

Title: When the bottom drops out.
Text: Isaiah 14.28 – 16.14
Theme: Where is your hope?
Series: Isaiah #20
Prop Stmtnt Hoping in a lie is hopeless.
Aim: I aim to help my people trust in God – alone, no matter what

When I am stressed out, I _____ (what)? What do you rely upon in order to get your way? Is it anger? Is it your power, threats? When I am stressed out, I _____ (what)? How do you complete that? Is it, "I've got to have a cigarette? Is it, "I've got to have a drink? How many of you retreat and take a nap, play video or internet games, veg out in front of the TV or medicate your stress with food? It is interesting, (convicting) to see how many of our responses to pressure are so counter-productive, and only add more stress instead of dealing with it. Most of the time, when you are under pressure, you need to respond. That means, in many cases, that you need to pick up the phone and talk to someone, or make an appointment, or take specific steps to address the pressure. But you don't. Why is it, that if you have a final exam in school tomorrow that tonight seems like a good night to cut your toenails? We would rather talk about the problem, garner pity for the stress that we feel, instead of actually do something about it. Granted there are healthier ways to deal with pressure than some that I have mentioned, but even going for a walk or a run, does not mean that I am handling things well. What we rely upon when we don't get our way, or when we are under stress usually reveals what we really trust. God loves His glory and you so much, that he will go to great lengths to cause you to look only to him. What kind of God doesn't care if you love him or not? What kind of God doesn't care what happens to you? God's relentless pursuit of your trust and affection is driven by his love for you! Apathy is a form of hate.

This text paints a picture of people who are facing an enemy that is going to overwhelm them and it shows what happens to people who face catastrophe without God. Isaiah was a prophet who lived in the southern kingdom of Judah about 700 years before Christ. He watched as his nation decayed from prominence to the brink of destruction. He was, it seems at times, a lonely voice calling his people to turn back to God. As a true prophet, he was the voice of God to the people. His call for them to return to God was God, speaking through him, to the hearts of the people. There was urgency in Isaiah's voice because the Assyrian armies were methodically crushing and destroying every nation in the Ancient Near East. Judah appeared to be no match for the might and determination that Assyria had for world domination. They would not be denied. In the midst of this, God calls to his people and says, "trust me." Turn to me and be saved. But they would not. Therefore, as we are learning from these first 39 chapters, "judgment is coming." But the book of Isaiah is longer than 39 chapters. Judgment will not have the final word. Yes, judgment is coming, but in the end, hope will win. Hope will win, because while God will judge the proud, he will also rescue the humble. He will rescue those who, even in the midst of judgment turn to him. Our God saves! Over and over, this message is given in this book. And here, we see it in the form of contrast. Here, we

see what happens to people who do not trust God, but instead trust in themselves and their idols. The result is so sad, and so pathetic, that it softens even the hardest heart.

This morning we are going to be looking at 14.28–16.14. 14.28-32 is a message to the Philistines (called an oracle) and chapters 15 and 16 is an oracle to the nation of Moab. I will read portions of this.

Read Text:

I What do you do when you have no answers? (14.28-32)

The Philistines were neighbors to the children of Israel. From the day that Israel returned to the land of Canaan, the Philistines were a pain in the neck. They were the only people that Israel was never able to conquer. They were at war with each other during the days of the Judges and Saul and were finally subdued during the reign of David. When you read v.28-29, it appears to us that the Philistines were possibly rejoicing because Ahaz had died. The truth is, Ahaz was like a human toad who squatted on Judah's throne. This guy inspired about as much fear as a gnat. The Philistines hated to see Ahaz go, about as much as U of M hated to see John Cooper go as the football coach at OSU.

Isaiah is dating this oracle with that statement in v.28. Ahaz died at a time of temporary weakness in the leadership of the Assyrian Empire, and the Philistines were making plans to rebel. Isaiah was saying that the Philistine plan was going to be a colossal failure. Not only would they not gain their freedom, they were going to be absolutely wiped out. Here is the point for Judah. The reason Judah was under pressure, was because God was stirring up the Assyrians. Do you remember that from 10.5? God is committed to his people loving him and trusting him. Instead, they had turned away from him and were giving their affections and worship to other gods. So, God is bringing in the heat to drive them back to himself. Do you realize what steps God will take to cause you to be aware of how much you need him? But instead of turning to God, they were tempted to turn to the Philistines. The envoys and ambassadors between the nations are going back and forth. These enemies are discussing the possibility of forming an alliance to stand against Assyria, and Isaiah is saying, "NO!" Do not trust in other nations, other gods, other kings, or anything other than God. They are all going down. They will fail you. Isaiah paints this picture of what is going to happen. Notice vs. 31. The Assyrian battle rams are at the gates and methodically destroying the defenses. The massive army continues to pour in, marching in a manner that shows their discipline and focus. There are no stragglers. The outcome is clear. All that the people can do is tremble. Everything that they had trusted in, failed them. Here, Isaiah describes the gates of cities as wailing and the people being overwhelmed with fear. It is pathetic, even if you were Judah and the Philistines were your enemy. The Philistines are no match for Assyria and if they cannot stand before Assyria, what are your chances of survival?

What will one answer the messengers of the nations? What is your plan now? The only hope for the Philistines is not in their walls, or defenses. The only hope for Judah is not in their political treaties and military plans. The only hope for anyone is God. Our God saves! There is no other. How do you think the Philistines would respond to this? Abandon your plans to rebel and instead put your trust in Judah's God. Repent of your pride and trust in the God of Judah. How likely is that going to happen? But that is their (and yours) only hope. You cannot follow God with a stick neck and proud heart. No one can. Not even Judah.

The next two chapters are one oracle.

II. What do you do when your "god" lets you down? (15.1-16.14)

This oracle, though written for Moab was read in Judah. Moab was located to the east of Israel. Moab and Judah seemed to have a friendlier relationship. Moab was known for her grapes. Moab lived and died economically on grape and wine production. Every country not only had to defend itself against hostile countries, it had to defend itself against the weather. The same climate that produced grapes and wine was susceptible to drought and famine. What do you do to protect yourself against drought and famine? How can you get it to rain, but not too much? Moab had a god named Chemosh. They would sacrifice to Chemosh so that they would get the favorable weather conditions in order to survive and even thrive. Now, in the face of the Assyrians who were coming in, Moab cries out to Chemosh to deliver them. These two chapters describe the pitiful state of these people as they come to grips with the fact that the god they have trusted in is no god at all and therefore, cannot save them. This text describes hopelessness.

There are times, when watching the news, I see the story of a suicide bomber who has killed a dozen or so people. The cameras show video of family members grieving the loss of their loved one and asking why this had to be. I don't know these people, but it still grabs my heart. Suffering is our universal language. But here is what I pray that you will grasp from this text. Even though suffering is universally known, those who are followers of Christ know that there is a purpose and God-glorifying end for their suffering. Suffering is framed by our knowledge that God is using this for his glory, and that in the end suffering will not win. Those who do not know God, have no such hope. Every one will face suffering. But suffering apart from dependence upon God produces despair.

A. You fall apart. (15.1-9)

Ar and Kir (v.1) were chief cities and fortresses that protected Moab but were useless in defending the country against Assyria. "Moab is undone" describes one who is utterly distraught. There is nothing to live for and nothing to hope in. The people of Moab are in a daze. They go to the places where they worshiped Chemosh, but all they can do is cry. The people are in a state of abject mourning (shaved hair, sackcloth, v.2,3) and even her armed men are crying and trembling.

Beginning in v.5, Isaiah is grieved over their loss. He sees the long lines of refugees along the roads, leaving their homes, and holding on to the few possessions that they could take with them. Children are crying, mothers are weary, most fathers and young men are dead. Some inhabitable land to the east bordered Moab. So I take the end of v.9 to speak of the people who in running from the Assyrians, went into this arid country, only to be killed by lions. There is no escape. Here is what every person will face, who does not trust God, either in this life or the one to come. Apart from God, there is no safety.

We see this now. This past century was marked by the highest number of refugees in the history of the world. Today, the humanitarian crisis in Sudan is staggering. The people who are trying to help are overwhelmed. What is so little food and shelter among so much need? What can you do to stop the violence against these people? But, here is what is worse. Those who hope in false gods to deliver them have no hope when they face a crisis like this. But hopelessness in this life is not nearly as serious as hopelessness in the life to come. Isaiah now describes how desperate the people in Moab get. They are so desperate that they say that they are willing to come to Judah in order to escape.

B. You become desperate. (16.1-5)

What this means, is that some of the people of Moab are willing to admit that their god cannot save them. So, they are running to Judah in order to be rescued. Isaiah then cries out to them (and Judah) that your only hope is Judah's God! Look to Him! He is going to send a ruler who will stop oppression. He will send a king who will cause all destruction to cease (4b). His throne (line of David) will be established in steadfast love and justice.

But there is a difference between trying to save your neck and truly trusting with your heart, know what I mean? When I was a senior in high school I had a curfew that had no wiggle room. If I came home one minute late, I would lose driving privileges for two weeks. Instead of choosing to leave on time in order to get home on time, I, at times would choose to drive faster than the recommended daily allowance. One Saturday night, I was going south on I-77 and discovered an Ohio State Patrol officer who was sitting in the medium looking for people such as myself. He obviously discovered me, because as soon as I blew past him, his car lit up like the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Plaza. I knew that I was toast. My life was flashing before my eyes. I was desperate. I ducked into a line of traffic in the right lane and prayed! I deserved justice, but justice was more than I thought I could handle, so I was crying out for mercy. I told God that if He got me out of this, I would do anything. I would even go into the ministry. I watched in my rear view mirror as the officer came like a torpedo toward me. And just when I was about to pull off to the shoulder, he pulled over the car behind me. So, here I am.

But, there is a difference between desperate trust, and true affection. It is not enough to want to get out from under the pressure. The pressure is designed to humble you and draw you to complete trust in God. Moab was desperate, but not necessarily believing.

C. **You lose all hope.** (16.6-12)

“Let Moab wail for Moab.” (7a) Instead of admitting the obvious and saying, “I was wrong! I need God. I cannot do this on my own, so many would rather die in their stubbornness than live in humility. These verses are a reflection of the bigger picture of life. Moab is no different than any other part of humanity. She had things that she was proud about and trusted in. But where did it get her? When the bottom dropped out, she had nothing to hope in. Her raisin cakes (delicacies that she was famous for), her grapes and wine and celebrations were now reduced to nothing. In the end, she had nothing. And it is so sad. The only thing that the people of Moab, who survive, can do is wail and mourn. Everything that they had is now destroyed. Their own future is essentially wiped out. This is the destruction of a nation, a people, a culture. When you read verse 9, what do you see? Here, Isaiah is broken over the sorrow of this nation that was not his own people. In v.11, he says that he feels like he was kicked in the gut. Their destruction is so bad, that he is just overwhelmed at the loss that these people were experiencing. The worse thing is, it was unnecessary.

16.13-14 is God’s final word on this oracle. Moab had three years to turn to God. She didn’t. But Isaiah did not write this only for Moab but for his own people. Look at what God said. He is telling you right now, what is going to happen in three years. In three years, Moab is going to be wiped out. Do not put your trust in Philistia or in Moab. Do not be tempted to think that their gods are more attractive than God, because their gods are idols. That’s it! They cannot hear, cannot speak, and cannot move. If you want your god to go with you, you have to carry him. What kind of a god is that?! If you are going to have a god, get one who can move himself. But, we are no different. Our gods of money, food, sex, power, toys, image, are nothing. When times of pressure come, when the bottom drops out, they cannot save.

Why is God saying these things? To demonstrate that He is the one, true God. These prophecies came true. This was to be a message to Moab, when your god, Chemosh lets you down, turn to the One who will never fail. At the same time, Judah was in deep weeds, just like Moab. Judah had turned from God to serve the gods of the nations around her. The other gods were more exciting and allowed for a little bit more freedom. After all, all gods are the same – right? Everyone really believes the same thing – right? We’re all going to the same place, but just taking different roads – right? NO!!! There is only One God who saves. All other gods are imposters. They cannot save!

One day, you are going to face a mountain that you cannot climb, that is, a problem that you cannot handle. When the bottom drops out, you will find out what you are trusting in. As much as we fear those times, they are good because they help us see where our hope truly rests on. The reason why God is our one and only and all-sufficient hope is made clear in 16.5. In that text, God was calling upon Moab and Judah to trust him because he was going to send a King who would rule over the nations. His throne will be established in steadfast love. He will be faithful. He will be just. He will be swift to do righteousness. Today, we are able to see how God has and is fulfilling that promise in

Christ. This love of this King is seen in his willingness to die in our place, for our sins. His justice is seen in the fact that he saw to it, that our sins were punished to the full extent of the law, but not as we imagined. Justice was satisfied when Christ paid the penalty for our sins by taking our death and paying for our crimes. No other god did that. No other god can do that. There is no other legitimate god. Turn to him. Trust in Christ, and be saved. He will be with you. He will see you through. And when death comes to your door, you will only walk through the shadow. His oath, his covenant, his blood, support me in the whelming flood, when all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay.