

Title: Relax! Our God Saves!
Text: Isaiah 28-29
Theme: The futility of self-reliance
Series: Isaiah #27
Prop Stmnt: There is no panic in Christ.
Aim: I aim to call my people to rest in Christ alone.

Last week I attempted to press upon you how merciful God is and called you to seek to reflect that mercy in your life this week. So, how did you do with that? Perhaps you forgot. So, let's do this. I want you to take 15 seconds and think about a way or a situation in which you need to be more merciful this week. I now want you to share that with the person sitting next to you. It may be, that you need to be more merciful with that person, but I want you take about 15 seconds and share that with the person sitting next to you and then the other share with you their goal for this week as well.

Isaiah 1-66 Our God Saves!
1st half - 1-39 (1-5) Introduction
 (6) The Holiness of God and the call of the prophet
 (7-39) Who are you going to trust?
 7-12 God or Assyria? (test – failed)
 13-35 God or the nations?
 28-33
 28-29 – Fools for leaders
 30-31 – Folly for counsel
 32-33 – Follow the King
 36-39 God or Assyria? Pt.2 (test – passed – sort of)

Remember that Isaiah wrote these prophecies over the span of his life. According to the first verse of the book, he lived during the reign of four kings in Judah. During his lifetime, the political dynamics changed. In chapters 7-12, Syria and Israel had conspired together to attack Judah for her refusal to join their coalition against Assyria. Instead of running to God, Judah's king (Ahaz) trusted in Assyria. That was like hiring the wolf to guard the hen house. Back at the beginning of this book, Isaiah told Ahaz not to even worry about Syria and Israel. Their threat would not amount to anything because they were going to be destroyed. Instead of listening to God, Ahaz puts his trust in Assyria, which means trusting Assyria's gods. Over and over we have seen how this theme has played out: Trust God, no one else. Our God saves, no one else can.

So now, as we near the end of this first half of the book, we are a little further in history. Damascus (capital of Syria) is no longer a factor. As Isaiah (God) had said, Syria was wiped out. (732 BC). Samaria (capital of Israel, which is also called Ephraim) is close to falling. Samaria was under siege for 3 years before she fell in 722 BC. This particular prophecy was most likely written between 732 and 722 BC. But, the real audience is Judah. God is giving Judah a second opportunity. God is so

merciful, he is giving Judah a second chance to take the test. It is now abundantly clear. Everything that Isaiah said was going to happen has either happened or is happening. So, what is Judah going to do this time? Look at the evidence!

The lessons are obvious:

- 1) You have been betrayed by your trust in a false god (Assyria). Assyria intends to destroy you.
- 2) Israel (N.Kingdom) is being wiped out because of her idolatry.

The threat is real – who are you going to trust? Are you going to listen to God? Are you going to run to the arms of your merciful God, or are you going to go it your way? Politically, Judah could either submit to Assyria (suicide) or form an alliance with Egypt, and make an angry enemy even more angry. Isaiah is now saying, do not trust in Egypt! Do not trust in yourself. Trust in God!! Our God saves. Our God will deliver you.

Read Isaiah 28:1-20

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

William Henley's *Invictus* is known by every good student of British Literature. This brazen pronouncement of self-reliance is the battle-cry of every person who attempts to live this life without God.

I took the liberty of writing a last verse to this poem.

*It matters not how skilled the poet
how brazen, how tough, how bold.
Our God reigns from pole to pole
as the Captain of your soul.*

This is what Isaiah is confronting. Our text is not the rant of an angry, volatile man whose reddened face and protruding veins make us think of a volcano poised to explode. This is the reasoning and pleading of a man who knows that to try to live apart from God is absolutely futile.

These two chapters address that by revealing how arrogant and idiotic it is to pretend to live as if you are not accountable to God. They go on to show how frantic people are, when they have nothing but themselves to trust in and chapter 29 talks about the futility of blind religion.

1. **Self-rule is arrogant.** (28.1-13)

The chapter begins describing the party crowd in Samaria. These are the people who are charged with the political and spiritual leadership of the Northern Kingdom and they are nothing more than drunks (1). They and their city are described as a fading flower. Their beauty has faded and they do not know it. They act as if they are fine and they have no worries. The boasts of a drunk man are sad and pathetic. In spite of impending doom that is coming upon them, these people are thumbing their nose at God, daring him to act, believing that they can and Isaiah is simply assuring them that God will. Isaiah warns them (4) that their demise will come quickly. It will be like someone snatching the first fig from the tree when it ripens. The bow has been strung. The arrow is set. The archer has pulled it back and is about to release his judgment. And yet, they drink. Is it because they know the end is coming and this is all that they know how to respond? Is it because they are in a group and each one is attempting to put on a front of bravado and toughness? The result of their drunkenness is graphically evident (8) and their arrogance is on full display beginning in v.9.

These people make themselves out to be so great that they openly mock Isaiah. They accuse him of being a preacher who is best suited for pre-school, where a teacher gives line upon line upon line. Isaiah, they claim seems is speaking beneath their level. He keeps repeating himself. He keeps warning them of the judgment that is coming unless they open their eyes to the reality of their precarious position. But, instead of taking this message to heart they act as if he is the fool. They openly scoff at him. His words are beneath them. His message is only for simple-minded, weak-willed people. But, this text reflects a truth that goes throughout the story of the Bible. It is this: If you accept and submit to what God reveals to you, he will give you more. If you reject what God reveals to you, he will not give you more, but will take away what you already have. The Word of God is dynamic. It is a life-giving force.

But it is also a justice-pronouncing, judgment-sealing power. Hearing the Word of God is the greatest blessing that you could possibly have in this life, if you hear and submit. But, if you hear the Word and you reject what you hear, then your heart will become darkened, your spirit calloused, your eyes dull, and your sensitivities hardened. The Word will be a bother to you, not a delight. Those who reject the Word, have the Word withdrawn from them.

Look at the pattern in this text: a) They heard the Word of God in a way that they could understand. b) They rejected what they heard. c) God spoke in a way that they could not understand. That is, he withdrew clear revelation.

Go backwards to the time of the Judges. Israel had heard the Word of God in a way that they could understand. Over and over they rejected what they heard. The book of 1 Samuel begins by saying that in those days, the Word of the Lord was rare. Fast forward to the time of Christ. The prophets spoke of the people who walked in darkness, who lived in the shadows, who have now seen a great light. What was that darkness? It was the time between Malachi and Matthew. It was the 400 years when God stopped speaking because his Word had been constantly rejected. But, God sent Christ, who, as John said, "Was THE Word." Now, the nation of Israel heard and saw the Word of God in an undeniable, unmistakable way. OT promises were being fulfilled before their eyes. People were healed, the dead were raised, Christ's authority was on full display and yet, while a few listened, most just wanted the free handouts, while the leaders hated him and rejected his Word. Now, after we study Isaiah, we are going to go through Matthew's gospel. And this pattern is on full display. Jesus preaches on Kingdom in Matthew 5-7. He claims to be the king and shows by means of his power that he is the rightful heir to David's throne. He is God and He is their King. After all, how else can you explain the miracles that he did right in full view of the people. In chapter 12, the leaders of the nation formally declare their conclusion. This Jesus does miracles in the power of Satan. He is a fraud! He has a demon! To which Jesus responds by pointing out the obvious problem with that. Some of the power of Christ was put on display in his authority over the demons and over Satan. How can Satan cast out Satan? But, their minds were made up. So, in the very next chapter, chapter 13, Christ changes his entire ministry. He begins to speak in parables. The disciples are really confused. What are you doing? He is now speaking in a way that those who rejected him, were being denied the Word. He is hiding the Word of God from those who rejected what they had already been given. And (big AND), what was the first parable all about? It was about the sower, the soil and the seed. The seed was the Word of God, and the four different soils reflected the four different responses to the Word. On the hardest ground, the seed simply sat on the surface and the birds came and snatched up what had been given to them.

Fast forward again, this time to the day of Pentecost. The believers, on that day spoke the Word of God in different languages. It was a clear manifestation of the power of the Spirit of God that authenticated these believers. The benefit of that was obvious. There were people who had gathered in Jerusalem from many countries in

the Roman Empire who heard the Word of God in their own language. But, there was another side to that sword, wasn't there? Christ had just been crucified in Jerusalem. The Word Himself was rejected. So, now the Word was being given to others. Now the Word was being communicated in a way that they could not understand. So, later on, when some of the believers in the church of Corinth were making too big of a fuss over the gift of tongues, and were acting as if the gifts was the ultimate expression of spiritual arrival, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14, be careful. Tongues was a gift to demonstrate judgment on the unbelievers. Don't think that it is the greatest thing going, when it is, in reality the withholding of the Word from people. That is why Paul said, I would rather speak five words that people can understand than a thousand that they can't. The point was clear. When the early believers spoke in different languages (gift of tongues), this gift was a sign of judgment from God upon unbelieving Israel. They had rejected the clear Word of God and now it was being hidden from them (and will be given to another).

That is exactly what Isaiah is speaking about here. If you will not accept the simple Word of God, then what you have been given will be taken from you. In his context, the point was clear. If Israel would not listen to the Word of God in Hebrew, then when they are taken away in chains and scattered throughout the Assyrian empires as slaves and they wake up in another country, another culture living under the authority of a master who is screaming at them in another language, then remember this, "that's the voice of judgment." The same point was given to Judah. If you will not listen to the Word of God and repent, then one day, you will wake up in Babylon, where the streets will not be filled with the Hebrew language. When you hear words that you do not understand, it is because you rejected what you did understand. Verse 13 speaks of the darkness that comes upon them so that they cannot see where they are walking and they end up tripping, falling, being broken and being captured. "The entrance of your Word gives light" the Psalmist said. To reject it, is to live in darkness, even though for a while you mock those who believe it.

Do you not see this in your life? God's Word is revealed to you and in so doing, it reveals an area of your life that needs to be addressed. And yet, you shake your head "no." You try to cut a deal with God. You try to make up for your disobedience by doing other things. For example, let's say that you are either involved in adultery, or you are steadily moving in that direction. And you know that it is wrong, but you want it anyway. You are rejecting the clear Word of God, and when you consistently do that, he will at some point, stop speaking. You will no longer have a desire to read the Word, when you hear the Word, it will not arrest you, convict, or enthuse you like it used to, you have become dull to it. For some of you, what I have just said, is enough to cause some fear because while you are in danger, you have not gone too far – yet. However, for others of you, you have rejected God's word so much, that it just doesn't matter anymore. You still come, for whatever reason, but you have little or perhaps no life in you.

What do you do, when you reject the Word? Think about how the process works. We are convicted or convinced about something, but we do not want to obey it. We do

not like the implications of our spiritual nerves being that sensitive, so we dig in our heels, and refuse to obey. Over time, our nerves become dull and lifeless. Initially, you may think that it is pretty cool to be spiritually lifeless. You can now sin and it does not bother you at all. But, the sad reality is that sin is destroying you, like a cancer, and you have no nervous system to warn you, and no means to defend yourself. You are powerless even though you claim to be powerful. On the surface you may look tough, but internally, you have no hope. Self-rule is arrogant, it rejects God's Word and ends up being rejected.

2. **Self-rule is folly.** (28.14-29)

Isaiah is now focused on the leaders in Jerusalem. They have learned nothing from the imminent demise of the Northern Kingdom. Instead of accepting the warning with humility, the leaders have given this false bravado. "We made a deal with death." Death is not coming for us. It is like the soldier who on the eve of a major battle announces to his buddies, that they have not yet made the bullet that will kill me. All this hot air, this grandstanding, this bravado, this trash-talk and tough talk is a joke. Those who speak like this are a dime a dozen and they are like dust, in the wind. They sound tough, but in reality, they are weak. They will not last. But look at the one who does last – (v.16)

V.16 is very meaningful to us. This is one of the verses that speak of Christ as the cornerstone. This is what is behind the meaning of our church. Cornerstone is a reference to, a prophecy about Christ. God is saying that in contrast to these pathetic, arrogant leaders who abuse the people and mislead the people and lie to the people and will usher in the destruction of the people, is Christ. He is the foundation that cannot be shaken, the rock that cannot be moved, and the truth that cannot be altered. He is. He was and He will always be. All other ground is sinking sand. "Whoever believes in him", that is, whoever trusts in him, will not be in haste. That means that there is no panic for those who trust Christ. Now, Paul quotes this text at the end of Romans 9. He points out that Christ is the Rock and you will either stumble over the rock and fall, or you will stand on the Rock.

Now, look at this verse in Isaiah. What describes the person who is not in haste? What is it? It is one who believes! Here is the gospel revealed, even back in Isaiah. Those who confess their failure to lead their own lives and trust in the Cornerstone that God provides, are those who give up their perceived right to "self-rule" and accept the Word of God, accept the authority of God, accept the King! Of course, all of this points to the fact, that this King, this Cornerstone here in Isaiah 28 is also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Our King is also Savior. Our Cornerstone is also Redeemer. Our God is also the sacrificial substitute who paid in full, the debt of our sin by dying on the cross, in our place. When you trust in him, all reason for fear is gone. There is no panic. You can relax, our God saves.

You can read through the rest of this chapter and discover that these people have no such hope. The same theme continues in chapter 29.

3. **Blind Religion is useless.** (29.1-24)

Here, Isaiah is exposing the leaders of Jerusalem who are hiding behind the rituals of the Jewish religion. They are going through the motions, but they do not really believe in what they are doing. They think that their outward actions count, but they don't. (Review 29.10-14) (16) – do you think

Going through the motions, singing the songs, repeating the words, taking a class, getting a certificate that you completed the course, or that you were catechized, baptized, soldered or welded counts for nothing. Filling in the blanks on the quiz and simply providing the right answers to the teachers' questions counts for nothing. Wearing the right clothes, standing at the right time, saying "amen" at the right time, raising your hand at the right time, or not raising your hand, counts for nothing. All of that will not save your soul and will not give you rest. There is only One who is mighty to save. And he saves you from sin, from wrath, and even from fear. When you trust the Cornerstone, there is no panic. Relax, our God saves. This had particular value to the faithful who really believed, but experienced the consequences of being in a nation that did not.

In the middle 1650's Christopher Love was a pastor in England, who was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel and sentenced to death. Christopher was a rare combination of a fearless prophet and tender-hearted pastor. He was a scholar, a shepherd and a husband and father. Some of his writings have been recorded and republished. I have a book about him in my library, that I cherish because it has some of the letters in it that he wrote to his wife Mary, while he was in prison, waiting to die. Christopher and Mary had 5 children. The first 2 died in infancy, the next 2 were alive, but very young during his trial and Mary was expecting another. When I read these letters, my heart grieves at the thought of this man being executed and his wife being left alone. I feel resentment at the fact that the church was robbed of such a brilliant and compassionate man. But, when I read his letters to his wife, I am rebuked. Here is a man, who instead of being angered at the gross injustice of his ordeal, is kindly and affectionately and tenderly writing to his young wife. They enjoyed a deep love together. By the way, do not let the edited and distorted images presented today about the puritans poison you from what they really were. These were the Redwoods in the forest of the Kingdom. But, what I want to leave you with is the complete lack of panic, the complete resting of soul that marks Christopher's life, even as he awaits his own beheading.

On the day of his death, he wrote this final letter to Mary. It is dated, August 22, 1651, "The Day of My Glorification". He writes:

My most gracious beloved

I am now going from a prison to a palace. I have finished my work, I am now to receive my wages. I am now going to heaven where are two of my children, and leaving thee

on the earth where are three of my babes. Those two above need not my care, but the three below need thine. It comforts me to think two of my children are in the bosom of Abraham and three of them will be in the arms and care of so tender a godly mother. I know thou art a woman of a sorrowful spirit, yet be comforted; though thy sorrow be great for thy husband's going out of the world, yet thy pains shall be the less in bringing thy child into the world. Thou shalt be a joyful mother, though thou beest a sad widow. God hath many mercies in store for thee; the prayers of a dying husband for thee will not be lost.