

Isaiah 33:11-24 (NKJV) March 11

11 You shall conceive chaff, You shall bring forth stubble; Your breath, as fire, shall devour you.

12 And the people shall be *like* the burnings of lime; *Like* thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire.

13 Hear, you *who are* afar off, what I have done; And you *who are* near, acknowledge My might."

14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:

16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense *will be* the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water *will be* sure.

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.

18 Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* he who weighs? Where *is* he who counts the towers?"

19 You will not see a fierce people, A people of obscure speech, beyond perception, Of a stammering tongue *that you* cannot understand.

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, A tabernacle *that* will not be taken down; Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, Nor will any of its cords be broken.

21 But there the majestic LORD *will be* for us A place of broad rivers *and* streams, In which no galley with oars will sail, Nor majestic ships pass by

22 (For the LORD *is* our Judge, The LORD *is* our Lawgiver, The LORD *is* our King; He will save us);

23 Your tackle is loosed, They could not strengthen their mast, They could not spread the sail. Then the prey of great plunder is divided; The lame take the prey.

24 And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick"; The people who dwell in it *will be* forgiven *their* iniquity.

Remember how Isaiah 33 is about people coming to God as a last resort? God has forced the issue of their partial/ convenient obedience to Him. They are experiencing the consequences of living their lives the way they wanted to live them, without living totally submitted to their God. And what do we see? We see what we always see. We see the grace of God. Have you ever considered that **the deal that God gets from us is never fair?** He NEVER gets the better end of the deal. Ever. And He is never tricked into this one sided deal. It isn't like He doesn't know what He is getting before He gets it. He knows us completely. He knows the ways that we will disobey Him and dishonor Him before He ever chooses us. He knows the sins we have committed, even the ones we will never **own up to** in this lifetime. And He still accepts the deal. God doesn't need time to consider **the inequity** in our relationship. He knows going into it that our paltry repentance will never match up to His overflowing grace. He knows that it will not be fair from the start. We will never even **fully appreciate** His grace. There will always be lingering thoughts in our brains that find us somehow worthy of what we have received from God in one area of our lives or the other. We will never really hang onto the idea that our salvation is really 100% **unmerited favor** on God's part and 100% **unmerit** on our part. He knows going into the relationship that His virtue will be underplayed and ours will be overplayed.

Doesn't it hurt our pride to know that God did not pick us because we were in any way a catch? Isn't it hard for us to really grasp that we were not chosen for any lovable feature inherent in our being. Have you ever had a vehicle or a trailer that you were afraid would start rolling away? What do you look for? Do you look for the perfect piece of wood or rock? No. You look for a lump to stop the wheel. Anything will do. That is a little bit what we need to imagine in God's selection process, except that his trailer isn't slipping. He has no need of us. He doesn't even need the lump.

He did not choose us because we had worth. We have worth because He chose us.

In our text we have people who have given themselves to the wrong things. And they are running out of time. They have one last chance. But they will need to come, just as they are, and cling to God's grace, and His grace alone, for their only chance for salvation. And what do they receive? Verse 17 is wonderful. **Your eyes will behold the King in His beauty.** Isn't that just like God?

Let's take up where we left off in our text.

Remember what we saw in verses 7-9. God's people were getting the point. And the point was getting them. They were repenting. They could finally say, I blew it. I knew better. It was my fault. I should not have done what I did, but I did it anyway.

Then look at God's response in verse 10. It is at this point, when His people have told the truth **to themselves** and **to God** that God begins to move.

I was talking to someone recently about something I thought might be an issue in his life. He took it to heart like few people I have ever seen. He made the changes he thought faith required.

When I talked to him next he mentioned that a whole lot of unrelated things suddenly all fell into place. It was as if God was waiting for him to do business with God **in this one place** for God to open his doors of blessing **in all the others**.

We confess. We agree with God. And then God moves. That is often the pattern in scripture and in our own lives.

Verses 11 and 12 are God moving after Judea has confessed.

11 You shall conceive chaff, You shall bring forth stubble; Your breath, as fire, shall devour you.

12 And the people shall be like the burnings of lime; Like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire.

I think this is talking about the unfaithful Judeans. It is interesting here how God moves. When the people repent, God moves to destroy the unrepentant. That is certainly not how God **always** moves. But it is how he does it here. In lifting Himself up, He destroys His enemies, those who resist lifting God up.

Then what does God do?

He does publicity.

13 Hear, you who are afar off, what I have done; And you who are near, acknowledge My might."

God says, "Look at Me". Look at what **I have done**. Look what **I can do**. Look at what **I am like**.

If that were any of us, this would be sheer ugly arrogance. But when God does it, He is providing the perspective that human beings **need** in order to live **rational sensible lives**. We need to see who King Jesus is before we will ever live as we should.

Here God's might is the emphasis, probably because it was God's might that was being questioned by His people. They did not deem God strong enough to protect them from the Assyrians. So they chose to rely upon the might of Egypt. And that worked out like it always does when we put God on the shelf for a while and take things into our own hands.

We have to keep in mind that God sometimes arranges awful things to show off His attributes. That just shows us how important it is to have God's attributes known. The Exodus from Egypt was orchestrated by God to show off His power. He wanted theater. He wanted drama. He wanted to show Himself off in a way that it would never be forgotten.

Did it work? Well 40 years later (that's 40 years) when the spies hid at Rahab's place of business, Rahab reported that everyone was afraid of Israel.

Joshua 2:8-11 (NKJV)

8 Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,

9 and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Yep. When God wants to show off, it always accomplishes what He wants it to accomplish.

14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

Has anyone ever asked you, what is your problem? My brother used to ask me that a lot. It was usually after I did something really stupid. But he wasn't trying to help me. So what is **your** problem?

Here we see insights into part of our problem.

We fear the wrong things. We have lists of Assyrias. They are problems of human origins that could happen to us. They are potential threats to things that we hold important. By their nature they are things we allow to compete

with God so the threat of them is worth our disobedience. God says “don’t worry” and we say well, that is all well and good, but the thing I am worried about is too important for me to let go.

Then we put God into a subservient role. We start telling God what we cannot afford to lose and we evaluate Him on how well He does what we tell Him. We judge Him by how well he believes what we believe about ourselves.

It is very dangerous for us to do this to God. We saw that again this week. We do not understand why God does what He does. We don’t know why He doesn’t go by what we think we need. He has taken precious people that we have depended upon much earlier than we would have thought proper. But at the end of the day, God is God and we are not. He has a goodness in His plan that we cannot see. In fact sometimes we find it very hard to believe. But that is what He promises.

We will never get where we need to be on the path of telling God what He needs to do.

No, to live the right life we must start by fearing the right thing. Scripture tells us that the Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

Jesus told us this:

Luke 12:4-7 (NKJV)

4 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

In our text, the sinners in Zion are afraid. Even the play actors are getting with the program. They are beginning to understand that they have been afraid of what life and circumstances can do to them. It is time to start fearing **what God can do to them**. Fear is a good thing. It is a good thing when we finally get our bearings and fear God. Then we begin fearing to do those things that are displeasing to God. We begin fearing not having God’s approval. We begin to fear wasting our lives on things that God does not care about. Fear helps us orient our lives properly.

And it helps us to begin to ask the right question. And the question- how can we live to avoid the punishment we deserve? How can we avoid the judgment of God? How can we live forever?

Notice how that gets God off the hot seat? We are no longer evaluating God. Now we live understanding that **He is evaluating us**. It is not He who must live up to our expectations. It is we who must live up to His.

Now look what God creates in those people who fear Him. We see none of this idea that a person can be saved without being radically changed. But we must remember that **the saving comes first**. The power to change arrives when God calls us to Himself. The changes needed can never happen **before** that event.

15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:

We get the picture here of virtue. This is what the walk of faith looks like. We begin acting because **we are trying to please our Master** who sees everything we do and knows everything we think. We fear **displeasing Him** and we long to **fully** please Him. These guys are finally doing all the right things as opposed to the wrong things they were doing.

And what do they get for their trouble? Is it really worth it? Will the life of faith really work out. Is it really worth the cost of what it will temporarily cost us?

16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure.

What are the things you need when the enemy camps at your gates? You want a secure environment that is heavily defended. And you want a source of food and water that cannot be taken away.

I think God, through Isaiah, is putting eternal life in a perspective that these people can really understand. He is saying I will put you where you have everything that is currently being attacked.

I hope, if nothing else, this study in Isaiah is whetting our appetites for eternity. I hope we are getting the idea that YES, Jesus is worth any price. He is going to place us in the optimal environment for a human being. We are going to have a home that lives fully up to our highest ideal of home. It is

going to be homeness at its ultimate. Jason, Aaron, Russell and Mike have finished their races. They are there or as good as there, depending upon what happens when we die. The next thing they will see is the eternity God has prepared for them. They are home safe. That is what Isaiah is talking about. In verse 16 we see that the saved individuals will be placed in a position immune from any threat with everything that a person needs. But it keeps getting better. Verse 17 is the ultimate.

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.

Maybe we should print this off and put it where we will see it. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty. That is the reality we cling to on the worst of days. Not every day will be like this day. We will one day look into the eyes of the one we love. We will see King Jesus in His radiance and purity. And we will know on that day that every moment we spent in service to Him, in obedience to Him will be seen as worthwhile, but never enough to represent the worth of Christ.

And not only will we see the King but we will see the land of the King. Yes, there is a pay day. Whatever we are suffering, we will not suffer much longer. The old Negro spiritual is right. All my trials Lord, soon be over.

When I prepared this sermon a few weeks ago I asked the questions "What was hard for you yesterday? What did you struggle with? What will you struggle with today?" I had no idea of what was to come. I did not know I would be able to answer that question for so many of us. But the point is still true. All the things we have suffered through, all of our many trials... they will on that day be gone. All of it will be gone. And we will have eternity to listen to the stories of grace that will surround us. And we will see the King. And our hearts will be glad. This is all true. It is truer than the trial. We will see the King.

And look at how this changes our perspective on those things we are so afraid of now. Look at the change. Isn't this the change you and I need now?

18 Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?"

19 You will not see a fierce people, A people of obscure speech, beyond perception, Of a stammering tongue *that you cannot understand.*

Can you see what the big mystery will be in heaven? Why was I so afraid of these peripheral things? Why did I allow myself to become gripped by the

fears of what I could lose during a temporary life in a temporary place? How did I allow myself to live so far out of perspective? I knew what God said. I knew it was true? How did I live as if it were not true. All or our enemies will finally be seen for what they were.

Then Isaiah directs us back to our future present tense.

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, A tabernacle *that* will not be taken down; Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, Nor will any of its cords be broken.

Finally, the crisis of living is over. We have peace, inside us, with each other, and with God. We have security. We have safety. We have provision. All threats are gone. Nothing will impinge upon our worship. No force will so much as cut one of the tent peg cord.

Is your life situation insecure right now? Is it rocky, uncertain? Again, I had no idea how sad these questions would be this morning. We know all about insecurity and loss. But again, God's word is still true. Our situations won't be rocky and insecure for long if we are a believers. Jesus has better in mind for us.

21 But there the majestic LORD *will be* for us A place of broad rivers *and* streams, In which no galley with oars will sail, Nor majestic ships pass by

22 (For the LORD *is* our Judge, The LORD *is* our Lawgiver, The LORD *is* our King; He will save us);

So what is this telling us. We will not be attacked by land or sea. We have lived with enemies all of our lives. We have the enemy of the devil and all his legions. We have the enemy of the world that flaunts all of the distortions to God's creations as **things that we must have**. And the enemy tells us we must rebel against God to have them.

We have the enemy of **flesh**, that holdover from our old sin nature that has trained us to love anything that pleases us. It is the hook inside us that the allurements outside of can attach to.

And how do all those enemies attack? However they can? By sea, by land? They don't care. Our enemies are around us always. These temptations no longer have an **irresistible power** over us like they used to. But they **still have** a continual presence. On the day described in Isaiah, the **presence** of sin will be removed.

Our Judge, our Lawgiver and our King will save us.

23 Your tackle is loosed, They could not strengthen their mast, They could not spread the sail. Then the prey of great plunder is divided; The lame take the prey.

This is rich. What we have is a ship that looks like a wreck. It is not even seaworthy. But it is the thing that divides the plunder. The cripples end up taking the good stuff.

I think this is a picture of the church. Aren't we an unlikely lot to be seen in the end as the captors, the victors, the winners? We aren't exactly terribly impressive by the world's standard of greatness. None of us are incredibly smart or rich or powerful. We don't really look like the ones that will be the last men standing. Look what Paul says about that.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (NKJV)

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--

31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Yep. We are the sloppy ship that shares the loot at the end. Well, we can be sure about one thing. We did not accomplish this for ourselves.

24 And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick"; The people who dwell in it will be forgiven their iniquity.

We have been told some great things about this city, about this land that God has for us. But what about illness? With all this protection from the dangers, and all the wonderful relationships we will have, what about our physical health? Isn't **that** the danger that normally robs us of life? Isn't **that** the great threat that gets us all?

Not here. No one will say- I am sick. I look around even our little room and I can't hardly think of anyone here who is not sick or who has not had to deal with some serious sickness.

Well, when we arrive at eternity, us old people are going to have to find something else to talk about. Because none of us there are ever going to be sick again. For those of you who are currently dealing with an illness, allow your mind to find comfort here. The worst your illness can do is send you eventually into a land where there is no illness. It may make **your road** more tough, but it will **never effect your destination** if you are a believer.

And look how Isaiah ends this text. The people who dwell in this land will be forgiven their iniquity. At the end of the day that is mankind's greatest need. If that need goes unmet, nothing good can be promised to a person. But if that need is met, every other need falls like dominoes. Life without sin forever. Life free from sin forever. Sinners saved by the blood of Christ, worshipping Him forever.

That is not too shabby of a payday, is it?

Many of us have been given a heavy load to bear this week. It will be a loss that will last our lifetimes. It isn't easy and it isn't supposed to be easy. But this loss is not permanent. The next time we see Jay we will see him as he should be. That relationship will be unhindered for eternity. We regret that God has asked us to wait for that day. But He has. And He knows best.

So until that day we have the opportunity of taking care of God's people, helping us all arrive at that same destination, and representing the love of God while we live. Loss always creates opportunity. Will we rise to the occasion and show off the love of Jesus while we all eagerly wait for our coming reward?