



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 5: 1-30

“The Vineyard of Jehovah, or the Problem of Lawlessness”

TRANSCRIPT

And by the way for those of you who are interested in some help in understanding some of the difficult portions of the prophets, I am speaking of the Book of Isaiah as well as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for this is the book that contains them. You will find that whilst it is not a completely accurate translation in some parts, no translation ever is except one that I have made myself that will be of course. [Laughter] Seriously, no translator ever will translate identical with someone else. It is difficult to transfer from one language to the other in the same way. So there are some values to be seen in many translations. But you will recognize that this is an attempt to bring down upon the level of each one of us the words of the prophet which being clued to and keyed to the culture of his day as sometimes a little difficult for us to understand. This is the 5th chapter. If you want to follow along as in the AV, I hope you will recognize the verses as we go along.

“Now I will sing a song about his vineyard to the one I love. My beloved has a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He ploughed it and took out all the rocks and planted his vineyard with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower and cut a winepress in the wild rocks. Then he waited for the harvest. But the grapes that grew were wild and sour and

not at all the sweet ones he expected. Now men of Jerusalem and Judah, you have heard the case. You be the judges. What more could have I done? What did my vineyard give me? Why did my vineyard give me wild grapes instead of sweet? I will tear down the fences and let my vineyard go to pasture to be trampled by cattle and sheep. I won't prune it or hoe it. But let it be overgrown with briars and thorns. I will command the clouds not to rain on it anymore.”

I have given you the story of God's people. They are the vineyard that I spoke about. Israel and Judah are his pleasant acreage. He expected them to yield a crop of justice but found bloodshed instead. He expected righteousness but the cries of deep oppression met his ears.

“You buy properties so others have no place to live. Your homes are built on great estates, so you can be alone in the midst of the earth. But the Lord of hosts has sworn your awful fate. With my own ears I heard him say, many a beautiful home will I desert it, their owners killed or gone. An acre of vineyard will not produce a gallon of juice. (I sort of like that.) Ten bushels of seed will yield but one bushel crop. Woe to you who get up early in the morning to go on long drinking bouts that last till late at night.”

Woe to you drunken bums. I am not sure I like that. Isaiah, remember, was a man of the court, a noble, I am not sure he would say "drunken bums" but he might say something laggard.

“You furnished lovely music at your grand parties, the orchestras are superb but for the Lord you have no thought or care. Therefore I will send you into exile far away because you neither know nor care that I have done so much for you. Your great and

honored men will starve and the common people will die of thirst. (I like this verse) Hell is licking its chops in anticipation of this delicious morsel Jerusalem. Her great and small shall be swallowed up and all her drunken frowns. In that they the haughty shall be brought down to the dust. The proud shall be humbled. But the Lord of hosts is exalted above all, for he alone is holy, just, and good. In those days flocks will feed among the ruins. Lambs and calves and kids will pasture there. Woe to those who drag their sins behind them like a bullock on a road.”

Now that text has been translated this way because of certain features of the Hebrew text which we need not explain at this point, but that is a possible rendering.

“They even mocked the holy one of Israel and there the Lord to punish them. Hurry up and punish us, O Lord. They say we want to see what you can do. They say that what is right is wrong and what is wrong is right. That black is white and white is black. Bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter. Woe to those who are wise and shrewd in their own eyes. Woe to those who are heroes when it comes to drinking and boast about the liquor they can hold. They take bribes to pervert justice, letting the wicked go free and putting innocent men in jail. Therefore God will deal with them and burn them. They will disappear like straw on fire; their roots will rot and their flowers wither for they have thrown away the laws of God and despised the word of the holy one of Israel. That is why the anger of the Lord is hard against his people. That is why he has reached out his hand to smash them. The hills will tremble and the rotting bodies of his people will be thrown as refuse in the streets. But even so his anger is not ended; his hand is heavy on them still.

“He will send the signal to the nations far away; whistling to those at the ends of the earth and they will come racing toward Jerusalem. They never weary, never stumble, never startled, their belts are tight; their bootstraps strong. They run without stopping for

rest or for sleep. (By the way this is a description of the Assyrians most likely and ultimately of the last days when God sends his final judgment upon the nation.) Their arrows are sharp, their bows are bent. Sparks fly from their horses’ hoofs and the wheels of their chariots spin like the wind. They roar like lions and pounce upon the prey. They seize my people and carry them off into captivity with none to rescue them. They growl over their victims like the roaring of the sea. Over all Israel lies a pall of darkness and sorrow and the heavens are black.”

Now tonight, we are coming to the 5th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah after our 3rd study and our subject is the "Vineyard of Jehovah, or the Problem of Lawlessness". Isaiah was thought by many and has been thought by many down through the years to be the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. I mention that he was distinguished for his vivid visualization of the truth as well as his profound feeling and majestic utterance. J. Sidlow Baxter in one of his books has said what Beethoven is in the realm of music, what Shakespeare is in the realm of literature, what Spurgeon was among the Victorian preachers, that is Isaiah among the prophets.

Now if Isaiah is known for his vivid visualization of truth, we probably have no better illustration of that than this 5th chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah. Another man has said that with Isaiah they sank into the grave, the greatest classic of Israel. Now in this 5th of Isaiah, we have a chapter that is written against the background that is approximately the same as that of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th chapters. In other words, this chapter was written during the early part of Isaiah's ministry.

Ahaz had probably just come to the throne after the deaths of Uzziah and Jotham. On the international scene at Syria, cruel and terrible was stirring itself again and on the national scene, while Israel had been favored with two good kings, apostasy was knowing at the heart of the nation and disaster was approaching. Judah was strong because of Uzziah's strength, because of his military victories and his preparations and the defenses

which he had built but while the nation was strong outwardly and militarily and economically, men were corrupt and the women, and they are specially singled out too, the women, they were careless.

And in the society, in which there was wealth and pleasure and men were corrupt and apostatizing and women careless, you have a situation in which spiritual apostasy can develop and develop very rapidly. God, according to Isaiah chapter 5, is about to abandon his people. Because you see he is more interested in purity than he is in prosperity. And that is always the case. God is not nearly so interested in how prosperous we are as and how passé we are or how pure spiritually we are. And I think, also we can learn from the 5th of Isaiah, this lesson too. There when a nation is prosperous under God, as this nation has made great pretenses of being, it is at that point that they are often liable to divine judgment.

But I would like to, instead of comparing Israel and Judah, Isaiah remember was the prophet of the Southern Kingdom primarily, instead of thinking of the country of Judah and the capital of Jerusalem and comparing that to the United States of America as is often done, the implication being that as Judah was a theocratic principality, i.e., a place in which God was honored and a place over which God had claims, and comparing them with the United States which is not a Christian nation and as far as I can tell has never really been a Christian nation. Instead of making that comparison which I do not think is really a completely valid one, I would like to compare Israel with the church of Jesus Christ. For it is quite obvious that the church is a group composed of a group of people who have made claims that they know the true God, and in which there are many who do know God.

And I would like to point out this, that as in Judah and as in Jerusalem, and as in Israel those whom God had chosen for himself long ago, apostasy came and judgment failed, so in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those whom God has chosen and over whom he has had some measure of control and now in which there has developed

apostasy that we can expect judgment. Just as Israel was told although God had chosen them and made them his own a long time ago because the descendents of those whom God had dealt with have now abandoned him, judgment is in the offing. So today, on the church of Jesus Christ, because often we have abandoned God we can expect that he also will abandon us.

Now, I am not talking about the genuine Christian. The genuine Christian of course the moment he has believed in Jesus Christ he has eternal life and that life is his for ever. He never can lose it. I believe with all my heart in the eternal security of the believer. Of the believer but not of the professor, not the eternal security of the church member, not the eternal security of the Baptist, not the eternal security of the Methodist or Presbyterian, or the eternal security of the member of some evangelical church, even some independent evangelical church. The Bible does not teach such a doctrine as that. It teaches the eternal security of the believer and it also teaches this: that when apostasy comes in the local church, we can expect that judgment shall come. And the church of Jesus Christ, speaking in the sense of its profession, faces, according to Scripture, the judgment of the last days.

We often like to say the church is going to escape the tribulation. That is true for those who genuinely believe but for those who do not believe the church is going into the great tribulation. So remember. Therefore I am not surprised today that when we read in our newspapers of those who deny the faith like the Molcolm Boyds or the Bishop Pykes or others and now even in some of the well established denominations which for many many years have been known for their fidelity to the faith, there has now entered into many of them an apostasy that makes it very difficult for us to believe that they shall be able to recover themselves from it.

Last week at my own church in which I grew up as a professing member because today in that church there is apostasy and as a matter of fact that apostasy that now is not

touching just the few but touches many. And it does not touch just the few who are of no consequence, but touches the leaders of the denomination.

I was in Winnipeg, as you know, over the past weekend and while I was there, a young man came up to me, well, he was younger than I am, he was really so young he was probably a little over middle age which means he was about 36 and he came up to me and I had known of him as the minister in a certain denominational church which has a name very much like the church of which I was a member, and he was now the pastor of a large independent church in the city of Winnipeg in Manitoba. And I asked him, what had led him to make this change? He said, well Lewis, it just finally got to the place that I could not stand it anymore. He said I cannot live with the new confession of faith which is antichristian, so far as I read it and consequently it was necessary for me to leave my church and he was pastor of a church with about 22 to 2400 members, a fairly good sized church, but he left it and I must say, I admired him for the decision that he made, because it had come to the place where he was unable to carryout the scriptural injunction which is to call to the attention of the elders that evil that exists and to call upon them to get rid of that evil. For if we do not, then we become partakers of it ourselves.

Now I hope I have not offended some of you in the audience by saying this, some of you I don't know. Occasionally some things have to be said and I feel that you must say them. I know there are lots of people who say why don't you just talk about the good things in the church. Surely there are lots of good things that you can talk about and there are. Some even say the good things outweigh the bad things and that is perhaps true in some denominations too and in some independent churches. For apostasy exists there as well as the denomination. But why is that you must point out evil? Some people think, you know, that it is just a matter of putting the good on one side of the scale and the bad on the other end of the good, just manages to outweigh the bad or at least it is about even. Don't say anything about it.

I like to use an illustration like this: why are you disturbed, ladies, about your husband who is running around with another woman. After all, there is a lot of good in him. He provides for you fairly well. You have a nice home. You have food on the table. You have clothes to wear. He educates the children, many lovely things about him. Why is it that you object to his running around with another woman? For the good far outweighs the bad. Now you are very much disturbed because you see your marriage is a relationship to a person.

Now Christianity is a relationship to a person. It is our Lord who according to his own texts of scripture has married us -- ideally, a marriage that shall be consummated completely in the future. But we have already been brought into the relationship of a bride to our Lord and so it is a question of spiritual fidelity. As a matter of fact, we have one of the most offensive words in the English language to describe the man or woman who is unfaithful to the relationship. We say they are guilty of adultery. And did you know that it is exactly what God says in the Bible about apostasy. That's precisely the word that he uses. He uses the very term adulterer and adulteress for those who break the relationship with God. And so that is why it is extremely important that we call black, black and white, white in spiritual things.

Well, now this 5th chapter of the Book of Isaiah is famous for another thing. It contains one of the two pure parables of the Old Testament. The other one is the parable that Nathan spoke to David about Uriah. You remember it is in 2 Samuel chapter 12. And I think it rather striking that this one is not about a lamb but about a vineyard. And when you think of Judah, you will see how appropriate this is. For you see that two leading industries of the little land of Judah were wine culture or grape culture, and sheep culture. And so the two parables of the Old Testament, the pure parables of the Old Testament or parables about things that Judeans were especially they familiar with. And so Isaiah writing to the men of Judah, and Nathan prophesying to king David of Judah,

each one of them reached back into the customs and culture of their own time to give the word of God.

Well, now let us look at the parable itself. Verses 1 through 7. Jehovah’s vineyard. Now the prophet seeks to reach the sensibilities by these attacks in parable and to show them that God is going to abandon a work that he has begun. Some times, you know it is good if you want to tell people something to tell it to them indirectly, instead of directly. And that is the way Nathan did with David. He didn’t come to say to David, you know David you have committed adultery. But he told him over the parable which described his action and then ask him to pronounce judgment upon it. And when he did, then Nathan said, you are the man. And so Isaiah, writing to Judah, he is going to tell a little story in order to get them to commit themselves morally before they know that it has to do with them.

So this is the way he begins, now will I sing to my well beloved, the song of my beloved touching his vineyard. This parable of the vineyard with the use of this metaphor of divine is something that is found not only in the Old Testament but the New, concerning Israel. In the area of Psalm, in Asaph’s Psalm, there is a little expression that in a sense is the summary of the whole of the Pentateuch. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and it is the little expression, thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt. And this is what he is expounding here. I am going to speak, sing a song, of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill and he dug it and gathered up the stones and planted it with a choicest vine.

Now let me stop for just a moment and point out this. It is quite obvious that using Isaiah’s metaphor or parable of the vineyard, that he wants to point out first of all that God chose Israel. He says he plants it with the choicest vine. That my beloved, my well beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill and in this is found all of the teaching of the Book of Exodus, of Genesis, and the choice of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, each one of them as the fathers of the nation. And so there came a time when God spoke to Abraham

and he did not speak to Abraham because Abraham was many; because Abraham was rich; because Abraham was a good man, he was actually an idolater. He did not speak to Abraham because he was nice looking; because he has done good works; because he knew he was going to believe; he chose Abraham by his sovereign grace. There is no other way to explain it. I do not want to lie to you. I do not want to say to you something that will mislead you. That is precisely what the Bible says. He chose him on the basis of sovereign grace.

Now when Paul is talking about this in Romans chapter 9, he spells this out in a more theological way as the New Testament often does and so we read concerning the choice of Abraham and concerning the choice of Isaac and concerning the choice of Jacob. We read in verse 11, for the children being not yet born neither having done any good or evil that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth. And verse 16, so then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. So God chose Abraham and then he made choice of Isaac, and he made choice of Jacob and down through the line there was a chosen route through whom God was to bless the world. So God has chosen this man.

The figure of course is designed to express the spiritual reality and the spiritual reality illustrates the figure. If you ever looked up a Wayside Gardens catalog, surely if you are gardeners, you should have seen a Wayside Gardens catalog, the most beautiful pictures, we cannot hardly resist buying from the catalog if you see it. If you know anything about gardening or love gardening and you can just picture a person who sits down and looks at all of those plants and he says, ah, I want this one.

Now of course remember God chose on the basis of sovereign grace. But you can see him being choosey. He chose this and this is what he is going to plant and so soon the plant arrives, and you know he gets out and digs and he fixes the ground, takes the hoe and so forth. Then he plants that little shrub or whatever it may be and he nurtures it and cares for it and rushes out every morning before he goes to work to see if there is a

new leaf on it, or something like that. And so the picture of God and Israel. He has dug, he has gathered off the stone, he planted it with the choicest wine, he has built a tower in the midst of it, perhaps a reference to Jerusalem; and also made a winepress in it or cut a wine press -- a big place where he can hold the grape juice which I would assume will be something like the temple, which was to be the place where Israel would express its fruit to God in praise and worship and thanksgiving for what he had done for them. And he looked for it to bring forth grapes and it brought forth and you would notice the climax of Isaiah's words, instead bringing forth grapes it brought forth wild grapes.

Now let me stop just for a moment and point out something else. It is obvious that God has chosen this wine by sovereign grace that he has done everything that he possibly could, that it should bring forth fruit. Now it gathers from this that the end of election is service or to put it this way that the end of election is that we please God in the life that we live. Now therefore when we talk about the five points of Calvinism or whatever it is that we believe concerning the truths of Scripture, and we talk about these great doctrines of the faith and no one talks about it more than I and I know you are sick about hearing this. But you see I have always liked to talk about it because it means a great deal to me to know that God has chosen me. And to know that such a thing exists to know that I belong to him, that is tremendous to realize that. That is a great comfort, in the trials and tragedies of life to know that you belong to him, and nothing can disturb that relationship, but the moment that we think that, that is not a means toward an end; we have misunderstood God's election.

Let me just quote one text of Scripture. Philippians chapter 1 and verse 29: It is given, given mind you, given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but to suffer for his sake. With our election has come the right the privilege of suffering. There are other texts that stress that we have been chosen in order that we might serve. And so I have the right to say to you, if you believe in the doctrine of election that there should be some fruit in your life of that doctrine. That is that there is evidence in your life, a

committal to Jesus Christ that acknowledges the fact that you are chosen and that his wonderful grace toward you has some practical result in a life that pleases him. God looked for fruit.

As a matter of fact, he looked for grapes, sweet grapes that will be pleasant to him. Instead wild grapes. Now he appeals. O now, and now O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my vineyard. What could have I done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I looked for it to bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes. Remember the translation I read. Now men of Jerusalem and Judah, you have heard the case and you be the judges. And then there follows in the 5th verse, the judgment. And you can see in this 5th and 6th verses that the vinedresser begins to move from out of the parable into the actual state of things.

“Listen, and now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it shall be eaten up. I will take its protection away, and I will breakdown its walls and it should be trampled down and I will lay up waste. It shall not be pruned nor digged but there shall come up briars and thorns, (and to this point the vinedresser, as a man might have spoken. But now notice, that there is already intruding into the parable, the real vinedresser, for look at the remainder of this verse) I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon them.”

No man can do that. No man can say no rain to my vineyard. Only a God can say that. And so what beautiful facility not only in language but also in literary power, the prophet has given us now a parable that suddenly becomes the word of God to Judah and to Israel. And so, in there follows the identification of the persons who are involved for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel. And the men of Judah is his pleasant plant. And he looked for justice but behold oppression; for righteousness but behold a cry. Did you know that prophets pun? That is right, prophets pun, if you had a

Hebrew text before you and you can read it, you would read that, “He looked for *mishpat*, and behold *mishpat*; and he looked for *tsedaqah* or righteousness but behold *tsedaqah*.” prophets pun to the tremendous effect. He looked for justice, behold oppression; he looked for righteousness; behold a cry, the cry because of the oppression of the people.

Now then what was the matter with Israel? What was the matter with Judah? What was happening in Judah? Now in the 8th verse through the 24th verse, after the description of Jehovah’s vineyard we have Judah’s wild grapes. Here they are. This is what he really found on his vineyard. I went out today and looked at one of my hackberry trees. What did I find on my hackberry trees but asps and caterpillars and my leaves practically gone. Don’t cry, but you see, God looked for the fruits of his election. He looked for the fruits of his sovereign grace and this is what he found.

May I make an application? I wonder what he finds in your life. I wonder what he really finds there. Does he find some grapes that he is able to enjoy or does he perhaps find some wild grapes there too. What about your church? Some of you have places of responsibility in them? What about your church? Wild grapes? Something you could do something about perhaps or sweet grapes?

Six woes. Now I am not going to make much over the fact that there are six of them, but six is the number of man. If there had been seven, however, I would have had an explanation for that too. The number of perfection, perfection of world but it is rather good that it is six anyway. Notice the 8th verse, I will just point the woes out:

“Woe unto them that join house to house; (verse 11), Woe unto them who rise up early in the morning; (verse 18), woe unto them who draw inequity with cords of vanity; (verse 20), woe unto them who call evil good and good evil; (verse 21) woe unto them who are wise in their own eyes; (verse 22) woe unto them who are mighty who drink wine, and men of strength to mix strong drink.”

Six woes describing the wild grapes of Judah.

Now all the great preachers use woes. So, if every now and then I try to emulate a great preacher I am pronounceable, I hope you will forgive me, but Isaiah was not the first. Many of the great prophets of the Old Testament followed by John the Baptist, I don't know that John ever really specifically used the term, woe. He said something however that were rather sharp. He said, for example, in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of Matthew when he was speaking to the leaders of his nation, in the 7th verse, I think it is, but when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism he said unto them, O generation of vipers. And that is a little worse than woe, is it not? A generation of vipers. Imagine when they took up the love offering John really felt that. But it is our Lord who uses woes.

In fact in the 23rd of Matthew when he talks about the Pharisees, he uses seven of them, in the Greek text 8, in our English text, those magnificent woes upon the Pharisees because of their great professions of faith and the lack of it in their lives. So our Lord is one who uses woes, John the Baptist speaks the same language, the prophets of the Old Testament give us woes and these woes of God are something to be thankful for. For you see the woes of God are warnings for us to escape from the woes and he tells us about them beforehand. If he waited until the woe actually came to pass it would be too late. But he pronounces these woes upon the people in order to warn them so that they will flee from the destruction.

Mr. Spurgeon used to say God's woes are much better than Satan's welcomes and they are. So here is a preacher who doesn't mind saying woe. I had a Britisher once say of a man who preached the sermon. That his sermon was made up of longitude, latitude and platitude; by which he meant that he went every where and preached every where a long time and said nothing.

Now Isaiah is not a man like that. Six great woes and these woes, I think as I analyze these woes all proceed from two things, and they may have some application to us here in Dallas, because it so happens most of us in Dallas have about everything that we want. Most of us, and all of these woes that seems to me proceed from two things. Love of wealth and love of pleasure. The instinct to gather, we have all got it, haven't we? Even preachers have it. The instinct to gather, collect, look at my portfolio. How I would like to increase it. You know, my balance in the bank, in the savings account, if you have such a thing as that; my business, my home, my car, my boat, my estates, my other home, my third home etcetera, you know, the instinct to gather nothing wrong with having things. Unless God is left out and then the instinct to squander, you know. I have got it. Now, spend it all myself. Belongs to me nobody else has any right to tell, I will do what I please and enjoy. Nothing wrong with that, providing God is not second in your life. You might like a little of that too. May be the means of some sweet grapes if it is spent under the direction of God.

Let us look at them real quickly. First of all there is the problem of the land inequities. Now what do you think? You think of South America, don't you? I do. There is no land on the face of the earth that is so riddled by the injustice of land inequities than South America where you have the very rich, the extremely rich and the very, very poor. Now you know it might have some message for the United States too. In so far as we are citizens have a part in such things. I am not going to preach socialism. You know I am not of that persuasion. I read *The National Review* and I like it. [Laughter] But I do think that the time comes when a Christian has to make some decisions that affect the social welfare of this country too, as a citizen, I am not saying that the church should do this. It should not, it should preach the Gospel. It has something that infinitely more important than that and we should engage in that wholeheartedly, completely. Nobody else is doing it. Why should we get involved in the other?

But nevertheless land inequities are bad. Listen, woe unto them who join house to house, who lay field to field till there is no place that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth in mine ears said the Lord of Hosts. Isaiah said, you know, what do you mean by that is the Lord whispered something in my ear. Of a truth, many houses shall be desolate even great and fair without inhabitant. Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath and the seed of an omer shall yield an ephah.

And then the problem of alcoholism. Is that a contemporary evil? Do you know Christians, who is most concerned about alcoholism in this country? Not Christians, they are not concerned particularly, some are. There is the Keswick Mercy Home in New Jersey, a fine Christian place devoted to service the alcoholics. There is one in Mississippi, there is one in North Carolina, there are others like this around the country. They are doing a great work. But you know who is most concerned about alcoholism? The District Attorneys, the Judges, those who are most concerned are those who see the pitiful condition into which people are brought by alcoholism.

I have a friend who is one of the Assistant District Attorneys here. He told me just a couple of years ago or so that seventy five percent of the felonies that are committed are felonies caused by or related to alcoholism. We do not really realize how evil this is. I am not recommending prohibition. I am not recommending that a man never take a drink. But I am looking at it from the standpoint of God's word. The abuse of alcohol is a great evil, individually and in society.

On Sunday, those of you who are here remember that I quoted Professor Arthur Schlesinger and how he ridiculed the Christian faith. In the course of it he said that the Christian faith with its doctrine of sin and damnation was an absurd mirth. And that society would be redeemed not by the blood of the cross but by the benevolent unfolding of history. I saw something else, Professor Schlesinger wrote. I cut it out about two months ago but I just read it again today. I have forgotten about it. It occurred in one of our within *The Wall Street Journal* of June the 10. And this is what Professor Schlesinger

says, “The world today is asking a terrible question. A question which every citizen of this republic should be putting to himself. What sort of people are we, we are Americans, and the answer which the much of the world is bound to return is that we are today the most frightening people on this planet. It is almost as if a primal curse had been fixed on our nation.”

Now I said this not long after the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy. Now that is of course nonsensical thinking. Professor Schlesinger knows far better than I that Senator Robert Kennedy was not slain by an American but by an alien, an Arab fanatic, living here. But the thing that interested me about this aside from the fact that apparently he has forgotten this doctrine of 20 years ago, the benevolent unfolding of history, the thing that interests me above is that it is true that we in America are not perhaps as concerned as citizens as we ought to be over the things that are happening in our land. And so I want to exhort you as Christians and as citizens, because the Bible says something about it. I would not want to tell you who to vote for at all. But I do think that the Bible definitely teaches us that we as Christians are to be concerned citizens about community. And when decisions which are for that which is right are possible for us to make then of course we should make them. I do not believe that we should preach politics. But I believe that we should be concerned. Therefore land inequities, alcoholism are things that concern us.

Let us notice verse 18 and verse 19. The third woe, the problem of presumption. Owe unto them who draw inequity with cords of vanity and sin as it were with a cart rope. There is a wonderful picture of a person who is drawing a wagon filled with inequity behind him. And their two connections, one is cords of vanity, light things, things which you can hardly see. I would presume that this has to do with that type of sin that is almost unknown to others. There are some Christians who are just about as light as a strawfly and as a giggle. That is about us deep as they are and they can never think seriously about anything spiritual. They have been brought into the faith and they

know Christ but that is all they know and they care for little more. And they are in the grip of Christian sin, lack of fellowship with God, lack of any depth at all.

And then there are those who are involved in the tightrope of sin. The big sins. I wish I had time to talk about this. I want to say just this. There is always hope in confession of sin. But then arises the problem of morality, verse 20. This is something I do want to say something about in our last few minutes. “Woe unto them 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.”

Now I think the Prophet Isaiah if he were living today, would have a great deal to say in exposition of this text. Woe unto those that call evil good and good evil. John Stormer’s recent book *The Death of a Nation* has a chapter in it entitled "The war in the churches". By the way I recommend that you read that book. I think it would profit you. I don't think every sentence in it is the truth but Mr. Stormer is a Christian man. He has had a genuine conversion experience, he says. I have no reason to doubt it. And his book has a lot of good sense in it. In that chapter he comments upon the church and how it is divided over such matters as communism, war in the streets, right and wrong, premarital sex, God's existence, political beliefs, and as a consequence, the gospel itself -- that all of this turmoil is existing in our churches.

And the thing I want to settle upon and center upon is this distinction between right and wrong; for believe it or not in the Christian church today we have difficulty in determining what is right and what is wrong. And I think that something in that chapter really struck home with me because I had just been reading Joseph Fletcher's book "The new morality". And as many of you know the new morality is the morality that many of our churches are not only reading but espousing it. And some of our denominational headquarters have actually at least for a time for one for the doctrines that are found in Professor Fletcher's book.

And in that chapter, Mr Stormer pointed out that Herbert Philbrick in 1953, had told the House Committee on Un-American Activities that there were numbers of certain men in our churches who are communists. And this is what he wrote; When he was asked the names of all, he said, the Reverend Joseph Fletcher of a theological seminary, Episcopal theological seminary in Cambridge, Massachusetts is another. These are Philbrick’s words. Joe Fletcher worked with also on Communist Party projects and on an enormous number of tasks.

Now in Professor Fletcher's theology, he has advocated that the Ten Commandments should be changed to read. Thou shalt not covet ordinarily; thou shall not kill ordinarily; thou shall not commit adultery ordinarily. Now this is the new morality. Morality that is determined by circumstances. Right and wrong are no longer absolutes. As the word of God sets them fore and as we had thought that they were. Now Mr. Stormer goes on to say how has this theological revolution been accomplished without the people in the pew coming to see what is being done with their church. Dr. John C Bennett, well known preacher today, has explained this also, writing in the March ‘66 issue of Wind & Chaff published by the National Student Christian Federation. Then it said this; “Churches often change convictions without formally renouncing their views to which they were previously committed,” and listen to this, “Where theologians usually find ways of preserving continuity with the past through reinterpretation.”

In other words, you poor people who sit out in the pew, have been fooled by preachers. That is precisely what he has said. Dr Bennett is an influential man. The way you preserve continuity with the past is the reinterpret those old words and so you reinterpret the words which sound very evangelical and you give them now a nonevangelical sense using the same terminology. You do not speak of Jesus as God and Savior any longer, for to speak of Jesus as God might inflame some people; Unitarians and others, so you speak of him as Lord and everyone has a definition for Lord and so

you have reinterpreted it and so on down the line. You could probably do think of other illustrations.

It has always been true that the pew is more conservative than the pulpit. There has hardly ever been a preacher who has not been tempted to walk on the fence in preaching, hardly ever, and that is why in the pulpit you have so much deception. I think, I understood why one famous preacher said that he doesn't understand how any preacher can ever get to heaven, who is not amazed that the grace of God has been shown to him. I understand exactly what that means because the temptation to trim your sails just a little bit is never worse than when you come in the pulpit and seek to speak to people whom you know that you are going to offend, at least some of them.

Now Isaiah is not the kind of man that cared. But you know why. Because he was not subservient to any denomination, he was not dependent upon them. He didn't have to think about his retirement plan, he didn't have any. He didn't have to think about his salary, he didn't get any. He was dependent upon God and he knew that if he spoke the word of God that God would supply his needs. In fact he had the sneaking suspicion if he begins to trim his sails with God he might not have his needs met by God. I am not against at all preachers not being paid the salary.

Now of course, I don't want you understand by this that I think if a man of God preaches the word of God we do not have responsibility to help that man. We do. Apparently some advantages in being dependent upon God only some great advantages. Isaiah was that kind of man. Hence he could say, woe unto them 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. Who take the good old doctrines of the word of God and say that they are not the good old doctrines of the word of God. Who say that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, but just any Son of God. Who says that he is not God but simply a one in whom the spark of the divine has reached its greatest manifestation, but really one of us. Who says that he is not one who died for the sins of the world as a substitutionary

sacrifice but simply one who died to illustrate for us the love of God; who did not really rise from the dead in bodily form, who can believe such a thing, is that you would have to be a supernaturalist to believe that but who believe rather that he lived in the sense that his influence lives on today. And who believes that he is coming again not in the sense that he went away as the angels said. But rather that he comes again when we die or he comes in the calamities and tragedies of life. Great truths will they may be through the first I don't think it is strictly scriptural but not the truths of the word of God; that is, calling evil good and good evil and darkness for light and light for darkness and bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Verse 21 quickly, “Woe unto them who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight.” The problem of pride. And finally the problem of perversion of justice 22 through 24. “Woe unto them who are mighty and by the way he uses the term sarcastically. Mighty to drink wine, here are the men of distinction and men of strength to make strong drinks who justify the wicked for a word and takeaway the righteousness of the righteous from him.” The perversion of justice, the nation is sick with this today in the United States and we have men who are preaching the non-virtue of nonviolence and all types of things like that.

By the way there is some encouragement, do you know why, even Berkeley is now disturbed over the immorality on the campus. That is right. There had been so many rapes on the campus of Berkeley that they are not disturbed and leaflets are being passed out asking for them to do something about it. Is it not amazing? Finally men discover that sin is really bad in their experience. Well, the chapter concludes with God's judgment, and it is a terribly sobering picture is the picture of some of the most profound moral phenomena of life. The persistence of divine wrath, the long lingering effects of sin, man's abuse of God's discipline and man's defects of the providence of God. So the chapter concludes with God's judgment upon Judah. We cannot escape it. We may think

it does not exist but it will come. Time is up. We must stop. Next time, I hope to begin with 6th chapter, next Monday night 8 o'clock. Let's bow on a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank thee for these wonderful chapters from the word of God. We thank thee that it is the word of God and we see its contemporaneity that the days of Isaiah are days like our days. Help us Lord to be followers of him and we through him. For Jesus' sake. Amen.