

Isaiah 28-29 • A precious cornerstone, a sure foundation

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All right, Isaiah chapter 28. This begins what is in the book of Isaiah, a somewhat extended message that God gives to the prophet. It spans about eight chapters beginning here, and it is mostly directed to the southern kingdom of Judah, although this first section here, God is speaking of the sin of Israel, the northern kingdom.

And we know that for the way that God begins to speak here in verse one. If you look with me here. It says in verse one:

"1 Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim. (ESV)

And there we're talking about the northern kingdom of Israel because Ephraim is another name for Israel or the northern kingdom. And you'll notice he refers to the proud crown. And that speaks of the capital city of Israel, which is Samaria, which was kind of a hilltop city, which overlooked a rather lush and fruitful valley where there were many vineyards and that sort of thing.

Keeping all that in mind, look at verse one again, where he says, *"Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!" (ESV)*

The Lord speaks of those in Israel as being overcome with wine. Well, let me explain a little bit what's going on here. Because, like I say, without a little bit of the back story, it makes it a little more challenging to understand what he's saying here.

You see, Israel had already been ravaged by the kingdom of Assyria. In other words, Assyria had come into the land, they'd flexed their muscle and the northern kingdom of Israel had essentially said, "you're stronger than we are, we can't fight back." And the King of Assyria was at first able to allow Israel to maintain their king and their local government. But as many nations did back then, they demanded tribute, which is kind of a way of talking about taxation.

When a country would conquer another, they would gain money and resources from the nations which they conquered. And that was given in the form of tribute. And so, for a period of time, Israel paid tribute to the King of Assyria.

But during that time, Israel, the leaders of Israel, became proud, and they rebelled against their Assyrian overlords and they refused to pay tribute. And they boasted about the fact that we don't need to pay anybody anything, and we are free, and we're the people of God.

But at the same time they engaged in all kinds of wild, sinful parties of drunkenness and debauchery. And this is what the Lord is now confronting in the nation, the northern kingdom of Israel. And so, he says in verse two:

"2 Behold the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters, he casts down to the earth with his hand.

3 The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden underfoot;

4 and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley, will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer: when someone sees it, he swallows it as soon as it is in his hand." (ESV)

In other words, what God is saying here about the northern kingdom, is that they're ripe for judgment. And he likens them to a ripened fig that somebody who passes by sees on a branch of a fig tree. And seeing that right fig, he grabs it; and as soon as he grabs it, he gobbles it up. And so, the Lord is speaking of Assyria who is going to come and gobble up the northern kingdom of Israel.

Now please understand, Isaiah is primarily a prophet to the southern kingdom. And so what that means is, the prophecies that are given here about the northern kingdom of Israel are given as a warning to the southern kingdom.

God is prophesying that even though Israel in her drunken pride is throwing off the chains, if you will, of the King of Assyria, that this is God's doing. And God says, "this is my plan, and I have one who is mighty and strong, and he's going to come. And he's going to gobble up the kingdom of Israel." And, in fact, that is exactly what happened. And that should have been a very stern warning to the nation of Judah, to whom really this prophecy was given.

But I want you to notice as we look at verse five, how the word turns positive here, for some. It says in verse five,

"5 In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of the people,

6 and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate."(ESV)

You'll notice that God talks here in these two verses of the remnant. And a remnant is always a small, faithful portion of God's overall people. And these people have remained faithful to the Lord. They've remained devoted to the Lord. And God is saying about these people that when he reveals his glory and his justice, that it will be a thing of beauty to them, because they will see the Lord moving, and moving powerfully, and moving decisively.

And they will even rejoice because they've known, and they've been grieved in their hearts for all of the sin, and all of the things that have been going on in the nation. And when they see God moving, they will rejoice, not in the loss of life, not in the difficulty of destruction, but in the glory of God to bring judgment.

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought about it, that it is the glory of God to bring judgment? Have you ever thought that God is revealing His glory by bringing judgment into the world? It is His glory, and it is His justice that, as it says in verse six, that spirit of justice. God is a just God.

Yes, He's a God of love, but He's also a just God. And if you favor one of those attributes more than the other, you're going to be out of balance. If you favor the love of God too much, you're going to have a God who never confronts sin, and anything goes. If you favor the justice of God, you're going to have a stern, unrelenting, unmerciful, vengeful God who cares nothing for people, but only for justice. Our God is a perfect balance of justice and love. And that's such an important thing to remember.

Now the Lord speaks to the rebellious in verse seven. He says,

"7 These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink: the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, (and) they are swallowed by wine,..." (ESV)

Isn't that interesting? The picture usually that you get of people drinking is them swallowing the wine. But God says, the wine has swallowed them. Isn't that a good picture of drunkenness, where you begin by swallowing the wine, but you do it so much that it then turns around and swallows you. And you are literally enveloped.

He says, "*they stagger with strong drink. (It gets rather graphic and gross here.) they reel in vision, they stumble in giving judgment.*

8 And" *all the tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left.*" (ESV) Not a very pretty picture at all, but this is a picture of how God saw the leaders, the priests and the prophets of the people.

Now in verse nine, Isaiah is echoing the response of the priests and the prophets to his prophecy, and the giving of this message that he is giving to them. And look at how they respond to Isaiah. He quotes them here. These priests and prophets are saying,

"9 *To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast?*" (ESV) In other words, they're saying, "who's he giving this to anyway? Does he think he's talking to children? Does he think we're idiots? Does he think we don't understand? We have no wisdom or insight of our own."

And then look what they say about his message. This is very interesting. Verse 10. He says,... They're talking about the message of Isaiah here. They say,

"10 *For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.*" (ESV)

Now that phrasing in the original Hebrew can be a little bit challenging to translate into English. But it's given here in the sense that they're mocking Isaiah. And they're essentially saying that, what he's saying, he's babbling. It's just, word upon word and thing upon thing. And he's babbling, and talking, and saying things. But it's ridiculous. And they're basically kind of saying the... It's just gibberish. He's not making any sense. In other words, that's what the priests and prophets are saying, "he's talking, but it doesn't make any sense. This fool doesn't make a bit of sense."

In fact, if you have a New American Standard Bible that you're looking at, your Bible renders verse 10 this way, "*For He says, 'Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there!'*... wah wah, wah wah wah. That's essentially what they're doing. They're mocking Isaiah.

I like even also how the NIV renders this verse. They say, "*For it is: do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there.*" They're complaining, "what is this babbler talking about?"

So now God responds to them. Look at God's response now, beginning in verse 11:

"11 For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the Lord will speak to this people," (ESV)

And when God says "speak" here, he's not necessarily talking about "speaking with words." He's talking about "speaking with actions and with judgment." He's talking about the Assyrians coming and conquering the northern kingdom of Israel and frankly spanking the southern kingdom.

Because you do know that the Assyrians spanked Judah very hard. They did not conquer her. It took later until the Babylonian empire rose to power for that to happen. But they spanked Judah.

And so, he says, "for by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue, the Lord is going to talk to his people." In other words, I'm going to have a talking to with them.

And look what he speaks of about his people in verse 12:

"12 to whom he has said, (or in other words, said previously) "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose;" (ESV) In other words, God said to the people, "I'll give you rest from your enemies. I will give you repose. You don't have to constantly be in danger and dealing with the drama of an impending attack. If you will just trust in me, I'll give you rest." And these are the people to whom I said, I will give you rest.

But look what he says at the end of verse 12. He says, *"yet they would not hear."*(ESV) They weren't listening. He says, "I told my people how to have success against their enemies. I told them how to have rest upon their enemies."

Verse 13, and this is very interesting.

"13 And the word of the Lord will be to them (nonsense) precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little..." (Why? so) that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." (ESV)

And this is kind of a sad verse, but God is saying here, "I spoke to my people. I told them how to find rest, how to find safety, but they wouldn't listen to me. And so now I'm going to speak to them through another means. I'm going to

speak... If they're not willing to hear my word, I'll speak to them through the enemies that I raise up against them."

And he says here that, "okay, you don't want to hear my word, fine! My word will become to you nonsense. It will become to you babble. It will become to you just a clanging gong or symbol that just makes noise and you won't get it."

There's something that's pretty important here to understand about people who repeatedly reject the word of God when they hear it. I think that there gets to a point with such individuals where they no longer can hear. Just like it was here with the people of God. They refused and they refused and they refused though God continued to talk to them and speak to them. And eventually God's word just became noise that they couldn't hear. They could no longer understand.

And so, he says, "I have done this so that they might fall backward and be broken. And sometimes you get to that point in a person's life where they won't listen. They've shut their ears to God, and there's nothing that God can do but let them fall backward and be broken.

And how many people though have recovered from that? That's the mercy of God. I mean, there are many people who can give testimony of closing their ears to God for years to the point where they wanted nothing to do with Him. And God allowed them to fall back and be broken. And when they were, they cried out to God, and He returned to them, and opened His heart, and embraced them when they called out to Him. What a merciful God that we have.

And so, God says, this is what it's come to with my nation. They will not listen. They've rejected my calls for repentance and return, so now I will close their ears completely and they will fall back and be broken.

Now he continues in verse 14 and following directing his words more specifically to the southern kingdom of Judah, and he says,

"14 Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem!

15 Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with (the grave or) Sheol (as your Bible may say) we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, (In other words, it won't touch us.) for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter";" (ESV)

Now, obviously, they wouldn't have said it that way. This is the way God interprets what they've said. They've basically said, "we've made a covenant with death, so it's not going to touch us." And God says, "yeah, but actually what you have done is you have made lies your refuge. You have made falsehood your shelter." And so, he says in verse 16:

"16 therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

17 And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter." (ESV) In other words, the things that his people had put their trust in. We'll come back and talk about the cornerstone in just a minute. But in verse 18, he goes on to say,

"18 Then the covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with (the grave) Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it.

19 As often as it passes through it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.

20 For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in." (ESV)

And verse 20 there that last verse, it's kind of almost like a euphemism to describe the fact that whatever you do to try to warm yourself, or comfort yourself, or whatever, it's not going to be enough. Whatever you try, whatever pains you take, it's not going to be enough.

And basically, what's going on here is that some of the leaders in the kingdom of Judah were watching all that was happening to Israel. And yet in their pride, they believed that God's judgment was not going to touch them. They believed it was not going to come to them. And so, they boasted and they even said, "we've made a covenant with death. It won't touch us." But God says, "you're believing in lies; and that's, those are going to be swept away from you."

They said in verse 15, if you look again, we have an agreement when the overwhelming whip, or if you will, scourge passes through the land, it won't come to us; we won't touch... But God says, listen, I got news for you, I have

annulled your covenant. I have overruled. And he says in verse 19, "as often as it passes, it will, it will touch you, in fact it will take you."

But did you notice in verse 16, we come back to this statement that he makes here when he says, *"therefore, thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am the one who has laid a foundation in Zion."* He describes it as a stone. Not just a stone, but a tested stone. Not just a stone or a tested stone, but a precious stone. In fact, he now calls it a "cornerstone." That part of the foundation that is key to making it a "sure" foundation.

And so, we first asked the question, who or what is he referring to? Well, it's pretty easy because under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter connected this passage, also using a passage from the Psalms, to the Messiah. Let me show you this on the screen from 1Peter 2, it says,

1 Peter 2:6-8 (ESV)

For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumbled because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

"For it stands in Scripture, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (Now, Peter goes on to say,) So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, (and this is where he begins to quote Psalm 118,) "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumbled because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."

Now, you might have noticed here when Peter was making reference to Isaiah, he kind of came up with a little different end to verse 16. Did you catch that? Here in the ESV you'll remember we read verse 16, and it said *"whoever believes will not be in haste."* But you'll remember there Peter wrote, *"whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."* So we have some different wording.

In fact, the Apostle Paul quotes that passage in Isaiah, the same way Peter does in Rome. And Paul does it in Romans chapter nine. In fact, let me show you some different ways this phrase has been translated by the different Bible translations.

NIV: ...the one who trusts will never be dismayed.

NASB: ...He who believes in it will not be disturbed.

NKJV: ...Whoever believes will not act hastily.

CSB: ...the one who believes will be unshakable.

The NIV says, "*the one who trusts will never be dismayed.*" The New American Standard Bible says, "*he who believes in it will not be disturbed.*" The New King James says, "*whoever believes will not act hastily.*" And the Christian Standard Bible says, "*the one who believes will be unshakable.*" Interesting differences, aren't they? Well, the Hebrew actually, literally means, "will not be in a hurry." He who believes will not be in a hurry. That's the literal meaning.

But you do understand that literal translations aren't always the best for giving the meaning. I mean that happens in our own language and culture. If I was speaking to an audience that didn't understand English, and I had to go through an interpreter, I might use a very English sort of, American sort of reference like "the whole nine yards."

You guys know what I would be talking about if I said, "man, I tell you, there was the whole nine yards." You and I know that means "the whole thing" or "all the way."

But if this was being translated into another language and the translator used the exact words that I used to another audience that didn't understand that statement, they'd be lost. They would say, "nine yards, what is it? I don't get it." Right?

There was a gal that was interpreting or translating some of my own teachings into German. And she would write me every single day. And I learned how American I am, because she kept writing me and saying, "Pastor Paul, I don't have a clue what you said here." And she'd give me a little link to go to the message where I said that. I'd have to listen to that section, and then write her and say, "oh, that means such and such." Then she would in her German translation, she put the meaning of what I said, not the literal translation of what I said. Does that make sense?

When verse 16 ends with the phrase, "whoever believes will not be in haste" or literally "will not be in a hurry" it is responding to what we read earlier in this chapter back in, beginning in verse 12. Look with me back in verse 12 would you? Here in the same chapter God was speaking of the people of Israel to whom he had said, "*This is rest; give rest to the weary*" and this is repose. But

what was the response of God, "yet they wouldn't listen." They wouldn't hear, right? They weren't listening to my word.

But I told them how not to get all in a lather. And how to find rest in me by trusting in me. God is basically saying to them here now in this passage, about the cornerstone, that the one who trusts in him will not be in haste, or, who will not be in a hurry, but will rest, okay?

The cornerstone is the answer to what he had offered them earlier, which was rest and repose. They wouldn't hear it, but the cornerstone is still the answer. I have laid in Zion a cornerstone and the one who trusts in him will be at rest rather than being uneasy and fidgety and anxious all the time and caught up in drama. The one who trusts in him will be at rest.

For that reason, honestly, of all those earlier translations I put up on the screen, I kind of like the Christian Standard Bible. Some of you may know it as the Holman Christian Standard Bible. And they said *"the one who believes will be unshakable."* And that's actually a good rendering of what this phrase is talking about.

Now, he goes on in verse 21. Look with me in your Bible:

"21 For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim; as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused; to do his deed-strange is his deed! and to work his work-alien is his work!" (ESV)

What's the work he's talking about? It's a work of judgment. God has borne with these nations, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah for hundreds of years. And now he considers this a "strange work" to bring about; this rising up of judgment. He says,

"22 Now therefore do not scoff, lest your bonds (your Bible may say chains or fetters) be made strong; (or in other words, be made stronger) for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord God of hosts against the whole land." (ESV)

Isaiah is actually speaking here to the people. And he says, "so don't scoff at what you're hearing or you're going to find that your slavery is going to be actually more intense. Your imprisonment is going to be more significant than it would have been otherwise."

And then the chapter ends with a very interesting parable, which would have been very commonly understood by a farming agricultural society. He says,

"23 Give ear, and hear my voice, give attention, and hear my speech (Here it is.)

24 Does he who plows for sowing plow continually?" (ESV) In other words, if you're getting your field ready to plant your seed, do you just keep plowing and plowing and plowing and plowing? Or is there not a time for eventually planting seed? He says, "Does he continually open and harrow his ground?"

25 When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border? (which I guess was a kind of wheat)

26 For he is rightly instructed; his God teaches him."(ESV)

And then, he goes on to talk about how these things are then harvested and threshed. There's a season to this. He says,

"27 Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin, (but they did use that for some things) but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod.

28 Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever; when he drives his cart wheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it.

29 This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. (ESV)

And this is an interesting, rather simple, parable where God simply points to the work of the farmer to show that the work of the farmer goes forth in stages. And one stage doesn't just continue forever and ever and ever. He moves on to the next stage once the first stage before it is done. And the Lord is saying to his people, that so also is the work of judgment. It comes in stages.

And he wants his people to know that there is a time when he warns through the prophets. There is a time when he allows certain things to happen, like the failing of crops, the bringing of drought and so on to get their attention. And there is a time, and they can be assured of this, that as one stage leads to another, there is a time when the final stage will be reached. And that is the final stage of judgment.

And God is simply saying these things are going to happen. Don't scoff, don't say "it's always been this way." Because God is saying, just as the farmer starts

that with this (extending left hand to indicate a starting point) and ends with this, (extending right hand to indicate an ending point) so also the Lord of hosts begins speaking to his people thusly. But if they do not listen, the judgment will come in stages, and it will come.

So that's quite a bit. You can see there's quite a bit there in chapter 28. I mean, there's a lot that God is saying to his people. And frankly, there's a lot that you and I learn about the character of God and the methodology of God.

Chapter 29 we will also cover tonight, begins with an interesting reference to Israel, the city. And it begins with the word "ah," in the ESV, which is also could be translated, "woe." But it says here in the ESV: "*Ah, Ariel, Ariel,*" And you'll notice that God speaks here and refers to Ariel. And he's talking about Jerusalem. And we know that by the rest of what he's going to say here.

But the name Ariel, and this is what you need to understand, sounds very much like the Hebrew for the word "altar or hearth." And in terms of sacrifices, the altar was a place, of course, that was constantly covered with the blood of the sacrifice. Right? So God is using this reference here to refer to Jerusalem as "a place" covered with blood.

Now notice what he says,

"Ah, Ariel, ah Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year; let the feasts run their round. (The NIV says, "let the cycle of feasts go on.")

2 Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation, (which is crying) and she shall be to me like an Ariel (or if you will, a blood soaked altar, God is saying, Jerusalem will become unto me as a blood soaked altar.)

3 And I will encamp against you all around, and will besiege you with towers and I will raise siegeworks against you. (ESV)

And God is saying, even though you're going to look across your wall and you're going to see an enemy out there beginning to build siegeworks, you see the enemy, but that's me doing the work. That's me behind it. I am going to raise those things. I am going to besiege you. I am going to encamp.

4 And you will be brought low; from the earth you shall speak, and from the dust your speech will be bowed down; (That speaks of a great humbling to come upon the people.) your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and from the dust your speech shall whisper.

5 But the multitude of your foreign foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff. And in an instant, suddenly,

6 you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.

7 And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night.

8 As when a hungry man dreams, and behold, (in his dream,) he is eating, and (he) awakes with his hunger not satisfied, or as when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, (in his dream) he's drinking, and (he) awakes faint, with his thirst not quenched, so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion."(ESV)

Now, this is a powerful prophecy. But it is where we see once again, this principle we've talked about so many times in Isaiah and elsewhere, frankly, in the word of "double reference."

Because, you see, the kingdom of Assyria is going to do this very thing. They're going to come against Jerusalem. They're going to build their siegeworks. And God is going to do this. God is going to be behind this as an act of judgment against his people, Judah.

However, then, and this is going to happen during the reign of Hezekiah, he is going to powerfully move on their behalf and the army will be no more. And it will be this incredible work of the Lord.

But the other side of this prophecy, the more long distance side of this prophecy, is speaking of what we refer to as the very end of the great tribulation period when the nations of the world gather against Jerusalem to overcome her. And we know that because in verse 7, it says, "and the multitude of all the nations, of all the nations, coming against and fighting against Mount Zion."

Well, in Hezekiah's day, it was just one nation. It was Assyria. But in the Great Tribulation period, it will truly be all the nations. And so you see, the attack upon Jerusalem by the Assyrians was a foreshadowing of what will take place at the conclusion of the Tribulation period when the nations of the earth, under the rise of the Antichrist, come against Jerusalem to completely destroy it. But the Lord then too, will fight against those nations and deliver his people.

The Lord now speaks in verse nine and following of the spiritual deadness of his people. He says,

"9 Astonish yourselves and be astonished; blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not with strong drink! (He's talking about a spiritual deadness. He says,)

10 For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, (and that refers to) (the prophets), and it covered your heads (and that refers to) (the seers).

11 And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. (In other words, you can't figure out what it means) When men give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." (And that word means it is hidden. The message is hidden.) 12 And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot read." (ESV)

And again, so this is a picture. God is speaking of their spiritual blindness, which has come upon them because of their constant refusal to hear the word of the Lord.

"13 And the Lord said: (verse 13) "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men," (ESV)

God says what's going on here is that they're just involved in empty religion. They draw near to me with their mouth. In other words, they come and they pray. They honor me with their lips. They speak of "the Lord, the Lord." But notice he says, *their hearts are far from me*. God cares about the heart. That's a way to interpret so much of God's word. If we would just remember that God looks at the heart.

I got to tell you, I constantly get emails from people wanting to know if something is a sin. And it could be a gray area, and so there isn't this absolute response to say, yeah, that's a sin or no, that's not a sin. It could be a sin depending on the heart. Because God looks at the heart. It's the heart that makes the difference, okay?

And that's why God says even in terms of your religious devotion, I don't want your empty prayers. I don't want you just coming to church and sitting there like a bump on a log. I want your heart. He says, *"your hearts are far from me."*

Jesus actually quoted this passage here in Isaiah during His earthly ministry, just to describe the people of Israel during His time. Let me show you this from Mark chapter 7. It says:

Mark 7:5-7 (ESV)

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" (They saw them eating and taking grain and so forth with their hands and eating them.) And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

It's pretty telling, isn't it? We look at what happened in the Bible to the nation of Israel, how they became so stuck on their traditions. And we think, how dumb was that? And then we turn around and do the same thing. I have to address many times with people who write and ask Bible questions their understanding of traditions and how traditions come into play related to God's word, and traditions that actually violate the word of God.

I won't mention the country, but I had a young man who'd been married for a period of time write to me about the fact that his wife had kind of fallen into disfavor with his family. And he said, frankly, she did some dumb things, said some dumb things early on in our marriage. And my parents were very much offended. My siblings...and now they hate her. And he says, they're always talking about my wife badly.

He said, but my wife has dealt with her issues. I believe that she has made a real change. She's repented of the things she did wrong, but my family won't hear of it. And they're constantly encouraging me against her. And he said, what should I do? Because then he went on to tell me, in my culture, family, extended family, comes before your wife. Well, that's a tradition. It was a tradition of his culture that now was superseding the Word of God.

And I shared with him, I took him back to Genesis (chapter) 2. And I said, "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united to his wife

and the two will become one flesh." I said, "this woman is your first ministry. She gets your first and your best. And if anybody comes against her, you defend your wife because there is no one to protect her but you alone. No one, you're it. You're all she has for protection."

This was an example of where cultures and the traditions of those cultures, had actually come to the place of becoming doctrine or belief. This is what we do in our culture, even though it violates the word of God.

He goes on in verse 14 saying,

"¹⁴ therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, (Now he doesn't tell what these are. He says,) with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden. (ESV)

So God doesn't tell us what he's talking about here when he says that he's going to bring about this wonderful thing among the people. All he tells us is that it will result in the demise of worldly wisdom.

Verse 15:

"¹⁵ Ah, you who hide deep from the Lord your counsel," (ESV)

The NIV actually makes this phrase a little clearer. It says, "*woe to you (those) who go to great depths (or great ends) to hide your (their) plans from the Lord" who do your (their) work in darkness...*"

And here in the ESV it says, *whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us? (Who's going to know? Anyway, the Lord goes on to describe the attitude of these people.)*

¹⁶ You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, (and the thing the) that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding?"(ESV)

Now, the reason the Lord is saying this in verse 16 is because some of the people, some of the leaders in Judah, were counseling the leadership there to create an alliance with Egypt. Now, God had told them, "don't do it. Don't rely on Egypt." He called it a splintered reed. And if you lean on it, it'll collapse. But

they were still saying, no no no! We need to make friends with Egypt so that we can stand against these invading nations like the Assyrians.

God is confronting their attitude, which is to exalt the wisdom of man above the wisdom of God. And that's why he says, *you turn things upside down!* He says, it's me you're supposed to go to for wisdom. You don't put your wisdom above mine.

But this is common, isn't it? I mean, this is common as the day is long. It's the spirit of self-sufficiency that we see in all people. It has as its root, human pride and arrogance.

And we've probably all, well we haven't all, some of us have raised teenagers. And we recognize that in the teenage years, kids get to a point where they truly believe they're smarter than their parents. They really do. Kids get to around 13, 14 years old and mom and dad are now dumb. And they have grown exponentially in wisdom in the last 12 months. And now they really have no need of listening to mom and dad because frankly, that would be a waste of time since they don't know anything, right? Anybody who's raised teenagers, they're all looking at each other going, "amen!" Right? They all know what that's all about.

We recognize this attitude in teenagers as a sign of immaturity. And we pray for our kids as they're going through it. And we pray that they'll get through it without terrible consequences, but we pray for them. And we recognize that as they grow and mature. Isn't that crazy? Kids start getting into their twenties and mom and dad start getting smart again, slowly. Slowly. By the time they reach 30, they're like, I think you're actually pretty bright.

But here's the interesting thing, we do the same thing as adults. We just grow up and start believing we're smarter than God. Just as teenagers think they're smarter than their parents, we think we're smarter than God.

We start leaning on our own ideas. We start thinking, well, this is the way I ought to do this. I got a problem, here's how I should solve it. I got a financial issue, here's how I need to make it better. I've got a relational issue, here's what needs to be done. And we go to people, and we call them experts. And the more initials they have after their name, the more stock we put in their opinion. And it is all the wisdom of man.

And God is saying here and confronting here, "you got it backwards. It's Me you come to. You come to Me for wisdom." Right? Oh, if we just get that through our hearts.

Verse 17 says:

"17 Is it not a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?" (ESV) Lebanon is here being used in this verse, as kind of an example of that which is not a product of human effort. God is speaking of those things which grow and become fruitful and so forth without the aid of man. God says in verse 18:

18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.

19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exalt in the Holy One of Israel. " (ESV) And of course, these statements point us back to the earlier statements he has made about the spiritual blindness of his people addressed in verses 9-12. And God says there's coming a day when they will hear. The deaf will hear and the blind will have their eyes opened.

He says,

20 For the ruthless (verse 20) shall come to nothing, and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,

21 who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right. (He says, these things will be gone one day. They're going to be taken away.)

22 Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale.(and that means with terror at an advancing enemy)

23 For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; (ESV) (Or as the NIV says, "they will keep my name holy" or make my name Holy) they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

24 And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will (then) accept instruction."(ESV)

The Lord is speaking here prophetically of a coming time when great transformation will take place among the people of the Lord. The hearts of his people will be changed, no longer hardened against the things of the Lord. And of course, he's referring in a long-distance term here to the Millennial Kingdom.

That's where we're going to stop at the end of chapter 29 and we're going to pick it up in chapter 30 next time.