

## Isaiah 28:1-29

<sup>1</sup> Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, Whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower Which *is* at the head of the verdant valleys, To those who are overcome with wine! <sup>2</sup> Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, Like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, Like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, Who will bring *them* down to the earth with *His* hand. <sup>3</sup> The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, Will be trampled underfoot; <sup>4</sup> And the glorious beauty is a fading flower Which *is* at the head of the verdant valley, Like the first fruit before the summer, Which an observer sees; He eats it up while it is still in his hand. <sup>5</sup> In that day the LORD of hosts will be For a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty To the remnant of His people, <sup>6</sup> For a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, And for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. / <sup>7</sup> But they also have erred through wine, And through intoxicating drink are out of the way; The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, They are swallowed up by wine, They are out of the way through intoxicating drink; They err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment. <sup>8</sup> For all tables are full of vomit *and* filth; No place *is* clean. <sup>9</sup> "Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those *just* drawn from the breasts? <sup>10</sup> For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." <sup>11</sup> For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, <sup>12</sup> To whom He said, "This *is* the rest *with which* You may cause the weary to rest," And, "This *is* the refreshing"; Yet they would not hear. <sup>13</sup> But the word of the LORD was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little," That they might go and fall backward, and be broken And snared and caught. <sup>14</sup> Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scornful men, Who rule this people who *are* in Jerusalem, <sup>15</sup> Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, It will not come to us, For we have made lies our refuge, And under falsehood we have hidden ourselves." <sup>16</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily. <sup>17</sup> Also I will make justice the measuring line, And righteousness the plummet; The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, And the waters will overflow the hiding place. <sup>18</sup> Your covenant with death will be annulled, And your agreement with Sheol will not stand; When the overflowing scourge passes through, Then you will be trampled down by it. <sup>19</sup> As often as it goes out it will take you; For morning by morning it will pass over, And by day and by night; It will be a terror just to understand the report." <sup>20</sup> For the bed is too short to stretch out *on*, And

the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself *in it*.<sup>21</sup> For the LORD will rise up as *at* Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon-- That He may do His work, His awesome work, And bring to pass His act, His unusual act.<sup>22</sup> Now therefore, do not be mockers, Lest your bonds be made strong; For I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts, A destruction determined even upon the whole earth. /<sup>23</sup> Give ear and hear my voice, Listen and hear my speech.<sup>24</sup> Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods?<sup>25</sup> When he has leveled its surface, Does he not sow the black cummin And scatter the cummin, Plant the wheat in rows, The barley in the appointed place, And the spelt in its place?<sup>26</sup> For He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him.<sup>27</sup> For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin; But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick, And the cummin with a rod.<sup>28</sup> Bread *flour* must be ground; Therefore he does not thresh it forever, Break *it with* his cartwheel, Or crush it *with* his horsemen.<sup>29</sup> This also comes from the LORD of hosts, *Who* is wonderful in counsel *and* excellent in guidance.

#### Outline

The two crowns : What are we proud of 28:1-6

The two words: What are we hearing 28:7-22

The two outcomes: Can we trust God's ways with us 28:23-29

Look at human history. What is it? We read of the same thing happening over and over. People gather. They begin to have some degree of success in organizing themselves. Then a kingdom begins. It is slow at first. But it eventually expands. Then it reaches a pinnacle of success. And what happens then? People become focused on what their **success has brought them** and lose focus on the process that **provided it for them**. They feel entitled to their pleasure. They become absorbed with it. And their success becomes their undoing.

Let me ask you. Is that purpose big enough for your life? Do you want to spend your life with the purpose of being just a cog in that wheel? Is that worth your existence, to just be one more earth dweller caught in the ebb and flow of human civilizations?

Here is a quote by Malcolm Muggeridge

**Can this really be what life is about, as the media insist? This interminable soap opera going on from century to century, from era to era, whose old discarded sets and props litter the earth? Surely not. Was it to provide a location for so repetitive and ribald a performance that the universe was created and man came into existence? I can't believe it. If this were all, then the cynics, the**

**hedonists and the suicides would be right. The most we can hope for from life is some passing amusement, some gratification of our senses, and death. But it's not all.... As Christians we know that here we have no continuing city, that crowns roll in the dust and every earthly kingdom must sometime flounder, whereas we acknowledge a king men did not crown and cannot dethrone, as we are citizens of a city of God they did not build and cannot destroy.**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

Our text starts by Isaiah looking north from Jerusalem to the city of Samaria and the land of Ephraim of Israel. We have a simple outline for our text. I borrow it from Mr. Ortland.

Outline

The two contrasting crowns : What are we proud of 28:1-6

The two contrasting words: What are we hearing 28:7-22

The two contrasting outcomes: Can we trust God's ways with us 28:23-29

We start with crowns. Israel had Samaria as their capitol. It was situated at the head of a fruitful valley. And it was the pride of Israel. It was their crown. The crown is the pinnacle of a man's pride.

Think about it. What does a person crown? The crown is the source of a person's identity. They say, I am under that crown. I have placed myself as a part of this bigger thing. The Israelites would have said, I am under Samaria. Samaria is the pride of who I am. It is our main city. It is special. And because **it** is special, so am **I**.

What do **we** look to for **identity**? If you were asked the question, **what are you**? How would you answer it? From the core of who you are, what would you answer? Your crown represents the core of what you are. Am I a fisherman, or an IT person, or a preacher? Or do I really get what I am? I am a miracle, just like every true follower of Christ, whose darkness has been intruded by Christ and who has been born into a completely different existence. That is the true identity of every believer.

A crown is also the source of a person's **provision**. These Israelites evidently have plenty to drink. Where does all that wine come from? The verdant valleys. And why have these people been so fortunate to have this luxury? Because they are Israelites with the crown of Samaria.

We do the same thing. Our crown provides for us. If someone were to ask you, what is the secret of your success, how would you answer it? That is your crown. Would you say, well I have this virtuous streak that would never have done such and such a thing? Guess what. Your imagined virtue is your crown. If you would say that you would have always done a right thing.... Same thing. If you point to something about you as the reason you have done so well, same thing. What are

you most proud of in your past? Be careful. It is very likely that that thing is a temptation to be a crown of yours.

A crown is also the source of a person's worth. It is what he thinks makes him something. It is something where he can beat his chest and say, look at this. This is what makes me special. This is what makes me more worthy than someone else. This is what gives me superiority. The Israelites would have said, look how special I am. Look at Samaria.

What is your crown? When you look at others, what makes you feel superior? And there is no sense pretending we don't have some. We all know that the right answer is that **we are not superior to anyone else**. Yet we all know by our reactions to being belittled or overlooked by others that we feel we should be honored. We all feel superior to others at points. What is it that we look to? Is it that we are so smart, or so logical, or so moral, or so loving, or so spiritual, or so attractive, or so responsible? What causes us to look down at our noses on others? That thing is probably our crown, the source of a false sense of worth. That which, if lost, would make us feel like we have no worth.

Israel had the wrong crown. And because of that they were facing the judgment of God. Verse 2 is less than a pleasant result of having the wrong crown. And we have to realize, this has never changed. The wrong crown leads to the wrong trust and the wrong destination. You will always face the same destination as your crown.

But look what verses 5 and 6 say.

**<sup>5</sup> In that day the LORD of hosts will be For a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty To the remnant of His people, <sup>6</sup> For a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, And for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.**

Here is the contrasting crown to the one created by humans. Here is the crown of the city of God as opposed to the city of man. The Lord of Hosts will be that crown. He will be the diadem of beauty.

Here is what our souls **long for**. Here is what our souls **were created for**. Here is the crown that fits and satisfies. Here is the only proper source of identity, provision and worth for the human soul. Jesus is the crown of glory.

But think about the implications. Consider this.

If it is Christ that is the only proper source of identity, provision and worth for the human soul, guess what? All of the false sources are seen to be bogus.

When we ask ourselves the questions, what are you? How have you provided your resources? And What makes you important? All the answers come back only Christ. So those things we want to look back as a crown? We find Paul's words ring in our ears.

**Philippians 3:7-11**

**<sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yet**

indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. **When Christ is our crown, we can never feel superior.**

There are some things in my history I am proud of. They are places where I did the right thing when it was very difficult to do the right thing. And the truth is, I want to take credit for them. But the longer I live the more I realize that even those things were likely direct answers to prayer by myself and others. They were not as much **an accomplishment** as **a gift**. I am glad for them. But they are an unsuitable crown. Jesus was the source for even those things. He is the only suitable crown.

In the end it will be found that **everything we have, everything we are, and any value we have** all trace their way directly back to Christ and Christ alone.

And the other side of that is that **we deserve no credit**. That is hard to bear. I want a little bit. I did, after all, make those decisions didn't I? But we learn from scripture that anything that is good about us has Jesus's finger prints all over it. Think about it. If you are a believer in Christ, why are you? What does scripture say about that?

Listen to this passage to ask the question, what did we contribute to our salvation?

### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> **And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

Who gets the credit here? Who gets crowned? It sure isn't us. Remember what grace means? It means getting something good that you sure **didn't and couldn't deserve**. We deserved punishment from God because of our sin. Yet Christ died for us before we had expressed a single positive sentiment toward Him. We didn't even like Him. But He died in our place. He suffered the wrath of God on himself that our sin deserved. And then, miracle of miracles, **he woke an awareness in us that we needed Him**. For the first time we saw what all this meant. And it was our most lucky, most fortunate, most blessed day. We had won the spiritual lottery and we hadn't even purchased a ticket.

So, after all that, how in the world can we think that we have any crown of our own making? The crown does not belong to humanity. Nothing of ultimate value has **ever come from humanity**. The only proper place to put a crown is on God. Where is your crown?

There's one more point I would like to add here. We usually only drop our wrongful crowns when they let us down. Oh, don't we love the illusion of our **self based provision** and **value** and **identity**. Isn't it a sweet feeling to think that there is something about ourselves that is wonderful. And then we watch what that wonderful self does. God in His mercy will **see to it** that our wonderful selves fail in ways that even we would have never guessed. We have done things in our past that even **we** have trouble believing. Improper crowns die hard. But they must die. That illusion has to fail.

It is only **then** that we find the **proper crown**. It is only **then** that our God will become our **treasure**. And somehow we will take on all the values of eternity. We will then be good with the last being first, the weak being strong, we lose our lives to save them. It is only when the citizenship of this world **loses its value** that we find the strength to let it go and seek the kingdom that matters.

Have you done something you are ashamed of? Have you let yourself down? Is it hard to believe what you have done? Maybe you have just gained a fresh awareness of it. Well, crowns die hard. But it is a mercy if God is in the process of killing your crowns. Let it drive you to king Jesus. If you are a believer, one day you will cast the crown that **He will give you** based on the faithful acts that **He created you for**, and you will **cast it back where it belongs, at Christ's feet**.

Next-

The two contrasting words: What are we hearing 28:7-22

**Isaiah 28:7-8**

**<sup>7</sup> But they also have erred through wine, And through intoxicating drink are out of the way; The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, They are swallowed up by wine, They are out of the way through intoxicating drink; They err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment. <sup>8</sup> For all tables are full of vomit *and* filth; No place *is* clean.**

I had a Sunday school teacher back in Elysburg Alliance church and somehow, I can't tell you how, he would find a way to make every passage of the Bible have the application that Christians should not drink, smoke, chew or go with the girls that do. I love that man. I learned a lot about love and faithfulness from him, but little about Bible study. Anyway, he would have loved this text.

We know that scripture prohibits drunkenness. It is just as much an evil today as it was back then. But what we see here is much worse than just drunkenness. Here we have people responsible for spiritual leadership getting caught up in the pursuit of thoughtless pleasure. This is probably both literal and figurative. They are senseless physically and they are senseless spiritually. They have no clear perception of spiritual reality.

We see the even greater problem in verses **Isaiah 28:9-13**

The thing that really helps us understand what is going on is to realize that the "he" in verse 9 is most likely Isaiah. They are criticizing the ministry of Isaiah.

**<sup>9</sup> "Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those *just* drawn from the breasts?**

**<sup>10</sup> For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." <sup>11</sup> For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, <sup>12</sup> To whom He said, "This *is* the rest *with which* You may cause the weary to rest," And, "This *is* the refreshing"; Yet they would not hear. <sup>13</sup> But the word of the LORD was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little," That they might go and fall backward, and be broken And snared and caught.**

In verse 9 these so called spiritual leaders are criticizing Isaiah's message. They are saying that it is not deep enough. It does not appeal to the modern man enough. It is too simple. This message of trust and obey, that has no appeal. The message of the gospel by faith alone by grace alone. No, that will never do. That is for children. That does not satisfy the pride of us intellectuals. Some things never change. Humans will always want a perception of God that appeals to flesh, that appeals to human pride. But the true God never does. The true message of the Gospel is always a humiliation to **the pride of man** and a trumpet to call attention to **the glory of God**. The message is for children and adults alike. But it is only for those who have been enabled to tell the truth about themselves. There is something very interesting about verse 10 that is not evident in the English translation. Precept upon precept, line upon line is very different in Hebrew.

It would sound like Sov sov sov sov kov kov kov kov. Our equivalent in English would probably be blah blah blah yada yada yada. They are probably passing off

Isaiah's word like the words of a broken record. He keeps saying the same thing over and over again.

Think about that. I sometimes feel bad that I say the same things over and over again. We keep coming back to the gospel that you already know. I keep saying that we must remember these things. We must bring them to our minds.

Sometimes I think that you are paying me to come up with better stuff. But you and I both know, **There is no better stuff.** The stuff God wants us to know and apply is not complicated. It is not usually hard to understand. The problem is that our wills are naturally adverse to it. So it takes remarkable repetition to get it into our heads and hearts and lives.

We must always evaluate a minister or ministry by the question- is this what God really says? We must never evaluate by the question- **how do I feel about it?**

What are **you hearing** when you hear scripture preached? That is the real question. Are you delighted by what God says, or are you annoyed?

In our text we see that the problem with **true proclamation** of the Word is only experienced positively by **true believers.** The heart of the hearer has got to be in the proper state. And our text is scary. Because it tells us that if a person's heart is not right, the words of the gospel will not reach them. It will never be good enough. It will never be appealing. No matter how true or how rich, the **heart problem** will always create the **hearing problem.**

What do you think of the Bible? That is a direct indication of where your heart is. And God is perfectly content to allow you to continue in your dissatisfaction. That is nothing to Him. Unless you want something different. And even that is caused by Him. Will you humble yourself to hear the words of God?

This is a quote from Mr Ortlund and I felt I had to pass it on.

**Isaiah is communicating the tragedy of unreality with God. Any shelter other than God is a "refuge of lies" ([Isaiah 28:15, 17](#)). What is the point at which *your* faith is being tested? How is God calling you to surrender control and accept his answers and keep pace with his timing? There's a lot more to God's salvation than deliverance from long-gone powers of the ancient Near East. Our real enemy is sin, and it can enslave us forever. God is saying, "Take refuge in *me*, not in denial, not in pleasant falsehoods. You can face the reality of your guilt, and I will show you how I can forgive a sinner." One of Nietzsche's aphorisms shows how we take refuge in soothing lies:**

**"I did this," says my memory. "I cannot have done this," says my pride, remaining inexorable. (remember how we talked about theories about our behavior. This is what I was talking about) **Eventually, my memory yields. Isn't that the way we are? But God loves dishonest sinners. He is willing to be our ally through Christ, if only we'll trust him.****

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

Isaiah continues-

**<sup>16</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.**

Here we see **something to hear** that is directly opposite to the way that the Israelites were hearing Isaiah. Here is a message that will change us. Jesus was placed as the solid foundation stone to the city of God. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord. Romans 9:33, 10:11 and I Peter 2:4-6 tell us that this was Christ. This is a prophecy about Christ. And it says in the New Testament that whoever trusts in Christ will not be ashamed.

So in Isaiah, what does trusting in that sure foundation lead to? **Whoever believes will not act hastily.** What this means is that believers who are really believers will settle into this truth. They won't get flipped out by the next wind of false doctrine. They will get to the point that they are confident and their confidence cannot be shaken. They cannot be knocked off their stride. Faith in Christ can stand up to anything.

Should we be surprised to see scripture point to Christ, hundreds of years before He arrived? Should we be surprised that He is God's solution to the problems the Israelites were having? No. We aren't surprised at all. Once you learn about what Christ was sent here to do, you understand that He was God's plan from beginning to end. All human history would orient toward this foundation stone. Everything that is lasting will be built on Him. Everything that matters will be laid on that stone. Anyone who lives forever will do so because they trusted in the one who said, **I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. John 14:6** How blessed we are that God intruded into our lives with the life saving truth of Christ.

Look how this second passage ends.

**<sup>21</sup> For the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon-- That He may do His work, His awesome work, And bring to pass His act, His unusual act. <sup>22</sup> Now therefore, do not be mockers, Lest your bonds be made strong; For I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts, A destruction determined even upon the whole earth.**

This is a warning from Isaiah. He is pointing out the fact that God has not acted dramatically often in human history. So it is a bit unusual. But when He has, what has happened? The enemies of God were always routed and the friends of God were always blessed. And that is what will happen now. An end is coming and this will be the result. God will punish his enemies and reward His friends. Now there are two choices. Trust and obey that God. Or mock that God. What are the results?

1. Have God intervene in your life in unusually good ways. Or
2. Face the bondage of sin and the destruction of the wicked.

That doesn't seem to be a real complicated decision. But it is a costly one. And it requires trust.

**Isaiah 26:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You*, Because he trusts in You. <sup>4</sup> Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, *is* everlasting strength.