

**“A Great Danger Comes, But Christ is Greater”**

<sup>1</sup> The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. <sup>2</sup> Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. <sup>3</sup> The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” <sup>4</sup> Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.

<sup>5</sup> Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. <sup>6</sup> From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with olive oil.

<sup>7</sup> Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. <sup>8</sup> Daughter Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city under siege. <sup>9</sup> Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

The whole book of Isaiah can be summed up in just one sentence: **“A great danger comes but Christ is Greater.”** The prophet is constantly warning about what is on the way. A great danger from the Assyrians that had only just carried off the northern tribes into captivity was now on its way south to Judah and Jerusalem. And later in the book, after the Assyrian crisis was over, another great danger was coming from Babylon. But always the prophet holds the coming Christ before the eyes of the people, because the greater danger is the coming judgment, and the punishment for sin. But greater than the savage Assyrians, greater than the brazen Babylonians, and greater even than the corruption of sin and death and the power of the lying Devil, is Christ our Savior, who liberates us from the pressures and fears of living under the weight of sin.

Through Isaiah, God calls down witnesses about the sins of his people-- and these witnesses are the heavens and the earth. He is saying to everyone who is listening, **do you think you have secret sins?** Do you think no one is listening when you curse under your breath, or when you mutter to no one in particular? Do you think nobody knows what you’re looking at when everyone’s attention is somewhere else? Do you think that God’s angels don’t know, don’t see, don’t hear? Do you think that the sidewalk and the parking lot and the floor at your feet cannot witness to Almighty God about you?

In just the second and third verses of the book, the Lord gives his prophet an illustration for the whole problem: “I adopted these people. I brought them up as my own children, but they have all forgotten me. I would say that they are as dumb as an animal, except that the dumb animals know who feeds them and knows where the manger, the feeding trough, is. But God’s people have forgotten who looks after them and who supplies all their needs.

It wasn’t as if they had never heard the creation story, or didn’t know about the Fall and the Promise, or Noah’s Ark, or about Abraham’s faith. They knew the story of the Exodus and they knew about their ancient heroes, the Judges. But they didn’t keep these things in their hearts. Their rebellion was in turning away from God and from his grace. They were trying to get into heaven through their own good deeds. And they were turning to other gods.

This is why God needed to call them back. When we are sinning, God calls us to repentance through the law. Now, this might be by showing our sins in the Ten Commandments, but if that doesn’t bring us around, he may chastise us. This is his way of using hardship and even disaster or disease to make us look to him for what we need. He had done this for Judah by allowing the northern kingdom of Israel to go into captivity, forced to march away, many hundreds of miles overland. And now the same Assyrians were going to come and threaten Judah.

Listen again to the words God uses: “Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed; Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you,”

We read prophecies like this, and I find that people typically have one of three reactions. (1) Some people just don’t understand that God is talking to us at the same time he is talking to the people of Judah in the 8th century BC. They sort of shrug or sigh and go, “This doesn’t mean anything to me.” (2) Or some people try to distract the Lord himself by gobbling up all the details. Did they really cucumbers back then? I have a wonderful cucumber recipe. My grandfather didn’t just make cucumber pickles but he also made the very best watermelon pickles...” and so on and on. Those people sort of roller skate across the text without remembering that it’s about their souls. (3) And finally, there are those people who get upset with Isaiah’s listeners. They understand the deadly seriousness of the prophecy, and they will wonder, “How could they have gone on sinning like they did? Were they really that wicked? Why would God put up with people like that?” But they, too, don’t know that God is speaking not only to them, to “Daughter Zion” which is another way of talking about Jerusalem and Judah, but to you and me today.

A hut or a shack in a cucumber patch is just not very defensible. It isn't exactly a mighty fortress against an attacking army, now, is it? Against armed men with lances and spears and chariots, it would almost be more of a problem than a defense.

God wants us to know that there's a danger coming that's more dangerous than invading armies. The real dangers of sin, death, and the power of the devil are in the lives of each one of us. But God also talks about those who have faith. "Some survivors" (in verse 9), are the people like Lot who escaped from Sodom only by the grace of God.

What about us? God is serious about sin, and he is also serious about rescuing us, liberating us from that sin. That's why Christ's sacrifice was not just a transfer of cash. The national debt of Israel was not in dollars or denarii, but in the debt of sin. The payment could only be made in the blood of the guilty, but Jesus claimed the guilt (even our guilt) for himself, lifting it from us, and bringing it down on his own head. He became like a city under siege; he became like Sodom to bring down the rain of God's brimstone on himself. And by doing it, he saved us. He saved me. He saved you. And that is the gospel.

But now, how shall I live? Do not let me live as if I'm just as dumb as an ox. Do not forget who God is! Return to the Word of God. Read it yourself, and study it here with someone to guide you so that you don't get confused by the firehose of false Bible interpretation that is happening everywhere you turn. How many Christian songs on the radio and online have false doctrine? Be careful! How many memes and TikToks and YouTube shorts that seem to be spiritual are in conflict with what you should remember from your own childhood faith. Be careful! Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. Who are you listening to?

I write a daily devotion, text and audio, every day without fail. If that's for you, you it's there. This is not boasting, it's an invitation.

We have printed meditations that cost pocket change in the back narthex. Pastor Scharf leads a refresher class every Monday that Pastor Oelhafen and Mister Kuschel and I help with. This is not boasting, it's an invitation. We have a dozen Bible studies for every level of Christian learning if that would help. This is not boasting, it's an invitation.

Next week Professor David Scharf begins a 3-part Sunday morning class on interpreting the Bible. We can get up to 220 people in the Fellowship Hall, but if more show up, we'll set up extra chairs.

Learn what the Word of God says. No other religion in history has ever had an actual communication from God, a factual message from God, to all its people. Isaiah was not the only prophet, but perhaps of all the Old Testament preachers, he points us Christ most clearly. A great danger comes-- but Christ is greater! His forgiveness covers over all. His mercy endures forever. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:

Isaiah also drew this contrast between all of our earthly possessions, everything in the world without exception, and the one thing we need above all:

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)