "Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne . . . earth is My footstool.'" It pictures God as a King sitting on a throne. He rules over everything in heaven and on earth. Folks there is not a stray molecule in the universe. He sits on a throne. Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all."

But verse 1 goes on to say that God is also incomprehensibly great. Notice, "Heaven is My throne and . . . earth is My footstool." That expression is of the immensity, the greatness of God. God is so great and earth is so small in comparison that there is only one use for it and that is as a stool for His feet.

In light of His greatness, notice verse 1 goes on to say, "Where then is a house that you could build for me? And where is a place that I may rest?" There's no place. You can't make a place that contains God. And if people have in their minds when they build a temple or a building or a church that that's going to somehow box God in, then they have misunderstood the true nature of

God. God is transcendent. He is incomprehensibly great. And when we worship, we must always think of God in that way. That's why out in the lobby of this building are the two mottos of our church and one of those mottos is *A High View of God* in worship. God is great. And in our minds and in our thinking, in our words and our worship, we must reflect that. God simply will not accept any worship from anyone that demeans His greatness.

Thirdly, acceptable worship is dependent worship. Notice verse 2, "For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being." It's as if God sweeps his hand across the universe and he says, "Just look at everything your eyes see. I made it all. I spoke it into existence." This is the message throughout Isaiah. Let me show you just one passage. Flip back to chapter 44:24,

Thus says the Lord [Yahweh], your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb,

"I, the Lord [Yahweh], am the maker of all things.

Stretching out the heavens by Myself

And spreading out the earth all alone."

God says, "I created everything you see." Everything you will ever see was made by God. Now in the New Testament we discover that God created all these things through His one of a kind, His unique Son. Colossians 1:16 says by Christ "all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible . . . All things have been created through Him and for Him."

Now the point there in verse 2 that God is making is this: since He created all things He needs absolutely nothing from us, including our worship. And this is the spirit with which we must come to worship. Here's how Paul puts it in his sermon. You remember that famous sermon on Mars Hill in the city of Athens recorded for us in Acts 17:24-25,

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, [listen to this, He] does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor [and here's where Isaiah's making the point] is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything.

Listen, God doesn't need anything from you. There is nothing you can give God that He needs. And in fact, that passage goes on to say, He Himself gives to all people life, breath, and all things. Not only can you not give God anything He needs, but He is the one who has given you everything you have.

He deserves our worship. We must worship Him, but when we come to worship Him we must never in a million years think we are giving something to God that He needs from us. Acceptable worship recognizes that we are dependent on Him for everything.

So, God demands that we who come to worship Him offer him the worship He requires. It must be exclusive worship. It must be transcendent worship. It must be dependent worship. But a second requirement that is here in this passage of us is that when we think about coming to worship God, we must display the attitude that He receives. We have to come in the right spirit with the right mindset. Notice verse 2, the middle of the verse, God says instead of temples and buildings, "to this one." Now look there for a moment, pause on that word *one*. That word reminds us that before worship can be corporate, it must be individual. *To this one*. And it also reminds us that God only receives a certain kind of worshipper, *this one*. This is it. This is the only kind of person I receive: "But to this one I will look."

Now obviously God sees all things and all people so this expression "to this one I will look" implies that He's looking at certain people with favor and affection. In other words, here is the person whose worship God will receive. Here are the attitudes that God looks for in a worshipper that He receives.

Notice, first of all, we must be humble before the greatness of God. We must be humble before the greatness of God. "To this one I will look, to him who is humble." The Hebrew word *humble* when it's used in the social sense, it speaks of those who are at the very bottom of society. It speaks of the poor, the needy, those at the very bottom end of the socioeconomic ladder. But when it's used spiritually, as it is here in this text, it refers to those who understand the greatness of God. It refers to those who not only see the greatness of God, but who understand and see their own smallness. They understand who they are in relationship to God. That He is God and they are not. That He is creator and they are creature. That He is perfect and they are sinners.

There is a sense of who God is.

This word *humble* obviously is always contrasted in Scripture with the proud. It's interesting, the book of Isaiah describes pride at the very foundation of man's problems. Look back in chapter 2. Isaiah chapter 2 and notice verse 11. As Isaiah talks about the future, the day of the Lord, the time when God will bring judgment on this world because of its rebellion, he says in verse 10, "Enter the rock and hide in the dust from the terror of the Lord and from the splendor of His majesty." Listen there's a time coming when God will interrupt life on this planet. And here's what He will do, verse 11: "The proud look of man will be abased and the loftiness of man will be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day."

The prophet says man's greatest problem, earth's greatest problem, is man's pride and the only correction for it is when God humbles man and He alone is exalted. Psalm 138:6 says, "Though the LORD is exalted, yet He regards the lowly, but the haughty [the proud] He knows from a distance." He holds them at arm's length. If you are proud before God, if you are proud of who you are, if you are proud of what you've accomplished, if you think that you are responsible for the successes in your life, if you don't understand what Paul asked the Corinthians: "What do you have that you haven't received?" If you come to God with any sort of pride, God will not hear your worship. He only dwells with those who are humble, those who humble themselves before His greatness.

There's a second attitude that God requires when a person comes to worship and that is they must be reliant on the grace of God. Reliant on the grace of God. Again verse 2 says, "To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit." The Hebrew word *contrite* is a fascinating word. It's used in 2 Samuel 9:3 to refer to the physical disability of Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both of his feet. Literally that text says, "He was broken in his feet." In Hebrew that's the expression. When it's used in context like this one it speaks of those who also know they are disabled, but in spirit. They are spiritually broken before God. A person who is contrite is painfully aware of his own personal sin and guilt, of his inability to stand before God. In other words, a person who is contrite or broken in spirit is painfully, clearly aware of his need of God's saving, forgiving grace. That's contrite in spirit. In fact, turn back to chapter 57, chapter 57:15:

For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, [and] whose name is Holy,
“I dwell on a high and holy place. [And then He makes this remarkable statement]
And also with the contrite [the broken] and lowly of spirit [and where I find that
brokenness over their sin, I revive them, I forgive them, I and restore them].”

This is the nature of our God. To be contrite in spirit means that you stand broken before God because of the knowledge of your own sin. You know that you deserve nothing from God except judgment, and yet by faith, you come to hope in His promises of salvation in and through His Son. You see that even in this amazing prophesy. Isaiah is probably the most New Testament book in the Old Testament. Turn over to chapter 61. Jesus quotes this passage of himself when he preached in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. Isaiah 61:1,

The Spirit of the Lord God [the spirit of Adonai Yahweh] is upon me,
Because the Lord [Yahweh] has anointed me
To bring good news [the gospel] to the afflicted [to the humble and];
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
To proclaim the favorable [acceptable] year of the Lord.

Our Lord read that. He closed the book and He said, “I am the fulfillment of that prophesy.”

You see, the broken, the spiritually broken, the spiritually disabled, those who have nothing, no way to find themselves into God’s presence, they trust in only one person and that is in the Redeemer, the Messiah, the One promised.

How could He accomplish those things? Well Isaiah 53, that amazing chapter, explains it. He was crushed by God for us. He stood in our place. He suffered the penalty of our sin so that we could be forgiven. If you’re going to come to worship God, if you desire ever to come into his presence, then you must stand broken before God, broken over your own sense of sin and its guilt and your deserved punishment and your only hope must be in the remedy He offers, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the saving grace of Christ.

There's one final attitude that is crucial in those whose worship God receives and that is they must be submissive to the Word of God. Notice how verse 2 ends: "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." The word *tremble* means to be filled with reverence and awe. In this case because of God's Word. But it's interesting in this passage we see the opposite of those who tremble at God's Word. Look at chapter 66:3, the middle of verse 3. At the very end actually, the last two lines: "As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations." In other words, like Isaiah says, "each one has turned to his own way and we did what we wanted." "I did it my way" as the old Sinatra song goes. This is mankind and so God responds. Notice in verse 4, "So I will choose [since they chose their own ways, I will choose] their punishments and [I] will bring on them what they dread." And then he explains why. Watch what he says in verse 4: "Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen." This is not a reference to some audible voice of God. Read the prophets. Read Isaiah and you discover this is the voice of God calling through His Word, through the word of His prophets. So here are the opposite of those who tremble at God's Word. God speaks, they yawn. God speaks, they ignore it. God speaks, the Bible goes in the drawer. Dust gathers on it. That's the opposite of those who tremble at God's Word.

So, what does it mean then to tremble at God's Word? It means, and by the way look at the end of verse 4 because I want you to see one other thing about those who despise the Word of God: "They did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight." So, they not only ignore the Scripture, they disobey it. They choose to do what it says they should not do. So, what then is it to tremble at God's Word? It's the opposite of those things. It's to believe that this is in fact God's Word. It's to believe that God has spoken. It is to listen to the Word of God. It is to humble yourself under it. Listen, if you don't tremble at God's Word, if you never read it, if you don't care what it says. You don't tremble at God's Word.

And, we must obey it. We must strive to obey it. That's why out in the lobby you will see if you haven't already seen today, is our other motto. The other motto of this church *A High View of Scripture* because as a church, as well as individuals, we want to tremble at God's Word. Be very clear about this. God only accepts the worship of those who not only are reliant on His grace but those who tremble at His Word. Those who are submissive to the Scripture. If you're not loving

the Scripture, if you're not pursuing the Scripture, if you're not obeying the Scripture, then God's not hearing your worship. He doesn't accept worship except from those who tremble at His Word.

So, as we dedicate this new worship center, let me ask you a simple question. Is your heart a worship center? Because that's how it starts. It starts by each one of us having hearts that are real worship centers and then this becomes a place where we gather. And when each heart is filled with worship then it is truly a worship center. May that be true of this church.

Let's pray together. Our Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You for how clear and direct it is toward us. O Father, help us to offer You the worship that You require of us. And Father, help us as well to display the attitudes that You require. Lord, may each of our hearts be worship centers so that this room when we gather becomes a worship center as well. Lord, I pray for those here this morning who are not true worshippers, who don't know You through Your Son. Father, help them to see, even in this text, the glory of the gospel. Help them to see that it's only in the good news that Christ brought, the good news of deliverance from sin through His life, through His death, through His resurrection, that we can be right with You. May they become reliant on Your grace in Christ today. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.