

Preparing a Place of Worship

Isaiah 66:1–2

Series: Thoughts on Worship

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Psalm 25 — **Call to Worship.**

Throughout the history of the church God's people have met in a variety of venues—from humble homes to grand cathedrals, from prominent landmarks to hidden caves and catacombs, from school gyms and store fronts to ornate sanctuaries and lavish halls.

Some have been used out of necessity, some out of a desire to plant the gospel in places where it is sparse. Some look to what is practical and functional and efficient—others look to what is beautiful, aesthetically rich and pleasing.

So where is the right place to worship? Where is God most pleased to dwell?

What kind of place—what kind of worship space—could we possibly prepare that would most honor and magnify Him?

Open your Bibles to the last chapter of the book of Isaiah—Isaiah 66. We will be focusing this morning on the first two verses. As this chapter begins God makes a declaration and He poses a question. His declaration is about who He is; His question is about where He will dwell.

Let's read together, Isaiah 66:1–2. Hear the Word of God:

Isaiah 66:1–2

Thus says the LORD:

"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?

All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.

But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

If you are taking notes this morning, we will look first at God's declaration and then at His question.

I. His declaration—Consider who God Is

He begins in verse 1 by declaring—

1) Heaven is His throne

God rules over all as the Sovereign One. There is none higher, none greater, none more glorious. Earlier in Isaiah the prophet is given a glimpse God on His throne—

Isaiah 6:1–3 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Psalm 99 echoes this refrain—

Psalms 99:1–3 The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!
 He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The LORD is great in Zion;
 he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!
 Holy is he!

God is exalted above His creation—the vast heavens are His throne.

2) God declares that the Earth is His footstool

All things are under His feet—He has all authority and power—All things are His. In Psalm 50:12 God says—

Psalms 50:12 ... for the world and its fullness are mine.

The earth—as His possession—is His footstool. And we on His footstool are called to worship:

Psalm 99:5 Exalt the LORD our God;
 worship at his footstool!
 Holy is he!

God has all authority in heaven and on earth, and this authority is administered through the Son—the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28, He tells them in verse 18—

Matthew 28:18 ... "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

God is placing all things at the feet of Christ as His gospel goes out in power. Psalm 110 begins with a promise about Jesus—

Psalms 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord:
 “Sit at my right hand,
 until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Hebrews 10 records the fulfillment—

Hebrews 10:12–13 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

Paul gives us more in—

Ephesians 1:19–23 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

God is working out His purposes in creation, exalting Christ, glorifying His name.

God’s throne is vast—the heavens.

His footstool is vast—the earth—all creation under His dominion and rule; all creation placed under the authority of the Son; all creation designed to radiate His glory and power.

II. His Question—Where will God dwell?

And so God asks the question at the end of verse 1 in Isaiah 66—

Isaiah 66:1b what is the house that you would build for me,
 and what is the place of my rest?

Where will such a God choose to dwell? In Heaven? On Earth?

Everything in heaven and on earth God has made. They exist only because of Him.

What house could we possibly prepare for such a God?

This is a question that has come up before in Scripture. In 2 Samuel 7 King David expressed his desire to build a temple of worship for God. At this time in Israel’s history, you remember, God had chosen to manifest His glory in the midst of His people in a tent—a tabernacle with sacrifices, all rich in meaning to help instruct His people, and point them to salvation that Christ would ultimately accomplish on the cross.

When David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, God sent His prophet Nathan to David in—

2 Samuel 7:5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in?’

And even when Solomon, David’s son, was allowed to build the temple in Jerusalem, he said—

1 Kings 8:27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

God cannot be contained in a temple made by hands. Stephen, quoting from Isaiah 66, acknowledged this in his sermon in—

Acts 7:48–50 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,
 “‘Heaven is my throne,
 and the earth is my footstool.
 What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
 or what is the place of my rest?
 Did not my hand make all these things?’

And Paul, when he spoke in the Areopagus in Athens, told his hearers:

Acts 17:24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man

Our God does not dwell in temples made with hands. God cannot be confined to one place. He cannot be contained in a temple of stone, even the grandest and most glorious structure man can build. Concerning heaven and earth, God says at the beginning of Isaiah 66:2—

Isaiah 66:2a All these things my hand has made,
 and so all these things came to be,
 declares the LORD.

So where then is His dwelling place? Isaiah gives us God’s answer in verse 2, and the answer is astonishing! Where can we find a right habitation for God? How are we to prepare a place?

We might think—

Let’s get the best minds, the most skilled, the most successful—the wisest we can find.

Let’s find the highest place, the most sought after possessions, the greatest palace...

But where do we see God turning His attention? Look at the end of verse 2.

Isaiah 66:2b But this is the one to whom I will look:
 he who is humble and contrite in spirit
 and trembles at my word.

Here God mentions three qualities of those who will be His habitation.

T — God chooses to dwell with those who have been shamed, smitten and shaken by His Word.

His habitation is with those who are humble, broken and trembling before His Word.

1) He who is humble [עָנָוִי]

Hebrew is a very picturesque language. This word for “humble” means to be brought low in mind or in circumstances—to be shamed, poor or afflicted.

It is a word found often in the psalms, describing those who are God’s—

Psalms 9:12 ... [God] does not forget the cry of the **afflicted**.

Psalms 25:16–18 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
 for I am lonely and **afflicted**.
The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
 bring me out of my distresses.
Consider my affliction and my trouble,
 and forgive all my sins.

Psalms 34:6 This **poor** man cried, and the LORD heard him
 and saved him out of all his troubles.

Psalms 70:5 But I am **poor** and needy;
 hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
 O LORD, do not delay!

God looks with favor on the humble.

Psalms 18:27 For you save a **humble** people,
 but the haughty eyes you bring down.

We see an example of this in the New Testament in the parable Jesus told in—

Luke 18:9–14 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

God makes His dwelling with those He has humbled—those who have seen His glory and holiness, and have seen their sin and wretchedness—and realize they are nothing before God—deserving only wrath and condemnation. Their only hope is that God would show mercy.

2) He who is contrite in spirit [נָכַח]

The word for contrite is a word that literally means “crippled” or “lame.” It is used only two other times in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 4:4 and 9:3) both in reference to Jonathan’s Son.

2 Samuel 4:4 Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was **crippled** in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

One who is contrite in spirit is one whose spirit has been broken or smitten. It cannot rise on its own. It has no strength or vigor of its own. Our God favors a contrite spirit.

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
 a broken and **contrite** heart, O God, you will not despise.

The contrite heart is the choice dwelling of God.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 “I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the lowly,
 and to revive the heart of the **contrite.**”

In this verse (57:15) Isaiah uses a different word for “contrite” [נִכְנַח] —it is a word meaning “crushed (to powder or dust), destroyed or pulverized.”

And Scripture promises—

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
 and saves the **crushed** in spirit.

God makes His dwelling with those He has humbled and those He has broken.

Jesus promised in—

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

3) One who trembles at God’s Word [יִרְדָּר]

To “tremble” is to be shaken or fearful.

To tremble at God's Word is read it as God's truth, a matter of life and death, a matter of utmost importance and weight. Because God is holy and we are all together sinful; because God alone is righteous and we are stained and shamed and smitten with evil—we are in ourselves without hope. God's Word spells out clearly judgment for the wicked—judgment we deserve—as well as hope and salvation for the humble and contrite of heart.

Do you see what God is saying through Isaiah? The dwelling place of God is not with those who "have it all together" or have an outward show of religion, success, charity or piety. God dwells where His Spirit and His Word have penetrated and broken the dominion and blindness of sin. This is God's work!

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Jesus said in—

John 14:23 ... "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

God chooses to dwell with those He has humbled and those He has broken and those who submit in reverent fear to His Word.

Turn for a moment to Acts 4. I want to show you one example of what this looks like in the New Testament. In Acts 4 Peter and John are arrested in the temple and brought before the rulers and elders and scribes in Jerusalem. Peter declares that they are serving Jesus and boldly proclaims—

Acts 4:11–12 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

After threatening them and letting them go, the council lets them go, and Peter and John return to the church. We pick up the account in—

Acts 4:23–24 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

(Does this sound familiar? This is what God declared to Isaiah in 66:1.)

Acts 4:25–26 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,
 "Why did the Gentiles rage,
 and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
 and the rulers were gathered together,
 against the Lord and against his Anointed' —

Acts 4:27–31

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

God is here in the midst of His people—in the power of His Spirit as they humble themselves and desire to boldly preach His Word. This is the essence of what Jesus said about worship in—

John 4:23

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God chooses to dwell with those He has humbled and those He has broken and those who tremble at His Word.

So what then are the implications of this?

There are many, but I want to mention just two.

- 1) God’s chosen dwelling place is His people.

It is not a structure or a building, though buildings can serve as useful tools. God’s promise is to **dwell with us**—Emmanuel—God with us. God has made this clear all along—

To Moses

Exodus 29:45–46

I will **dwell** among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might **dwell** among them. I am the LORD their God.

David says in—

Psalms 132:13–15

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his **dwelling** place:
“This is my resting place forever;
here I will **dwell**, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.

To Solomon

1 Kings 6:13

And I will **dwell** among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel.”

God fulfilled this promise in Christ.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and **dwelt** among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus humbled himself and came to tabernacle among us. And God is fulfilling this promise through Christ's body—the church. The temple of God is now the hearts and lives of His people.

1 Cor. 3:16–17 Do you not know that you are God's **temple** and that God's Spirit **dwells** in you? If anyone destroys God's **temple**, God will destroy him. For God's **temple** is holy, and **you are that temple**.
[“you” is plural referring to the church]

1 Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a **temple** of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

2 Corinthians 6:16 What agreement has the **temple** of God with idols? For we are the **temple** of the living God; as God said, “I will make my **dwelling** among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
[this verse quotes Leviticus 26:11–12]

Ephesians 2:21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy **temple** in the Lord.

And this will be our joy through eternity—the reward of heaven. The tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament were physical structures that pointed toward this greater spiritual truth—God with us. In the final nine chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet is given a vision of God's temple and city in perfection—portraying the people of God dwelling with God in glory.

Ezekiel 43:7 and he said to me, “Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will **dwell** in the midst of the people of Israel forever.

John announces the fulfillment of God's purposes in—

Revelation 21:3 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.

2) God prepares us to be His dwelling place through affliction and brokenness.

God selects the broken and downcast—those who understand that they have no hope in themselves. These are the stones that God makes alive and places in the walls of His temple. Not those who are out to make a name for themselves or vindicate themselves—not those who think they can take on the world by themselves, not the self-satisfied and self-sufficient. There are no self-made men in the Kingdom of God.

He has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; and what is weak in the world to shame the strong [1 Corinthians 1:27].

1 Cor. 1:28–31 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

If you are here this morning and know your life to be broken and brought low—if you know yourself to be sinful and needy—if you are wondering how you are going to make it tomorrow and realize that there is no way you can do it on your own—then **there is good news!** You are just the kind of person that God chooses to enfold in His mercy and lift up by His grace. God is full of power and He is at work rescuing and redeeming those who cry out to Him for help.

He is at work, **bringing us low** and **breaking us**, breaking us from the stranglehold of the world, removing all that would distract us and dissuade us from pursuing our greatest need and deepest longing—to know and love the One who has made us for Himself. God is at work shaping and fashioning us according to His will and His purposes, fitting us together as His people for His dwelling place.

Our God chooses to dwell in a temple made from the rescued lives of His people—those whom He has redeemed and fit together for His glory.

If you do not know Him, my prayer for you today is that you might seek and find Him.

Pray that he will make you poor and of a contrite spirit, one who trembles at His Word. Only as the Spirit comes with the preaching of the gospel can your heart be conquered and made a fitting habitation for God.

Keep yourself under the preaching and reading of God’s Word. Tremble and rejoice before it. God uses His Word to guide us, direct us, revive us and shape us. It is our light against all darkness and our lamp for every trial.

Let us pray.

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