

Calling Good Evil

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[0 : 00] Well, it's a privilege to be with you this morning. I'd like to thank your minister and the session for giving me this privilege. And I look forward to the fellowship that we'll enjoy together. Just to make reference to those postcards you were given as you came in, thank you to all of you who already support the work of the Christian Institute.

We seek to serve the Lord and his people by upholding biblical standards in public life and in the lives of the various communities throughout our nations. We are dependent upon the Lord's people, both financially but more importantly, for their prayers. And those of you who have prayed for us and supported us, we do thank you and thank the Lord for you.

However, if you are not yet on our mailing list and you may be interested in receiving from us regular information about the issues that are shaping the debates in our nations today, and if you want to be informed on matters for prayer, then if you please would fill in one of those cards. You can either give it to me at the end of the service or if you prefer, you can take it home and fill it in at your leisure and just simply put it in the post. It's a free postcard so you won't have to put a stamp on it and it'll go back to our headquarters in Newcastle.

And you will then be put on the mailing list. Receive our literature and information. Please be assured you won't be inundated with useless mail. You get enough of that already from other places.

Neither will you be pestered for any financial contribution. And also on the card there is a little section that asks for an email address.

[2 : 34] That's in order that every Friday we produce a news briefing, a summary of the week's news from a Christian perspective. And if you put your email address in, you will automatically receive that news bulletin every week again to encourage you and to help you in prayer.

So we are thankful for the partnership that we have with many people. There are over 2,000 churches throughout the UK who partner with us and of course many individual believers as well. We have our website and that website receives 400,000 visits every month.

So it's one of the leading sources of Christian news in the UK. So the Lord has given us a ministry to encourage his people to stand faithfully for Christ in our day and age.

And that's why I want us to turn to the passage read to us a while ago in Isaiah chapter 5. It's always important for us as believers to be aware of the signs of the times, to be conscious of the age in which we live, the prevailing attitudes, the moral standards, which set the context in which we uphold our witness to the Lord.

[4 : 28] Now in this chapter, God describes the decadence of Isaiah's day. But perhaps as the passage was read, you felt, well, these words could so easily describe today.

Written so many years ago. Thousands of years ago. Yet so relevant to the situation we find ourselves in.

And especially verse 20. Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.

Who put darkness for light and light for darkness. Who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

A society which has lost all sense of right and wrong. Which turns things on their head.

[5 : 44] A society where up is down and down is up. A society where there are no moral certainties.

A society which can only be described as amoral. You see, an immoral person is somebody who acknowledges right from wrong.

But declines to do what is right. They accept that there is a difference. They acknowledge that there is a right way.

But they choose the wrong way. That's an immoral person. But we live in an amoral age.

And an amoral person is someone who says. There is no right and wrong. There is no true and false.

[6 : 52] There are no standards for us to live by. Minister referred to the days of the judges.

Where every man did what was right in his own eyes. And so it is for us today in our nations. We are living in an amoral age. and that is much worse than being in an immoral age because at least an immoral age recognizes that there is right and wrong that there is good and evil but we live in an age similar to that of Isaiah where there are those who call evil good and good evil there is moral confusion an inability to pronounce on issues of right and wrong an age in which our children are being taught in schools that to say that a family unit should comprise a mother and a father united in marriage that a family unit should have as its heart the union of one man with one woman for life our children are being taught that if they believe that that is the only right relationship to be at the heart of the family that they are wrong in fact they are told that to take that view is to be immoral because all stable relationships they are told whether that be between a man and a woman in marriage or whether it is cohabitation or whether it is having two daddies or two mummies well that is that is all fine that is good we live in an age of moral confusion and where does that begin well here in Isaiah 5 we are told in verse 24

I think it is that they rejected the law of God the end part of verse 24 for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel the confusion of Isaiah's day grew out of their rejection of God's law and the rejection of God's law is a rejection of God himself it is not merely declining to obey the rules that God has put in place but it is to despise God himself for the law is the expression of God's own holy character and it is a part of man's rebellion against God that came after the fall with Adam to reject

God's law as an expression of our rejecting of him and we live in an age where God is denied and at best put on the periphery of life if people acknowledge that there is a God at all well he is not a God with whom they engage in their lives he is a God who is to be kept to the outskirts of our existence he has no influence he has no authority he has no command over us we might decide to turn to him on occasions but basically we do not have to answer to him we do not have to deal with him he is there for us if and when we want him and other than that he is an irrelevance to our lives but once there is a rejection of God and of his truth there can be no absolute standards there can be no right and wrong a very famous

[12 : 35] French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said whatever I feel to be right is right whatever I feel to be wrong is wrong he was an atheist and so he sums up the spirit of our age the only absolute concepts today are those of love freedom happiness in Wales recently our education minister said that her goal for children in our schools was that all children should be happy that's the ultimate goal children should be happy well we want our children to be happy of course we do but is that all life is about one young boy 10 11 year old who took part in a pilot relationships and sexualities education lesson was asked what he had learned from that lesson and this is how he summed it up he said that what he had learned was that he should do whatever he wanted that's what education is about in our age you've got to be happy and to be happy that means you have to be allowed to do whatever you want to do there are no rules there is no good there is no evil there is just being happy but without

God without his laws such concepts of love and freedom and happiness are meaningless they have no content there is nothing tangible solid about them they are just like a wet piece of soap that you try to grab and you think you have got hold of it and the next thing is that it is squirted out from your grip life becomes an empty meaningless affair perhaps you enjoy Shakespeare I'm not a particular fan of Shakespeare I have to admit but Shakespeare has Othello saying after he's killed Desdemona his wife that he was one who had loved not wisely but too well he's killed he's murdered his wife over a misunderstanding but he excuses it as being his love his great love he's loved her so well yet not wisely well what love is it that kills and murders and following on from the rejection of

God comes our substituting of ourselves in God's place look at verse 21 of Isaiah 5 woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight this is what happens when people reject God and his wisdom his laws they substitute God with themselves and their own judgment they become wise in their own eyes and the consequence of that is the anarchy of individualism my right to be happy above all things else irrespective of rights and wrong and so today in our society countless unborn children are slaughtered by abortion because of the individual's freedom and

happiness our word for hell comes from the name

Gehenna the name in Hebrew of a valley outside Jerusalem where child sacrifices were offered to the Ammonite God Molech and in our land hell is present in the sacrifice of children we have made greed a virtue we have exalted tolerance as the outstanding virtue of a secular society and so the only thing that can no longer be tolerated is a belief in the authority of God and his word and his sovereignty over men everything must be tolerated except a belief in the authority and divine sovereignty of the almighty we live in godless days just as

Isaiah did and we are told how god brought judgment upon the people of Israel in Isaiah's time Galatians chapter six of verse seven reminds us that we should not be deceived for God is not mocked whatever a man sows that he will also reap God doesn't stand idly by whilst men live in open rebellion against him God will vindicate his holy name God will establish his rule and so in Isaiah's time in verse 16 of chapter five we read but the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice and the holy God shows himself holy in righteousness in verse 24 we read that God brings judgment upon their crops of rottenness that infects the roots the blossom being blighted blown away as dust such crops are of no use they can only be cut down and burnt and that is a description of the worthlessness of a life lived without reference to God it's a picture of the emptiness of our own society today a German philosopher Nietzsche recognized that Christianity is a system and if you remove from it belief in God everything else crumbles everything else becomes nothing more than dust and all around us people are trying to escape the meaninglessness of life by hedonism did you notice how in Isaiah 5 it speaks about those people who get up early to have a drink those people who spend their days trying to find some form of fulfillment and satisfaction in the ways of pleasure now there are many things that God in his goodness has created that we should enjoy but the enjoyment of the things that God has created cannot be experienced without enjoying God himself the only way that human beings can find satisfaction and fulfillment in life that they can have a sense of the privilege and the blessing that it is to enjoy the good things of this world is by first of all knowing the God who has given those good things the

[23 : 05] Westminster Confession so famously begins the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever but once you remove God everything becomes empty and meaningless it becomes nothing more than a rat race when our son was younger the class in school had a pet hamster and of course every family had to take it in turn to look after the hamster over the weekend and everybody dreaded that the hamster would die when it was in their home you always felt such a relief on the Monday morning when you could take the hamster back and it was still alive well we had the hamster and in the middle of the night

I'm a light sleeper there was this strange noise in the house and I had to get up and find where the noise was coming from and I made my way downstairs and following the noise I arrived to find the hamster in its cage running on the wheel and the wheel was squeaking and that hamster was going flat out and it was getting nowhere it was just going around and around and around and that's a picture of the futility of human existence without God you're on a treadmill you're on an endless pursuit of an illusion of happiness and self fulfillment in the things of this world that can never satisfy the more you have the more you want that's

God's judgment that was the judgment on Israel of old and it's the judgment upon our society today people are never satisfied because you can only be satisfied when you know God and the Lord raised up the Assyrians and brought them against Israel verse 25 speaks of the mountains quaking corpses being like refuse in the streets Israel was destroyed God's judgment came but chapter 5 also speaks of the ultimate judgment in verse 14 it speaks of hell and hell is seen like a gaping voracious mouth swallowing up people hell awaits those who so foolishly live without

God there is no doubt that as the psalmist tells us it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God because in declaring that there is no God the fool condemns himself to an empty and meaningless life to the ultimate destruction of death and to the eternal punishment of hell it is the fool who says there is no God and we live in an age of fools who pride themselves as being so wise so clever so educated so knowing able to peer into the riddles of the universe and yet they are fools we are fools because we are a people who have rejected

God and who have said we can decide for ourselves what is right and wrong we have no need of the almighty well what are we to do well those of us who by God's grace and we we acknowledge don't we that it's not that we are wiser than others it's not that in some way we are cleverer or that because we were brought up in a Christian home we had a particular advantage or that we are

better people because we have lived a good life no no we we know that along with everybody else we are sinners and that we too in the foolishness of our rebellion and sin that we rejected [29 : 14] God oh we still came to church and we still spoke about him and we still sang the psalms but in our hearts and in the depths of our being we were in rebellion against him the story of a young boy who had misbehaved and his father was disciplining him and the father said to him now I want you to sit down in that chair and listen and think about what I'm saying and the boy crossed his arms and said no you sit down in that chair the father said no the boy replied the father raised himself up to his full height and said now you sit down the boy reluctantly did so but as he sat he said

I want you to know I may be sitting on the outside but on the inside I'm standing up we were all like that when it came to God we are all rebels it's not that we because we belong to the free church of Scotland or in my case to the reformed baptists that somehow we are better no we know it's because God in his love and mercy and according to his grace has dealt with us not as we deserve but in kindness he's brought us to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and we want others to know that we want to proclaim this gospel this good news of forgiveness and salvation even for the greatest rebels and so we want to say to anyone who's here this morning you are in your sin a rebel against God you deserve his punishment and one day you will face that punishment your life will be empty of any significance and ultimately you will stand before the judgment seat and be condemned but God in his love and mercy sent his only begotten son the Lord Jesus Christ to die upon the cross in your place to take your punishment so that your sins might be forgiven and you might be restored to a right relationship with God which is eternal life and we plead with you this morning come to the savior don't be wise in your own eyes accept the wisdom of God in Christ and we who by God's grace are believers we need to pray we need to pray for our nations to pray for those in authority as we are commanded to do in James in the New Testament we need to pray that God would according to his sovereign will and purposes overturn the evil of our day and by his great power bring good remember how at the passing of Jacob Joseph's brothers were concerned that now that their father had died that Joseph their brother would gain revenge on them Joseph who they had sold into slavery but God had raised to be second in command in Egypt and the brothers are fearful that now their father's influence has been removed Joseph couldn't now take revenge on them but Joseph says to them you meant it for evil but

God meant it for good God is the sovereign God who turns what men intend to be evil yet to bring good for the praise and the glory of his name and we should be praying that in our day God would so work that out of the moral confusion of our age yet by his grace the gospel of salvation will go forth with great power from on high to the salvation of many and we are to be salt and light as the Lord Jesus Christ instructed us in this fallen world we are to be part of God's outworking of his purposes we are to be an instrument in the hands of the almighty to restrain evil in our day that by our actions and by our words by our lives we would sound a clear note that the people of our communities and of our nations will know that there is truth it's found in the person of the [35 : 45] Lord Jesus Christ and it's seen in you and in me it's present by God's grace in us and so we uphold the biblical standards God uses us as a witness to restrain the evil to promote what is good and especially to proclaim the saving grace that is in the Lord Jesus Christ Isaiah was that voice in his day Isaiah was that life that spoke of God to a decaying dying society and you and I are to be voices and lives that speak into the decaying dying society of our day and say there is a God in heaven the great

God who has created all things the God who in his goodness has given us so much the God who is to be worshipped the God who is to be known and the God in whom men find their fulfillment we are to say here is our God come to him he welcomes those who return from their rebellion he embraces them with his love he blesses them with his presence he gives to them eternal life all through the death the sacrifice of his precious son on the cross who paid in full for your sin come to him repent we have two daughters as well as a son and one of our daughters learnt very quickly when she was young to say sorry she do something wrong and before we could tell her off or discipline her she immediately say sorry but she wasn't sorry at all how do we know that well because she would do the same thing again in a short while she was just saying sorry in order to avoid the consequences that were coming her way she didn't mean it well people often say sorry to

God when they don't mean it but repentance is when you are truly broken before God and you know that you were a sinner before him and you cry out to him Lord have mercy upon me a sinner do that today if you're not one of his children yet come to him know this God who is gracious and loving know what it is to be born again dear brothers and sisters in the Lord let us pray that God would use us as a means of bringing many others to the Savior and use us as his instruments in the restraining of evil in our day woe to those who call evil good and good evil who put darkness for light and light for darkness who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter woe but blessed are those who know the

Lord and who trust in him for salvation let's pray O Lord we thank you that you are a gracious God a God of mercy we thank you O Lord that you have not allowed man in his rebellion against you to go to the full excesses of his sinful inclinations Lord we pray that in our day in our land you might again arise in sovereign power and grace and draw people to the cross that they might come in faith to Christ and know the forgiveness of their sins and help us your people to be salt and light in our day help us to be prayerful help us O Lord to stand boldly winsomely compassionately for the truth of the gospel we pray we ask it that the glory might be to your holy name

Amen Amen Well thank you and we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the closing words of that psalm psalm 9 psalm 9 we're singing from verse 15 down to the end of the psalm psalm 9 it's on page 209 in the blue psalm book from verse 15 the heathen are sunk in the pit which they themselves prepared and in the net which they have hid their own feet fast are snared the Lord is by the judgment known which he himself hath wrought the sinner's hands do make the snares wherewith they themselves are caught and we'll sing on down to the end of psalm of psalm 9 we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise to the heathen the heathen are sunk in the pit which they themselves prepared and in an earth which they have hid their their their their own faith past our snare the

[43 : 21] Lord is by the judgment loan which he himself hath wrought the sinners hounds to make the smith wherewith themselves are caught they who are wicked in to hell each one shall turn and be and all the nations forget to seek the Lord most high for they that need thee are shall not forgotten be away the expectation of the poor shall not be lost for e'er our eyes

Lord let not man prevail judge even in the sight that they may know themselves but men the nation's Lord of the pride the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more amen thank you