

**Isaiah 66: 18-24    “A Whole New Team”    September 14-16, 2019**  
**Pastor Don Sutton - St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN**

**Isaiah 66:18-24**

<sup>18</sup> “And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory. <sup>19</sup> “I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. <sup>20</sup> And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD—on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,” says the LORD. “They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels. <sup>21</sup> And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,” says the LORD. <sup>22</sup> “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure. <sup>23</sup> From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD. <sup>24</sup> “And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

***Introduction***

Recently another football season began. Some teams have a lot of familiar carry-overs. But last spring’s graduations and this summer relocations, new recruits, draft picks and or off-season trades have resulted in familiar players being gone and new players stepping in. For some fans this year’s starters may seem to be a whole new team.

When the Holy Spirit moved Isaiah to write The Book of Isaiah about 700 years before Christ, football wasn’t part of Old Testament Israel’s sports world. Yet, in the last chapter of Isaiah – chapter 66 – God, in a sense, focused on **“A Whole New Team.”** God enabled Isaiah to see the end of the Israel as a nation and the end of Israel’s being God’s chosen people – his team. In respect to the kingdom of God, Isaiah could see God’s plan for reaching beyond Israel to the people of every race, tribe, color, and language to assemble **“Whole New Team.”** Let’s take a closer look at what Isaiah saw.

***Poor Performance***

In the first verse we consider, we hear God saying, <sup>18</sup> **“And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.”** The plans and actions to which God referred were generally those of the Jews. God’s people were not sincere in their worship and they mixed their worship of the true Triune God with idolatry. They defiled themselves eating pigs, rats, and other things disgusting in God’s eyes in the Old Testament times. Even when God disciplined them through the Babylonian invasion, many Israelites embraced the old sinful ways. This disgusted God. So, God decided he would keep the faithful Jews and those who would repent and bring in Jews who had not heard of God and people from nations.

Comparing it to football teams today, God was like the professional football coach frustrated with certain Prima Donna players who come to practice when it suits them, play hard when they feel like it, and are into doing their own thing rather than the team thing. The coach tries to work with these players if he can and get them to become team players. But if he can’t do this, he trades or cuts these players and looks for replacements through trades, drafts, acquisition of free agents, or moving up

players already on the team. Like such a coach, God had worked with Israel but with few positive results. So, God planned to get **A Whole New Team**.

### ***God's Plan for a Whole New Team***

As indicated in vs. 18 God planned to recruit for his Church, his team. As for his recruiters, God said this, <sup>19</sup>**"I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations."** God would use Jews who remained faithful to God to reach out to people from around the world – Jews and Gentiles. Think of Pentecost. Think of the apostle Peter going to the Roman soldier named Cornelius or the apostle Paul going to the Gentile world on missionary journeys or his trip to Rome. Peter and Paul, together with others who faithfully believed God and his promises, were among "survivors" from the Old Testament Church. The nations to whom they would go would include **"Tarshish, ... the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), ... Tubal and Greece, and ... the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory ...(people coming on) on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels ."** These would be people of different cultures, customs and economic standing.

### ***What God Offers***

Depending on the level of football, recruiters offer potential players a superior team experience, a better education, an opportunity to start or star, higher pay, a championship or the Super Bowl. What did God have to offer?

God said that his recruiters **will proclaim his glory** and recruits **"... will come and see my glory."** Throughout the Bible we see God showing his glory as he delivered people from trouble. The ultimate deliverance and greatest revelation of God's glory is the deliverance from sin and its curse, that comes through Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. In Jesus God shows the glory of his love. This is the glory connected with the revelation of the gospel showing us a holy God loving and saving sinful people. Paul summed it up in this way, **"You see at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly ...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom5:6,8)."** God showed his glory as Jesus died and rose again to defeat the devil, death, and the dominance of sin. God's new players would see this glory through the gospel.

They would see God's glory and by the power of God's Spirit would come to God's **holy mountain in Jerusalem**. While ancient Jerusalem was located on a mountain and God's temple was on a highpoint in the city, this reference in Isaiah 66 is to God's Church, all true believers in the Triune God and Jesus as Savior of the world. Through the gospel the Holy Spirit would bring people to faith and onto God's team.

Those brought from the nations would come as **offerings brought on ceremonially clean vessels**. Through their faith they wear the holiness of Jesus and enjoy the forgiveness of sins. God will treasure and accept them better than any football coach accepts and welcomes new players.

And as a coach may promise playing time to new players, God says people from the nations will be acceptable for service or ministry in God's kingdom. <sup>21</sup>**And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites," says the LORD ."** In the Old Testament only those from the Israelite tribe of Levi could serve in God's temple. Of the Levites only the descendants of Aaron could be priests. Not on God's new team, his New Testament Church. God's plan was to give all team members gifts and then call on them to use those gifts in service. He intended that they play.

God promises those who play on his team victory. <sup>22</sup> **"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure."**

While God's people will have to endure many training camps, do spiritual calisthenics, and even experience some injuries – in other words, go through the tribulations of life - in the end they will be eternal winners. They will see the glory of heaven. Not even the devil and his team can overcome God's team.

God says that those on his team will worship their owner and coach. **"From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the LORD ."**

God's players will look at the love, faithfulness, and concern for his players that God shows them, and they will worship God with their lives and in worship services.

God adds a sad note about his players in respect to opponents of God and his team. **"And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."** Those who do not play for God through faith in Jesus Christ, will be eternal losers in eternal suffering.

### ***The Meaning for Us***

What does this mean for you who are listening to this message? God's plan for bringing new players to his team included you. You would not be Christian if God hadn't acted to get you on his team. Even though you were once dead in sin and damned to hell God wanted you so much that he paid for the right to have you with the blood of his eternal son. Then he washed you in the water of baptism and brought you to his team through the gift of faith. Eternal life is yours. The resurrection of the body is yours.

With God on your side and Jesus as your Savior, not even the devil can overcome you. But he will try. Therefore, watch and pray so that the devil doesn't recruit you for and get you on his team. You don't want to be left out. The only way in is through Jesus. Use God's word regularly. Through the power of God's word, God will give you the strength to resist the devil. Pray often. Through God's answer to prayers he will provide help and deliverance as you need it.

As God has made you a player on his team of believers, now play. Sadly, the sinful nature leads some on God's team to want to be spectators and not players. They sit along the sidelines of life or they don't show up for practices or games. There is little involvement. God did not pay for you with the blood of his Son or invest in you with the working of the Holy Spirit to have you sit on the sidelines of life and do nothing. Now you are dressed in the holiness of Jesus. God has given you a gift or gifts for service in the gospel ministry of his church. You have the opportunity to serve him and the privilege of worshipping him. God wants you to play for him using opportunities he gives you for worship and using the gift or gifts the Holy Spirit has given you for service.

As God has made you a player on his team of believers, now play according to **God's** game-plan and rules. Live like the team member God has made you to be. Unfortunately, many Christians act like they play for the devil or one of the world's teams with the result that others can't be sure whose team these folks are on. They curse with fluency. They fornicate without shame. They drink until they are drunk. They gossip and get even. Money and materials often matter more than the almighty and merciful God. These sins are worse than being off-sides, clipping, holding or un-sportsman-like conduct. They can lead to personal defeat. Does this describe you? Now is the time to change. See your sin. Confess it to God.

Look to Jesus for forgiveness. Then play the game of life as a member of God's team – according to his plan and his rules. Love God above all. Live according to his guidance. Give glory to God in all things.

Finally, remember that the same God who paid the price to have you on his team and then recruited you to bring this about, wants you to play a part in recruiting others whom Jesus bought with his blood so they could be on God's team too. This relates to personal witnessing to people and your support of mission work in our area and elsewhere. Wherever you may live, there are people with whom you contact who don't know or believe in Jesus. Sincerely love them and look at them as people who without Jesus will end up among **"those who rebelled against me."** Sincerely love them and let that love show. Sincerely love them and when you have the opportunity, tell them of Jesus and his love that moved him to suffer and die for all.

There are also those in other places you can't go who need to hear of and believe in Jesus. You still can play an important and God-pleasing role as you join with fellow Christians to send and support missionaries and evangelists through your offerings and prayers. As they go in God's name and in your behalf, they go in fulfillment of God's New Testament plan for **A Whole New Team.**

In the New Testament the apostle Peter sums up how God's plan for whole new team affects you and me: **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9.)**