

Jean Ross: Good morning, friends, we'd like to welcome you to "Sabbath School Study Hour," here at the Granite Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sacramento, California. You know, we like to mention where we are because we have folks who are viewing this program, and they might be living right in Sacramento, and they don't even know that we're in Sacramento. So I'd like to welcome all of those who are joining us online across the country and around the world and also those who are here in person-- come a little earlier for our Sabbath school this morning.

We're going to be continuing our study in the book of Isaiah today, and we have such an important study. It's lesson number 11. If you're following along with your lesson quarterly, it's entitled "Waging Love," and we're going to be looking at a number of very important passages in Isaiah, Isaiah 58, in particular, so we're looking forward to that study.

Before we get there, we'd like to let our friends know about our free offer for today. This is one of the Amazing Facts study guides. It is entitled "A Love that Transforms," and we'll be happy to send this to anyone who calls and asks. The number for that is 866-788-3966, and you can ask for offer number 710, and we'll get that in the mail. We'll send it to you. If you're outside of North America, we can also provide you with a digital download of the study guide. Just text the code "SH003," to the number 40544. Now, I guess you need to be in North America in order to text that code, and we'll give you a digital download. If you're outside of North America, you can read this for free by simply going to the Amazing Facts website. So we want to let you know about that as well.

Well, before we get to our lesson this morning, we want to begin by lifting our voices in song. Our Sabbath school hymn is "More About Jesus." It's hymn number 245.

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♪ More about Jesus I would know, ♪

♪ more of His grace to others show, ♪

♪ more of His saving fullness see, ♪

♪ more of His love who died for me. ♪

♪ More, more about Jesus,

more, more about Jesus, ♪

♪ more of His saving fullness see, ♪

♪ more of His love who died for me. ♪

♪ More about Jesus, in His Word, ♪

♪ holding Communion with my Lord. ♪

♪ Hearing His voice in every line, ♪
♪ making each faithful saying mine. ♪
♪ More, more about Jesus,
more, more about Jesus, ♪
♪ more of His saving fullness see, ♪
♪ more of His love who died for me. ♪
♪ More about Jesus, on His throne, ♪
♪ riches in glory all His own, ♪
♪ more of His Kingdom's sure increase, ♪
♪ more of His coming, Prince of Peace. ♪
♪ More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus, ♪
♪ more of His saving fullness see, ♪
♪ more of His love who died for me. ♪ ♪

Male: Amen.

Jean: Let us bow our heads for prayer. Dear Father in heaven, how grateful we are to be able to gather together to open up Your Word and study such an important passage written so many years ago but so relevant for us and for the time in which we are living. Lord, we want to invite Your presence, Your Spirit, in a special way to be with us as we study together. Be with Pastor Brummund as he leads out in our lesson this morning. And be with those who are watching and listening around the country and around the world, and we commit this time in Your keeping, in Jesus's name, amen. Our lesson today is going to be brought to us by our Family Life pastor here at Granite Bay: Pastor Shawn Brummund.

Shawn Brummund: Jesus once said, "The thief does not come but except to kill, and to steal, and to destroy, but I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." And friends, I stand here before you today again to be able to testify that life with Jesus is 100 times better than life without Jesus. Can I hear a number of "amens" out there? Because you have experienced that difference as well. And I speak from personal experience. When I was brought up, my parents, in the very early age of my life, when I was two or three, four at the most, my parents had decided to leave whatever limited, religious experience in church that they had been brought up with, and they had decided to raise their family and live their life in a secular basis.

And so my experience up until the summer that I turned 21, as far as my memory goes back, is nothing but secular, and so I had no knowledge of God. I had no knowledge of the Bible. I had no knowledge of the person of Jesus. I had no knowledge of church and how it works and the benefit and the blessings that can come with it. And so, that summer, when I turned 21, and I started to be able to open up the door to my heart, as it says in Revelation 3, in verse 20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and I knock, and if anyone opens that door, I will come in and dine with him, and he with Me," and that was my experience

that summer because when I began to go to church on my own, when I began to discover God and pray for the very first time, when I began to open the Bible and look at the gospel records and learn about this person named Jesus, when I began to discover this greatest man that ever lived, the Son of God Himself that not only lived and taught the greatest, most powerful sermons and lessons of truth but also died on the cross for me-- and what I learned all these things, God did indeed come into my heart, and He began to dine with me, and I with Him, and He began to change me. He began to transform me from the inside out, and I've never looked back since because I know that life with Jesus is a hundred times better than life without Jesus.

And when we look at this particular lesson here, today, we're looking at two very powerful chapters in the book of Isaiah. We're looking at chapter 55, and we're looking at chapter 58. And we're going to start in chapter 55, as the lesson study does, and when we come to this chapter, it's a very powerful chapter. In fact, I would say it is perhaps the most powerful, if not at least in the top three most powerful chapters that we can find in the entire book.

The entire chapter is a powerful, extensive invitation to the person of Jesus Christ, to the person of the maker of the heavens and the earth. It is a personal invitation to enter into a personal, saving, power-filled relationship with God, and so that's what makes it so powerful. We find the gospel that is found there, and it is the unpacking of that verse that quickly became the signature verse for my experience because it was the first verse that metaphorically, I would say, jumped off the pages of the Bible and just explained this new experience that I had in God because again, when I first came to experience God and put my faith in God and discovered that there was a God, I was at ground zero.

And so my knowledge of the Bible and of the Bible message, and so on, was pretty close to zero at that point, but, when I came to John chapter 10, verse 10, and Jesus says, "I have come to give them life and to give it to them more abundantly," I said, "That's me. That's my experience," John chapter 10, and verse 10. In Matthew chapter 11, in verses 28 through 29, Jesus offers that great invitation of which many of us have responded to, that great invitation in which Jesus cried out to the crowds that are around Him one day in His frustration and desperation as He looked around of all the different religious man-made traditions and false theologies and hypocrisy that was existing in this nation. And in the midst of all that, he cries out to the crowd around Him; He says, "Come unto Me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon Me and learn from Me." "Learn from--" who? "Learn from Me."

You notice how Christ is at the center of that invitation? It says, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You see, friends, the devil comes up with-- and mankind has invented a hundred different ways to be able to try to find peace, try to find fulfillment, try to find satisfaction with life and purpose in life outside of the person of Christ, but Jesus says, "Yes, I give you the Bible message, and this is a valuable truth. This is what you must base your life upon and trust implicitly," but, friends, this book is not worth anything if we do not know the person of that book, and that's the difference between all the other pathways and all the other philosophies, all the other self-help courses and theories and pathways that have been invented by mankind. They all are relying upon ourselves or upon some philosophy or some kind of theory, but when we come to the Bible, when we come to the message in the Christian experience, it's all about the person. It's centered on the person. It's centered on the God who made the universe, and that's why Jesus says, "Come unto Me."

Now, He could've said, "Come unto the Word." He sort of could've said, "Come unto your local rabbi or your local pastor or some local therapist." No, friends, it says, "Come unto Me," Jesus says, "and I will give you rest. Learn from Me, for I am lowly and gentle in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." And when we come to Isaiah chapter 55, we find here that Jesus and His Father are doing the exact same thing in this chapter, way back in 700, approximately 700

B.C., during the generation of Isaiah. And so, when Jesus made that invitation that day, as recorded in Matthew, this was not the first time that He made that invitation. He had already made it some 700 years before and, of course, through other prophets before that as well. And so we come to verse 1 of Isaiah chapter 55, where it says, "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat. Yes, come buy milk and wine without money and without price."

Now, I just want you to stop and imagine with me just for a moment if we saw in the newspaper or online or the local television station, and it was advertising a sale at your local Costco, and the sale was this: Everything in the entire store for a day, a week, whatever the duration of the sale is, there's going to be a 100% discount on all the merchandise. Now, how popular do you think that sale would be? All right, we all know the answer to that, don't we? In fact, we would be thought of as crazy if we didn't take up on that offer. If we said, "You know what? I'm going to be busy that day. I don't have time to go to Costco, sorry." We would be viewed as crazy, and yet, when we come to the beginning of chapter 55, it is introducing the ultimate sale. It is a 100% discount that God is offering to mankind and to Israel during the generation of Isaiah, but not only to Isaiah's generation but to you and me, to the world today. It is an ongoing sale. It is not one day. It is not one week, but it's been going on for 6,000 years now, and it will continue on until the close of probation, until Jesus says, "I cannot let evil and sin go any further into time. Something is being offered for free. There is no money, there is no labor to be able to accept this gift that God is offering."

Once again, in this powerful chapter, Ephesians chapter 2, in verses 8 and 9, we find the synopsis of Isaiah, and what he's presenting here is God is giving it to him and through Isaiah in his day, but Paul later penned it some-700 years later when he says, "By grace you have been saved through faith. It is not of yourselves. It is a--it's a gift. It's a gift of God. It's not of work, lest anyone should boast." And so we find here that the very basis, the foundation of the Old Covenant that God was selling back to Israel, appealing to them to come back to that covenant that He originally had made with them so long ago through His servant Moses is the exact same covenant, or basis of the covenant, that is offered in the New Testament era as well.

The Old Covenant that points to Christ on the cross that was pointing forward is exactly the same basis and gift and salvation and offer from God that is found as we look back at the cross in the New Testament era. This is pointed out-- I forget what page it was in our lesson study, and its 'course-- it's entitled "Waging Love," which is lesson number 11. "Waging Love," lesson number 11. It's on page 85, which is Sunday's lesson. I'll just go ahead and read that. It's the last paragraph, and it says, "Isaiah encapsulated the gospel in the Old Testament, and it is the same as the gospel in the New Testament."

Now, this is a great preview for our next quarterly study because our next quarterly study is going to be on the covenants of the Bible. "There is no old covenant salvation by works, to be superseded by new covenant salvation by grace." You see, friends, "Ever since God's promise of a Deliverer to Adam and Eve, there has only been one way to salvation: By grace through faith, 'the free gift of offer is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord.'" And so this is one of the big reasons why Isaiah has been referred to by Christians through the ages as the great Old Testament gospel preacher. It is the Romans of the Old Testament.

When we come to the book of Isaiah and we come to chapter 55, God makes it clear perhaps than anywhere else before-- anywhere else, even as Ephesians tells us, "It is by grace that you have been saved by faith. It is not of yourselves. It is a--it is a gift of God." And what is that gift that God offers to us, free of charge, a 100% discount to you and me? It is total forgiveness of our guilt and sins. God offers to clean your slate completely, no matter how evil, no matter how shameful, no matter how horrible.

No matter how destructive those sins have been, God offers to be able to clean your slate completely, complete and utter forgiveness of all your guilt and your sins, and not only that but it's a package deal. It's not only complete forgiveness but it's life for eternity. God is offering you the gift in which you can actually live for eternity. Your heart will beat without ever stopping for all time, and not only that but He says, "In that free package also comes a way better quality of life in the here and now. The quality of your life will be paramount, will be light years better than it is without this gift in your heart, without this gift in your life." That's why Jesus so confidently say "The thief," representing the devil, "does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy." He's only out to be able to drag you down with him into hell, but God says through Jesus is "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." He's talking about the here and now, amen? He's talking about the life that you and I live, from day to day, right now.

And so the quality of our life goes up dramatically when we have Christ, when we accept this gift into our life, and so the million-dollar question that so many people that have come to accept Christ in their life, accept this free gift and live under the liberated experience of having God's grace as we give our faith to Him from day to day--and it is so exciting-- the quality of life is so much better. We ask ourselves, "How in the world are so many around me not interested, in fact, are aggressively pushing back against that gift? Why is it that only a few, as Jesus says, accept that gift and walk into eternal life?"

Well, the Bible gives us a number of different answers. I just want to look at three, three here this morning. Now, the reason that this particular gift that God offers to us is so unpopular is for three key reasons: Number one, the devil uses the world to deceive us the same way that he succeeded with Eve at the tree of the knowledge of Garden of Eden so long ago, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is there that not only did he say, "You shall not surely die," the very first lie that he brought to mankind, but he followed up with that lie and said, "The only reason that God said that you shall surely die if you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is because He's trying to threaten you. He's trying to hold you back from having a much more rounded experience in your life. The only reason that He's telling you not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not because you'll die. You're not going to die. No, the fact of the matter is God knows that you will become just like Him, that your life will be well rounded, even as mine and His is, that you also can have the knowledge of the good and the evil as well."

In other words, the devil was saying, "Listen, there's not a whole lot wrong with some of the good that you have in your experience right now, but life is going to be a whole lot more fuller if you also have some evil there to enjoy as well." And that is still the same today, is it not? Many people will not come to Christ because they look at Jesus, they look at the Bible, they look at religion and Christianity as nothing but a giant party pooper, isn't that true? "I don't want to come to Christ. He's going to take this away, He's going to take this away, He's going to take this away, and He's going to take this away," and I believe-- and I believe the lie that my life is much fuller. "It's much more well rounded, not only with some good things-- oh, I have nothing against doing good and having good and love and peace and all these other things, but it's also good to have sin in my life." And so the devil uses the same deception that works so successfully in the garden, in the garden of Eden at the tree, even today with mankind.

Number two, unlike shopping at Costco, the gift that God offers to us at 100% discount involves a commitment, involves a relationship to a Person with a capital P. It involves a relationship and a commitment to a Person that made the heavens and the earth. God is saying, "Listen, when it comes to accepting this particular gift, this gift is something that also involves a relationship with Me. I'm offering you Myself," God says. And so God tells us that involves a very real commitment. Many of us are not that excited about committing.

And the third reason, as Jesus says, "We love sin." There's something about the human heart that loves sin. Our fallen nature, we default to a love for sin, and we have-- we love to have the freedom to pick the sins of our choice without judgment from a God we need to commit to that might get in the way. And so because of these three key reasons, that observation of mankind, as well as we can also find in the Scriptures, God reveals to us, indeed, some of the key reasons why so many around us refuse this gift in which God has given to us at such a great cost.

And so I invite you to open your Bibles to Isaiah 55, if you haven't already. I'd just like to look at some verses here as we just kind of spend and keep our nose in the Bible itself. In verse 1, again, we read, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters," God says. Doesn't that bring back to your memory when Jesus was at the water well, Jacob's well, when He was a human walking upon this planet, and He stopped, and His disciples were grocery shopping in the local city of Sychar, and He's having this conversation with the Samaritan woman, and He was selling her on the very same thing that Isaiah is selling us on in Isaiah 55, and Jesus finally says to her, "He who drinks of this water, which I offer, will become like a fountain springing up into everlasting life." Ho, everyone who thirsts," Jesus says, God says, "Come to the waters, and you who have no money, come and buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Verse 2, God continues to go on and says, "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your wages for that which does not satisfy?" God says, "Listen, you're investing your time, your money, your resources into all the wrong places. Jesus stood up there in his lifetime, and He says, "I am the Bread of Life." Do you remember that? "I am the Bread of Life." Jesus tells us in John chapter 6, in verse 33, "For the bread of God is He." That's with a capital H. "For the bread of God is He, that is Christ, who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the Bread of Life," Jesus says. That's why He says, "You must eat of Me." You must invest your resources and your life and your energies in the person of Christ, "In Me," Jesus says, "and then you will find life. Then you will find satisfaction. Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, and your wages for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance."

There's that key word, "abundance." Jesus says, "I have come that you might have life more abundantly." This is the same thing. You see, almost everything that Jesus taught during His earthly lifetime was simply reiterating, bring back to life what He had already been speaking to through Isaiah and the prophets of the Old. In verse 3, it says, "Incline your ear, and come to--come to Me," Jesus says. Again, it's the Person, isn't it? He's not just saying, "Come to the truth," which is one with Jesus, and it's paramount in importance to Jesus, but it is secondary to the person of Christ and which that word comes from. "Incline your ear and come to Me," Jesus says. God says, "Hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- the sure mercies of David."

God says, "Listen, I will offer you the mercies of David." Jesus understood that. When He came into this world, He was the ultimate Son of David, was He not? That's why they cried out when He came into the holy capital of Jerusalem, just before He was crucified. On that donkey, the great triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and they cried out "Hosanna, hosanna, the Son of--" the Son of David. They understood that the ultimate Messiah, the Promised One, the Prophet with a capital P, the Great Redeemer and Deliverer of the world would be a descendant of David, would be the ultimate and final David that would sit on the throne for all of eternity. And God offers the sure mercies of David, the sure mercies of Jesus to the generation that existed then.

I'd like to drop down to verse 6, as we pick up on that same vein. In verse 6, it says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He may be near-- while He is near." Jesus, God is always near, is He not? In fact, He's so near, as we just talked about a little bit earlier. In Revelation chapter 3, verse 20, Jesus says, "I'm so near that I'm always there, and I'm knocking on the door of your heart that if you

open the door, I will come in and dine with you, and you with Me." We will enter into a lifesaving relationship. Verse 7, it says, "Let the wicked forsake his way."

God calls us to repentance when we come to Him because He is a holy God, is He not? And so, when we invite Him into our heart, we're inviting holiness into our life. That's why Paul says that the Christian, a true believer, that opens the heart, opens the door to their heart, they become instantly a holy temple of God because now the Holy God of the universe is residing in your heart. And of course, the heart represents this part of our biology, is it not? It's the brain. It's the mind. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." And then, when we come to verses 12 and 13, God then paints before us, before you and me, before that generation, the great fruits, the outcropping, the abundant life, the higher quality of life that God will inevitably bring into your life when you accept Jesus and respond to this invitation. In verse 12, He says, "For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace." Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 5 and around verse 20, 21, 22, he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."

Now, again, friends, Paul wasn't being original when he penned that. They're just simply reiterating what God had been speaking for centuries already. "For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace. The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

This is the abundant life that God is selling that generation on. This is the abundant life that God is selling on to us here today. And again, friends, the ultimate gift that God is offering to us is the person of Himself, and how tragic it is that when we read this passage among dozens of other passages throughout the Scriptures--Old, New alike-- that God has to work so hard at selling the greatest offering gift to mankind, especially since He spent so much, and it cost Him such an infinite amount to be able to buy that salvation, free gift for us, the eternal Son of God, suffering, beaten beyond recognition, dying a horrible death on the cross of Calvary, taking upon Himself the guilt of all the world, not only of the saved but also of the unsaved, not only those who go to their grave looking for the resurrection of condemnation but He also bore upon himself the guilt of those who would reject Him until they went into the grave.

The great cost that it came to Jesus, it is free to you and me, but that did not come with a cost, even as Costco, if it had 100% discount out of all its merchandise, it would be free to us, but it would be a very expensive price for Costco, yes? And it's the same thing with God. It's the same thing with salvation. It's free to you and me, but God paid a tremendous price, and yet He has to work so hard to sell us on it, and yet how amazing the grace and patience God has and willing to go to such lengths to bring us into His eternal family.

How true is the Bible when it says, "God is love"? That He would actually endure our stubbornness, our persistent resistance to God's voice, to the greatest gift that has ever been boughten for mankind?

Well, there's another couple verses in there that I skipped over, but I want to return to and the lesson study it certainly looks at, and that's verses 8 and 9 and 10 and 11. So let's back up to verses 8 and 9 and 10 and 11, and just spend some time there as well because again, 8 and 9 are two verses that many of us that have been in the Christian faith for some time are very familiar with, but let's go back and revisit it. Verses 8 and 9, it says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My way,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'"

Now, friends, when we look at this-- and most of the time, when we think of it, we talk about it, we apply it. We rightly do so, and we say, "Listen, when it comes to trying to understand the world and all the intricacies and the injustices that sometimes prevail and all these different question marks that come upon the world and upon our minds as we go through this life, we remind ourselves that God's thoughts are much higher than our thoughts, that His ways are much higher than our ways, that who are we to question Him even as God had challenged Job towards the end of his experience as recorded in that book of the Old Testament?"

But friends, I believe that if we read verses 10 and 11, again, we look at the context here. It helps us to understand what the immediate application is. Why is it that God has told us that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, that His ways are much higher than our ways? In verse 10, He goes on, and He says, "For as the rain comes down, and the show from heaven, and does not return there, but waters the earth and make it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please and shall prosper in the thing in which it is sent."

And so, friends, when we look at the context at verses 10 and 11, as God goes on and He expands on those two verses in the more well-known verses, it tells us that when God is talking about His thoughts being higher than our thoughts, His ways higher than our ways, He's talking about the fact that He's inviting the Israelites and you and I to put our implicit trust in the Word of God that comes from the mouth of the Maker of heaven and earth, that God is saying, "Listen, even if your opinions do not align with the opinions that are recorded in the Bible, even if your opinions do not align with the opinions of God Himself, put your opinion aside and lift up the opinion of God," that God's ways are much higher. Put your implicit trust in what God has told you.

Friends, I have been in the Christian faith for about-- I don't know. Denise, how long has it been? Thirty-three years or so. And I've been in the pastoral ministry for 23 years, and, friends, I have met so many-- people that so obviously have used their opinion to trump the opinions that God has revealed in His Word: churchgoers, Christians, non-Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists. Friends, God is telling us, "Listen, when you are tempted to lift your opinion and your perspective above the perspective and opinions that are in the Word of God, remember that God's ways are much higher than your ways, that His thoughts are light years ahead of your thoughts, and even though your opinion seems so right to you, 'There is a way that seems right to a man,' the Bible says, 'but the way therein leads to death.'"

And so we need to lift up God's opinion above any opinion, no matter how--you know, some of us are so opinionated that God has to work double time to be able to overcome those opinions to convince you that His opinion is actually the right one. But that's what God is saying here. That's why He starts out in verses 8 and 9, because it's a precursor. It's a precursor to the fruit that bears when we come to His Word and His opinion. Even as He brings rain and snow down upon the water to precipitate and feed that which gives life to the plants that then give life to you and me, so is God's word like a seed. It goes forth from His mouth, and it shall not return to us void," but it cannot only return to Him void when we actually accept it, when we submit to God and we submit to His Word and His ways and His thoughts. "And then it shall accomplish what God pleases, and it shall prosper in the thing in which I have sent." And so the Word of God is the key source of sanctification.

That's why Jesus said in His last prayer before He was arrested and crucified, He says, "Thy word is truth, O Father. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." And so Jesus understood that one of the greatest sources of sanctification is to submit all our perspectives and opinions to the Word of God, and when we do that that of course, with the Holy Spirit, and choices concerning our environment, those three sources can either make us or break us, depending on how we handle them.

Sanctification of God is largely based upon the Word of God. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," it says in Romans, does it not? And faith, of course, is part of the sanctification process. Without faith, we cannot be truly sanctified and transformed from the inside out. Well, let's go to chapter 58 now. We still have about 12 minutes, or so, to be able to look at some important things there. Chapter 58, of course, is just loaded as well. I've just been so blessed to be able to be, you know, to have the privilege of being able to teach today's lesson because these are two powerful chapters.

Now, when we come to chapter 58, we're looking at here God is unveiling a very real trap that can exist for us as Christians, especially for us on the conservative Right, in which I count myself a conservative. And so we have to be very careful, and God is helping us and warning us as we look at this particular chapter. Now, the irony is that when we look at verse 1, verse 1 has been used as a directive to point to the open sins, the worldliness, of the Christians and local churches that can be found guilty of erring on the liberal Left. But as we look at chapter 58, it reveals that even though idolatry was very prevalent in Israel-- and that is abundantly clear as we look at many long passages in Isaiah where God goes to great extensive measures to compare Himself to the false gods and idols in which Israel was falling for.

And so idolatry was very prevalent in Israel, and even though idolatry was very prevalent in Israel, many still found themselves playing the part in the Jewish religious ceremonies, the feasts, the fasts, approaching the temple during the times of prayer. They were walking the walk as far as the religious ceremonies and rites goes, as God had directed through Moses, as well as some others that perhaps had been developed by the local rabbis, as we so often make the mistake of doing. But coming back to verse 1, verse 1, "Lift up the trumpet. Spare not. Cry aloud."

Have you heard that before? I've heard that. In fact, it was just-- I was just barely baptized. Denise and I were baptized in 1992, joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and a dear saint, an elderly lady came to our door unexpectedly and knocked on the door and says, "You need to see these tapes." So we looked at these tapes, and our eyes got about this big as we watched it, and he was showing videos of these liberal churches and the open rebellion and spirit that was found in these, and we discovered later that a lot of them weren't even in Seventh-day Adventist Churches. They were filmed in non-Adventist churches, but it was in independent ministry that was calling people out of Babylon, calling people out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And the key verse that that particular person in ministry was capitalizing on was "Cry aloud. Spare not. Lift up the trumpet."

Many years ago, when I began to study this verse in the context of the entire chapter, I was surprised to discover that it was actually addressing Jews who were erring on the religious, conservative Right, not on the Left. And so, friends, God is speaking to us here. It says there are plenty of Bible passages that addresses the liberal, openly compromised churches. You can find them all over the Bible. So God does not stop in speaking to those who are liberally, openly compromising their faith.

But this particular verse and chapter is actually revealing that we could also fall into a trap on the Right ditch as well, and so God is saying we also must be careful. And so, friends, being on the conservative Right doesn't mean that we're immune to the deceptions and traps of the devil. The devil just simply switches gears. He works in a different way. His methods are different, but the end is still the same. It is severing a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, friends, we have a movement that has been growing here in America called the religious Right, outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in evangelical Christianity, and many of them are very sincere Christians. This is not a judgment call on any of them. God knows that there are many sincere, saved followers of Christ in every church, amen?

So that's important for us to understand, but, friends, there is a very real and live danger that exists and a predicament which prophesy tells us will lay the foundation for establishing a religious system across this land and across the world before Jesus comes that will be very much like the religious Right. And if we are not aware of the devil's methods, we can be deceived here as well. He tempts believers to develop what we call a double life, and this double life looks like this: On the outside, we can appear and act like we are the most zealous followers of God that there is. We go to church, and we go to church for Seventh-day Adventist even on the right day. We faithfully go to prayer meeting. We find ourselves involved in different worship services. We like to go to Bible studies. That's what's being described here in this verse that is so famous: "Lift up the trumpet, spare not. Lift up your voice."

Let's read it together in verse 1. You read it silently. I'll read it out loud. Verse 1, it says, "Cry aloud and spare not. Lift up your voice like a trumpet. Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Friends, these are not open, rebellious, liberal sins. He's talking about hidden, conservative sins. In verse 2, it makes it abundantly clear. He says, "Yet they seek Me--" how often? "They seek Me daily."

Now, this is almost inevitably referring to the different hours of prayer that the religious Jews had developed in Israel. There were certain times of the day in which the rabbis and the different religious leaders offered times of prayer, both of the temple and of the different synagogues, and so they would seek God daily. "And delight to know my ways." These are people that are interested in Bible studies. These are people that show up to Bible studies. And so showing up to Bible studies, going to church on a regular basis, going to the hours of prayer and prayer meetings does not guarantee that we have not fallen for the deception that we are here being exposed to. "They delight to know My ways." They are into Bible study. "As a nation that did righteousness."

In other words, they're saying, "Listen, they do all the right things on the outside, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinances of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice. They take delight in approaching God." They're even approaching church with a smile on. And so we could come to a church with a smile on, delight to approach God, delight to come to church, delight in Bible studies, and still not have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

There seems to be a predicament in conservative Christianity today in America, and that predicament looks something like this: As long as you are openly opposed to abortion and a couple of other socially moral issues-- and certainly, the Bible does speak very clearly against abortion. Don't get me wrong. But as long as you sign up on one or two of these trendy kind of moral issues in evangelical Christian-- in conservative Christianity today, that's all that's necessary, and we have them all around us, friends. Very vocal about abortion, very vocal about a couple of other issues, and my mind is not able to recall what they are, but there's only two or three in total, including abortion. As long as you're openly vocally opposed to those three, two or three issues, then you're in good stead, but, friends, the Bible doesn't tell us that. It says you need to be opposed to those three immoral issues and every other immoral issue that God reveals in His Word, including the Sabbath, including being honest, including not coveting, including not using God's name in vain. All of them.

You see, friends, there was a trap. There was a predicament that I believe that is very real and alive today, and God is revealing it in a very real way, even in these two powerful verses that we're looking at here today. And so it's important for us to be able to see that, that we might know the methods of the devil, both on the Left as well as on the Right, that we might not find ourselves falling into, and it doesn't happen overnight, but we can fall into a double life. On the outside, we can appear like we're the most zealous followers of God, but at the same time, we are not following. We're not truly connecting with God at all.

Now, as we read the following verses, verses 3, onward, it says, when God doesn't respond in a positive way, they then complain to Him for not acknowledging their religious zeal, their faithfulness. They're saying, "Why are You not blessing us? Why are You not acknowledging our great piety and this great show that we are bringing?" Because God knows that it has simply-- has been reduced to an act. There is no serious, genuine, heart-pouring prayer life in a life of these Israelites. They are not on their knees on a regular basis, saying, "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Give me Your Holy Spirit that You might be able to give me that abundant, high quality of life again today, that I might be able to resist temptation, that I might be able to live the life that You have designed for me. Help me to be able to follow in all of Your ways and not just the popular ones." And so verse 3, it says, "'Why have we fasted,' and they say, 'You have not seen?' 'Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'" God responds very quickly. He says, "In fact, in other words, the fact of the matter is that in the day of your fast, you find pleasure and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and for debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness." He's saying, "Look at the fruits of your fast in religious experience." It's empty. It's conservative, but it's empty.

And so God is speaking to me, as I count myself a conservative Christian, and He says, "Listen, when you decide to fast," whatever the fast is, and I know the quarterly is proposing that it's the Day of Atonement fast, and it very well could be, but I don't think it's an airtight argument. In fact, I would think that there's evidence that say the opposite. I think that it is a man-made fast as the Pharisees stood up in the temple that Jesus taught, and he said, "I fast twice a week, and I tithe of all my income," and so we have most likely here a man-made fast.

In the religious zeal, they're putting on a show for extra show to be able to extra-convince themselves and, hopefully, God that they are leading a literal double life that they don't want nobody to know about or find out, but it actually says, "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure." He says, "Listen, while you're fasting, you're also looking for pleasure." And so they made the mistake of believing that fasting was simply a show, it was holiness of itself.

You see, fasting itself is not holiness. Fasting is a way and a means to find holiness. Prayer in itself is not holiness. Prayer is your connection to the God who is holy, that you can find holiness. The devil has convinced too many of us through the centuries, the aesthetic movement, the monasteries, the convents, and so on, that the movement of the nuns and the monks and the-- I'm forgetting the other fellows that used to run around during the Middle Ages and-- but, you know, and they started to believe that the prayer itself and the fasting itself was holiness. And so, if I pray all day long, then I'll even be holier because I'm practicing holiness all day long, but in spite of that, they still led a very unholy life.

And the same with fasting. Fasting itself is a means to holiness. And so fasting is a practical means to put aside your cooking, your cleaning, your eating, and the digestive energies that are there so that you can focus all-- so much more energy on God, the source of your holiness. But they understood that it was simply an act. It was something that you just went through, and so at the same time, to distract you from the displeasure of having your stomach a little bit more hungry than normal, why you would find other pleasures. And so you'd go out and you'd watch a show or you'd go to a party or you would find yourself, you know, with your friends, or whatever it was or skiing or whatever it was, and God says, "No, the fasting in itself is not-- it's a means."

And so He's saying, "You missed the whole point. This is just a show. You exploit your laborers" and I'm out of time. And of course, verse 6, then God goes on. It says, "Is this not the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bonds of wickedness and to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free?" It's the opposite, friends. God then paints this beautiful picture of the fruits of the true, abundant life that is found in Jesus.

Well, friends, it was good to be able to study with you here again this week, and don't forget to take advantage of the free offer that we talked about at the beginning, and I don't have it on the pulpit with me here today, but be sure go to AmazingFacts.org, and you can find that and the information, of course, is also on the screen as we speak. And so please take advantage of that. Until we come together next week, may God bless you.

Male announcer: Don't forget to request today's life-changing, free resource. Not only can you receive this free gift in the mail, you can download a digital copy straight to your computer or mobile device. To get your digital copy of today's free gift, simply text the keyword on your screen to 40544, or visit the web address shown on your screen, and be sure to select the digital download option on the request page. It's now easier than ever for you to study God's Word with Amazing Facts, wherever and whenever you want, and most important, to share it with others.

Casey: I would go out and go drinking, and I would-- just wanted to have fun. I was working a lot at the time, going to school and just wasn't really interested in really following God. I would have people tell me, "Why don't you just have faith?" if I was going through some type of trial during my life. I didn't understand what that meant. I would pray, but I didn't feel any less stressed about or worried about a situation. I didn't understand God's Word. It seemed like it contradicted itself, and so I struggled with that a lot.

My ex-husband and I, we had--began dating, and within seven months we got married, which was really fast. After we got married, he was very disrespectful, and he was cheating a lot. I found out he was cheating when I was pregnant with my first son. I tried to get him help, and he checked himself out of rehab a week later, living homeless in our hometown. He was saying and doing things that he shouldn't be doing. He was committing crimes. It always started with alcohol, and then pot, or marijuana, and then he would go to the meth. So it's just a really ugly chain of things, and that's when I moved in with my sister.

We were staying with her and her husband, and I started doing studies with my sister. She was studying with some people, and I joined the studies, and I learned a lot of different things that I had never known about the Bible, and it started opening up to me and making sense. So my sister had installed the satellite, and I found "Amazing Facts." The one thing I love about Doug Batchelor is he uses his own life situations, and he uses really good stories to connect stories from the Bible or teachings.

I didn't understand why he was always bringing up the Sabbath and why it was so important, and I was asking my sister, "Why does he keep talking about the Sabbath?" And later on I found out through studying more and listening to his teachings about it, the truth about the Sabbath. I know that I started changing as a person. I wanted to follow the truth. I wanted to have a closer relationship with Christ and be closer to God. So after doing the studies and learning the truths that I had been learning, I decided to take that next step and give my life to Christ through baptism. Besides learning these messages, these truths about the Bible through Amazing Facts, all of these wonderful people from Amazing Facts, the way they've reached out to me, they really show me that they have caring hearts, that they're Christlike, because that's what a Christian is. My name is Casey. Thank you for changing my life.

Male announcer: Amazing Facts, changed lives.

Dan: One particular evening, we're searching through the channels and happened to find a program called "Amazing Facts with Pastor Doug Batchelor." Some of the things that he was talking about were very interesting and intrigued me.

Female: As Dan began to continue to watch "Amazing Facts" with this Doug Batchelor, this caveman that had an incredible story, my world is beginning to change. It's been turned upside down. I was resistant. I

think hit me was really the testimony of Pastor Doug. This was a real person with a real story that had had some things in his lifetime that maybe I didn't experience, but he was real. His journey was real. He was honest about wanting to share and giving that light to other people so they, too, could have more light. That's when we got the cancer diagnosis, and nobody wants that C word, "cancer," and then to find out that it's aggressive, and sometimes people get to wait with prostate cancer, but we didn't have that opportunity. He's in surgery, and doctor comes out, and I knew something was wrong. Come find out that my husband has had a stroke. So we go about midnight and have an MRI, and they confirmed that it truly was a stroke, and he was going to be okay.

Dan: Within one year and a half, I had a major heart attack, cancer-- aggressive cancer-- now stroke. I really was at the lowest point. I didn't know what I was going to do. We had rehabs scheduled after I was dismissed from the hospital.

Female: And I watched him walk out of a facility with a cane that two weeks before, he couldn't even walk into.

Dan: God knew ahead of time that I was going to be going through all of this, and I truly believe that it was His hand that brought the Amazing Facts and the additional light that I was getting, that it helped take my mind off of the circumstances at the time and in a way that I don't think anything else could.

Female: It's so comforting to know that we have a Christ that loves us so much and will always hold us.

Dan: I cannot thank the people enough who support ministries like this. Because of them, I am one of those lives that have been changed. And I can only thank God for leading me through His providence to that program. My name is Dan. Thank you for changing my life.