

The King and Unforgivable Sin

Isaiah 22.1–25

Sermon

Woke up Thurs am to a surprising FB post from Scott E: “Sometime around Jr High/High school I got to know [a guy named] Jacob. For several yrs, we were inseparable. If he wasn’t at my house, I was at his or we were together somewhere else. He became my best friend, a brother really. He was my 1st real best friend. His mom & mine had cancer at the same time, when his mom died we worked through it together. When my mom died, he was there for me. I got married and moved away. We kept in touch a little but nothing remotely like when we were in high school. When I took [a] job [back home] last July he called me. It was the 1st time we’d actually talked in years. It was like we’d never missed a beat. We talked about getting together & having lunch at Dos Pesos (the place we went nearly every Sun for years) when I got back into town. 7 months later, we still haven’t gotten together. He died last night. He was 36. My heart hurts.” I didn’t know Jacob, but as I read Scott’s post my heart hurt with his. When we hear news of someone dying, almost always takes our breath away. The day before I read Scott’s post I received an email from one of our members, Brian R., informing me that his grandfather had passed away: “He was 85yo & had been declining the past few weeks w congestive heart failure. Still, it was a shock to hear.”

Our society doesn’t like to talk much about death, prefer to block it out. [David Zahl](#), dir of [Mockingbird](#): “We don’t talk about death, we don’t acknowledge it, we don’t see it, we send peo away to suffer it, & when a death does come, we do our utmost to ensure that it has the least poss impact on our normal lives—even though nothing is more normal than death. It is the tie that binds all of us to one another” ([source](#)). Nothing more normal than death, happens around us (sometimes surprisingly), stares each of us in the face. Ergo value of today’s text: Isa 22 (p. 487).

Series of oracles, all addressed to Jeru. Something dift today: not only addressed to Jeru but about Jeru. & in it we find three approaches peo take to their own mortality. Look for them. [Read text.]

This oracle stands bet past & fut battles, some details point backwards, some point forwards, some prob point both ways. **Backdrop**: Assyria the powerful empire of Isa's day. Having swept through the lands north of Judah, in 711BC besieged Philistine city of Ashdod, much closer to Jeru. Peo feared what would happen, thought Jeru would be next. To their surprise & for reasons unknown, Assyria didn't go to Jeru next. Judah appeared to be safe from Assyrian attack & peo like Hezk may have presumed it was bc of their alliance w Bab that Assyria stayed away. Thus rejoicing of vv. 1–2a. But Isa can see something that they don't see. Peo see present victory, safety, "peace in our time." But Isa **foresaw** a day when Jeru would be besieged just like Ashdod & the one to lay siege against them wouldn't be Assyria but instead their seeming ally, Bab. So while the peo partied, Isa mourned (vv. 4–5). See, Isa stands bet past victory & coming death to bring his peo this word.

& where he begins is by describing 3 ways we deal w our mortality. 1st **approach** (9–11a): **avoidance**, sidestep death. Siege: lit. surround city, cut off travel in & out, cut off trade, cut off water, let peo starve. What Assyria did to Ashdod, so Hezk tried to prepare for it. Water supply in anc Jeru dependent on Gihon Spring outside city. Had been an aqueduct from before David's time, but Hezk went one better, built tunnel to protect flow of water into city. Described in 2Chr 32.3–4 & 2Ki 20.20, referred to in vv. 9b, 11a. Not only water but walls: fortifications, even tearing down houses to make themselves secure (9a, 10). Approach to mortality: avoidance. Goal: self-preservation.

2nd approach (12–13): **indulgence**. Jeru would be spared this time, but a day would come when they would be under siege wo deliverance. & once peo realized they would die, figured they might as well enjoy what

few hours they had left. Ergo feasts, joy, revelry. No reason not to live excessively, after all provides a good diversion since going to die anyway. Approach to mortality: indulgence. Goal: self-gratification.

3rd approach ill'd by Shebna (15–16). *palace admin*: lit. "one over the house," i.e., prime min, #2 to king. Clearly thinking about death, tho maybe not bc of siege. Dedicated to building his memorial. Consumed w thought of how he'd be remembered: knew death was coming, sought to establish a legacy, create something that would outlast him, namely, a huge tomb. IOW, Shebna's approach to death not one of avoidance or indulgence but **significance**. "Make my life extraordinary, memorable, lit. monumental." Goal: self-glorification.

Nothing new under the sun. Same three approaches we take to death. Avoidance for us takes form of wrinkle creams & cosmetic surgery, send dying peo to live where we don't have to see them & be reminded of death. Indulgence seems to be air we breath, life has no meaning but what meaning we make of it, so live life to the full, pursue every dream, only sin is to die w regrets. & significance marks our every endeavor, create a way to be remembered: your kids, career, philanthropy, spir.

I know what some of you are thinking: "nothing inherently wrong about any of these things." & you're right. Nothing wrong w trying to avoid death: in fact B celebrates long life, encourages peo to walk narrow path to life everlasting. Nothing wrong w trying to enjoy life: terms used in v. 13 all used in other psgs to describe good life, life that G wants peo to have, not a prob to eat meat or drink wine. & nothing wrong w trying to have a good name: Scr speaks of good reputation as worthy goal, leaders in ch called to exemplary char, "follow me as I follow X."

So what makes these three approaches to death wrong? Goal: "I want to preserve myself, gratify myself, glorify myself. Life is all about me." We think our existence ultimate & do whatever we can to make it so.

Funny thing is: we think we see so clearly, but we're not on a mountain of vision but in a valley of vision (cf. Ps 23.4). What we need is a view from above. Who has that view? *The Lord, the LORD Almighty* (lit. "the Master, Yahweh of armies," 5, 12, 14, 15; "the Lord" in 8, "Yahweh of armies" in 25, "Yahweh" in 17, 25). Emph on divine sovereignty. & what G does from above could be summarized in one word: **exposure**.

If our goal is self-preservation, G exposes our **vulnerability** (9–11a). Hezk furiously building a tunnel to provide water for his city, peo tearing down houses to fortify the walls. But their efforts would ultimately prove futile when Bab laid siege against them. Like making preserves/jams/jellies/salsas: trying to store up berries or grapes or tomatoes, furiously putting them in jars—& someone reminds you, "The jars are made of glass! All it takes is one swipe & it's all lost."

& if our goal is self-gratification, G exposes our **culpability** (12–13). Peo adopted fatalistic mindset & decided no reason to hold back. After all, what else could they do? **Oswalt**: "The tragedy was that there was something that could be done—commit themselves & their sit to G—but they would not do it" (p. 411). Like blowing your diet at lunch w a double cheeseburger w fries & a milkshake at lunch & deciding you might as well blow it at dinner, too—& someone reminds you, "You're going to pay for that at the gym!"

& if our goal is self-glorification, G exposes our **dispensability** (18–21). Ergo Shebna replaced by Eliakim. **Motyer** shows how graphic this is: "Look, the Lord is going to throw you far away, big man" (188). Or as **Oswalt** says: "God will take the rag that is Shebna and twist it up into an insignificant wad" (420). & all of Shebna's glory, the authority (*keys*) & trappings (clothing) will go to another. Even his tomb would go to another. [This tomb may have been found, but ironically name mostly rubbed out!] Like killing yourself to get the top prize in your company/industry, complete w a banquet in your honor & a commemorative

plaque—and someone asks you, “Who won last year? 5 yrs ago? 50 yrs ago? Who will remember that you won this year?”

But the biggest tragedy is yet to come. Oracle not only exposes our vulnerability, culpability, dispensability, but shows that our sin of looking to ourselves instead of to G is **unforgivable** (14). IOW this psg not only says, "The way you're living right now will cost you in this life," it also says, "The way you're living right now will cost you forever." *till your dying day* (14): not saying G will forgive some time after you die, but a statement of utter hopelessness. You will never be forgiven, in this life or next. Failing to trust G is the unforgivable sin.

So is there any **hope**? If we're in a valley of vision & cannot see, can he take us up a mtn & show us a way out? Yes, in that word about **Eliakim**. A leader will come who will genuinely care for the peo (*father*, 21), who will wield his auth in a way that doesn't crush but serves peo (*key*, 22), who will be rooted & stable like a nail driven into a wall (*peg*, 23). But even this Eliakim isn't the final hope. He will be so dependable, so faithful to his peo that they'll place all their weight on him & eventually crush him (25). Even Eliakim isn't the ultimate hope.

But there's a clue: G ids him as his *serv* (20). Isa doesn't use this descrip lightly: 1x wrt Eliakim, 1x wrt David, 1x wrt Isa himself, 13x wrt Another, ultimately **the M**. See, Eliakim ultimately a type/pic/image of final hope of G's peo, the M. Already we've heard that M would be called Everlasting F (9.6), govt on his shoulders (9.6), kingdom would hang on him (9.7). & so his peo would put all of their weight on him. But our weight is not just the burdens of this life but all of our failure to trust G, our attempts to make meaning apart from G, seeking only to preserve ourselves/gratify/glorify. & that weight, that sin of his peo, would break the M, just like hanging too much weight on a wooden peg will snap it in two. Like Eliakim the weight of G's peo would break the M. But the M wouldn't remain broken, but would emerge victorious.

Indeed by his being broken under the weight of our sin—by his wounds—his peo are healed. & not just the ones up front, the ones who get to teach & preach, the ones w bios written about them—all of them, even the most insig/unknown/unappreciated, the *lesser vessels, from the bowls to the jars*. We hang our hopes on the M & are forgiven.

& it's from this vantage point, hanging our hopes on X, that we're able to address this matter of death. No longer consumed w preserving ourselves, fearful of aging, trying to stave off death. Instead free to confess our vulnerability. Gos moves us to **faith**. It's what G was doing for peo of Jeru. Whose idea was it anyway for David to build his cap in a city w no water supply? G himself put his peo in a vulnerable pos. Why? So they'd have to live by faith. No longer consumed w gratifying ourselves at every opp, eat & drink for tom we may die. Instead free to confess our culpability. Gos moves us to **repentance**. Acknowledging sin wherever G ids it. & no longer consumed w glorifying ourselves, trying to build a name/rep, be remembered. Instead free to confess our dispensability. Gos moves us to **humility**. G doesn't need me. He can raise up from these stones a better, more effective witness to his glory. Ill of pix on the wall: forgotten faces. So gos keeps us from taking ourselves too seriously. & by keeping us from taking ourselves too seriously, helps us confront reality of death.

One other pt of app: institutional death. Obvious to us all that our ch has sig struggles. Just look around. Used to joke that my goal as pastor was to not be last to turn out the lights. But something quite wrong w that thinking: it's ok, even natural, for things to die. True for peo, true also for chs. Now I don't want our ch to die & like many of you I'm working/thinking/praying for the Sp to restore this ch & grant us gos impact in this city for many more yrs. But if our working/thinking/praying is product of self-preservation, self-gratification, or self-glorification, we should just pack up shop right now. See, while we're dealing w enormous threats to our survival, survival has not been nor must it ever

be our goal. We only survive in order that we may advance—advance his gos, advance his kingdom, never our own. & if we die trying to advance his kingdom, then our death will be valuable, for time & for eternity. But if we survive only to preserve our legacy or gratify our desires or glorify our works, it would've been better to just die. We're not here for ourselves, either as indivs or as a cong. We're here for the glory of X. So if we survive, may it be only for the spread of his gos & the advance of his kingdom here on the uws.

Let me close w the words my friend Scott used to conclude his post: “I live life far too often with the assumption that there will always be tomorrow. I live like a fool. All that matters is this: Life is short. Death is real. J saves!” Amen.