

ISAIAH
Part Three: The King We Can Trust
“A Foundation for Trust” (Isaiah 28-29)
Northlake Church | 2.17.19

Isaiah 26:1-4 - *In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.”*

Doesn't that sound like the good life? That's the Christian life we all want. To live in security, to be aware of our salvation and our Savior. To be kept in perfect peace, to keep our minds stayed on our Lord. To trust Him wholeheartedly and forever. Does it get any better than that?

So how many of us really feel this way about ourselves? Like, these verses describe our hearts? See, most of us read these kinds of verses, and we tend to gloss over them. That's not to say that they don't sound great...but if we really got honest, we just don't believe them to be true. We don't trust that *this* could be our everyday spiritual reality, that we could live in this kind of spiritual freedom. Because, well, our life is what it is.

Our life doesn't feel like singing any songs. It doesn't feel protected by the gates of this “righteous nation” God is building. And our life feels anything but peaceful. Our mind is not stayed on God, but tossed and thrown from one circumstance to the next. I know some of you feel this way, because I see these things happening in my heart and in yours, even right here on Sunday mornings! Burden, anxiety, hopelessness.

So, how do we get from here to there? From how we honestly feel about Isaiah 26, to how we take part in Isaiah 26? I believe, at its root, it's a simple issue of trust.

When we feel dissonance about these kinds of passages in Scripture and face these kinds of feelings in life, all of it is rooted in some form of suspicion - that God can't be taken at His word like we confess He should be. From the moment in Genesis 3 when the serpent asked Eve, “Did God actually say?” we've been doubting how trustworthy God and His Word are for our lives.

Since we are born into a sinful nature, trusting God really and fully does not come naturally to us. It's what most of us want as Christians, but if we're honest, also feel like it's out of reach most of the time.

We've talked about trust already a time or two in this series. Which goes to show how significant this theme is in Isaiah's prophecy. And what we've said is, God knows we have trust issues. That's part of the reason for this prophetic work of Isaiah in the first place.

In our last section of Isaiah, chapters 13-27, we looked at how God communicates His purposes and promises. But God knows we're stubborn. In this section of Isaiah, we'll look at how God shows Himself trustworthy to fulfill His purposes and promises. Isaiah 28-39 is a section that centers around trust. The big event happening at this point in time is that the leaders of Jerusalem are now looking to Egypt for

deliverance from the hands of Assyria. At their core, the people are choosing self-trust over trusting in God. And God begins to speak words of warning to both His people and to Assyria through his prophet, urging them to turn away from trusting themselves and trusting Him instead, all the while proving His trustworthiness.

Within our section of chapters 28-39, the first two chapters, chapters 28-29, serve us by beginning to lay the foundation for the rest of the section. Similar to how Isaiah 1-5 lays a foundation for the rest of the book, these two chapters begin to introduce the principles we'll be looking at for the next few weeks.

In this section, we'll be answering a few different questions - Why do we fail to trust God? Why is God trustworthy, and even further, why is God more trustworthy than anything or anyone else? What does trusting God in life look like practically?

But we don't need to get ahead of ourselves. Because if we are going to have a conversation about trusting God, we need to establish a foundation for trust. We have to verify that this exercise is even worth it for us. Can God be taken at His Word?

In Chapter 28, Isaiah begins with the word "ah." The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, called the Septuagint, translates this word to "woe" (w-o-e). There are six different "woe" addresses found in this section, each beginning with the word "Ah;" every time you see one, God is essentially starting a new address.

Isaiah 28:1-4 - *Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters, he casts down to the earth with his hand. The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden underfoot; and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley, will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer: when someone sees it, he swallows it as soon as it is in his hand.*

Here, Isaiah is looking north to Ephraim, and specifically its capital city of Samaria. The city of Samaria is called "the proud crown." It's a luxurious land, with beautiful gardens, matchless beauty, fertile lands, wonderful produce - what a pristine place to live, from the outside looking in! But when we look with a more spiritual eye at Samaria, we see a proud, self-indulgent, people. A people who have shrugged off a clear vision for following God for the sake of pleasure.

Everything within us and around us tells us that life is about feeling good and doing what makes us happy in the moment and pleasing ourselves. We trust pleasure above all because pleasure is the only thing that can deliver us from a bitter and disappointed and unfulfilled life. This is what Ephraim does, and what we do - living for pleasure, and finding ourselves eventually direction-less and staggering like a drunk.

Isaiah prophetically warns of their coming end - one day, like the pressed grapes they love to drink, they will be trodden underfoot. Like their plucking the vine of its fruits, the northern kingdom of Ephraim will be picked apart by the Assyrian kingdom soon enough. Pleasure won't save Ephraim. And it won't save Judah, either.

Skip down to verse 7. Isaiah transitions to another people group: his own, in Judah. He says, “These also.” Those words are so disappointing to hear. Judah, the people whom God has already exhibited great patience and forbearance with, is falling for the same nonsense that those in Ephraim are.

Isaiah 28:7-8 - *These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed by wine, they stagger with strong drink, they reel in vision, they stumble in giving judgment. For all tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left.*

The people of Judah aren't that much different from Samaria. They display a similar kind of pride in their own unique way. Instead of being filled with the Word of God, the people of Judah are intoxicated with their own way of doing things, drunk to the point of vomit. They are beyond doubtful and suspicious of God's ways: they simply don't trust him, and trust themselves instead.

The priests and the prophets that Isaiah is speaking God's Word to dismiss him, going even as far as to mock him in verse 9:

Isaiah 28:9-10 - *To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.*

They treat Isaiah's message (God's Word) with contempt...described as “scoffers” and “mockers” in verse 14 and verse 22.

None of us in here suspect that we are “scoffers” or “mockers” of the Word of God. After all, we're sitting here, in church. But I'm not asking you if you're an atheist. I'm asking you if you are what Alec Motyer calls a “practical atheist.”

You see, practical atheism is not just a field made up of scholars and scientists who are trying to disprove the existence of God.

Practical atheism is any man or woman who refuses to bring themselves under the authority of God's Word, who believes that God's Word should not be the rubric by which we measure and shape our life, but rather by human words and common sense. You may not consider it “scoffing,” but when you choose human wisdom and self-trust instead of God's wisdom and trusting in Him, you're operating as if His Word is not true, as if He's not even there.

The people go as far as to say in **verse 15**, “we have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement...we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter.” Certainly this is a reference to the alliance that Jerusalem's leaders have formed with Egypt. But notice what's really being said. These people even express that they know this is the way of death, and they choose it anyway. They know better, and yet still fall for it.

Maybe you don't realize it yet, or maybe you do. The question needs to be asked regardless - Have you made a covenant with death? Have you made lies your refuge? I don't know what it is - addiction, the pursuit of pleasure or success, finding your identity in the wrong place...Have you made peace with a

way of life that you know leads to death? You and I know what His Word commands of us. We are not stupid. Have we put our trust in something that we know deep down will not deliver? Dear brothers and sisters, let this be the wake-up call that snaps us out of it!

Can I just put it to you this way? God just wants more for your life. God wants you to experience real satisfaction, real joy. The good news of the gospel is that God is not content to let us settle for a misleading covenant, or a shabby refuge. He wants us to trust in what will deliver, something we can plant our feet on, that won't give away. So He gives us the foundation – His Word – on which we can build our faith and trust in Him.

But what is the foundational case for trusting God by taking Him at His Word?

He reveals His glory by exposing our idols of trust.

Isaiah 28:5-6 - *In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people, and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.*

“In that day.” What day? Our darkest day. The day that the enemy seems to have won and overtaken us. The day that our idols, our false saviors and sources of security prove themselves untrustworthy. As Leif Enger wrote, “Pride is the rope that God allows us all.”

Here is the kindness of God on display. In his desire to grow our trust in Him, he removes all our pride, all our poser sources of joy, brings us to ground zero, and offers us the only real source of joy - Himself.

Sometimes, life runs over us. We trust in the wrong thing, and we pay for it - hard. And it's in these moments, where all seems lost, where we feel crushed, that God will remind us that we are not abandoned. He will show Himself to be who He is to His chosen people - the unfading crown of glory, sober in judgment, with a beauty that doesn't diminish and a strength that does not tire. God needs to bring us to this kind of place of emptiness, of brokenness, of being at the end of our rope to help us see this crown of glory. He will gladly tear everything away from our lives if that's what it takes to help us realize that we need Him. One commentator reflected on this verse, putting it this way: “The one we treat as our last resort is in fact our Fountainhead. And he is saying, ‘Let me prove it to you.’”

I've used this analogy before, but it's the reason that jewelers place a diamond ring in a dark velvet box. When the diamond is presented in the environment of something dark, it shines and shimmers. The brilliance of a thing is only accentuated and deepened by its context. And God is willing to let us enter the darkness to reveal His beauty to us.

Augustine of Hippo's famous *Book of Confessions* is one big prayer and conversation with God that Augustine has with him. And shortly after his conversion, he put it **this way**: “*How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose! You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure.*”

He offers His Word as the truth for all of life.

Isaiah 29:18-20 - *In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease.*

God does not pander. He does not offer His Word as saying what we want to hear, but what we need to hear. The Word of God is pure truth, and nothing less. Proverbs 30:5-6 tells us that “Every word of God proves true.”

If God’s Word is rock-solid, foundational truth, then that means something important: every single one of us will be shaped by it, somehow. It will prove to be good news to us, or it will be a word of judgment. None of us walk away from hearing the Word of God totally unaffected. It’s either moving us away from or closer to Him.

But whatever side we fall on, it will be a word of truth. God is trustworthy, because His Word is not inconsistent, or wishy-washy. It never changes, and always lives and is active. It is the Word of the Lord, and therefore, it will silence the scoffer, and help the humble.

He takes decisive action.

Isaiah 28:14-16 - *Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem! Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death...and in falsehood we have taken shelter”; therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation.”*

God is not obligated to do anything about our trust issues. He has no personal need to fulfill in helping us. But He glorifies Himself in meeting our needs. He takes action, not because we’ve forced His hand, but simply out of His love for us, and His desire for us to experience real joy. He wants us to trust Him, to take Him at His Word.

We said earlier that God will go to whatever lengths necessary in our lives to make us try to stop saving ourselves. God will also go to whatever lengths necessary to make salvation possible for us. And so to a people who are completely and totally unable to save ourselves, caught in a covenant with death, He gives us His Word.

But He does not stop there. He installs the cornerstone. He brings the Word to us, in a visible, incarnational way.

His Son - Jesus Christ, a tested and precious stone, of a sure foundation. The Father sends the Son to us. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

This Word made flesh, this Cornerstone, is tested; without blemish, no spot or wrinkle in Him. He is precious; utterly loved by the Father. And He is sent to us, because we need a foundation for trusting God. Kevin DeYoung once remarked that “there is no calamity like the silence of God.” And to that I reply, that there is no blessing like the Word of God coming to us.

Judah had thousands of examples that they could point to in their lives that demonstrated God's trustworthiness, and so do we...but the greatest example of all is found in the Father sending His Son to us so that we might have life. If any of you are struggling with whether or not God can be trusted in our failures, in our circumstances, in our anxieties, look to Christ for your answer. Your Father in heaven graciously sent His precious and tested cornerstone to become your foundation for building a relationship of trust with Him. This is the evidence *par excellence* that God is trustworthy - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Isaiah 29:22-23 - *Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel."*

God refers to them as the house of Jacob, for a reason. He's reminding them of all that He has done in their lineage, all that He has done from of old, to keep His promises. These are not just random promises God is making; we are talking about the people whom God has delivered over and over again in history. Why would He have done all that if he didn't want to finish what He started?

The house of Jacob had to trust that God was not just speaking to hear Himself talk. God's Word is purposeful, full of intention and action. God was calling His people to trust that His Word was leading them somewhere far beyond what they could envision or comprehend at the time. He was doing a work in their days that they would not believe even if they were told.

And he is doing the same to us. Dear Christian, the God of the universe is at work. And not just in a general way. He is at work "in your midst!" Just as he was with those in Isaiah's day. **John Piper** reminds us, "*God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.*" And why would He do any of those things if He didn't intend to finish them? The God who begins a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

It is the work of God that you had any shot at being saved,
it is the work of God that you are saved,
it is the work of God that you are being saved,
it is the work of God that you will be saved.

That sounds like a God we can trust with everything.

Your past may haunt you, your present may be crushing you, your future may perplex you, but God sees all of it, and he has spoken to you an invitation to trust Him with all of it.

I don't know what your experience with church has been. But I'm here to tell you, God's Word makes it clear that Christianity is built on nothing but trusting in the finished work of Christ. It's not doing the right rituals, it's not checking church off the list, it's not earning God's approval, it's not praying a prayer...it's a lifelong decision to trust Jesus as King, with every square inch of ourselves.

If that sounds different than the kind of Christianity you've adopted, this is your wake-up call. We have elders and pastors here who want to help you find the peace and the freedom in Christ you've been looking for. We want to see people saved by the grace of Jesus in this community. We want to see the gospel turn Lago Vista upside down. And it starts with trusting God.

Look to Christ. Look to the Word. Be done with covenants that lead to death, with refuges built on lies. Look to the truth. Trust King Jesus. His Word is trustworthy, because it is the only foundation on which we can find stable ground.

How firm a foundation
You saints of the Lord
Is laid for your faith in
His excellent Word

What more can He say
Than to you He has said
To you who for refuge
To Jesus have fled