

Isaiah 1:24-31

²⁴ Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies. ²⁵ I will turn My hand against you, And thoroughly purge away your dross, And take away all your alloy. ²⁶ I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." ²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness. ²⁸ The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together, And those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed. ²⁹ For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees Which you have desired; And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens Which you have chosen. ³⁰ For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades, And as a garden that has no water. ³¹ The strong shall be as tinder, And the work of it as a spark; Both will burn together, And no one shall quench *them*.

What are you most ashamed of? What are you most embarrassed by?

What we are going to see this morning is a people who were ashamed too late.

They were embarrassed after the fact.

You know what? The only way to know what to be embarrassed by, the only way to know what is honorable and know what is shameful is to hear it from God.

There are a whole lot of people on our media who are very proud of behavior that is very shameful. There are a whole lot of people who are shamed for behavior that is very honorable.

I am always a little bit amazed that people like Miley Cyrus and Madonna and Marilyn Monroe get respect. They end up looking like some kind of icon of virtue. Yet much of what they got famous for deserves only shame.

And there are brothers standing up for the truth of what God says about all kinds of issues in all kinds of places, and they are treated with contempt. They are shamed. I read an article about Tim Tebow by an author that was trying to shame him because Tim is politically incorrect. He couldn't find a real reason for shame, so he chose to shame him according to our society's wacky ideas.

Even in our own histories, we are quite likely proud of some things we should be ashamed of and ashamed of things that were actually honorable. We probably felt pride for some things that we now only feel shame about.

How do we know the difference? Can we trust our inner gauge, our intuition of what we should be proud of and what we should be embarrassed by? I know I can't. My seer has given me some very bad advice. How about yours?

We know what is shameful and what is honorable only by getting the perspective of our creator. We do well to believe it quickly. We do well to believe it, even when we do not feel it. God's word tells the truth about all of life. Our

experience lies all day long. Our hearts tend to be deceitful. Our creator is going to convey to the Judean people what is disgraceful through Isaiah this morning.

²⁴ **Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies.**

We need to look at the names for God that Isaiah uses here, because they are telling. We see words used sometimes as shepherd and father, but those are not the words that Isaiah chooses.

The first word is Lord.

'ādôn: A masculine noun meaning lord or master. The most frequent usage is of a human lord, but it is also used of divinity. Generally, it carries the nuances of authority rather than ownership.

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

This word is used of God by Isaiah more than by any other OT writer; and, in its absolute form, as here, it always introduces a note of judgment (cf. [3:1](#); [10:16](#), [33](#) et al.).

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 6: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel.

The second word is LORD Jehovah and the word refers to **the proper name** of the God of Israel, particularly the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses ([Ex. 6:2, 3](#)). The divine name has traditionally not been pronounced, primarily out of respect for its sacredness (cf. [Ex. 20:7](#); [Deut. 28:58](#)). Until the Renaissance, it was written without vowels in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, being rendered as YHWH. However, since that time, the vowels of another word, 'adōnāy [<H136>](#), have been supplied in hopes of reconstructing the pronunciation. Although the exact derivation of the name is uncertain, most scholars agree that its primary meaning should be understood in the context of God's existence, namely, that He is the "I AM THAT I AM" ([Ex. 3:14](#))

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

The third word—"the Mighty One of Israel"—is a somewhat uncommon term suggestive of bull-like strength ([Gen 49:24](#); [Isa 49:26](#); [60:16](#)).

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 6: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel.

What Isaiah was conveying is that these people have been **messing** with the one and only true and powerful God. They are in big trouble. The words used convey **the power and right to judge**. And this power cannot be withstood. No bribe or deal is going to get them out of the trouble they are in.

Then Isaiah quotes God as saying:

"Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies.

This word "Ah" lets us understand where God is coming from. He is exasperated with this people. He is agitated. He is not going to let this go on. Parents, have you ever had your child do something that you and he or she both knew was

wrong? And they did it in your presence anyway, like they were provoking your response. That is what we are looking at here.

Then look at what God says.

I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies

Now, I have a question for you here. Have you ever seen the tract that says that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? If you were in Isaiah's vicinity handing those tracts out, would you be comfortable you were telling these people the truth?

According to scripture, God thinks that a lot of human beings are His enemies. It is not our job to lie to God's enemies in hopes of making them God's friends. I don't know if God loves the person I am speaking to or if He is planning to destroy him or her. I cannot know that. I do know that God showed amazing love to some inhabitants of our planet when He died for the people in this world. He did not exclude this world from His love. In fact, He singled this world out for His love.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life. But that doesn't mean that everyone in this world is His friend. God has adversaries. He knows who they are. And the truth is, we are surrounded by people who God views as an enemy. But since we don't know who they are, we hold out the gospel of Christ to every one of them. If they respond, we know one thing. They are not God's enemy.

But we can rest assured of this one thing. God knows who His adversaries are and He is going to destroy every one of them.

Notice too that God is going to take vengeance. Vengeance is not a bad thing. But it is something **we** are forbidden to take. Just as justice is a good thing, but in many ways we are not the ones **to enforce it**.

God is going to take vengeance on the unrepentant prison guards in the Nazi concentration camps and the North Korean labor camps. He will take vengeance on the unrepentant Muslim criminals butchering both Christians and fellow Muslims. He will take vengeance on unbelieving people who have treated you unjustly. And you know what. We simply don't need to worry about that. God will take care of it. I think a large part of what Christians refer to as forgiving those in their past who have harmed them is really simply trusting God to take care of it. I think we are wrong when we label that forgiveness. We are simply declaring our freedom from pursuing justice for them. We leave that in God's hands. Vengeance is mine says the Lord, and no one will be better at it than He is. Do not ever get in your thinking that God is kind to those who chose to remain His enemies. He will destroy them.

²⁵ **I will turn My hand against you, And thoroughly purge away your dross, And take away all your alloy.**

Now Isaiah defines who these enemies are. He says "You". They are part of God's own people. They are what we would call false believers. They are in his bloodline but not they are not blood bought by Him. His enemies are the Judeans. Not all of them are enemies, but the majority are.

And look where He says God will thoroughly purge away your dross. Remember earlier we saw that the silver had actually become the dross. You get the idea that there is going to be very little left that is of value.

We need to see this and understand it. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. It really is. We never ever want to have that happen to us. Never. God will rid himself of adversaries, take vengeance on His enemies, He will turn His hand against them. That is just as much what God is like as to extend grace to those who respond to His call. They are both very much like God. I often point to the places where God extends grace to unlikely candidates like us and say that it is just like God to do so. Well the opposite is also true. When God destroys the wicked completely, that too is just like God. We have got to see God for who He really is.

Now, what is God's end game? What does He hope to accomplish? Does He just want to destroy all His enemies? Is that what He hopes to accomplish?

No. From the beginning of the Bible to the end we see that God is saving people. In fact, history will be over on the day that the last person comes to Him. There will be no more purpose for suffering and struggling and sin.

Now this text is interesting in its word play.

The words "I will turn" ([1:25](#)) and "I will restore" ([1:26](#)) translate the same verb (*'ašîbâh*). We translate this with different English verbs, "turn" and "restore," because our idiom requires it.

Isaiah is implying that one God, acting in one way, is able to accomplish two things at once. When God turns his hand against us, it isn't a disaster; it's an act of restoration. The discipline of God achieves just what he intends, in purification and in restoration, both at the same time. We can expect the goodness of God to show up in unlikely experiences. When he turns his hand against us to purify us, let's trust him to restore us.

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

Look what Isaiah says here.

²⁶ I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." ²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness.

Look at the words here. Restore Redeemed. Aren't those New Testament concepts. As always we see that God has never changed. This is the end game. God is going to restore. God is going to redeem.

To restore basically describes things returning.

To redeem means to ransom or deliver, to buy back.

God's judgments are always a preparation for something better for His people. When evil got too bad, God destroyed the evil people. But He still had a plan for the people He chose. It was **a better plan**. God has constantly, through world history, had to destroy groups of people. Oh yeah, that is very politically incorrect. How could God possibly evaluate people and say that some don't deserve to live? But God does that all the time. And only **He** has the right to do so. He has granted that right to civil courts of law that execute God's justice on those who commit capital crimes. But we as individuals are not given the right to execute justice. Yes, judgement happens. But God's end game is restoration. God's end for all of this human struggle and suffering is an eternity of bliss for His people where they will celebrate God's goodness. Restoration and redemption are what God will accomplish in the end.

Now here we see what God is restoring. He is going to reinstall judges who actually care about justice. They will represent Him truly. And there will be counselors who will give good Godly counsel. Who of us has not needed a good counselor? Who of us has not needed help walking our way through the confusing parts of our lives? What have we needed? We needed godly counselors. Those who would tell us the truth the best they knew how. Can you see how important that is? That is what God says He will restore. If He sees the need to mention it, it must be pretty important.

It is interesting that the **means to redemption** are put in place **before the redemption happens**. First the counselors and judges are straightened out. Then the redemption of the people happens.

Now how do we know if God has accomplished the restoration He promises? By this:

Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

When God restores the building blocks of His people's character, His people will eventually establish a reputation of having God's character. They will be known as a city of righteousness, of rightness. They will show up in the survey of where is the best place to live if you are one of God's people. They will be known for their determination to live for God and follow Him, no matter what.

²⁷ **Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness.**

Now the whole people shall be redeemed. They will be purchased back from those who seemed to own them. It will be a city of penitents. A city of people who have repented from their evil paths. That is the goal of the punishment that God is soon to inflict upon His people in our text. It is not simply the removal of the dross, it is also for the purification of the good, of the true, of the valuable to

God. What God **does harmful** to the wicked is always all about what **He will do good** for His people.

²⁸ **The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together, And those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.**

The words here describe rebellion and those living in a condemned state. Forsake means to leave a location to go to another. Again, we see people who are showing the back of their heads to God.

We can never get the idea that we are safe with God if we hold to some creed that allows us to claim God's salvation while rebelling against His Lordship of our lives. No thought could be more dangerous to a person who thinks himself a Christian. Those people who live in rebellion, who have turned their back on God, who have said, I am going to pursue this path even though I know God forbids it, those people are in mortal danger of God's judgment, no matter what assurance they may claim from their self formed doctrines.

God will destroy His enemies. And some of His enemies will probably be surprised that they are declared enemies. They may think that they are God's favored children. But they aren't.

²⁹ **For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees Which you have desired; And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens Which you have chosen.** ³⁰ **For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades, And as a garden that has no water.**

³¹ **The strong shall be as tinder, And the work of it as a spark; Both will burn together, And no one shall quench *them*.**

Sacred trees played an important part in the Canaanite fertility cult (cf. [Deut 12:23](#); [2 Kings 16:4](#); [Hos 4:13](#)), for deciduous trees like the oak or terebinth may well have symbolized the death and rebirth of the god. The "gardens" (v.29) may be groves of these trees, or, alternatively, (esp. in the light of v.30) places of sacred springs or wells.

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 6: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel.

So what we see here is that the people eventually see things from God's perspective. But it is too late. One commentary makes the point like this.

Why are these verses so confrontational? God isn't slapping us around. He is pressing his point. We think, "It doesn't matter. My decisions, my attitudes and thoughts and feelings—do they really make that much difference?" But God is saying, "Every moment of your life matters to me. Your choices have lasting repercussions. *That's why I am confronting you with the truth.*"

If we set the course of our lives by the earthly things we foolishly desire and choose, we will end up with nothing. The key to the metaphors in [verses 29, 30](#) is [verse 31](#): "the strong... and his work." The "oaks" and "gardens" are metaphors for human strength and potential and preference. The point is that our own brilliance and desire will be the death of us. But repentance opens up

life. In the ways of God, the weakness of repentance is how we experience the power of redemption.

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

We come back here to the point that we started in our text. Shame and embarrassment.

These people had given themselves over to the idol worship of the Canaanites. Doesn't it seem strange to serve the gods that did not protect the Canaanites from the Israelites? Why would they do such a thing? It isn't that it made logical sense.

No, when you look into Canaanite idols, what you find is an appeal to the flesh. It fostered sexual orgies in its so called worship. It was great human fun in rebellion to the laws of God. And the Judeans seemed to like to worship this god during the week and show up on the Sabbath to worship Jehovah. While the Canaanite so-called gods were happy to accept this arrangement, the one true God would have nothing to do with it.

Isn't this so much like us? We claim to be servants to the one true God, until our passions and desires lead us in a different direction. We aren't going to drop our **orthodoxy** for these other gods. But we will compromise **our worship**. And we think that God won't take notice. And we are so very, very wrong.

But when we see God moving, when we see Him assigning consequences to our sinful idolatrous other-likes behavior, then we start to blush. This is especially true if God grips our hearts.

they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees Which you have desired; And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens Which you have chosen

When you look back on your life, are you not embarrassed? Are you not ashamed? Think of it. What thing did you pursue apart from God's command? What god did you sacrifice to thinking he would bring you happiness and contentment? We have all done it. We have all departed from what God has said in the hopes that we could find contentment and satisfaction and pleasure and meaning and happiness elsewhere, apart from the Lordship of Christ. And when we look back on it today, what are we left with?

Shame and embarrassment.

Who of you would not want to get rid of that shame and embarrassment? If a cart came by and you could put it on the cart and never see it again, wouldn't you do it? Wouldn't it be sweet to see it gone?

We have the choice in front of us every day. Do we want embarrassment? Do we want shame?

Why is it that we find that choice so hard? Why do we find it so hard to simply do what God says and believe what He tells us?

Shame and embarrassment. Oh what regrets they hold. Oh, if we could just shed them. But we can't. We can be forgiven of the sin. And praise God for that. But we can't shed the shame. But since we can't shed them, why not take them to heart and avoid them going forward? That is really the path that is open to us. That is the opportunity Isaiah is giving us. Will we consider the end results of our behaviors, trust God, and avoid shame and embarrassment.

How wonderful that would be for us. How good to live a life free of shame and embarrassment? How wonderful to think back on our lives without needing to cringe?

And if we don't?

³¹ **The strong shall be as tinder, And the work of it as a spark; Both will burn together, And no one shall quench *them*.**

We had a bonfire at our house a few years ago. Maybe some of you were there. The flames were so hot that one side of a pine tree lit on fire probably up to 12 feet high. It just ignited. That is what is going to happen to the people who do what they feel like doing, no matter what God says, if they don't repent. These people who thought it wise to follow the gods of pleasure and self satisfaction. A fire is coming. It is coming for sure. And it will ignite and no one will be able to put it out. That is how Isaiah describes the judgment of God.

Do you want that? Surely not. Let's be the ones who repent early, who obey God's call, who avoid the shame and embarrassment of a godless life.

If you don't know Christ, if you have never trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord, you can do that today. You can be sure to avoid the judgment of God.

If you know that you are a child of His-

Haven't we had enough shame?

Haven't we had enough embarrassment?

Isn't it time to quit worshipping our idols and sell out completely to God?