

Re-Thinking the Present and the Future

Isa 2:1-22 – Isaiah Part 2 – November 12, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Reading of Isa 2:2-22

We begin with three quotes on the issue of being countercultural as Christians. Heads up—won't be able to listen here and text same time.

We have mentioned this idea counterculture several times over the last months. Idea that our faith leads us to reform not only our souls but the world around us.

First from Francis Schaeffer. 1973, *The Church at the End of the 21st Century*:

One of the greatest injustices we do to our young people is to ask them to be conservative. Christianity is not conservative, but revolutionary.
Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 21st Century*

Being countercultural is being a revolutionary, no mere "conservative." It is "counter."

Second also Schaeffer. Essay called "Art and the Bible":

When a man comes under the blood of Christ, his whole capacity as man is refashioned. His soul is saved, yes, but so are his mind and body. True spirituality includes the Lordship of Christ over the total man.

There have been periods in the past when Christians understood this better than we have in the last decades. Some years ago when I started to work out a Christian concept of culture, many people considered what I was doing suspect. They felt that because I was interested in intellectual answers, I must not be biblical. But this attitude represents a real poverty. It fails to understand that if Christianity is really true, then it involves the whole man, including his intellect and creativeness. Christianity is not *just* "dogmatically" true or "doctrinally" true. Rather, it is true to what is there, true in the whole area of the whole man in all of life.

Francis Schaeffer, "Art and the Bible," *Complete Works*, II:376-377

Starting point to counterculture is seeing "the Lordship of Christ over the total man." Our faith speaks to "the whole area of the whole man in all of life." Don't worship on Sundays as Christians and then do our job like everyone else does.

Third quote by Herman Bavinck. Year is 1888. Appealing to churches in Netherlands to unite. Speaks to how Christian worldview is comprehensive. So big that it encompasses everything, all facets of life, all arenas of our world and culture:

Our conflict is not with anything creaturely but against sin alone. No matter how complicated the relationships may be within which we as Christ-confessors find ourselves in our age, no matter how serious and difficult, perhaps even insoluble, the problems may seem in the areas of society, politics, and above all, in science, it would testify to unbelief and powerlessness for us to withdraw proudly from the fray and under the guise of Christianity to dismiss the whole of our age's culture as demonic. In the words of Bacon, that would be nothing less than attempting to please God with a lie. On the other hand, faith has the promise of overcoming the world. That faith is catholic, not restricted to any time, place, nation, or people. It can enter into all situations, can connect with all forms of natural life, is suitable to every time, and beneficial for all things, and is relevant in all circumstances. It is free and independent because it is in conflict only with sin and in the blood of the Cross there is purification for every sin.
Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27(1992): 248-249.

Dense quote but idea that FAITH SPEAKS "into all situations" is important. That sentence is critical. Your faith is not simply what you believe to be saved. Praise God for that. But it speaks into everything around you. Takes work, but it speaks.

This morning we dial down into a specific aspect of how our faith speaks—how we think of PRESENT, FUTURE, HISTORY.

Prayer – Open hearts, minds to Isaiah. Holy Spirit be w/ those grieving the loss of Wilson Brant, 26-yr old connected to CYT.

A COMING AGE OF GLORY (2:1-5)

Isaiah prophesies of "the latter days" when the "mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains" (v. 2).

"Nations" and "peoples" go to "mountain of the LORD" to learn "his ways" and "walk in his paths" (v. 3).

"The law" and "the word of the LORD" will come out of Zion.

Nations no longer at war (v. 4).

When will this occur?

Dispensationalists would say the millennium, that this describing the 1,000 years of Rev 20. Weakness of that view is that there is nothing in this passage or Rev 20 that would connect the two passages.

Better to see it as fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth.

That day described in Revelation in places like Rev 15:3-4 →

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev 15:3-4

But another element here.

That phrase, "in the latter days" is used only one other time in Bible. Acts 2:17.

But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (Acts 2:16-17)

"In the last days" in Acts 2:17 = same phrase as "in the latter days" of Isa 2:2-4.

Pentecost = united nations, people gathered in Jerusalem, Word went out from Jerusalem.

Pentecost = these ARE THE LAST DAYS! NT is clear that we are in the end times. Age to come at the return of Christ is ahead of us, but in terms of salvation history it is the NEXT STEP.

We living some fulfillment of Isa 2:2-4 and await the final fulfillment. It is the ALREADY and NOT YET of our lives.

Countercultural piece here is this: **We believe in a God who is sovereign over all history.** But also, **we believe in a future realm of glory where God, his creation, and God's people, are in perfect peace with each other.**

How it should **affect** us: We work for redemptive changes in this world. But never forget that the coming age of glory will infinitely surpass anything we experience here. That's where we experience a world at peace with God and with itself. Till then **we are trying to make beautiful a life in a war zone.**

We work for racial equality and racial justice but know that it's the coming age of glory where all nations are truly at peace with each other.

We work toward being a nation where its laws reflect the good and evil that the Bible defines—but know that the coming age of glory is where God's Word and Law are seen by all as TRUE TRUTH.

A COMING DAY OF NATIONAL JUDGMENT (2:6-11)

The mood changes radically at verse 6. Like a movie that starts off in the happiness of one scene, then shifts to a dark and sinister time. Caption that reads, "3,000 Years Earlier."

Second scene is a scene of God's judgment on his people—his people!!! (v. 6).

They will be judged for their "haughty looks" and "lofty pride" (v. 11). Vivid portrayal of pride in those phrases. Facial expressions, chin high, looking down their noses at others. But it's all PRIDE, VANITY, SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, SELF-IMPORTANCE. Such PRIDE will be judged by the LORD.

What does their pride look like?

Proudly indulging in **false religion** (v. 6) – "High places" of **2 Kings 15:4** →

Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. (2 Kgs 15:4)

Proud of their **wealth** (v. 7) – Uzziah received tribute from the Ammonites (2 Chr 26:8)

Proud of their **military strength** (v. 7) – Uzziah expanded the army and its weaponry (2 Chr 26:12-14)

Proudly turning to "**idols**" and away from the living God (v. 8) – foolishness so vivid here: "bow down to the work of their hands." Yet, that connects, doesn't it?

In **2 Chr 26:15-16** see how pride infected Uzziah's reign:

In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. 16 But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. (2 Chr 26:15-16)

What will God do? Come in judgment.

Two things will happen when he does. (1) Judah will be "brought low" and (2) "the LORD alone will be exalted in that day" (v. 11).

Lord will threaten judgment throughout these kings and reigns until sin of Judah reach a certain level and then Babylon in 586 BC—over a century later but shadow is there throughout what are called the pre-exilic prophets. Those writing before the Babylonian exile.

Countercultural piece here is this: **We believe in a God who judges people.** He has the right to do this, and he actually does this. People are comfortable with a God who observes things and is a source of comfort in hard times. They don't like a God who judges people. A God who sets the standards. A God who rules from a throne of both redemption AND judgment.

The **application** for us: **Don't trifle with God.** He judged Israel and Judah in a brutal and terrifying way. But as God he was also perfectly just to do this.

Part of reason he did it was to help us all take seriously what we find in the third scene of the passage.

A COMING DAY OF FINAL JUDGMENT (2:12-22)

In the third section the LORD reveals another day of judgment. This time it isn't a national one but an all-encompassing one.

Now the judgment is "**against all** that is proud and lofty" (v. 12). This "**against all**" phrase reverberates like a judge reading a sentence in a courtroom—**verses 12-16**

Natural wonders (vv. 13-14) – this creation beautiful but reminds us that also cursed. One day restored!

Man-made wonders (v. 15-16) – remarkable achievements but God's judgment will crush the ones done with self-importance and pride

Idols (v. 18, 20) – Isaiah will continue to harp on Israel's idols – they are **wicked** and **stupid!!**

Barry Webb summarizes the judgment of God:

Everything in which people have trusted instead of trusting in the living God will be brought down. Even religion will prove worthless on that day if it is man-made (18-20), for man-made religion (represented here by idols) is the supreme expression of human arrogance. It is an attempt to bend God to our will by remaking him in our own image.

Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, Bible Speaks Today, 47

What will God do? He will come in judgment. Look at the terror and fear of his judgment in **verses 20-21**.

To those who are his people we will see it as "THE SPLENDOR OF HIS MAJESTY." But to those who are not his people, it will be "THE TERROR OF THE LORD...WHEN HE RISES TO TERRIFY THE EARTH."

Countercultural idea here is this: **There is a day of judgment coming on all humanity and this entire world**. We need to be aware of that.

How it should **affect** us: **Do what you must to escape God's judgment**. Take a quick glance at a familiar verse to see the answer. John 3:16.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

You escape judgment by believing in Jesus Christ—believe that you need a Savior and he is the only one! Believe that he is the Son of God and follow him as your King and Lord!

CONCLUSION

Isaiah challenges us by how he looks at THE FUTURE. But we are also to live in THE PRESENT in light of these words on THE FUTURE.

Look at 2:5 and 2:22.

2:5 – If it is true that God's Word and Law are the only true words, then "let us walk in the light of the LORD." All else is darkness. Let us walk in God's Word. His Word is the light we need in our darkness. Walk in it!

Not enough to have a Bible or even to read a Bible! Must "WALK IN IT!!!!!!!"

When Bible says that **sexual immorality** is a sin, we are to WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.

When Bible says that **drunkenness** is a sin, we are to WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.

When Bible says that our speech is not to be **vulgarity or gossip** but to be BUILD OTHERS UP, we are to WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.

When Bible says to **honor your mother and father** or obey your parents in the Lord, we are to WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.

And 2:22 – If it is true that God will judge the "lofty pride of men," all that is the best of human accomplishments, then "**stop regarding man.**" **He's nothing but a man.**

God has made us to be influenced by people and affected by people, but we are never to WORSHIP people.

We are to give thanks for human achievements that are beautiful or helpful, but never to WORSHIP those who created them. We worship only the Creator even as we give him thanks for some person or some aspect in his creation.

Isaiah has given us a hard word here. He tells us what to do but not how to do it. To "walk in the light of the LORD" you must be connected to Jesus Christ who said, "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD." **To walk in the LIGHT OF THE LORD you must be connected to the LIGHT OF THE WORLD.** Otherwise you have no power to obey. And you have no forgiveness for your "lofty pride."

Turn away from God's judgment by walking in the light of the LORD. Walk in the light of the LORD by being connected to the light of the WORLD.

Prayer

Closing Song

MISC QUOTES

William Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality* (Crossway, 2013):

"For [Francis Schaeffer] all of life, including politics, was a matter of spirituality, just as were prayer life, Bible reading, and the link. Not that he confused the church and the state, as we have seen. Nor that church life should be ignored, or that doing politics, writing a poem, making a scientific discovery, raising a family, and so on are strictly the same kinds of activities. Yet in a deep sense, they are spiritual activities. For Schaeffer, then, spirituality was not restricted to the special practices we often associate with religious devotion" (186).

Schaeffer's goal, according to William Edgar, was for the Christian to think and act in a distinctively Christian manner in what sphere of life he found himself. Embraced Kuyper's "spheres," the idea that each of us occupies a variety of spheres. Yet, we do so as Christians in every one of them.

Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Eerdmans, 1931). Opening lecture is called, "Calvinism a Life-System."

Idea is that our theology is far more than a view of certain aspects of theology. It is a comprehensive worldview or "life-system" in his words. Its uniqueness comes from the way it views three all-important relations: Our relation to God, our relation to man, and our relation to the world (19). Our relationship to God is one of direct connection through the Holy Spirit to the God who is supremely sovereign and the source and center and end of all things (20-21). Our relationship to man is distinct because we acknowledge all to be creatures made in the image of God and equally in need of redemption because of the fall. "All men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented, as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently as man to man" (27). Thus, there is an inevitable movement in Christian cultures toward a democratic

kind of society: "It was not the man of lower estate who reduced his superior to his level in order to usurp the higher place, but it was all men kneeling in concert at the feet of the Holy One of Israel" (ibid.). Third, our faith compels us to have a distinct relationship to the world: "Placing itself before the face of God, it has not only honored *man* for the sake of his likeness to the Divine image, but also *the world* as a Divine creation, and has at once placed to the front the great principle that there is a *particular grace* which works Salvation, and also a *common grace* by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator....Instead of monastic flight *from* the world the duty is now emphasized of serving God *in* the world, in every position in life. To praise God in Church and serve Him in the world became the inspiring impulse" (30).

Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220-251.¹ See esp. pp. 248-249:

"The Church is sometimes referred to as catholic because it embraces the whole of human experience" (221)

"In Israel itself revelation dominates everything. A separation between the cult and the rest of life is altogether impossible. All dualism is eschewed in the unity of God's theocratic rule. The law of YHWH regulates everything even to the smallest minutiae. Not only the priests but also the kings; not only the cultic and the moral but also the civil and social and political dimensions of life are governed by the one law of God. Here we encounter an inner catholicity, a religion that encompasses the whole person in the wholeness of life" (222).

¹ Another study ("Herman Bavinck on Catholicity," Barend Kamphuis, *Mid-America Journal of Theology*) points out that this was originally an address by Bavinck at the Theological School in Kampen on Dec 18, 1888. In this context Bavinck was leading one branch of the Reformed church in the Netherlands and Kuyper another. Bavinck's burden in this address was to bring the two side together. Thus, there is a strong condemnation of schisms within the church. Though he acknowledges the contributions by different Protestants branches, he is also quick to point out that it should not be so infintessimally divided.

His NT argument was not quite as strong. God's love for the world, Christ uniting all things within himself, the hope of a new heaven and new earth (223). He will say in inspiring fashion, "The Gospel is a joyful tiding, not only for the individual person but also for humanity, for the family, for society, for the state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation" (224). Yet, it is not quite obvious what this really means.

"Faith appears to be great, indeed, when a person renounces all and shuts himself up in isolation. But even greater, it seems to me, is the faith of the person who, while keeping the kingdom of heaven as a treasure, at the same time brings it out into the world as a leaven, certain that He who is for us is greater than he who is against us and that he is able to preserve us from evil even in the midst of the world.

"Now is this not precisely what the catholicity of our Christian faith requires of us? The Gospel is not content to be one opinion among others of the life but claims to be the truth, the truth that by its very nature is exclusive in every area. The church is not just an arbitrary association of people who wish to worship together but something instituted by the Lord, the pillar and ground of the truth. The world would gladly banish Christianity and the church from its turf and force it to a private inner chamber. We could give the world no greater satisfaction than to withdraw into solitude and leave the world peacefully to its own devices. But the catholicity of Christianity and the church both forbid us to grant this wish. We may not be a sect, we ought not to want to be one, and we cannot be one, without denying the absolute character of truth. The kingdom of heaven may not be of this world, but it does demand that everything in the world be subservient to it. It is exclusivistic and refuses to accept an independent or neutral kingdom alongside of it. Undoubtedly it would be much easier to leave this entire age to its own devices and to seek our strength in quietness. But such a restful peace is not permitted us here. Because every creature of God is good and not to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because everything can be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, rejection of any one of His creatures would be ingratitude to God, a denial of His gifts. Our conflict is not with anything creaturely but against sin alone. No matter how complicated the relationships

may be within which we as Christ-confessors find ourselves in our age, no matter how serious and difficult, perhaps even insoluble, the problems may seem in the areas of society, politics, and above all, in science, it would testify to unbelief and powerlessness for us to withdraw proudly from the fray and under the guise of Christianity to dismiss the whole of our age's culture as demonic. In the words of Bacon, that would be nothing less than attempting to please God with a lie. On the other hand, faith has the promise of overcoming the world. That faith is catholic, not restricted to any time, place, nation, or people. It can enter into all situations, can connect with all forms of natural life, is suitable to every time, and beneficial for all things, and is relevant in all circumstances. It is free and independent because it is in conflict only with sin and in the blood of the Cross there is purification for every sin" (248-249).

Martin Luther – To these we should add Martin Luther's basic ethic of "love your neighbor." This was his practical solution to what our vocation(s) should look like, especially our occupations. We do our work in a way that results in our neighbor being blessed. I am sympathetic to this approach. I do think it allows for a spiritual life that encompasses all things without some of the complexity that the Reformed view creates.