

An Unexpected Result
Andrew Kneeland, June 26, 2022
Isaiah 65:1–10

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray: Father God, these are your words. This is your truth. Sanctify us in this truth this morning, remove all distractions and obstacles, and bless us with your Word. Be our Rock and our Redeemer, amen.

The people of God were in a tough spot.

The children of Israel were being persecuted and harassed, and it seemed like the only ones who were enjoying life were the wicked and sinful people. It seemed like God had left the scene; abandoned His children and gone back to wherever He came from.

God's people felt alone. They needed God.

Before these verses in Isaiah chapter 65, Isaiah wrote a prayer to God that captured the attitude of the people. It was a lament. He pleaded with God to have mercy on the people. He cried to God to look at the suffering and the distress of the people and to listen to them and to have mercy. Isaiah asked: "Where are you, God? Come and save us!"

These verses in Isaiah 65 are God's response. We're going to look at just the first several verses here in Isaiah 65, and God's response can be split into three themes. Isaiah said "Where are you God?" and God responds first by saying **What the People Did.**

Listen to God speaking here:

1 I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name. 2 I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; 3 a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; 4 who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; 5 who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I

am too holy for you.” These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

God is angry. Isaiah asked God, “Where are you?” and God here responds with exactly where He HAS been. He HAS been ready to be found, but the Israelites chose to rebel and provoke Him instead.

There’s some meaningful wordplay here in these verses. Usually, when God is talking about the Israelites he calls them “MY people.” Did you notice what he called them here? He said they are “A nation” ... “A people” ... “A rebellious people.” Not MY people... He calls them A people!

God is disassociating Himself from these sinful, idolatrous Israelites. He’s putting his hand up and cutting them off. Sin breaks relationships. Have you noticed that? Sin can often have an immediate consequence, and that consequence is usually a broken relationship.

When the Israelites sinned, their relationship with God was broken. God’s hands WERE spread out in love to welcome and embrace and save HIS people from their sin... but HIS people did not turn to him. God was ready to be found, but HIS people ran to other gods instead.

God lists here some of the common practices of these sinful people. It’s a specific list of specific sins. They worshiped in gardens, which was something that foreign nations did for their foreign gods. Two wicked kings of Israel even chose to be buried in a garden, trying to be closer to those foreign, *false* gods. God also mentioned altars made out of bricks. The Babylonians sacrificed to their goddesses on brick altars; the Israelites were never commanded to make altars out of bricks.

God also said the people “sit in tombs,” probably meaning they are trying to communicate with the dead in some form of witchcraft. They also intentionally ate pork as part of other pagan ceremonies, even though God commanded them not to.

And then did you catch what God said in verse 5? He’s responding, remember, to Isaiah here, who asked “Where are you God?” And God said, “I’ve been here! My arms have been wide open but you people have wilfully and arrogantly gone your

own way. These sinful people say, ‘Keep to yourself, God, do not come near me. For I am too holy for you.’”

Now, that should send a shiver up your spine. “Do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.” Who could possibly say something so confidently arrogant? So hopelessly out of touch and sinful?

The Israelites. This is the peak of spiritual blindness. To be so full of yourself and confident in yourself that you don’t just ignore your Savior... you’re blind to the fact that you even NEED a Savior.

God said, “These people are a smoke in my nostrils. A fire that burns all day.”

They have stirred the fire of the righteous wrath of Yahweh. The people have spit in the face of God’s loving offer, turned their back on their all-powerful Creator, and willfully disrespect and dishonor Him by chasing after the false gods of their pagan neighbors. God is angry, and He has good reason to be.

After summarizing **What the People Did**, God turns to the next part of his response. He made it very clear that the people were guilty of disobeying Him and openly disrespecting and mocking him. And so his next response to Isaiah is **What the People Deserve**:

Listen to God speaking again:

6 Behold, it is written before me: “I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap 7 both your iniquities and your fathers’ iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds.”

Now, this is a good example of why it’s important to read Scripture in context. If we just randomly flipped open our Bibles and read that phrase in verse 7: “I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds” — we might think, ‘Oh okay, like a payment of gold for a job well done.’

But the “former deeds” God is talking about here are not good deeds. This is not a job well done, these deeds are awful, atrocious, appalling deeds of disrespect and idolatry. The people sinned, and they deserve only the harshest and most

severe penalties.

One of the last things Isaiah said in his plea to God in the chapter before this one—after asking, ‘Where are you, God?’—is “How can you be silent, God?”

God here in verse 6 says in response: I will not keep silent, but I will repay. Generations have continued the sinful and idolatrous practices of former generations; the sons have continued the sin of their fathers. The sin of the people is provoking God to a justified response of wrath. The people deserve God’s wrath.

This is just as true today as it was in Isaiah’s day. There are no neutral options when it comes to God. Friendly agnostics are just as deserving of the fires of hell as devoted atheists. If you read through this summary of what the Israelites did as they turned their back on God and ran after their own false gods and pagan worship—if you think this ISN’T talking about you, you are dead wrong.

You are JUST as guilty as the most vile Israelite. You—who come to church every Sunday—are JUST as deserving of the fire of God’s wrath as the most wicked idol-worshiper.

When is the time you sacrificed to the false god of your own appetite? The false god of your own convenience and preference? The unholy trinity of “me, myself, and I?” We are JUST as guilty as the most wicked Israelite.

God has a book. It’s an open book that is recording the name of every person who is ever born, and it records every person’s every thought. An Israelite in Isaiah’s time is recorded in Yahweh’s book. A single mother from Bangladesh in the 17th century. An orphan son of a Greek soldier in the 2nd century. You. Me.

After recounting what the people did our God explains what the people deserve. They deserve the just consequence of their sin: eternal separation from their Heavenly Father and a thousand lifetimes of eternal torment and pain.

This is a reality that is still true today, isn’t it? We know from the New Testament that “the wages of sin is death.” Paul writes in Galatians that those who live in sin “will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.” The person who indulges in sin and follows the whims of the sinful nature—like the Israelites had done—will “reap

destruction.”

God is angry. And he has good reason to be. His people have turned their backs on them and arrogantly rejected his loving offer of salvation.

That takes us through the end of verse 7. Isaiah had asked God, “Where are you? Come save us!” and God responded here in chapter 65 with **What the People Did**, and clearly told Isaiah **What the People Deserve**.

But then he takes a deep breath, and pauses.

God is the stern and loving father who is chastising his son for being disobedient. You can picture it. He stands above him, one hand on his hip and one hand pointing a finger of judgment at his child. His eyes frowning in disappointment and frustration and anger. The son is seated below him; hands in his lap; tears of guilt, remorse, and fear wet his face.

The Father sees the repentance and shame in his son’s face, and takes a deep breath. He pauses.

His frown disappears. He sits down next to his beloved son and takes the hand that was pointed in accusation and wraps it around his son in reassuring comfort.

The people of Isaiah’s day know what they did, and they know what they deserved. But listen to what God says in these last three verses; he tells them **What they Receive**:

8 Thus says the LORD: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,’ so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all. 9 I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there. 10 Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.

The people deserve to be destroyed. They deserve God’s wrath and God’s punishment, but God is a merciful God.

The grapes that grew all across the Israel countryside are plucked from the vine, thrown into a tub, and stomped beyond recognition. To the grape, this isn’t a very

fun process. It's not fun to be harshly plucked from your life-giving vine; it's not fun to be thrown into a cold, barren tub and to be stomped over and over and over.

But that's how wine is made. The people of Israel are like God's grapes. They deserve to be stomped and obliterated and thrown into the fire. But God chooses to not destroy them. He chooses to preserve them "for his servants' sake." There were still believing Israelites living among the sinful nation, and for their sake God would remember His promises and honor his contract to save them.

He said he will bring forth children to possess His holy mountain and live there with him forever. It will be like the land of Sharon and the Valley of Achor, which the people knew as lush, fertile fields where all of their needs were provided for.

Our merciful Father gave his people an unexpected result. Where there should be punishment he gave promise. Where we should have received destruction He gave opportunity. Where we should be dead; he makes us alive.

And did you notice something else about these last few verses? What does God call the people of Israel who He's promised to save? MY people. God says "these people are MY people and I WILL take care of them."

This is God's promise. He KEPT His promise several hundred years later when He sent His one and only Son to become a man, grow up with a family in this same land of Israel, and be put to death for someone else's crimes.

That "someone else" was the people of Israel here in Isaiah 65. That "someone else" was every man, woman, and child who will ever be born. That "someone else" was you, and me.

God said: "I will not destroy them all. My servants shall dwell on my mountain." This beautiful promise is for us today, too. We might feel like grapes in a crushing bin; stomped and kicked and torn and tossed. But God will remember His promises.

Revelation 21: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and

God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Amen.