

Idolaters Redeemed

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Date: 19 August 2012

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[0:00] Turn in your Bibles to the book of Isaiah chapter 43. We're going to be starting at chapter 43 of Isaiah, verse 22.

! And we're going to read all the way through to 44, verse 23. You have not called upon me, O Jacob.

You have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings, nor wearied you with demands for incense.

You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins, and wearied me with your offenses.

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

[1:06] Review the past for me. Let us argue the matter together. State the case for your innocence. Your first father sinned.

Your spokesman rebelled against me. So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction, and Israel to scorn.

But now listen. Listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what the Lord says.

He who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you. Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

Listen, for I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

[2:09] They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. One will say, I belong to the Lord.

Another will call himself by the name of Jacob. Still another will write on his hand, the Lord's, and will take the name of Israel. This is what the Lord says.

Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty. I am the first, and I am the last. Apart from me there is no God.

Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come.

Yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble. Do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

[3:13] You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other rock. I know not one.

All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind.

They are ignorant to their own shame. Who shapes a God and casts an idol which can profit him nothing? He and his kind will be put to shame.

Craftsmen are nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand. They will be brought down to tear and infamy.

The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals. He shapes an idol with hammers. He forges it with the might of his arm.

[4:13] He gets hungry and loses his strength. He drinks no water and grows faint. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker.

He roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine.

He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine and the rain made it grow.

It is man's fuel for burning. Some of it he takes and warms himself. He kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a God and worships it.

He makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire. Over it he prepares his meal.

[5 : 18] He roasts his meal and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, Ah, I am warm. I see the fire.

From the rest he makes a God, his idol. He bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, Save me. You are my God.

They know nothing. They understand nothing. Their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.

No one stops to think. No one has the knowledge or understanding to say, Half of it I use for fuel.

I even baked bread over its coals. I roasted meat and ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?

[6 : 20] He feeds on ashes. A deluded heart misleads him. He cannot save himself or say, Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?

Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you. You are my servant, O Israel. I will not forget you.

I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Sing for joy, O heavens, for the Lord has done this. Shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forest and all your trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob.

He displays his glory in Israel. Well, we're in the book of Isaiah. Six points this morning from our passage show us that nothing is more relevant to us today than what God said through his servant 2,700 years ago.

[7 : 36] And we have that in our laps this morning. The very first thing that we want to see and that we're shown in our text is boring worship. Boring worship.

Few things reveal our hearts more than our worship. Verse 22. Yet you've not called upon me, O Jacob. You've not wearied yourself for me, O Israel.

They had wearied themselves in worship, but it wasn't for the Lord. Indeed, some of the translations, most of them here have, you have been weary of me, O Israel. That was the truth of the matter.

The fact is that when Israel turned their back upon their God and went out after other idols and sinned against Him, they didn't cancel their worship services. No, the whole sacrificial ritual system rolled on.

The machinery didn't miss a beat. But it all became wearisome worship, a boring burden to Israel.

[8 : 43] And so God's complaining here. You have been weary of me. You don't come to meet with me, to call on me, to pray to me, to confess to me, to rejoice in me, to honor and please me.

In fact, earlier in chapter 29, the Lord said this about their worship. These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts.

The one thing I'm after here, more than anything else, their hearts are far from me. So they're there. They're singing the hymns. They're saying the prayers.

They're reading the scriptures. They're listening with their outward ears, but their hearts are a million miles away. Boring worship. Their hearts were elsewhere, with their idols, with those God substitutes.

They weren't dealing with the Lord God himself. Plenty of sacrifice and offerings, but the thing missing was their hearts. Now when idols have our hearts, God's worship is boring.

[9 : 58] God's worship becomes a burden. Do you realize that God never designed worship to be a wearisome burden to man, but rather a joy and a delight?

For man. The Psalms are the Old Testament book of worship. And as Stan has already pointed out, they're constantly calling the worshiper to sing for joy to the Lord, to delight in him, to worship the Lord with gladness and come before him with joyful songs, with praise and thanksgiving for who he is and for the marvelous things that he's done.

Rejoice. The dominant note of worship. Verse 23, he says, I've not burdened you with these grain offerings, nor wearied you with demands for incense.

Even these offerings that God commanded were not meant to burden them. He didn't lay them on them, these responsibilities, in order to burden them down, but actually to unburden them as they realized their failures throughout the week.

And how many times in their living and thinking and speaking and doing, they came short of God's commands. Those are sins. And they started to feel the weight of that and the guilt got on them.

[11:23] And so they came to worship. And in their worship, God required sacrifices and offerings, not as further burdens on them, but rather to point them to the fact that God is willing to receive a substitute being damned in your place so that you might go free.

And every time an animal was sacrificed, they were told, God accepts a substitute in the place of me, the sinner. And as faith laid hold upon that picture of the coming Messiah, their hearts were unburdened.

And that burden of sin rolled off their backs. And they went away from worship, rejoicing. The very sacrifices themselves were not given to burden them, but to unburden them.

That was God's design. Recently, one of you came to Wednesday night prayer meeting and testified how you'd come to church on Sunday with your heart burdened and weighed down.

You were feeling low. But something happened in the worship of God. God met you here. That's all we could say. God met you here.

[12:41] He had dealings with you. You personally. Through the reading of His Word. The preaching of His Word. But not just that. Through the singing of the songs and the praying of the prayers and all that transpired in the worship of God.

So when you went home from this place, your heart was lifted and you went on your way singing for joy to the Lord. That's how God designed worship to be.

We come in heavy. The burden of sin, perhaps. The burden of responsibilities and stresses of the week. We get a view of our God, our merciful Savior. We go home rejoicing in Him.

A few things reveal how our hearts stand with God than our attitude toward worship.

Our attitude toward worship. When idols have our hearts, worshiping God is a boring burden. It's wearisome work. It's just one more thing that we must do in order to coerce blessing out of God.

[13:52] That's how we view it. But something else out there has our hearts, you see. Has God's place in our hearts.

So, here's a word. When worship becomes boring, look for an idol in your heart.

It's bound to be there. Now God is saying then, let's get it straight. Let's get it right on who is burdening who.

Though I have not burdened or wearied you, he says, in my requirements of worship, yet you have burdened me with your sins and you've wearied me with your offenses.

You see, the Israelites thought that as long as they kept bringing their sacrifices to God, God ought to smile on them and God ought to keep blessing them and God ought to be just tickled pink that they're in the house of God, worshiping, sacrificing, even while they go off seeking their idols and living for themselves and pursuing their own sins and rebellion.

[14:59] But they're back here and they bring the sacrifices and maybe God won't see that our hearts are far from him. He just sees like the idols see. They don't really see.

Well, God wasn't pleased and the very book of Isaiah opens in chapter 1. The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me? God says. I have no pleasure in them.

They're detestable to me. I cannot bear your worship services. I hate them. They become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. Do you see the picture then?

Israel is weary of God. It's seen in their attitude and worship. And God says, I'm not the one who has burdened you. You're burdening me. You come and you think that I ought to be pleased.

The very thing you think ought to please me is actually wearing me out. I'm tired of bearing it, he says. Now buckle your seatbelt.

[15:59] That was the first point. Boring worship. Because we come to a surprising gospel text speaking secondly about a forgotten past.

A forgotten past. Verse 25 says, I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and remembers them no more.

There's many amazing things in this verse. First of all, who is speaking? I, even I, God says. I, the one that you've burdened with your sinful, heartless living and heartless worship.

The one you have burdened, I, even I, am the one who has blotted out your transgressions. Wow. What is it that he will do?

He says, I'm the one who blots out your transgression. The word transgression means rebellion.

When I said don't, you said watch me.

[17:03] When I said do this, you said you can't make me. It was in your face rebellion. They, they would not obey God's commands. They instead went after their idols.

I said no other gods. I said turn from your sins and instead you turned your back on me. You dissed my authority. You trampled my words. So here's what I'm going to do.

I'm going to blot out all your transgressions. It's not what you expected to hear, was it? A trip to the woodshed.

A trip down to Babylon perhaps. But not, I'm going to blot out all your transgressions. I mean here they are on the book of heaven.

All of your transgressions, all your misdeeds, your rebellions, they're right here. The books will be open one day. But I'm going to so blot them out that you won't be able to find them.

[18:04] I'm wiping the slate clean. And there's one other thing. I'm going to remember your sins no more. Those sins that separated you from me, they're gone.

They're not remembered, not just for a day, but never. No more. Never to be brought up against you again.

I mean we ask, is such a thing even possible? To have all my sins blotted out forever, remembered no more. What's that going to be worth in the day of judgment?

When even one sin found will damn me to hell forever. What will it be worth then to have some way to blot out all my transgressions and never remembered again?

In 1971, President Nixon thought it would be neat to have a personal record of all his conversations on the phone and all the conversations in his meeting rooms in the White House.

[19:07] So the line taps and the voice activated, microphones were installed all around and the recording tapes began rolling. A decision that would later come back to haunt him, as you well know.

Because during the Watergate investigation, these very tapes were subpoenaed as evidence. But when the judge finally received the tapes, there was an unexplainable 18 and a half minute gap. Right in the middle of a crucial conversation with one of his aides about something or other about Watergate. Somehow that's where the tape had been erased.

And no one in the White House seemed to know how that happened. Though we smile at his botched attempt, we all have wanted to do the same thing ourselves.

Those words once spoken that we could not recall, those deeds once done that we could not undo, in one way or another, we're all haunted by our past, decisions we've made, opportunities neglected, and we completely understand Mr. Nixon's desire to erase parts of our life if only we could.

[20:34] I'd have more than 18 and a half minutes of my life gone. Maybe 18 and a half years. What would you erase from your life if you could?

But do you see how good the good news is? Because here is Almighty God the Judge. The one you're going to face one day. The one who will open the books. And He is saying, Himself, here's what I'm going to do.

I am going to blot out your transgressions. I'm going to splice the tape. I'm going to cut out all your transgressions, all your sins, and remember them no more.

Amazing. Can it be true for a sinner like me? When will we stop trying all of our futile attempts to cover up our sins?

No need. There is a way to have God cover them up so that they will never be remembered again. That's what He will do, He says to His idolatrous people.

[21:46] How will He do that? I mean, that's quite a feat, is it not? To wipe out your sins so that they will never be brought up again against you?

How is He going to do that? Well, He doesn't tell us here. It's Isaiah's way of saying, you're going to have to keep reading, fella. So don't stop reading at chapter 43.

It's when we come to chapter 53 that we will see that He blots out our transgressions by putting all of our iniquities upon His suffering servant who then bears them up to the cross where He was wounded for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. And the punishment that brought us peace was on Him and by His stripes we are healed. Keep reading to know how will God wipe out our sins.

But another question comes from this text. Why? Why would He ever do that? Why would He ever do something so wonderful as this as to wipe out all my sin? Well, He doesn't tell us how He's going to do it, not yet at least, but He does tell us right now why He's going to do it.

[23:04] And if you're looking for some reason in yourself, look no further. I blot out your transgressions for my own sake. Not because of anything deserving in you, only because of the grace found in me.

In the very nature of God there is this willingness to not treat us as our sins deserve. That's what He says. For my own sake I will do this.

Because if He waited to do it for our sake, He never would blot out our transgressions. We're not deserving of that. In fact, we need to be gripped with that reality more and more.

That we don't deserve one good thing from this God. And that's why what follows is God says to Israel, let's review the past here, verse 26. Let's review the past for me here.

Let us argue the matter together. State the case for your innocence if you can. As for why I should do this great thing for you. Well, there is no case to be made for our innocence and for our deservingness.

[24:12] In fact, the story has ever been the same from the beginning until now. It's one rebellion after another. Your own father, your first father sinned, your spokesman rebelled against me.

These are the leaders among you. You all are the same. What you deserve is clear to any who review your history. Verse 28, so I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn.

That's what you deserve, disgrace and destruction. Does that not make it a wonder to behold that this God says, I will blot out your transgressions and remember them no more?

Yes, Babylon came and exposed them to just this disgrace and destruction, but that was not to have the final word. Chapter 43 is not the full stop, but chapter 43 starts, but now, but now, that's the way the last chapter started.

You would expect to find more wrath and instead you find grace and blessing. And so what do we have? There's going to be a remnant chosen by grace who had their past forgotten and were given a glorious future.

[25:28] How's that for blessing? Past forgotten, glorious future. For who? Idol-worshipping rebels.

You see, it's one grace upon another. It's grace upon grace, forgotten past, glorious future. If you ever become a Christian, you better be ready to receive grace because that's all you get from God. One grace after another. Here's this glorious future. And what he's saying is that though you've sinned greatly against me, I'm not finished with you.

I have not gone back on my covenant promise to Abraham to bless him and his seed. No, no. I'm not giving up. I still count you my servant whom I've chosen, whom I've made and formed, whom I will help.

So don't be afraid. What were they afraid of? They were afraid that Babylon was the end of the nation. They had just seen their land decimated by the Babylonians.

[26:35] Cruel things they did to their wives and children and old men and maidens. And they'd seen it with their own eyes. They'd seen their capital city leveled, their temple burned.

They'd seen their kings and the best of the remaining men hauled off into Babylon. It's all over. It's the end for us. That's what they're fearing.

And it would have been had it not been for the Lord. It would have been the end. That's the story of Israel from beginning to end. It would have been over had it not been for the Lord's grace.

Our rebellious past has forfeited any glorious future in front of me. And yet that's exactly what he promises to these idolatrous people of his.

And that shows that the glorious future is completely the work of the Lord. Three times he says here in these opening five verses. I will, I will, I will.

[27:35] I will help you. I will pour water. I will pour out my spirit. Now we've seen dry and thirsty land this summer, haven't we? We've seen everything turn parched brown for lack of water.

That's a picture of the spiritual condition of the people of God. They're under God's judgment. They're withered. There's no spiritual health in them at all.

And yet, God says, I'm going to do something that will change your future. I will pour water on the thirsty land.

I will pour streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants. You see, it would be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would bring these descendants of Israel to faith and repentance.

It would only be by the work of the Spirit that there would be any future for Israel. That there would be a remnant who did return to the Lord. Who did come out of Babylon, yes, but more than that, that returned to the Lord and served Him with all their hearts.

[28 : 53] And so he says in verses 4 and 5, they will spring up like grass in a meadow like poplar trees by flowing streams. Haven't you seen that this summer? Brown grass and then suddenly it's like grass by flowing meadows, by trees, poplar trees, cottonwoods by flowing streams.

They just take off. What's the cause? What's going to be the cause of Israel's future just bursting with life? It will be when the Spirit of God is poured out on them.

Can I take you forward 700 years from this point? And there's a Jewish man named Peter on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem preaching to a bunch of Jews from all over the world who had come back to Jerusalem for the feast.

And he tells them, God sent His Son into the world and you killed Him with your wicked hands. You rejected the Lord of glory. God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand. And what you see and hear, everyone speaking the wonders of God in your own languages from all over the world, they're not drunk with wine.

[30 : 12] That is the Holy Spirit. That's what Amos promised. I will pour My Spirit upon all men in the last days. It's happened. That's the fulfillment of Isaiah 44.

I will pour My Spirit upon you. And what will happen? Your descendants will spring up. believers will be added to the church. There will be an infusion of new converts into the Israel of God.

And that is exactly what happened is 3,000 on that day responded to the gospel and believed and professed faith in Jesus Christ.

Some will say, I am the Lord's. Others will say, I belong to Jesus. I belong to Him. What did they do on that day? Those who believed were baptized. What are we doing in baptism? We're saying, I belong to the Lord.

Once belonged to this world. This world was my people, my friends. No longer. The Lord is now my Savior and my Lord and His people are my people.

[31 : 11] They'll call themselves by the name Israel, the people of God. What a glorious future for rebellious idolaters.

God's answer for those who sinned against His grace He gave them more grace. More grace. The fourth point we see is Israel's treasure.

What's the real treasure? What's your darling? What is the most valuable thing you had? The most valuable thing that Israel had was that the one true God was their God.

Israel's king and redeemer. The Lord Almighty says, I am the first and I am the last. Verse 6. Apart from me, there is no God.

That's God's exclusive claim. Nobody shares this category with me, the category of God. I'm the only one. I'm the first. I'm the last. None before me, none after me. And you are my witnesses.

[32 : 15] Verse 8. If there's any God besides me, no, there isn't any. There's no other rock. No one to build your life upon. No one who will be security under your feet.

I know not one. Can you see the privilege of Israel? Out of all the peoples of the world, they were the nation that was given the privilege to know the one true God.

All the gods that the nations worship, they worshiped the true God. And they knew him as their king and redeemer.

I wonder if you prize your privilege, believers, that today you are here worshiping the one true God. And not under the deception of some false God.

If you worship the one true God, Jesus says, that's eternal life. This is eternal life, John 17, 3. To know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you've sent.

[33 : 15] And now, about those idols. About those idols. Why is it that the Lord keeps coming back to the subject of idols?

It dominates this section of Isaiah. You know the answer? It's because idolatry is our biggest problem. It's seen in Israel's proneness to idols.

Abraham, the father, their first father, was saved out of what? Out of idolatry. On the other side of the river. And God no sooner called the descendants of Abraham to enter into a covenant with him at Mount Sinai than Moses is up on the mountain receiving the law from him.

And what are they doing down below? They're bowing down to a golden calf, an idol. And then they enter into the promised land and they start worshiping the idols of all the nations that are around them.

This section on idols is not just for the pagan nations around Israel. It's for Israel. Idolatry is Israel's sin. And that's why it dominates chapter 40 to 48.

[34 : 28] God, idols. Who will you compare me to? Come on, show me your idols. Let's look at them. John Wesley said, in his natural state, every man born into the world is a rank idolater.

I don't doubt that one bit. My own heart is amazing and its ability to create idols out of anything. any number of things that we put in the place of God.

Replacements for Him. God is the only God and because He is the exclusive God, He demands the exclusive place of our hearts. So because I'm the only God, you shall love me with all your heart.

It's not me and your idols. No, it's me with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, exclusive rights to your heart. I want to reign without a rival there because I'm the only God.

I should be your only God. Stands to reason, doesn't it? And my heart starts to look around and says, but I lack this.

[35 : 44] And it may be something good, but I give it God-like status and I start to share my devotion with God with this thing, this precious, this darling.

And now I'm worshiping an idol just as surely as the nations of Canaan bowed before Baal and some other God substitute. This is a bigger problem than what we may own up to in the church of Jesus Christ.

Do you know how John the Apostle ends his first epistle? Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Idols. Idols of the heart.

They have a way of worming into our hearts and pushing God over a bit. And so when God's worship is boring and neglected, you can be sure there's an idol in his place.

Something stealing love from him, trust from him, joy and delight from him. Idols are things we turn to to make us happy, to make us feel comforted, to make us feel fulfilled, excited, in control, safe, significant, instead of finding all of that and more in God himself.

[37 : 00] So God takes this largest part of the chapter to set forth the fifth point and that is the folly and deceit of idols. And I must be quick. What he shows is that idols can rise no higher than their makers and their materials, the materials with which they're made.

And he starts with the makers. Who are these God makers? He says, verse 9, all who make idols are nothing and so the things they treasure are worthless.

You see, if the makers are nothing, the things they make cannot be more than nothing. They're worthless. Verse 11 says, these craftsmen are nothing but men.

Gather them all together. What are they? There's nothing but men here. There are no gods here.

How can you start with mere men and have them make something supernatural?

Gods. Won't happen. They're not only mere men, they're blind and ignorant men. and the end of them will be shame.

[38 : 16] Three times he says that, 9, 10, and 11. Shame. That's what they're headed toward.

Why? Because whenever you trust in something other than God to do what only God can do, you will be disappointed in the end.

You'll be shamed by your own idols. That's where they're headed. An idol cannot do what God can do. Can you think of one idol that ever did what God can do?

Name one. So we're taken into the Idol Making 101 class and we're introduced to Mr. Blacksmith and he's making a God.

We're watching over his shoulder and he's got his fire going, his bellows, his tongs and his hammers and he puts a hunk of metal in the coals until it's orange and it's supple, it's starting to soften and then he pulls it out and he starts whamming on it with his hammer and shaping it and then it gets cold and he sticks it back in the fire and he's sweating now and he's wiping the sweat and he's letting it get hot and he's pulling it out and then he's whamming on it again with his

hammer until he's got this wonderful shape of a God and he bows down and he worships it. But if supper is late and he doesn't drink enough water he loses his strength and he grows faint. [39:48] Who are these God makers? They're mere men and they're frail men at that. They are men who are dependent on things outside of themselves. They need water, they need food themselves and yet it is by their mighty arm that they make these gods.

Do you see the folly? Do you see how Isaiah is mocking the idol makers, the idol worshippers? The idol can rise no higher than the man who made them.

Well, Mr. Carpenter is not to be outdone so he's got his measuring line, his compass, his chisels and his markers and he works over a block of wood into the shape of a man in all his glory.

That's what we do. We make God in our own image. He calls it his God. He made it and now he's worshipping it. An idol can rise no higher than the man who makes it and secondly it can rise no higher than the materials that are made of.

Where did Mr. Carpenter get his block of wood? Well, he cut it down from the forest. There it just grew up in the forest or else he planted the seedling.

[40:57] But in either case, whether he planted it or it just grew up in the forest, that seedling was dependent on forces outside of itself for it to grow.

The rain had to fall on it to make it grow. It's a dependent little sapling and outside forces bring blessing upon it and cause it to grow into a tree. And he goes and cuts it down.

And he makes an idol out of it. Do you see the folly of it? He chopped down the tree. Half of it he uses for firewood to bake his bread and to warm himself.

And the leftover chunk of wood he goes to work on with his tools until he has made his God, which he then sets up and bows down before and worships and prays to it, saying, you are my God, save me.

What's wrong with this picture? Isaiah is saying. Half of it he uses as firewood and the other half he bows down and calls his God and looks to it to do what only God can do, save him.

[42:08] Do what only God can do, save him from a wasted life. Remove his sin and guilt.

Bless him. It's the same tree for crying out loud. Half of it, firewood, other half. God?

What if he'd started on the other end? Then that God would have been firewood. No. The point is, it's a block of wood.

That's what it is. Nothing more than a block of wood. At what point did it become something more than a block of wood?

something divine, something supernatural. Do you see the folly? There's something else being said about idol worshippers. Not only the folly, but they're blind and they're deceived.

[43:06] They're worthless. The worthlessness of their idol is not obvious to them. They know nothing. They understand nothing. Their eyes are plastered over. They can't see it. They cannot see that that object they're praying to is just a block of wood.

They think it's more than that. They cannot understand that it's just a worked over hunk of metal. They think it's much, much more.

You're my God, save me. Now we laugh at that, but the same thing is true of the things that modern men make gods of. Created things. The work of our own hands, of our own sweat, our own arm of our strength.

Look at me. Look at me. We give honor and praise and trust and joy and devotion to things that are nothing but created things that we exchange for the creator.

But they can't understand that. No one stops to think, verse 19. That's the hallmark of idolatry. No one is thinking anymore.

[44:16] If that's not our day, I don't know what is. Who stops to think for a moment. Half of it I made, I burned for firewood. The other half I made a god out of. Nobody stops to think.

There's no discernment. It's all gone. You see, the idols steal their understanding. They blind men so they can't even see the stupid, foolish thing that they have done.

That they're giving something to a creature that is only to be given to God. And so we're given another picture of a man eating.

And it's not corn flakes, it's ashes. Verse 20, he feeds on ashes. And there is, he's eating ashes. He can hardly exhale without blowing them off the spoon, but he's eating ashes.

You say, there's not much nutrient in that. No, there isn't, but he eats on, doesn't he? He feeds on ashes. It's a picture of the idolater. He's feeding on idols, worthless things that can profit him

nothing, and yet he goes on worshipping, doesn't he?

[45 : 26] Why does he do that? Why does he go on giving himself to these worthless idols? Why does the man keep on shoveling ashes into his mouth? Things that cannot help him?

Well, we're told a deluded heart misleads him. When will we ever believe God's view of the human sinful heart? The problem is the heart.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and it tricks him. Don't ever tell me that the sinful heart is neutral and is seeking for truth wherever it's to be found.

It's not true. It's a sinful, deceiving, deluding heart, and it's lying to us. That's the picture of the scriptures about the human heart.

It lies to us about reality. It says, this is worth giving your life to when it's nothing. And it says of Almighty God, he's boring.

[46 : 30] Isn't this much better? It's all lies, and it's a deluded heart that misleads him so that he cannot save himself or say, is not this thing in my right hand a lie?

He's shoveling ashes. He's worshipping idols, and he doesn't even know that it's an idol. It's a lie. It's not true.

It's claiming to be something more than it is a block of wood. The blindness, the captivity, the helplessness of idolaters.

Hence, our need for sovereign grace to interrupt our idol worshipping, to open our eyes, to show us the folly of trusting in things that cannot save us, to expose the lies that we believe and nothings that we live for and expect good from, the ways that we have substituted things in the place of God. We would never see it if God did not come and turn the light on and open our plastered eyes to see it. And the fearful fact of the matter is that if God doesn't do that, then we will be idolaters to the end, clinging to our idols, to the grave.

[47 : 49] And our modern God substitutes are no less real, foolish, deceiving, and damning. Dear, dear, chosen people of God, do you see how blessed you are if your eyes see this morning?

You've been made to see your idols and say, oh, what was I thinking? I spent the better part of my life living for all the wrong things. God, forgive me.

Blot out my transgressions. Be gracious to me. Your eyes were opened, so you didn't go to the grave, and now you're feeding, you're feeding, not on ashes, but on Christ.

And there's real nourishment. There's real blessing. how blessed that when we could not save ourselves, he broke into our blind, idolatrous hearts and saved us.

Well, to an idolatrous people that he has redeemed, who are ever flirting with idols and giving room in their hearts to them, God points out the way back, the last three verses, verses 21 to 23.

[48 : 56] Three crisp commands. He calls us to remember, to return, and rejoice. Remember is the first word. Remember that I am the only true God and all the idols are lies, cheats, deceptions.

Remember that I have made you, he says. No, you didn't make me. That's the way the God makers are. They make their gods, but you didn't make me.

I have made you. Remember that. And I've made you my servant and I will not forget you. Would you remember that? Would you remember that I will not forget you.

That's what he's telling us. And remember that I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, verse 22, and your sins I've swept away like the morning mist. You wake up and there's clouds covering the horizon, the whole sky, and in a matter of two hours you can't find a cloud in the sky.

Swept away by God. That's how he says, I have done with your sins. I've blotted them out. I've swept them away so that they're not remembered anymore.

[50 : 03] Remember that. Remember that I won't remember your sins anymore. Remember, remember. Forgetfulness inevitably leads to idolatry.

That's why the Bible never tires of calling us to remember. It's a key word of the Bible. Don't forget. Remember. remember. The Bible knows that our hearts will be fascinated either with God or with God's substitutes.

We cannot afford to be forgetful of God's acts of grace and love, whether it be in last night's supper or in tonight's Lord's supper.

God is good and we must remember. Remember. New Testament Christian, your sin bearing Savior calls you to be here tonight to remember this do in remembrance of me.

Remember how I swept away your sins. Remember how I blotted out your transgressions.

Remember how I remember them no more. Will you be here tonight to remember him?

[51:18] And if you find something more fascinating to do, will you tell me the name of your idol? The heart will be fascinated with something either God himself or God replacements.

Remember, he says. Return, secondly. What a gracious command to a people straying after idols. He wants us back. I'd be done with them.

Not God. Return. Return to me, he says. And returning always involves repentance. They had fled from God. If they're going to return to him, what are they going to have to do? They're going to have to leave their idols behind.

They're going to have to turn from their idols and come back to God. And that's what God wants them to do. Hosea tells us how to do that. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.

Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him, forgive all our sins and receive us graciously that we may offer the fruit of our lips. We will not mount war horses.

[52:23] Assyria cannot save us. We will never again say our gods to what our own hands have made. That's repentance. That's returning to him. That's saying, these idols that I trusted in, I am turning from and I'm coming back to you.

The only true and living God returned to me, returned to me. The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and to worship only thee.

We return. Notice he says, return to me for I have redeemed you. See how he keeps pointing to that? How is it that me, a sinner, can return to God when this sin separates me from God?

There's only one way and that's if Jesus can get rid of that obstacle that separates me from God. And that's what he said. Return to me for I have redeemed you.

How does God redeem us? What's the price he paid to set us free? You've been redeemed not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish or spot.

[53:33] Therefore, return to me. Come back because I have redeemed you. I've taken away the offensiveness of your sin. I blotted it out for the sake of Jesus and now you can return to me.

Returning is to be motivated by the cross, the open arms of Jesus, welcoming us to come to him for he has blotted out our sins.

God redeems idolaters. That's the meaning. That's the message of our text. And lastly, rejoice. Sing for joy, O heavens, for the Lord has done this.

Shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests, and all you trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob. He displays his glory in Israel. Why is all creation called to join in loud singing?

Because the Lord redeems his idolatrous, rebellious people. And in doing so, he displays his glory. And in redeeming his people, he redeems their environment.

[54:38] All creation is to share in the redemption of the children of God. There is to be a new heavens and a new earth when Jesus comes back. This created order is to share even as it's shared in the curse of man.

It is to share in the redemption of God's children. Heaven and earth, mountains and forests, notice, even trees are to sing praise.

Not to be carved up into idols and have people worship them. No, the true purpose for trees is to sing praise to the Lord. And in that day they will. So our passage that began in burdensome worship, boring worship, ends in joyful song.

Why? Because our God redeems idolaters. for the sake of his own name, for the sake of his son. Should we redeemed idolaters then not be leading the choir, leading all creation and singing the praises of our blessed Redeemer and telling a world about a God who forgives and blots out and does not remember sin anymore for the sake of his son, for all who come and put their trust in him. Let's pray. Lord, how often our eyes are clouded, how often they do not see, how often you, the most glorious one, look boring to us and sin and the world looks so attractive to us.

[56:23] Forgive us of our idols, our idolatrous thoughts. Forgive us for our lack of fascination with you, this God of all grace who heaps grace upon grace upon your people.

We confess, Lord, that we have sinned against you. We have put other things in your place. Come and blot out our sins for Jesus' sake. Send us on our way, again struck with your grace and singing for joy of our blessed Savior who has redeemed us by his blood.

We pray in his name. Amen. Number 465 echoes many of the words of our text.