

“The Betrayal of the gods” Isaiah 8.1 – 9.1

Imagine that standing here is a dad. He has a wife and a beautiful teenage daughter whom he delights in beyond anything else in this world. He is giving, loving, compassionate, involved, challenging, encouraging, discerning, rightfully protective, and 6'8", 325 lbs of ripped muscle and can bench press a Ford Escort. One day a punk of a boy tries to impress this girl in front of his friends and she ignores him. In his embarrassment, he gets angry and threatens her. She continues to ignore him until one day he attacks her. Her clothes are torn, her hair is torn, her face is bruised, her legs and arms are bleeding from falling to the ground, but finally she breaks free and gets home and tells her dad.

Now, what is going to happen? Up to this point, this man has only been known to be loving, compassionate, kind and good. But, what are they about to witness? They are about to see wrath. And this punk boy? Let's just say that he will be breathing through his socks. But what is it that has generated this wrath? This is not an angry man. But, he has just been ignited, hasn't he? Someone has attacked the one in whom he delights. Now, let's say that this girl comes home from being attacked and she tells her dad what happened and he says to quit whining and get over it. That would never happen in this case, would it? That which you love, you will defend.

When we learn the story line of the Bible, we find some things out about God that may initially sound harsh. There are times that God acts in judgment and wrath. But, what is it that has generated his wrath? It is true that God delights in his children, like this father in the analogy. But, here is where the illustration breaks down. Before God delighted in his children, God delighted in himself. The Father, Son and Spirit have enjoyed the ultimate expression and ultimate harmonious relationship of goodness, love and joy. God has forever delighted in being God. Anything that attacks, defames, and attempts to slander the character of God will invite the wrath of God, not because God has for eternity past been a God of wrath, but because is infinitely the highest and greatest expression of goodness. Because God's goodness is the greatest goodness, and therefore, God's glory the greatest glory, God is right to love his goodness and cherish his love and promote his joy and guard his glory. Remember, that which you love, you will defend. It is right and necessary for God to act in judgment. And I pray that your heart will be like a sponge that is squeezed and placed into this theological bucket. Let this truth be absorbed by your inner being. The judgment of God is motivated by God's commitment to his goodness. God is NOT the punk boy whose self-centered expression of affection has been spurned. God is the Father, who cherishes that which is beautiful and true and will do everything that he must to protect it.

Because God is good, true, righteous, and perfect in all His ways, it is right, it is wonderful to make much of God's trueness, righteousness, and perfections by trusting him. It is offensive to God to say that he is not good. That his commands are

not righteous, that his ways are not perfect, that he cannot be trusted and that you know better than he does! It is not only absurd; it is, in the truest sense, obscene. It is obnoxious. It is outrageous. It is outlandish. But, it is exactly what we do! All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned each one of us to our own way. We have not only ignored God, but we have replaced him with our own gods that are a poor substitute because they are not real gods and because they act like us! Idols are not necessarily physical images. They can be images that we create of ourselves. And when that image is threatened, then we react in anger or depression because we are attempting to delight in that image and something is attacking our image. Let's say that you are in high school and that you have this image of what you want to look like, and that image means that you are wearing these cool beach and surfer clothes from Hollister (which is headquartered in Columbus, OH – about as far from the ocean as you can get) and there is this hoodie that you've got to have and when you get to the store, they don't have any in your size. Now what? Your life is over. There is absolutely nothing left to live for. All of your identity and value and worth were in that hoodie, and now, there is nothing left to live for. But it isn't just students who do that. You can do that with a car, a job, a degree, a title, a house, a relationship, and certainly money.

Read Text:

For about 700 years the children of Israel, lived in the land of Canaan. Whenever they trusted God, they thrived as a people and whenever they didn't they suffered. God defends that which he delights in. Before God brought judgment, he always brought in prophets to call the people back to faith in him. Isaiah was one such prophet. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah. Our text this morning, takes place during the reign of a king called Ahaz. While he was king, the Assyrian Empire was flexing her muscles again.

This prompted Syria and Israel to form an alliance and they tried to force Judah to join with them. When Ahaz did not, then Syria and Israel attacked Judah and published their plans to replace Ahaz. This was not only war, it was civil war.

Isaiah goes to Ahaz (chapter 7) with a promise from the Lord. Do not fear Israel and Syria. But fear God! Ahaz does not want it. He does not want to be obligated to the Lord and does not want the Lord to get any credit for victory. Instead of trusting God, who loves Judah, he paid Assyria who is NOT a friend! Ahaz would rather pay a god (Assyria) that desires to destroy him, than trust God who desires to rescue him. What is it about us that we distrust the only One who can save us and trust the idols and gods who will betray us? Look at the trouble that God goes to, to show you this.

1. **God goes on the record.** (1-4)

“Then the LORD said to me.” This is personal. In fact, this is now very personal. God tells Isaiah to make a big poster and announce that he is going to have a son and that his name is going to be, “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (meaning “speeding to the plunder,

hurrying to the spoil”). Now get this. Isaiah’s wife is not even pregnant – yet. In fact, I don’t think that Isaiah is even married at this point. (I will explain in a minute.)

Running throughout this section in particular is a subtheme that I want you to note. Isaiah’s life is not his own. This means that Isaiah’s family is not his own either. God tells him what to name his children so that their very existence is part of God’s warning to his people. Some couples like to wait a while before they announce that they are expecting. Some announce it right away. But I don’t know of many who announce it before they have even become pregnant, that they are going to be pregnant and give both the gender and the name. That’s pretty bold – eh? But that is exactly what God tells Isaiah to do. Why? Because....

A. God is very public with his word.

The history of God with people is characterized by God going on the record. Over and over God puts his promises in print so that there is a record for you to look to. Not only that, but God takes pains to demonstrate that he is not pulling a fast one on you. In v.2 that Uriah and Zechariah are called to be witnesses. Now, this is very interesting because after Assyria defeats Syria, Ahaz travels to Damascus (formerly the capital of Syria). There Ahaz meets Tiglath-pileser who is not only there, but has his gods with him, including the altar that he uses to offer sacrifices with. (2 Kings 16) Ahaz is so impressed with this altar that he gets exact dimensions and renderings so that he can have a copy of it built in Jerusalem. When Ahaz returns to Jerusalem, he gives the blueprints to Uriah with orders to build it and replace the bronze altar, which Uriah does. Ahaz will worship anything but God. And here is a classic example. But, beware; your gods will betray you (as we will see).

B. God tells us ahead of time what he is going to do.

Tiglath-pileser does not tell Ahaz what he is going to do. Fact is, he is not going to stop with Syria and Israel. This is not a merger of equals, this is a hostile takeover, but Ahaz is too blind to see it. So, here, Uriah is forced by God to see God going on record. Uriah is going to be swept up in Ahaz’s apostasy, but in order for him to do so, he is going to have to do it deliberately and in spite of the clear evidence of God’s promises. If you are going to run from God, you will never be able to claim that it is because God hid himself from you. It will only be because you deliberately refused to believe what he has already revealed.

Now, let’s go back to 7.14. In spite of Ahaz’s arrogant response, God gave him a sign anyway. How was that sign fulfilled? Notice how v.3 begins. “And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived a son.” Some times (certainly not always) the Bible uses expressions (called euphemisms) that describe personal, often bodily functions in more socially comfortable terms. That is the case here. But what is interesting about this phrase, is that the wording of it in Hebrew is that it is used several times in the Old Testament to describe the first act of consummation for a married couple. Also, the word translated virgin, speaks of a woman of marriageable age. Finally, in

v.3 Isaiah goes to “the prophetess” which could be the title of his wife, or could be a woman who had that role, who became his wife. Given the fact that the sign in 7.14 was very important, it seems to be that the immediate fulfillment of that sign in Ahaz’s day would not be done secretly, but in full view. Hence, Isaiah is giving a birth announcement before his wife is pregnant. In fact, it is my opinion that when Isaiah is given this order (v.1) that he is not even married. I believe that Isaiah was previously married through whom he had a son (chapter 7 – Shear-jashub). Isaiah’s life is not his own. His entire life and family is part of God’s message to Judah. Since, the language of this text sets the table like this, I believe that Isaiah’s first wife dies. Isaiah gives this sign to Ahaz that a woman who is a virgin now, is going to get married and have a son, and by the time that this boy is old enough to know right from wrong, and eat curds and honey and say “Daddy and Mommy” that Syria and Israel will no longer be a threat. What Isaiah may or may not have realized in chapter 7 is that he was part of the fulfillment of that promise. At any rate, his first wife dies (the text does not say this), and the LORD said to me (v.1) that he is supposed to make a birth announcement. Now, Isaiah realizes that he has to get remarried and father a son in obedience to God. So, he does (as v.3) indicates. I believe therefore, that the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz is the immediate fulfillment of that sign, whose birth points to an ultimate fulfillment in Christ who was born, not only from a woman who was a virgin at the time of the announcement but was a virgin at the time of his conception and birth. That leaves, however one loose end. Why isn’t he called Immanuel? In a sense he is. Immanuel comes into play in both v.8 and at the end of v.10. And like the next point indicates, this message from God is both hope and judgment. God is with us. If you rebel against him, then his presence to you will be in judgment. If you trust him, his presence will be deliverance.

2. **There is hope in judgment.** (5-10)

Ahaz paid off Tiglath-pileser and Assyria invaded Syria and Israel. For the moment, Ahaz appeared to be “the man.” But, by trusting Assyria instead of God, Judah aligned herself with a lion that she cannot tame. In verse 6 Judah is rejoicing over the demise of Syria and Israel, but God warns them, “not so fast.” You rejected Shiloh. What does that mean? Shiloh was the little stream that flowed from the Gihon spring on the west side of the Kidron Valley, traveling through conduits that eventually fed the pool of Siloam that we read about in the New Testament. Here is the point. Shiloh symbolized God, while the Euphrates River symbolized Assyria. Shiloh does not look like much. Instead of trusting in the simple and plain things that God has already put in place for his people, Ahaz (and by extension Judah) are trusting in something that is much more impressive – the River. Assyria is much more impressive in appearance than God. By the way, that is one of the themes that are woven throughout the Bible. God chooses unimpressive ways to carry out his plan. He chooses weak people through whom to show his strength. But the story is not done...

A. **Your god will betray you.** (5-8)

Even as Judah is back-slapping each other over this diplomatic coup, they were making it clear, they had delivered themselves. They had found a solution. They had figured out how to handle things without God. They did not need a word from the Lord. They did not need that irritating prophet, Isaiah. They found their own way. But, what was the way? The River, Assyria, had overflowed her banks. She overwhelmed Syria and was going to overwhelm Israel, but guess what? She wasn't done? What was Ahaz thinking? Did he think that now, Assyria would simply return to her riverbed? Did he not realize that what he had unleashed would not stop until it had gone as far as it could, devastating everything it could possibly reach? V.8 says that Assyria will invade Judah and will cover the land, "reaching even to the neck." (2 Chron. 28.20-21) This is all fulfilled during Hezekiah's reign. So, what stops Assyria from complete victory? In fact, how is Assyria defeated? It is God. (Immanuel) God himself will intervene. And he does. The gods that Ahaz trusted betrayed him. They always do.

B. The true God will be with you. (9-10)

Notice that these verses are set off with a margin because they are the words of a song. Isaiah breaks into singing. God is allowing him to see that beyond these immediate days of destruction are days of deliverance by God and days of faith by the people. It will not always be the way it is now. God is going to come. What an incredible promise this is (Immanuel – v.8, God is with us, v.10). Isaiah does not realize the ultimate fulfillment of his words. God not only fulfilled his promise the, but he used the fulfillment as a promise that pointed to the ultimate "God is with us" even, in the person of Christ. We cannot go to God because of our sin, so God comes to us in our need. God enters into our world, our mess, our realm, by taking upon himself the form of a man. God becomes man in the person of Jesus Christ in order to rescue us from our greatest need. Our greatest problem is unbelief in God. The rest of this text lays this out.

3. God is serious about you trusting him. (11 – 9.1)

Because trusting God magnifies and exalts the worthiness of God, trusting God is the greatest thing that you can do, while distrusting God is the worst thing that you can do. That contrast is clearly set forth in these verses.

A. Trust in yourself and fall – hard!

1) Conspiracies (hidden) (11-15)

Now, keep in mind that governments then acted like they do now. In each country there are spies and high level informants who seek to sway the kings. Judah, no doubt had Assyrian sympathizers, Israel and Syrian informants who were all doing things and seeking influence in the palace. There was all sorts of intrigue. Every one wants to know what is going to happen. This is what makes conspiracy theories so

captivating. There are conspiracies. But, once you give yourself over to them, there is no end to the speculation and you end up in bondage to them, bowing down at the altar of your own intellect to figure everything out, only to fear that your theories may themselves be a conspiracy to keep you distracted from the real one! The people are paranoid! But it gets worse. What do you do to influence the gods?

2) *Spiritists* (hidden) (16-9.1) (19)

These people are in a panic over the future. So, they appeal to the spiritists. That is, they appeal to witchcraft that is associated with idolatry. The whole scene here is sadly dark and murky. The leaders are reduced to relying upon necromancers and sorcerers whose demonic lords put all inquirers into bondage. Does it make any sense to ask the dead how the living are supposed to live? Verses 21-22 speak of their end. But it does not have to be this way.

B. Trust in God and live - forever!

What a contrast!

1) *God's Person* (revealed) (11-15)

Look at what God offers! (14) God himself will become a sanctuary!!! That is the story line of the Bible in one verse. God is going to dwell with his people and they are going to dwell securely in him. This is what he offers. He offers forgiveness, life, security, and protection, all in exchange for your trust. Look at the contrast with the conspiracies. Conspiracies are hidden. They are the plans and machinations of man. You can give yourself to the study of them, but in the end, what good will it do? What if JFK was assassinated by a foreign government? What if the 911 was an inside job? What if the Rothchilds are using the banking crisis in Europe to take over the world? Even if you figured out some of the conspiracies, do not forget, even conspiracies serve the sovereign hand of God. Trust God who has revealed himself. And what has God revealed? I am the Rock! Either stand on me or trip over me, but either way you will deal with me. (14-15) Sadly, for Israel and for much of Judah, they tripped and they fell.

2) *God's Promises* (revealed) (16-9.1)

In verse 16, Isaiah is recording, binding and sealing what God has made known. He doesn't need to find "secrets" from sorcerers when he has truth from God. Not only that, but God has revealed it. Look at v.20. "To the teaching and to the testimony!" God is serious about you trusting him. He is so serious about it, that when you don't life will be frustrating. That is a kindness from God. He is either your sanctuary or your stumbling block.