

July 06, 2025

Isaiah 66:10-14

# “Which Group Are You?”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah wrote at a time when there were two groups of people in Israel. First, there were those who had chosen their own ways. Their souls delighted in abominations. Sin had taken dominion over them so that they loved and practiced sin. Listen to what the Lord said about them before our OT text for this morning: “I ... will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.”

The second group in Israel were those who trembled at the Word of the Lord, properly fearing the Lord, a God “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (Ex. 34:6).” This second group did not delight in abominations and they deliberately fought and avoided sin, refusing to love and practice it. Now, those who loved abominations had cast out those who loved the Lord. But the Lord promised to put them to shame. Isaiah writes: “The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the Lord, rendering recompense to his enemies!” In other words the Lord would compensate by giving to his enemies and the enemies of his faithful people the punishment that they deserved, reminding us once again that he is the Lord and he “will by no means clear the guilty (Ex. 34:7).”

Today, there are still two groups who claim for themselves the kingdom of God and his King. There are those who delight in abominations. Sin is in charge of their lives and they love and freely practice it. And then there are those who tremble at the Word of the Lord because they see the nature of their sin and are aghast by it and emptied of any notion that sin is good and that it somehow can be justified by what they do. They trust in Christ who lived a perfect life for them, and they believe that he suffered and died so that they might have the forgiveness of sins. They believe that, in the forgiveness of sins, they possess the key to heaven, and they fight by denying themselves to keep the key. **Which Group Are You?**

The words of our Old Testament lesson are for God’s people. They are also for those who are struck by the danger of harsh treatment, and the possibility that the Lord will make all of their fears come true. God is calling all of us right now that we may examine ourselves and answer in repentance. He is powerfully speaking so that we may listen and not plug our ears. He desires us to hear his Word and has set before us our Old Testament lesson to empty us of ourselves that we may be filled with him, and either strengthened or renewed in our battle between our old sinful selves and our new life in him. May we desist from the desires to do evil in his eyes. May we cease to choose those things in which he does not delight.

This can only come about by the power of the gospel. When the law shows us our sin, where we are headed, and our inability to do anything to save ourselves, we are then ready to hear the wonderful consolation that Jesus loves us and has done it all on the cross. At the cross of our suffering servant is the powerful pardon that declares us forgiven and the baptism that washes all the filth away. At the cross was the body and blood of Jesus that was offered and shed so that we might eat from the tree of life and by faith receive a paradise, even now, so that we may one day behold the consummation of it in glory. Thus, we have a Savior and a saving rule in him as our King, who desires to give us every good thing forever.

**So, Which Group Are You?** Are you of those who cheapen the grace of God? Do you think of sin as lightly nor consider the danger of evil? The apostle Paul warns not receive the grace of God in vain, for it is written, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Today there is the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of heaven. This is the day of salvation and the moment when we need to remember that, contrary to the thinking of those who love their abominations, there is no fellowship between light and darkness. God has said, “... go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

Indeed, the Lord says before our Old Testament lesson, “this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” And for those of us who are humble, contrite, and tremble, there is set before us the new happiness of the deliverance from all our enemies that is ours in Jesus. In verse 10 we read: “Rejoice *with* Jerusalem, and be glad *for* her, all you who love her; rejoice *with* her in joy, all you who mourn *over* her ...” The people of the time of Isaiah were invited to consider the plight of all who had gone on before them and their entrance into glory so that they would keep their focus on the city of peace. This city of peace are God’s people who are at peace. We are invited to do the same. Like our fellow believers of the past, we travel in a fallen creation that wishes to cast us away from the peace that is ours. Like them, we are invited to travel through the violence, holding on to the peace we now have by faith in the forgiveness of sins, and the everlasting peace that is ours in the city of the church.

We who believe in Jesus are surviving the violence as our forefathers survived long ago and we, as they did, await the eternal glory. And, as they are now there, we look forward to being there. They were called lovers of Zion who at one time mourned over her misery. And like them, in the mourning over our own miseries, we are bid to rejoice with Jerusalem - to be lovers of Zion - and be glad with her and to exult over her since we are counted as her children and she our mother.

We rejoice over her spiritual treasures. Thus, in verse eleven we read “... that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.” The idea is that we are like a very hungry baby (the church) that finds sustenance and exceedingly great comfort in our mother who, in this case, represents Jerusalem and everything that heaven is. Fixing our eyes on things above, and what is even ours now by faith, sees us through the rough times.

It is then that the imagery of Isaiah is broadened in a most unusual way. We read in verses twelve through thirteen: “For thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem ...’” It is here that Jerusalem shifts from a place and people to the Lord. The place and people is from the Lord who takes to himself the role of a mother. This is a rare image in Scripture. But this is for good reason. One Lutheran theologian writes in his commentary:

The Lord will take into his arms the children who had been so miserable and oppressed. He will dandle them on His knees and comfort them as a mother comforts a man. The grief of

a grown man is the deepest and heaviest that we know. There is no comfort more heartfelt than that bestowed by a mother on her son. Her son, even though grown to manhood, is still closer to the mother's heart than to the heart of father, brother, or sister. [The expression] "through Jerusalem," says that the glory of the church is both substance and means of the divine comfort, even as Jerusalem's misery had been the cause of the mourning of her children.

This, of course, should not be taken to negate the time when a grown man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. The illustration of mother and grown son takes us to that vulnerable stage when a son has no wife and when he is in great misery. He will most likely go to his mother who nurtured him from the beginning to find comfort. The Lord is like a mother who carries her child on the side or hip and bounces him upon the knees which immediately rescues the child from the tears.

Our text closes with the main point: "You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the Lord shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies." There is joy and gladness for those who tremble at God's Word. But there will not be joy and gladness for those who delight in abominations and allow sin to have dominion. And while, for a time, those who love abominations and who allow them to have dominion torture those who tremble at the Word, there will come a day when all enemies of the gospel will be no more. The Lord, like a mother, will whisk us away onto the hip and bounce us on the knees. By faith this is already true. But one day we will see his face like the face of our mother and we will see that face and smile and laugh and giggle in full relief and joy.

I don't know about you, but as for me, I sure do want to be in the right group! So, **Which Group Are You?**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott