

**Confrontation with Crisis:
When Crisis is Connected to Our Sin
Isaiah 29:13-16, 30:1-3, 31:1-3**

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September 23, 2018

Text Introduction: With the exception of a few Sundays here and there for special emphases, we are going to be in the book of Isaiah from now until the end of the year. We are considering this book from the general theme of “Crisis,” because it is a prophetic message from a time of crisis in Isaiah’s day, focused on the nation of Israel and more precisely, Judah. We are examining the *Confrontation* that comes from Crisis. Eventually, we are going to consider passages of *Comfort* in the midst of our Crisis. We are then going to consider some *Challenges* we face in the midst of crisis. Finally, in the month of December, we will isolate the *Christ* for our Crisis.

Isaiah 1:1 indicates that Isaiah preached these prophetic messages contained in the book during the reigns of Uzziah (also called Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Second Kings 15-20 gives us a reference point for the time of Isaiah’s prophecy. The years covered are 740 B.C. to at least 701 B.C. Some would say that there is evidence that Isaiah’s prophetic ministry lasted until nearly 680 B.C. We must remind ourselves that this time frame puts us in the midst of the divided kingdom (Israel in the North, Judah in the South). In fact, even though Isaiah’s prophecy is focused on Judah in the South, the fall of the Northern kingdom would have happened during his ministry. “Judah faces extinction at the hands of the cruel Assyrians. In this crucial hour of national emergency, God sends Isaiah—a unique man with an unpleasant message. The nation of Judah is rotten to the core and ripe for judgment. Her habitual sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, injustice and corruption have not escaped the notice of her holy God. His righteous wrath will soon fall upon king and commoner alike, that all might learn that the Lord Almighty cannot and will not be mocked.”¹

Many commentators, on the whole of Isaiah, outline the messages of Isaiah around three major crises that happened during his lifetime. The first crisis is described in chapter 7. We considered that crisis. The message Isaiah spoke then is an example of spoken prophecy. God used Isaiah to speak a message to King Ahaz. The message is to depend upon God for victory. Isaiah prophesies that though enemies say they will invade, they will not. They must have faith in God’s message and presence (7:7-10). But, instead, Ahaz formed a treaty with the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser. This is an example of Judah’s continued disobedience to the message of God. Their continued disobedience leads to their ultimate fall.

The preaching of Isaiah in the midst of the second crisis is described in Isaiah 20. An odd prophecy, to be sure, God instructed Isaiah to take his robe off as he preached as a visible sign that those for whom Judah was placing their trust would soon be led off stripped and shackled as prisoners of war.

The subject of our message today is the third crisis—one that scholars refer to as the Sennacherib Crisis. Sennacherib was the king of Assyria, now the threat to Judah. (So, just note here that they once wanted to rely on Assyria for protection, but now Assyria comes as their enemy. This is just the reason that God warned them against the treaty with the Assyrians.) This occurred during the time of Hezekiah whose

¹ *The Daily Walk Bible*, p. 809.

story we will come to at the end. Now, what I want to do today is give you a flavor of the content of Isaiah's preaching during this period. This covers a rather large section of Isaiah, but we will look at parts that serve as a sampling of the content of his preaching during this crisis.

Text: (29:13-16) The Lord said:

These people approach me with their speeches
to honor me with lip-service—
yet their hearts are far from me,
and human rules direct their worship of me.

¹⁴Therefore, I will again confound these people
with wonder after wonder.

The wisdom of their wise will vanish,
and the perception of their perceptive will be hidden.

¹⁵Woe to those who go to great lengths
to hide their plans from the LORD.

They do their works in the dark,
and say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"

¹⁶You have turned things around,
as if the potter were the same as the clay.
How can what is made say about its maker,
"He didn't make me"?

How can what is formed
say about the one who formed it,
"He doesn't understand what he's doing"?

(30:1-3) Woe to the rebellious children!

This is the LORD's declaration.

They carry out a plan, but not mine;
they make an alliance,
but against my will,
piling sin on top of sin.

²Without asking my advice
they set out to go down to Egypt
in order to seek shelter under Pharaoh's protection
and take refuge in Egypt's shadow.

³But Pharaoh's protection will become your shame,
and refuge in Egypt's shadow your humiliation.

(31:1-3) Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
and who depend on horses!

They trust in the abundance of chariots
and in the large number of horsemen.
They do not look to the Holy One of Israel
and they do not seek the LORD.

²But he also is wise and brings disaster.
He does not go back on what he says;
he will rise up against the house of the wicked

and against the allies of evildoers.

³Egyptians are men, not God;
their horses are flesh, not spirit.

When the LORD raises his hand to strike,
the helper will stumble
and the one who is helped will fall;
both will perish together.

Introduction: In John 9, we read that Jesus and the disciples passed by a man who was born blind from birth. Seeing this, the disciples asked what seemed to them to be a very honest question, “Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents?” Jesus rightly answered, “Neither, but instead so that God’s work might be revealed in Him.”

I begin with that story this morning to remind us that not every crisis is caused by sin. However, we must also be reminded, and Israel’s history reminds us of this, that many of our crises are the result of sin. And, perhaps, we ought to start with our lives, our sin, when we face crisis.

King Sennacherib of Assyria besieged Jerusalem during King Hezekiah’s reign. We read of Isaiah’s preaching during this crisis in Isaiah 28-33 and then the narrative of these events in chapters 36-37. That certainly is a large body of Scripture for our review today, but I think we can get a good handle on the summary of the content of Isaiah’s preaching during this crisis.

The situation looked hopeless. Isaiah’s message during this crisis focused on (1) causing Judah to see that their circumstances were directly related to their sin and (2) faith in God to help them through this crisis.

So, in sum, Isaiah’s preaching in 28-33 isolated two primary sin areas for Judah.

See the Problem

- False Sense of Worship

For an example of this kind of preaching see Isaiah 29:13ff. “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”

We tend to have more conversation about the style of worship than we do the substance of worship and the surrender of our lives once we have left the formality of the worship service. Both of these display exactly the sin of false worship exposed by this text.

- False Sense of Protection

For an example of this kind of preaching see Isaiah 30:1-3 and 31:1-3. Judah was trusting in an alliance with Egypt to protect them rather than trusting in Almighty God.

There’s one verse that I want you to see with me in this section as a great visual about this kind of preaching from Isaiah. It’s 28:20.

Indeed, the bed is too short to stretch out on,
and its cover too small to wrap up in.

I love this image. The bed is just too short. The cover is not quite large enough, leaving you exposed. That's what trusting is someone or something other than God will do to you.

The application to our lives from this section is rich. Don't we display false worship? We say the right things in worship, but our hearts are far away from God. Don't we trust in ourselves more than we trust in God? In times of crisis, we are to recognize our sin, repent of that sin, and trust in God for deliverance. Unless we do, we are in the words of 30:1 just "piling sin on top of sin."

Now, we understand that these are problems. But, here is what we don't understand. We don't understand how blind we are to our sin.

Isaiah warned of this right before the passage about false worship. Look at 29:9-12.

Stop and be astonished;
blind yourselves and be blind!
They are drunk, but not with wine;
they stagger, but not with beer.

¹⁰ For the LORD has poured out on you
an overwhelming urge to sleep;
he has shut your eyes (the prophets)
and covered your heads (the seers).

¹¹ For you the entire vision will be like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to one who can read and he is asked to read it, he will say, "I can't read it, because it is sealed." ¹² And if the document is given to one who cannot read and he is asked to read it, he will say, "I can't read."

In a rhetorical way, Isaiah is saying "You're blind."

I've been trying to avoid this, but I'm not sure I can anymore. Last December I went to Dr. Mizelle and said, "I just don't see as well anymore." So, I got these glasses. I've tried to ignore it. I got a Bible with a bigger font. I got my notes in a little larger font, but what I really need to do is wear these glasses.

So What? Solving the Problem

- Ask God to reveal the truth to you.

Be willing for God to reveal your sin.

- Be Willing to Return to God.

Isaiah 31:6

Return to the one the Israelites have greatly rebelled against.

A Wonderful Illustration of What this Resolution Looks Like!

Read Isaiah 37:8-20.

When the royal spokesman heard that the king of Assyria had pulled out of Lachish, he left and found him fighting against Libnah. ⁹ The king had heard concerning King Tirhakah of Cush, “He has set out to fight against you.” So when he heard this, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰ “Say this to King Hezekiah of Judah: ‘Don’t let your God, on whom you rely, deceive you by promising that Jerusalem won’t be handed over to the king of Assyria. ¹¹ Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries: they completely destroyed them. Will you be rescued? ¹² Did the gods of the nations that my predecessors destroyed rescue them—Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the Edenites in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, or Ivvah?’”

¹⁴ Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers’ hands, read it, then went up to the LORD’s temple and spread it out before the LORD. ¹⁵ Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD:

¹⁶ LORD of Armies, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you are God—you alone—of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. ¹⁷ Listen closely, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see. Hear all the words that Sennacherib has sent to mock the living God. ¹⁸ LORD, it is true that the kings of Assyria have devastated all these countries and their lands. ¹⁹ They have thrown their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but made from wood and stone by human hands. So they have destroyed them. ²⁰ Now, LORD our God, save us from his power so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are God—you alone.

We all must come to a time when we spread it out before the Lord.