

Title: Whose holding the Leash? Pt.2  
Text: Isaiah 10.5-34  
Theme: The Sovereignty of God  
Series: Isaiah #15  
Prop Stmt: Don't trust in that which opposes God. It is going down.  
Aim: Trust God, no matter what!

This text addresses one of the great debates within the church. Does the Bible teach that God is Sovereign over all, or does the Bible teach that man has a free will? Those who emphasize God's sovereignty have to wrestle with the issue of: "Where did evil come from?" Those who emphasize man's free will have to wrestle with the issue of: "How can God predict the future and guarantee anything?" Both sides can marshal passages to support their respective positions and muster philosophical arguments. But I want you to look at this text. I want you to see how both of these issues are presented here. And recognize this: This issue is not a conundrum for God.

Read Text:

So, here is the bottom line: God uses the free choices of man to carry out His will. What is the king of Assyria doing? He is doing what he wants to do. In fact, this guy has more freedom of will than you do because by virtue of his position. If you ever saw Disney's Lion King, you may remember the song, "I just can't wait to be king." That song expressed desire. But the king of Assyria had desire and the position to act upon that desire. His position of influence gave him freedom to act in a way that you and I cannot act. We are not kings. So here we see that the king of Assyria is acting how he wants to act. He is not being coerced. He is doing exactly what his little heart is telling him to do, but what his heart is telling him to do is exactly what God has ordained for him to do, but he does not know it. He is ignorant of the fact that God is using him to carry out God's plan. Notice the language of v.6. "*Against a godless nation **I send him** and against the people of my wrath **I command him.***"

That promise of God; that prophecy of God would be absolutely useless unless God had the authority to carry it out. If God was not sovereign over kings, courts, advisors, armies, generals, councils, weather, strategies, and weapons, then he could never promise that one nation would rise against another – could he?

At the same time, if the king of Assyria did not make this decision to invade Israel and then Judah and to be cruel and arrogant, then God could not hold him responsible for what he did. Since God does hold him responsible, the king of Assyria is morally accountable to God for the desires of his heart and for how he acts upon them.

Acts 2.23, 36 and Acts 4. 23-31

Joseph said to his brothers, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” God’s sovereignty does not excuse man’s evil, or make it less evil, but magnifies his grace in spite of our sin.

So, what is the conclusion of this? God uses the free choices of man to carry out his will. But while this text addresses this fascinating subject that I would love to delve into, this text is here for MORE than that. It is certainly helpful for us to see how the Sovereignty of God is compatible with what appears to man to be his free choices. But, the purpose of this text is to call you to trust God- no matter what. That is why it is good for us to go back and seek to reconstruct the original setting. Otherwise we can miss the point, particularly in a text that is so theologically and philosophically loaded. Here is what I mean. This text and the issue of God’s sovereignty and man’s freedom are great topics of discussion. We have these discussions in my family and they can be fun and they can be exhausting. But, when Isaiah wrote this, there were many in his audience who did not have time to sit in a classroom or go to Starbucks and engage in deep theological and philosophical issues over a caramel latte. Oh no! These people could smell the body odor and garlic breath of the Assyrian army approaching their village. They did not have the luxury of time to debate the particulars. They needed to know, why in that moment of crisis, in that time of catastrophe and apparent ruin why they should trust God and not give in to full-fledged panic. Even though Israel trusted in that which will betray them (idols) and Judah is repeating the same folly by trusting in Assyria. That does not mean that what is destroying Israel and threatening Judah is in control. The same idols that betray Israel will betray Assyria. The same sin that betrays us, will betray Satan. Satan is playing with something that even he cannot control. It is going to take him down. The destroyer itself will be destroyed. The destroyer is on a leash. Trust the One who holds the leash!

1. **God uses the arrogant and “Godless” choices of man to carry out his will.**  
(5-6)

This text is very clear. Assyria is a tool in the hand of God to carry out God’s promises. Please look at this. God is not saying this in a fatalistic manner. Isaiah is not writing about this in a cynical tone. This is not a matter of “well, whatever will be will be” as if we have no responsibility in life and we are just person-less cogs in a giant machine. NO!!! It is the very fact that Israel and Judah have exercised their wills against God, that they are reaping these consequences. This is not fatalism. This is cause and effect. Their rebellion is bringing about the effect of judgment. The initial temptation is to look in bewilderment at the means of judgment and say – Assyria?! How could God give Israel over to Assyria? But the truth is, Assyria did not have the Law, the Prophets and the Tabernacle, did she? Israel is more liable for judgment than Assyria because Israel had more light to reject. The shock to Israel that God is using the godless and arrogant Assyrians as his rod of judgment reveals how godless and arrogant they have become. They lived in the very land that God gave them as the result of his direct intervention in their lives as slaves. They were the nation for whom he opened up the Red Sea, gave the law, the tabernacle, opened

up the Jordan, and demolished the walls of Jericho. In order to reject God, they had to step over all of the evidences. They lived with the evidences!

On Sunday mornings I usually walk through the building and listen to the teaching of the Scriptures that takes place in the adult, student and children's classes. Honestly I am so encouraged by what I hear that I can hardly wait to get into this pulpit and add my voice to yours. But, I also know that there is another edge to that sword. There are people who come, sit and hear, but they don't really listen. The light is there, but the light is discounted, trivialized, treated as being inconsequential or non-authoritative. There are children who grow up with parents who teach them the Scriptures, who expose them to biblical preaching, who live out the gospel in front of them, and yet some of those children will walk away from the truth.

## 2. **Arrogant man is ignorant of the sovereignty of God.** (7-11)

Arrogant people assume that they are smarter, more skillful, more clever, or harder working than others. And they probably are in comparison to some, but certainly not in comparison to all. But that is not what they think. If you have a better job than someone else, or are making more money, or had an investment pay off, or your car is newer, or your kids get better grades, or your kids are better athletes, or you have fewer weeds in your yard, or you have better health, it is so easy to take credit for that. And maybe you study hard and work hard, but as soon as you take the glory for the brains or the strength, then you are seeking to rob glory from God.

The Assyrian king had no idea that he was a tool in the hand of God. And granted, we are not always aware of how God is working out his plan in us and through us, but the difference is this and it is a big one. The Assyrian king really thought that it was all about him. He looked at nations as his to do with what he wanted. He had no sense of being under the authority of the Almighty. In his mind, he was the almighty and is no servant of the God of Jerusalem. He is proud of the men who serve him (v.8). He boastfully lists his conquests beginning with his victory at the Euphrates River and heads south until Damascus (v.9). In his mind (v.10) the God of Jerusalem is another inferior god and idol like Marduk, Hadad and Baal who will cower before him. This Yahweh is just another idol.

## 3. **God judges arrogance!** (12-19)

These verses reek with arrogance. In v.12, God makes it clear that the destroyer is going to be destroyed because he does not acknowledge the absolute right of God to rule. He thinks (13) that he has done all of these things because he is inherently superior. He thinks (14) that by virtue of his strength that he has the right to pillage and take from others. But what axe boasts of chopping down a tree? It is not the axe, but the person who swings it (15).

Every human being is under the authority of God. There are no exceptions. Every person is aware of God's authority. Many, like the Assyrian king attempt to deny it

and pretend that they can live by their own rules. People like Darwin, Nietzsche, Hitler, Stalin, and Peter Singer of Princeton University simply believe that the strong can live off of the weak. Evolution teaches us that. If you are superior, then you can see from nature that you can take from those who are inferior. But that is not how God thinks. Positions of leadership are to be used to serve and to care for those under your influence.

Any person who is in a leadership position is supposed to use that position to reflect the character of God. I understand that our world does not think like that. I understand that many in churches do not think like that, but it is true. When you use a position to serve yourself instead of serving those under your care, then you are, in that way, usurping the place of God. You are pretending to be God. The truth is, every position is under the authority of God. And even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

God does not ignore arrogance. Proverbs is full of warnings against pride. 6.16 says, "There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes..." is the very first thing that is mentioned. This sin is so offensive to God and it is so subtle and so deceiving in us. Pride, at its root, is the attempt to take credit for something that ultimately God has done. He will not share his glory with another. And his response reveals how serious He is about this.

- wasting sickness
- destructive fire
- devastation so complete that even a child can write down the number of trees left

In 701 BC, Sennacherib returned to Canaan. The northern kingdom had been wiped out 20 years earlier, now he was coming to take wipe out little Judah. It should be a relatively easy operation, but these were pesky people. His campaign was on the verge of complete victory. His massive army had just about subdued the entire land, expect Jerusalem and it was expected to fall any day. But in one night, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were inexplicably killed. Sennacherib beat a hasty retreat back home, where he was killed by his two boys. This was only a harbinger of what was to come. In less than 100 years, the Assyrian empire was absolutely decimated. For an empire that big, that powerful, that organized to be wiped out that completely is impressive. In the end, all of Assyrians power, massive armies, cities and awesome weapons were nothing more than fuel for fires.

#### 4. **God's plan will come to pass.** (20-34)

"In that day" is always a reference to "the day of the LORD". This is a time of God's obvious involvement in directing the events in such a way that no one, other than God could have ever predicted the outcome. It would have been like someone saying that Tim Tebow would lead the Broncos to 6 victories in a row (just kidding).

Now, do not forget that this entire passage is laying out an argument for why you have to trust God! The rest of chapter 10 hammers this theme home. God's plan will come to pass. Therefore, trust God. Now, this is not always easy to absorb because God's plan does not revolve around you (individually). Can you handle that? Can you handle the fact that God's love for you is so great because his love for you is rooted in and reflected from his love for his own glory? Therefore, God has chosen to put the glory of his majesty on display in history by selecting an unworthy people to know him and live with him forever. The ultimate expression of his plan will be seen in the culmination of everything that is going on now. Now, is not the goal, then is. Therefore, he allows us to be part of things now, but this is not the goal. This is temporary. We are players in his plan. We are players because he loves us, and uses us and satisfies us, but the plan is not to make much of us now, but to make much of Christ. God gives us parts to play. Some of you have more lines in the play than others. Some of you appear in more acts than others. Some of you serve behind the scenes or in the chorus line. But none of us are the stars. In this play, there is only one Star – and that is Christ. But God has chosen a people to make much of Christ. We are here to do that, and not to live as if life is about us, because it isn't.

a. **God's plan for a people will not fail.** (20-23)

God will always have a people. A remnant will survive and when they do, they will have at least learned this: Do not trust in the enemy of God. All idols will betray you. Trust God!

Assyria is big and powerful. But they are not the biggest. In fact, Babylon is going to take them down. But Babylon is not the biggest. No matter how big and how bad and how evil and powerful all of these empires are, God has made a promise that no matter what, he is going to have a people. Through it all, he did. And he still does. Not only did all of the chaos and catastrophe not mess up God's plan to have a people, but God used catastrophe to bring about faith. Here is Isaiah writing over 100 years before of what is going to happen – and it does. And when it does, the people of God are able to see that God has said all along what is going to happen and now he promises that his plan for his people will go on. You are part of something that will outlive you. You are part of something that is bigger than you and greater than you. What an encouragement this will be to those who are taken captive and will die in Babylon. You can die in hope. You can live out your days in faith, knowing that God's plan through you is going to go on.

Kids love to put their initials in wet concrete. Later on, they want to carve their initials in trees or put them on buildings with paint. Adults try to build a reputation at work, or build something that will outlive them. For most of us, we try to build a legacy in our families, but even that is vulnerable. If you are an authentic member of the body of Christ, then you are already part of a kingdom that cannot be stopped, that cannot fail and that will one day put every single thing in order. Your commitment to a sports team cannot promise you that. Your commitment to a car, to a degree, to a career cannot promise you that either. You want to be part of

something that will outlive you. That something is the gospel-driven church. Though no individual church is perfect, God's plan for a people will not fail.

**b. God's plan to judge his enemies will not fail. (24-34)**

Man is not only a tool in the hand of God, but man's fury only brings about his own demise. God is not intimidated by Assyria. Look at what he did to the mighty Egyptian empire at the Red Sea? Look at what he did to the powerful Midianites at the Rock of Oreb. Beloved, do you know why these accounts are in the Bible? It is because they actually happened. Do not make the mistake of having two categories of history in your brain: 1) Bible history and 2) World history. They are one in the same, but the Bible tells you world history from God's perspective, while World history can tell you the events, it cannot interpret them for you. History from God's perspective is his story. He oversees all events. Look at verses 28-32. Do you know what this is? This is a description of the route that the Assyrian army is going to take when they attack Jerusalem. God knows what is going happen. Assyria is on a leash and God holds the leash. The point for Judah was so clear. Do not trust in Assyria when you can trust in the one who holds Assyria.

Christopher Hitchens died this week. His attacks on the gospel and on people like us have been venomous and relentless through the years. But the news of his death gave me great sadness. I read, what I think was his last article for Vanity Fair (appropriate title) magazine. He is an excellent writer. His description of his cancer and the treatments is so vivid that you feel it with him. But as I read about his experience, it became painfully clear that all he could do was describe what is, and interact with what other writers and thinkers have reflected on in the midst of suffering. That was it. There was no hope in his writings. There was a glaring absence of future. He had nothing to look forward to. To him, this was it and of course he is being hailed as a brave man who was willing to take us all on his journey of looking at death. He was not a brave man, he was a fool. He had nothing to offer. There was no inspiration, no calling, no drive, and no vision at all. I read the words of a dying man, who was feeling the lights being turned out and all he could do was write about the growing din. He felt the judgment of living in a body that will not last, with a soul that will, but that he was hoping would not. While the writing was good, it left my soul so empty, my heart grieving for him. He had nothing to offer.

Contrast that with Christ. And here is what I mean. This entire text is about hope in judgment. Isaiah is writing for the remnant and calling them to have hope in the midst of judgment because God's plan will not fail and God will have a people. That is exactly what drove Christ to die in hope, even though he was experiencing the intensity of his Father's judgment for sins that he had not committed. He died under judgment, but he died in faith. He died looking forward to the future because he trusted in the promises of God. In fact his death is the grounding and the securing of the promises of God. Beloved, we can live out our days with hope, even though we live in a world that is under the curse of sin. We can live out our days and die, like

Christ in confidence in the promises of God that his plan and his people will go on – forever! Do you remember what Patrick said last week? “Don’t pity me.” Why wouldn’t we? He is part of that which cannot fail! Pity the man who lived 98 years as a Tigers fan, who traveled the world but who did not know the gospel. Pity Christopher Hitchens who died of cancer and could not write of the future, because he had none worth writing about.