

Title: You're Serious?
Text: Isaiah 17.1-11
Theme: The loss of glory
Series: Isaiah #21
Prop Stmt: Only God is permanently glorious.
Aim: I aim to help my people trust in God even more since true glory is only in Him.

Read Text:

It was one of those great mid-western summer evenings when the sun seems to stay up forever. I was probably about 10 years old and 20 kids or so were playing, as we did almost every day and night growing up. The game was "kick-the-can" and I was lurking in my neighbor's front yard preparing to make my move when I had one of those moments in life where something more profound than a game entered my mind. I remember the exactly where I was when it hit me. These kids were my friends. We played baseball, basketball and football together. We rode the bus together to school and rode our bikes everywhere else. But many of them, if not most of them did not know the gospel, and were not followers of Christ. I wondered, why did I know the gospel and they didn't? That led to another thought. Would I believe the gospel, even if my parents didn't believe it, or did I believe it because they did? Did I believe the gospel because I really believed the gospel, or did I believe it because that was all that I had known? Is it true because it seems to be true, or is it really true? About that time, I saw an opportunity to kick the can (we used a ball) so my quest for truth was set on hold, but those questions were never far from me.

Today, our world does not view those as questions any more. Our world declares that there is no universal truth. There is no one true religion. It is arrogant, presumptuous, narrow-minded and bigoted to believe that your religion is superior to another and it is the height of offensiveness to attempt to convert someone to your religion. Who are you to say that your religion is better than anyone else's? What makes you think that your religion, your way, is exclusively true? Besides, we are told, most likely you believe this because you were raised to believe it and you only believe it because it made your parents happy, and since you needed them, you did what they wanted, meaning you simply believed what they believed.

In other words, they are saying that you believe things out of convenience and the desire to please, not out of actual conviction. Of course, if that is the case for the person who believes in the exclusivity of the gospel, then that would also be the case for the open-minded liberalist who believes everything and nothing all at the same time, wouldn't it? If people believe what they believe because of environment, then how can the person who is so open minded claim that his way is right when he only believes that because of his environment? Of course, if you believe that it is your environment that shapes your beliefs and not the legitimacy of the beliefs, then that must mean that your environment led you to believe that your environment shapes your beliefs...but that is getting a bit too far down the road, isn't it?

Even from a strictly philosophical point of view, all that I am trying to say is, if we are ridiculed because we believe in the exclusivity of the gospel as being the only way, then why are we condemned for being dogmatic, when those who are condemning us are being dogmatic? Their complaint against us is that we believe that we are right. But isn't their complaint simply a revelation that they believe that they are right?

Pluralism is championed as being enlightened. If you believe in the exclusivity of the gospel you are viewed as being a threat to society. You are a threat because you are intolerant of other people's way of life and culture. So, here is the compromise, you are free to believe whatever you want, as long as you do not practice it or try to convert others to it. Once again, notice the inherent contradiction in that. I cannot practice what I believe, because I have to practice what you believe. Anything that is not worth living for, is certainly not worth believing in.

This morning we are looking at Isaiah 17. Isaiah's world was very similar to ours in this respect. Everybody had their own gods. Each culture, nation had beliefs, stories, traditions, and ceremonies that centered upon their gods. Before battles, sacrifices were offered to the gods. During weddings, sacrifices were conducted to the gods in order to ensure many children and prosperity. So, of course God prohibited the children of Israel from inter-marrying. When the 10 northern tribes split from the 2 southern tribes forming Israel to the north and Judah to the south, the king of the north (Jeroboam) realized that he had a potential problem. His citizens would be tempted to go to Jerusalem to for the Passover and other holy days. So, he had to create a substitute religion. He did. He set up a golden calf in Bethel and one in Dan and then, said, "These are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt."

At that time, the religious landscape was like this:

- 1) Judah worshipped the true God.
- 2) Israel worshipped a false god, but called it God.
- 3) The surrounding nations worshipped false gods.

By Isaiah's day the religious landscape looked more like this:

- 1) Judah tried to worship the true God and false gods at the same time.
- 2) Israel worshipped a number of false gods.
- 3) The surrounding nations worshipped false gods.

You can see what happened. Israel looked like the other nations and Judah was looking like Israel. Isaiah is speaking on behalf of God to Judah. He is warning them that the false gods will betray them because they are no gods at all and possess no power to accomplish a thing. Therefore do not trust them. Instead, trust in God. But, trusting God means trusting only in God, and not any other God. Since God is the Creator and I am the creation, he makes the laws because he has made everything. It

is not, therefore, the height of arrogance to say that God's way, as He has revealed it, is the only way, it is the height of arrogance and stupidity to say that it isn't!

Now, Isaiah 17 is a message from God to Judah, about Syria and Israel. Last week we looked at the oracles to two of Judah's southern neighbors and here we are looking at oracles to two of her northern neighbors. Judah is surrounded by nations who worship all sorts of other gods. The temptation and pressure to follow them is enormous. So, God is telling Judah what is going to happen to all of these other nations. They will not survive. In fact, the only people who will survive are those who make God their refuge. But, here is the tension: We are tempted to make the refuge our god, instead of God, our refuge. Know what I mean?

A friend of mine has a daughter who is engaged to a guy that she should not marry. He had warned her and warned her, and she blew him off, until she broke the news to him that she was pursuing this relationship. That night he went for a long walk and for two hours cried out to God. His soul was crushed. His dreams for her were broken. His prayers for her, seemingly unanswered. He crawled into bed and lay on his back. The tears ran onto his pillow and he knew that sleep would not be easy. And, he said, the Spirit spoke to him. Is your hope really in Christ, or is your hope in Christ changing your daughter? Do you love Christ, or do you love what Christ does to make your life comfortable? At that moment it hit him. His joy was not really in Christ, it wasn't really in the gospel; it was in what he wanted Christ to do in his circumstances and in his family. That night, he confessed this to God and acknowledged that Christ was enough. Even if my daughter marries this guy and goes against my counsel, you, Christ, are enough. He then rolled over and promptly went to sleep.

1. **All other ground is sinking sand.** (1-6)

These first 6 verses are warnings to Syria (1-3) and Israel (4-6) that their days of glory and freedom are coming to a violent end. The capital city of Damascus sat in an area of land that formed the most natural road from Mesopotamia to Egypt. As a result, Damascus (capital city of Syria) became very wealthy, large and influential. Isaiah spoke of the day when all of her glory would be reduced to rubble. The cities of Aroer, refers to the region of Syria that were further south. They would face a similar fate. The coming Assyrian invasion would bring about a devastation that would be overwhelming in its scope.

In verse 3 we see that Ephraim (another name for the Northern Kingdom of Israel) and Syria were going to suffer the same fate, together. Remember that Syria and Israel demanded that Judah join them in their fight against Assyria. Judah, under Ahaz refused to join their cause, but instead of trusting God, Ahaz put his hope in another enemy, Assyria.

Verses 4-6 describe what is going to happen, and it did. Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, led a siege against Damascus in 732 BC that was the cause of enormous suffering.

When the city finally fell, there was nothing left in it to devour. The once powerful city was, as Isaiah predicted, nothing but ruins. Isaiah uses the imagery of a wheat harvest and the harvesting of olives to illustrate the coming judgment. In the fields, not every stalk is cut, there are always a few that are missed. The same thing is true with olives. There are always a few at the very top that are not reached. In the end, Syria and Israel will only have a few people left. The rest will either be dead or taken captive.

Once again, Isaiah writes this about other countries, but he writes this to Judah. He is going on record in order to tell them what happens to a people who reject God. Do you see the point? God is serious about people trusting him! That shocks people today! You're serious? God is really serious? Yes! God is kind, gracious and right to call you to trust in him since he knows that your only hope of being rescued and the only true joy for your soul is found in trusting him. God is so serious about you trusting him, that he demands it. When you do not trust him, he disciplines you. Now, we know that when you dare say something like that, people in our culture act offended, don't they? Why? In our day, we want a God who cooperates with our desires and supports our choices, and stands off to the side and offers encouragement, pep talks and pats on the back. Let's say that you are like me, a freshman in high school who was 4'11" and wanted to grow up and play for the NFL. Let's say that the adults in my life supported me by saying, "Follow your dreams, son! Follow your heart! You can do anything that you set your heart on!" Have you ever watched any of the opening rounds of American Idol? At times I wonder, where was your momma? Why didn't she love you enough to say, "Son, you can't sing! You can do other things, but singing is not one of them." What if I believed that it was God's job to fulfill my dreams of getting to the NFL and I did not make it? Then I would be tempted to believe that God had failed me. God did not come through for me. When, the problem was not God, the problem was I had the wrong dream! Our culture has a very twisted and deformed view of love. Love is you letting me do whatever I want to do and you pay for it and support it. That is not love!

So, when a people reject God, replace God, believe lies and devote themselves to myths and legends, God is supposed to be okay with that – right? God is supposed to support you no matter what and tell you that it's okay. In other words, God is not supposed to care whether or not you love him, trust him and obey him. He is not supposed to care if you pursue a life that will destroy you. You're serious? Think about that? What if God were apathetic about your trust and affection for him? What kind of a God would he be, if he did not care whether or not we trusted, loved and obeyed him?

So, here is the point! Syria and Israel have rejected me. As a result, their "glory" is going to be unmasked as being no glory at all. True glory is only found in the One who is truly glorious. Becky Pippert wrote, "*God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer . . . which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.*"

2. In the end, some will look to God. (7-11)

“in that day” (7) “in that day” (9) “in a day” (11) all refer to the day when judgment comes to the nations of Israel and Syria. A few months ago, I pointed out that these days of judgment then, were illustrations and pointers to The Day of Judgment yet to come. In verses 7-9, Isaiah states that “in that day” (referring to the destruction of Syria and Israel) that there will be a few people who will look to God and will not look to the false gods. The problem is that in many ways it will be too late. It will be too late to save the city or the country. But notice the language. Isaiah points out that finally, the people are looking to the uncreated One instead of trusting in what they have made. We cannot be saved by what we have made. We cannot be saved by a god that is dependent upon us to prop up, if it falls down, or needs us to carry it from room to room. But, this is what the people have believed. This judgment and last minute realization of who the true God is, is a preview of the day that Zechariah speaks of when at the end of the Tribulation period, the armies of the Antichrist have virtually destroyed Israel and have surrounded Jerusalem. When it looks as if the city is about to be overwhelmed, Christ returns. And Zechariah says, “And they will look upon Him whom they pierced and will mourn.” Some of them will finally get it. They will finally see that God, as he is revealed as Father, Son and Spirit is the true God. Their redeemer, Christ is their only hope. All of that is illustrated right here!

Their repentance will come too late to save the country, but their repentance in the midst of the destruction reflects one of the major themes of this book. “In judgment there is hope. In wrath, God remembers mercy.”

Verses 10-11 get to the heart of the matter – again. They did not think that they needed God. They looked to their own achievements and were proud of their accomplishments. Look at how they were able to make things grow. All of this was reflective of their involvement in the Baal/Asherah cult. They believed that this god and goddess of fertility were the powers behind good crops and large families. But, in the end, their crops are destroyed, their families all killed. What a sad, and grievous day this is. It is “a day of grief and incurable pain” (v.11).

God is glorious in his justice and is right to demand your trust, love and obedience. He is right and loving to warn you and correct you. A god who did not correct you, would be a god who did not care about you. Far from being offensive, a god who does not judge is not worth worshiping.

It was April 11, 1961. Exactly 11 months earlier, on May 11, 1960, Mossad agents secretly arrested Adolph Eichmann as he came home from his job as a foreman in a Mercedes Benz factory in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The agents got him out of the country and took him to Israel, where they announced to the world that after years of searching, one of the masterminds behind Hitler’s “Final Solution” was captured. Now, 11 months later, his trial began. The world waited to see this man, this intimidating, powerful, despot whose orders sent 5 million Jews to their deaths.

When he appeared in the courtroom, he was not what you would think would evoke terror in the eyes of his enemies. He was a tad over 5'9" and weighed around 160 lbs. His receding hairline and small frame made one wonder how anyone could be afraid of him? The glory of the 3rd Reich, the German Empire that was going to last for a thousand years, lasted about 12. And now, one of the last remaining leaders of this murderous regime was sitting in a bulletproof compartment between two guards. That is the glory of this world. All of her dynasties, political, athletic, military, and economic are like dust in the wind. They are all coming down. But, there is something else that I want you to see.

In May of 1960, Eichmann wasn't the only criminal wanted by the Jews. Joseph Mengele was also spotted in Buenos Aires. Mengele was the notorious "angel of death" doctor who performed unspeakable experiments on so many of the Jews in the death camps. Mengele got away and was, in fact, never captured. He lived out his days on this earth and was never held to account for his crimes.

When someone tells you that they are offended at the idea that God is a God of judgment, tell them the story of Joseph Mengele. Tell them in detail of his acts of torture and his escape from justice. If God is not a God of justice and therefore judgment, then, they have every right to be offended because that means that in the ultimate sense, there is no justice. What kind of a god ignores violence? What kind of a god does not get angry at injustice and respond with wrath? If God does not respond to injustice, then there is no hope that injustice will ever cease. We are doomed to endless cycles of destruction unless we blow up the entire earth in a nuclear holocaust. A God who will not judge is not worthy of worshiping and is certainly not worthy of trusting. How could you trust a god who will not do anything when you are sinned against? Here is what you say. But do not pretend to be offended that he is a God of judgment because what really is behind that is the nagging fear that God will hold them accountable for their actions, which he will. And they fear, standing before true, eternal, and perfect glory and having no defense and no excuse, which they will. Then tell them, that there is only one attorney who can get them out of that mess. He's the Son of the Judge. But they cannot afford him. And he will not accept payment. He only accepts repentance and faith, nothing else, nothing less.