Sermon 10 – Oracles of Woe Study Notes

Weekly Scripture Memory Verse

"Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones." (Proverbs 3:7-8, NKJV)

Day 1: Bound to Our Sin

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:18

"Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, And sin as if with a cart rope."

Devotional Teaching and Application

As we continue our exposition of Isaiah, we come to a very serious word. The prophet declares a "woe," which is an interjection expressing God's absolute abhorrence of sin and His denunciation of it. To be under God's woe is to be under doom. Isaiah declares this judgment upon those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity. It is an unusual metaphor. The picture here is of men yoked and hitched to a heavy wagon, straining and tugging like beasts of burden.

What do we mean by this? These men are laboriously dragging their own iniquity behind them. They are bound to their sin. The word iniquity names behavior that is twisted and perverted, missing the mark that God established in His moral and holy law. Instead of seeking to be freed from their sin, they are using all their effort to hold onto it. They weave these cords of vanity themselves through lies and falsehoods, chaining themselves to a cart of wickedness.

Iniquity is a severe taskmaster. No taskmaster of Egypt ever treated the Israelites more brutally than their own sin treats them. Men strain and struggle to accomplish a good end, but these individuals strain and struggle to keep their sin close. We must recognize that the way of the transgressor is hard. Men can weave these cords of vanity, but only the Lord Jesus Christ has the power to break them and set the captive free.

Family Discussion and Reflection

Sin often promises freedom, but it actually turns us into beasts of burden, dragging a heavy weight that eventually destroys us.

1. How do we sometimes make excuses or tell lies (cords of vanity) to hold onto a particular sin, rather than asking God to deliver us from it?

2. Parents, ask your children: If you tied a heavy wagon to your back, it would be very hard to walk. How does disobeying God feel like carrying a heavy, exhausting weight?

Family Prayer Prompt

Lord, we confess that we sometimes cling to our sins instead of turning from them. Open our eyes to see the heavy burden of iniquity. Break the cords of vanity in our lives, and set us free to walk in the lightness and joy of Your holy law.

Day 2: The Mockery of Judgment

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:19

"That say, 'Let Him make speed and hasten His work, That we may see it; And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, That we may know it.'"

Devotional Teaching and Application

The people dragging their heavy carts of sin were not ignorant of Isaiah's preaching. They heard his warnings of coming judgment. But their response was complete mockery. They scoffed at the prophet, daring God to act. They looked around, did not see immediate destruction, and concluded that God would do nothing. They even used Isaiah's own unique title for God, "the Holy One of Israel," in absolute sarcasm.

This is the natural response of blind men who love their sin. If they take the threat of judgment seriously, they have to repent. They know they cannot continue living the way they are living if God's Word is true. So, they react by mocking the doctrine of hell and the wrath of God. They trivialize eternity. But blessed is the man who does not sit in the seat of the scornful, but takes God's judgments very seriously.

True Christians are not presumptuous. They tremble before the Word of God. They do not look back at a card they signed years ago and assume they can live however they please today. They know that believing is a present, continuous action. Every day is a new day of faith. Every day is a challenge to believe and to order our lives according to the fear of the Lord.

Family Discussion and Reflection

Our culture frequently uses words like "hell" or "damnation" as casual jokes, completely missing the terrifying reality of God's holy wrath against sin.

1. Why is it dangerous to joke about God's judgment or to assume that because punishment hasn't happened yet, it is never coming?

2. Parents, ask your children: If a father warns his children not to play in the street, is it foolish or wise to laugh at his warning? How should we respond when God warns us in the Bible?

Family Prayer Prompt

Holy One of Israel, forgive us for the times we have been insensitive to Your warnings or casual about Your holiness. Give us hearts that tremble at Your Word. Help us to live every day with an active, obedient faith that takes Your truth seriously.

Day 3: Calling Evil Good

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:20

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

Devotional Teaching and Application

Here we find the very essence of moral rebellion: blindness of heart and foolishness of mind. The visible covenant community of Judah had become so degenerate that they entirely mixed up the categories of right and wrong. God is the Creator. He alone defines all moral categories. He establishes what is good and acceptable, and He defines what is evil and abhorrent. He has not left us to stumble around in the dark; He has given us His written law.

Yet the people rejected God's definitions and substituted their own. We see the exact same principle at work in our beloved America today. We live in a culture that calls the murder of the unborn "a choice" and calls it good. Our society calls the biblical design for the family "oppressive" and labels the defense of biblical truth as "hate speech." Things that are evil are praised as noble, and things that are good are condemned as wicked.

The level of decline in a culture is measured exactly by this standard. We must not be swept away by this antinomian spirit. God's infallible Word is the only standard for ethics. If the church fails to define good and evil properly, we have nothing to offer a dying world. We must cling to the law of God and refuse to compromise with the shifting definitions of our culture.

Family Discussion and Reflection

The world constantly tries to pressure Christians into agreeing with its twisted definitions of right and wrong. We must know the Scriptures well enough to recognize the lie.

1. What are some specific ways our modern culture calls evil good, and how can we boldly stand for the truth without wavering?
2. Parents, ask your children: If someone put a label that said "sugar" on a jar of salt, it wouldn't change what is inside. Why doesn't calling a sin "good" actually make it good?

Family Prayer Prompt

Father, You are the Creator and the lawgiver. Protect our minds from the lies of the culture around us. Give us the courage to call good exactly what You call good, and to call evil exactly what You call evil, no matter what it costs us.

Day 4: Wise in Our Own Eyes

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:21

"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!"

Devotional Teaching and Application

This woe builds directly on the foundation of the previous one. Those who call evil good are the same ones who consider themselves wise in their own eyes. This is the sin of human autonomy. The autonomous man is a law unto himself. He refuses to be ruled by anything outside of his own independent reason. He judges for himself what is right and wrong, believing he possesses the ultimate wisdom to determine his own path.

This goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. The serpent tempted Eve with the lie that she could be an independent source of knowledge, that she did not need God's Word to interpret her world. She could be her own god. But true wisdom begins entirely differently. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Without the fear of the Lord, you are not wise; you are merely shrewd in a worldly sense that will lead to your destruction.

We are faced with a stark choice in our homes and our individual lives: autonomy or theonomy. We either walk the path of self-law, leaning on our own understanding, or we submit to God's law, acknowledging Him in all our ways so that He might direct our paths. True blessing only belongs to the one who humbly looks to God for direction.

Family Discussion and Reflection

It is a daily temptation to trust our own logic or our own feelings over the clear commands of Scripture. God calls us to reject our pride and look to Him.

1. In what areas of life are you most tempted to rely on your own understanding rather than stopping to ask what God's Word says about the matter?

2. Parents, ask your children: Why is it dangerous to think we know everything? Why do we always need to ask God to show us the right way to live?

Family Prayer Prompt

Lord, forgive us for our proud and arrogant autonomy. We confess that apart from You, we have no true wisdom. Teach us to trust in You with all our hearts, and to never lean on our own understanding. Guide our steps according to Your holy law.

Day 5: Rejecting the Law Brings Judgment

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:22-24

"Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away justice from the righteous man! Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, And the flame consumes the chaff, So their root will be as rottenness, And their blossom will ascend like dust; Because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

Devotional Teaching and Application

Isaiah turns his attention to the civil rulers. With biting sarcasm, he calls them "heroes" and "men of valor" not for defending the oppressed, but for their ability to drink alcohol. Their character was entirely corrupt. As a result, justice was completely overthrown in the land. They declared guilty criminals to be right in the eyes of the law, and they punished the innocent, all for the sake of a bribe. They used their civil office to line their own pockets.

In God's order, a magistrate's sole function is to uphold justice as defined by the will of God. Character and faith are absolutely essential for those in authority. But notice the root cause of this massive societal failure in verse 24. Why is the nation rotting from the inside out? "Because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." They threw the Bible over their shoulders. They treated it as worthless.

When a nation, a church, or a family casts away the law of the Lord, the result is always rot and destruction. God is merciful, and He sends discipline to get our attention. But if we mock His discipline and refuse to repent, swift judgment will follow. We must not fret first about the country; we must begin with ourselves. Repentance starts with us individually. Let us be a people who love the law of God, meditate on it day and night, and walk in obedience to our King.

Family Discussion and Reflection

The character of a nation is directly tied to its reverence for the Word of God. We cannot expect God's blessing if we despise His commands.

1. When we look at the corruption in our own culture, why must our first response be personal repentance rather than simply complaining about the government?
2. Parents, ask your children: The leaders in Judah threw God's rules away because they wanted to do whatever they wanted. How can we show that we love and respect God's rules in our house?

Family Prayer Prompt

Righteous Judge, we pray for our nation and our leaders, that they would recognize Your authority. But we pray first for ourselves. Forgive us for any way we have ignored or despised Your Word. Send revival to our family and our church, and give us a deep, abiding love for Your holy law.