

ISAIAH
Part Three: The King We Can Trust
“The Fate of the Faithless” (Isaiah 30-31)
Northlake Church | 2.24.19

We now come in our study to Chapters 30 and 31, which in my opinion are some of the most quintessential, choice words from all of Isaiah’s ministry. What we’re going to read this morning is classic Isaiah - this is clear-cut and honest, with no-punches-pulled, and yet grace-filled, and God-exalting. Few other prophets achieve this kind of straightforwardness in their writings, which is one of the reasons why Isaiah is often referred to as “the fifth gospel.” Even those with a novice understanding of the Bible can understand its message.

It’s also one of the reasons Isaiah’s ministry was met with such resistance and hostility. Isaiah was not interested in speaking vague generalities or abstract concepts to the people of Judah; they needed an explicit message, one that lifted the scales from their eyes to help them see their sin, and their Savior. The gospel, when preached, is going to be offensive.

Last week, I encouraged us to be painfully honest about our hearts as we read chapters 28-29. I want to do the same here – and what you may find is, the gospel just might be “offensive” to your sensibilities. It may disrupt the way you’ve always thought about God. It may run counter to your intuition. But ultimately, my prayer is that these words of Isaiah will be to us a Refiner’s Fire, that God will remove all of the impurities within us in order to make us whole again.

What we established last week was the theme of trust found in these oracles. The people of Judah are not trusting in God and His Word the way they ought to be. But what, specifically, were the people of Judah doing to warrant God’s anger? Why were they doing it? And what is the fate of God’s chosen people? These are all questions we will attempt to answer today in these two chapters.

This morning, I want us to examine three different themes in the text:

- The Failure of Judah
- The Reason For Distrust
- The Fate of the Faithless

The Failure of Judah

Isaiah 30:1-2 - *Ah, stubborn children, declares the LORD, who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!*

So here’s what’s happening. You’ve got the **Assyrians** hailing from the northeast, and they’re breathing down the necks of Israel. They are some of the most ruthless, wicked, cruel people in all of human history. They did not just want to overthrow nations. They wanted to massacre, destroy, burn, and torture. They were a bloodthirsty people, and everyone knew it.

So, the leaders of Judah make a decision: go south. Judah wants to get on the other side of the Red Sea and occupy space in Egypt to distance themselves from the Assyrian Army, and hopefully, if they can convince them, Egypt will join them in the fight against Assyria.

So, what's the problem with that? Well, if you remember anything about Israelite history, you would know that this should be the *last* place the Israelites should be trying to go! They spent an incredible amount of time under the tyranny of Pharaoh, enslaved and worked to the bone. The book of Exodus gets its very name from these historical events, outlining God's deliverance of Israel through Moses from the clutches of Egypt.

For so long, the people of Israel cried out to God for deliverance. They pleaded that He take them away from the Egyptian power. And now, the leaders of God's people devise a plan to return there. One commentator calls it "a reversal of their salvation" - it's like a man who gets released from prison, then asks to be handcuffed.

These plans and potential alliance leaves no room for God's directing their steps...no seeking His direction and guidance. They simply "add sin to sin." Not only are the people of Judah leaving God out of their planning process, but they choose to associate with and dwell among the very evil that God delivered them from! They hope to find shelter in the shadow of Egypt instead of the light of Yahweh.

This decision is, not surprisingly, a disaster for God's people.

Isaiah 30:3-5 - *Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation. For though his officials are at Zoan and his envoys reach Hanes, everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace.*

Three times, the LORD pronounces that shame is what awaits His people in Egypt. It will be the unavoidable reality of everyone who puts their trust in Pharaoh to protect them. Upon arrival, they'll be conscious of their foolish behavior. It's the chorus the Avett Brothers sang: "Shame, boatloads of shame, day after day, more of the same."

Let me go ahead and let us in on a secret straight out of the Bible that we need reminding of over and over again: When we decide to forego trust in God and choose something else to trust wholeheartedly in, it always turns to our shame and disgrace. The people of Judah made a very serious mistake. They returned to their chains. They shut God out and said, "We can take it from here."

Even *good* things aren't worthy of this kind of trust. Because we're putting trust in the gifts, and not the Giver. We're banking all of our hopes on something that was *created* with no intention of being your Savior.

Your marriage was never meant to save you.
Your children were never meant to save you.
Your job was never meant to save you.
Your political party was never meant to save you.

Your reputation was never meant to save you.
Your being a good Christian was never meant to save you.

If any of these things were meant to save you, then Jesus wouldn't have come. When you put someone or something in the place of God and trust it instead, not only are you scoffing at the sovereignty and the power of God; you are laughing at the Incarnation and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 30:6 - *Through a land of trouble and anguish, from where come the lioness and the lion, the adder and the flying fiery serpent, they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them.*

This oracle is especially interesting. It is an oracle "on the beasts of the Negeb." The Negeb is the dry desertlands immediately south of Judah. This is the land they would have to travel through to get to Egypt. Isaiah says that "they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels" because the people certainly were offering money in exchange for being received by the Egyptians. It was going to cost them *something*, after all. And, fittingly, not only do they lose their money - the Egyptians leave them more in the red than ever. They cannot profit or help this people. He ends the oracle with a summary:

Isaiah 30:7 - *Egypt's help is worthless and empty; therefore I have called her "Rahab who sits still."*

Rahab was a poetic name for Egypt, and "Rahab who sits still" underscores Egypt's inability to do anything of value for the people of Judah. Alec Motyer sums it up: "Egypt ever the trouble-maker, full of promises but in the event *the Do-Nothing*."

Isaiah 30:8 - *And now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever.*

There's some debate over what exactly verse 8 means, but I believe God is directing Isaiah to write this particular oracle down, to keep ever-present before the people. A sharp and severe reminder, written in stone, of their mistrust in God, and the consequences it brings. God laments their behavior in what follows:

Isaiah 30:9-11 - *For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.*

Again, at the heart of the issue of mistrust is revoking God's Word. The people are saying to Isaiah in effect, "We're tired of hearing all of your stupid, dated prophecies. We want something fresh, something tantalizing."

Now before we move on, I want us to zero in on something here, because it's really important to understand. Look closely at what the rebellious children of Israel are saying: "Do not see." "Do not

prophesy to us what is right.” We touched on this last week, when the people of Judah claimed that they made “lies their refuge.”

The people are very clearly and explicitly denying not that God’s truth is indeed true...only that they’re not interested in the truth. Right here, we are getting a deep look into the heart of sin, and the real reason we don’t trust God. Keeping this in mind, look at how Romans 1 confirms what’s going on here in Isaiah.

The Reason We Don’t Trust

Romans 1:18 - 20 - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”*

So here’s what Paul is getting at. We don’t get to plead ignorance in God’s court, because at the end of the day, none of us are truly ignorant. Sin is not anyone’s fault but our own. We can’t blame-shift, because God has made Himself known, in a plain and clear way, to all peoples.

This reminds me of a story which is somewhat of an urban legend that many, many years ago, the famous newspaper *The Times of London* ran a cover story entitled, “What’s Wrong With the World?” (This was before Facebook, so people were probably largely unaware back then unlike now.)

The paper wanted to compile a massive list of responses from some of the world’s leading philosophers and thinkers at the time, diving deep into the perils and issues of the world for the sake of unity and debate. They reached out to several men and women to comment.

Imagine if one of them had been you. How would you answer that question - *what is wrong with the world?*

The story goes that one of the men they asked was a Catholic theologian named Gilbert Keith Chesterton. And this was the telegram that The Times of London received **back from Chesterton**:

Dear Sirs, I am.

Sincerely, G.K. Chesterton.

What I appreciate most about this story from the life of Chesterton is the sincere admission that we simply have no one to blame but our own selves for the mess we find ourselves in. It’s common in our day to blame-shift:

Presidents and politicians say, “Look at the mess I inherited.”

Star athletes say, “The refs lost us that game.”

We all see the mess that sits in front of us, but none of us want to be responsible for it. Husbands, wives, employees, bosses, pastors, church members.

What we need to admit this morning is that the greatest threat to our ability to trust God and follow Him the way we should is not out there, but *in here*. Of course, spiritual warfare, the leaders we listen to, and our environment have an effect on us. But at the end of the day, we have no one to blame but ourselves for our sin.

Sin is not only denying God's truth is true. Sin can be nothing more than a suppression of what we all know to be true. It's looking at the objective truth of God and saying, "Well, we're just not that interested. We're after something else." That is what the people of Judah are doing, and this is what we do: we don't *trust* the truth. Distrust of God is not something that gets sprung on us from the outside; it is decided, by us, from the inside.

Returning to Isaiah, look at the way verse 11 ends: "Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."

Isaiah 30:12-14 - *Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,*

God will not be silenced. We tell Him to shut up, and His Word remains.

Because you despise this word and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant; and its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel that is smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a shard is found with which to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern.

God exposes Egypt for what they are. They're utterly powerless when put on the same plane as God. They'll be smashed to smithereens, crushed into a fine powder. They will be able to help Judah as much as finely shattered pieces of glass can be used for tools. In Chapter 31, Isaiah scorns the people, saying "the Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit." Their neglect of spiritual strength is damning.

Is God cruel to let Judah endure this worthless pursuit? Absolutely not. In fact, one could argue that God is being entirely accommodating to His people. He's simply giving them what they want.

This takes us back to Romans 1. When we, as Paul says, do not honor or give thanks to God, but rather become foolish in our thinking and darken our hearts, we will be judged. And God's greatest form of judgment to the unrighteous is not the stuff of miraculous plagues or natural disasters...His greatest judgment is letting us have what we want.

Romans 1:22-24 - *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...*

Romans 1:26 - *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions...*

Romans 1:28 - *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.*

Perhaps as we look around in our own culture, this is why things are the way they are. It could be that the most doomed people in our day are the people who find themselves in power, the people who have hordes of treasures on the earth, the folks who claim to be living their best life now. God is giving them what they want...perhaps to their destruction.

Verse 15 of our chapter is the real anchor of this entire chapter. Derek Kidner calls this verse “the distinctive challenge” in all of Isaiah’s book.

Isaiah 30:15 - *For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” But you were unwilling.*

The challenge was posed to Judah. A people who had been saved by the grace of God already, would reject the grace of God. They were unwilling to go His way, to trust His Word, and it backfired.

I find it significant that God calls these rebellious people His children. Because He’s not only defining the relationship He has forged with them...but He’s also communicating His love for them, despite their behavior.

As those of you who are parents know, you sometimes have to let your kids figure things out for themselves. Protecting them from every threat and every potential bad decision isn’t helpful to them. They need to be able to make mistakes, so that they can learn and mature from them.

As our perfectly good Father, God knows when we need to learn a hard lesson on our own. But He also knows when He needs to intervene. Good fathers know when to give their children something that not even they know they need.

I think of how I’m already learning these lessons early into parenting. I’m surprisingly a little more over-protective than I thought I’d be. I’m a little on-edge at times with Nora. And it’s not helping now that she’s learning to pull up on things, and even stand on her own. I’m tempted to throw my hands out to catch her every time she does. But Hannah wisely reminds me from time to time that we’re just going to have let her figure it out. She may tip over. She’ll be okay. And she’ll learn to hold herself up or brace herself. It’s the only way she will. But there are obviously other times where it’s necessary for me to step in, to protect her from real harm.

The Fate of The Faithless

Our Father in Heaven wants us to learn to trust Him...which sometimes means, He will absolutely allow us to make mistakes and reap the consequences.

But God will not give up on His children.
When we are faithless, God remains faithful.

Isaiah 30:18 - *Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.*

Divine grace defies human logic. The Lord's discipline is meant to be a mercy to the people. Praise God that He doesn't give up on His children the way we give up on Him. Instead, He aims to glorify Himself in saving us and waiting to be gracious to us.

How is he gracious?

Isaiah 30:19-21 - *For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."*

To a people who make God sorrowful with their actions, He wipes away their tears.

To a people who refuse to hear His words, He commits to hearing their cry.

To a people who try to hide from God's providence in Egypt, He makes Himself present.

To a people who reject His way, He guides them back to safety.

Isaiah goes on in the rest of the chapter to explain how God will be piecing together the new Messianic world order – rich crops and lands, bright light, addressing their brokenness and making them whole again. But going even further, and protecting them and going before them in the fight against Assyria. He will strike down the enemy on the behalf of His people.

Why does God do this? What motivates the grace of God? It's a totally free decision. **J.I. Packer** says it well: *"God does not owe it to anyone to stop justice taking its course. He is not obliged to pity and pardon; if he does so it is an act done, as we say, "of his own free will," and nobody forces his hand. Grace is free, in the sense of being self-originated and of proceeding from One who was free not to be gracious."*

It can't be anything else but this that motivates the grace of God: love. A love for His glory. A love for His children. The Father sent the tested and precious Cornerstone, His Son, to win us back to Himself. His love is not cancelled by our disobedience; His love is covenantal. Love is the fuel for grace. And it is the only appropriate response to grace as well.

Packer goes on: *"Love awakens love in return; and love, once awakened, desires to give pleasure."* Love is a two-way street. He does love the faithless. But He wants more for us. He determines to change our unloving heart to love Him again.

Sometimes we talk about the unconditional love of God – that absolutely no matter what, God loves us. To say God is unconditional in His love is not totally a bad thing...but as one author pointed out to me recently, I think there's a better term we can use to more accurately describe God's love – it's *contra-conditional*. Here's his explanation:

Jonathan Leeman - *"God loves us contrary to what we deserved. After all, there are always "conditions" on God's love (the Son had to pay our sin debt, we must devote ourselves entirely to Him,*

those who truly love Jesus will obey His commandments). [God] loving us for Christ's sake means that God loves us with a purpose."

Paul tells us in Romans 2 that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Grace is not poured out for nothing. Friends, let us not presume on the riches of God's kindness to us. Time and time again, we have placed our trust in everything but God, and time and time again He has responded with scandalous grace.

We have two options in response to the grace of God demonstrated to His children: we can reject it, or we can realize it. Which are you doing?

To those who reject it this morning: Your Father waits to be gracious to you. Stop running. Turn to Christ. Trust in Him. Be done with making deals with everything and everyone else; they won't save you - they'll only eat you alive. But God waits to be gracious.

To those who realize it this morning: This grace is meant to lead you somewhere. Don't follow the desires of your heart; they only get you off the path. God wants your love. Love His truth. Love His Word. Love trusting in Him.