

Rock of Ages
 Isaiah 30:1-33
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We are in the fourth¹ of the six prophetic poems of warning by Isaiah. They are sometimes called *poems that summon Judah to trust Yahweh because they were in the crosshairs of the Assyrian army*. You may have noticed that these poems are somewhat repetitive, but through each prophetic warning, there is something different to get the attention of the people of Judah and also our attention.

Why would Yahweh keep repeating Himself in these poems? Why would He keep summoning the people to trust Him? Why would he warn Judah of the danger of looking to Egypt for help? It is because both they were, and we are all slow to trust and obey God.

We tend to ignore God's warnings. It is like the tornado siren that is sounding, but we just keep right on going about our daily business. We will say to ourselves, *"It is most likely a test; I have nothing to worry about."* What happens then is that we become deaf to its warnings when the fact is that it may not be a test at all and our lives are in danger.

So, in Isaiah 30, the fourth siren is sounding. Isaiah was not crying wolf. He was sounding the alarm, but it was not a test. The question is will we listen to God's warning for our lives?

What voice controls your life? When anxiety, suffering, and trouble come into your life, where do you turn? To what or to whom do you turn for help or relief? When hard times come, many people say to themselves, *"If only . . ."* (then they think of what they want to happen or what they want to avoid, or what it is that they do not want to lose in their lives)?

Friends, how you answer these questions is really important. You see, the answer to these questions reveals where you turn in a crisis and if you are not trusting in Jesus, then what you are turning to is an idol of the heart. Bottom line: The answers to these questions are things to which you and I will consciously or unconsciously give our allegiance and trust.

Also, these idols have voices in our hearts and minds, and we hear them when we talk to ourselves about what we want to happen. When we think about these voices, what we realize is that they sound like God talking because they are telling us what we need in order to be satisfied. For example, *"If I only had this job, then I would be satisfied. If I only had this much money, then I would have enough for my family. If only I could get a promotion at work, then I would feel like I had made something of myself. If only my spouse would just meet my needs, I would enjoy this marriage. If only my kids would act better, then I would feel like a good parent. If I only had a college education, then I would feel better about myself. If only, if only, if only . . . the list of what you tell yourself you need goes on and on."* The idols of our hearts talk to us, and they sound like us and tell us to turn to anything other than Jesus.²

You see, idols of the heart are as old as mankind itself. John Calvin said that *our hearts are idol factories*. He was right, but he is not telling us anything new. Listen to what God said through the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 14:2-5:

² *Then the word of the Lord came to me: ³"Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and have put their sinful stumbling blocks in front of themselves. Should I actually let them inquire of me?" ⁴"Therefore, speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Lord God says: When anyone from the*

¹ Next Sunday is Isaiah 31-32 and then the final poem is Isaiah 33-35.

² David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 129-143.

*house of Israel sets up idols in his heart . . . ⁵ They are all estranged from me
because of their idols.'*

Here is the point: When trouble comes into our lives, it begins to create fear in our hearts and minds, which will steal our peace. Fear will steal our peace with God unless we intentionally turn to Jesus by the Spirit in prayer and then trust and obey His word so that we live by the Spirit.

You may be saying, "*Oh! Wow, Pastor Michael! There is nothing new in this message.*" If you say that, then you are correct but beware. By saying that, you are at the threshold of becoming deaf to the warning Isaiah 30 is giving us because you are thinking, "*I've heard this siren before, so I'm okay.*"

I want to ask four questions to guide us through Isaiah 30, and we will apply the text as we go.

I. Who is your help? (Isaiah 30:1-7)

Look in vv. 1-2.

*Woe to the rebellious children! This is the Lord's declaration. They carry out a
plan, but not mine; they make an alliance, but against my will, piling sin on top
of sin. ² Without asking my advice, they set out to go down to Egypt in order to
seek shelter under Pharaoh's protection and take refuge in Egypt's shadow.*

Verses 1-2 set up the problem. Assyria was threatening to invade, and instead of turning to God, they were considering making an alliance with Egypt. Think about how crazy this sounds. They want to turn to the very nation that enslaved them for 400 years. The old Keith Green song is so true for Israel when trouble comes, "*So you want to go back to Egypt.*"

Bottom line: This was an exercise in self-salvation. Instead of turning to God when trouble threatened, they were like the Israelites of old who wanted to save themselves by going back to the very thing that enslaved them.

Do you ever do that? Trouble comes into your life, and you want to return to the very sin that enslaved you thinking it will save you.

You lose your job; you lose your loved one; you lose your financial safety net; you lose a relationship or something that was your means of peace and security, and then you go into action. Instead of seeking Jesus for help, you begin working the system. You get on FaceBook and let everyone know all your dirty laundry. You begin to work the social grapevine and social media in order to try to fix or recover your loss. Perhaps drinking used to have you enslaved, and so you return to the bottle for relief. Perhaps porn gave you relief, and so you return to porn and even sexual sin.

Think about it this way, perhaps it is an unplanned pregnancy, and so the first thing you do is begin planning an abortion instead of seeking Jesus and godly counsel. All you want to do is fix the problem, and this seems the quickest and easiest way. It seems harder to seek Jesus and the help that God will give you for an unplanned pregnancy, but it is there if you will but wait on the Lord.

Perhaps someone said something bad about you at work or at church, so you begin to harbor bitterness; then, instead of talking to God about the problem, you begin to talk bad about that person. When trouble like this hits our lives, our tendency is to neglect to spend time in prayer instead of following the biblical means of grace that God has given us to help us work out conflict.

When trouble hits our lives, we begin to replay that problem in our minds over and over and over. Do you ever do that? Jesus wants us to do is press pause on the DVD that is replaying the painful circumstances or problems in our hearts and minds and turn to Him. So, instead of letting our minds race to figure out some self-salvation kind of means, He wants us to run to Him. Jesus wants us to trust in Him and wait on Him in prayer, worship and Scripture intake, and meditation.

Brothers and sisters, it is sinful for us to make plans and then look to Jesus and ask Him to bless them. Do you ever do that? To my shame, I've done that.

Listen, when "the Assyrian army kind of trouble" is bearing down on your life, don't go back to Egyptian slavery. Turn to Jesus. It is a sin for us to seek deliverance in anyone or anything other than Jesus.

A final application of this text is where you will spend eternity. You see, physical death, Hell, and eternal destruction is coming for everyone unless they have turned to Jesus. There are people who do not believe God will not judge and send people to Hell. Also, there are people who try to manufacture all kinds of methods and plans for "self-salvation" like Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the list goes on and on. They are hoping there is some kind of blessed eternity waiting for them.

Bottom line: Only those who have fled to Jesus for refuge will be saved. You see, all other means of salvation are like what v. 7 says:

Egypt's help is completely worthless; therefore, I call her: Rahab Who Just Sits.

Friend, if you are here today and you have never trusted in Jesus, look to Christ while there is time. All other means of salvation are worthless, for *there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved other than Jesus Christ.*

II. Who are you listening to? (Is. 30:8-17)

Who are you listening to when trouble comes into your life? We are all listening to someone. Biblical counselor Paul Tripp *says no one talks to you more than you do.* Therefore, by default, you listen to yourself more than you listen to anyone else. In other words, we are always talking to ourselves and telling ourselves what we must do.

Yet, there are more voices that vie for your attention than yours. There are millions of voices competing for your allegiance and affection. They all want your heart. So, the question is, who are you listening to when problems threaten to steal your peace and even destroy your life?

Look at Isaiah 30:9-13:

*They are rebellious people, deceptive children,
children who do not want to listen to the Lord's instruction.¹⁰ They say to the
seers, "Do not see,"
and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy the truth to us.
Tell us flattering things. Prophecy illusions.
¹¹ Get out of the way! Leave the pathway.
Rid us of the Holy One of Israel."
¹² Therefore the Holy One of Israel says:
"Because you have rejected this message
and have trusted in oppression and deceit,
and have depended on them,¹³ this iniquity of yours will be like a crumbling
gap, a bulge in a high wall
whose collapse will come in an instant—suddenly!*

The problem is we often don't want to listen to the voice of truth--the voice of God's truth. The voice of the Spirit of God speaks through God's word. We often do not want to hear hard things spoken to us. If we are not careful, we can become like the people of Judah and not want to listen to the Lord's instruction and correction. Instead, we want to hear only things that flatter us and give us the illusion of feeling good about ourselves. But the words of flattery are not what we need to hear. These words are not words that give us an accurate reflection of who we are and what needs to change.

If we are not careful, we will become like the people the Apostle Paul told Timothy about. These people only wanted their ears tickled by preaching that made them feel good about themselves because that kind of preaching did not call them to repent of their sin. When this happens, we become like the man in James 1:23-24:

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

Commenting on Isaiah 30:8-17, Pastor Ray Ortlund says:

True spirituality is a spirituality of truth. We go deep by making our hearts vulnerable to truths most offensive, yet most [valuable] and essential. And we can open our hearts. Why? Because whatever God says to us in the gospel, he speaks with love and grace. Some of his truths will melt in your mouth. Other truths will hit you like a ton of bricks. But everything God says opens up to you the life hidden with Christ in God—if you are open. Trust him enough to keep listening.³

If we listen to God in His word, then by His Spirit, v. 15a will become true for us:

*For the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel has said:
“You will be delivered by returning and resting;
your strength will lie in quiet confidence.*

Verse 15 is a promise for us if we will but listen to Jesus. We are called to rest in Him, which means trusting in Him. It means we stop trying to work the system and instead listen to Jesus and rest in Him.

However, resting in Jesus does not mean that you just sit in a chair and do nothing. It means to make use of the means of grace that God has given us. *It means worshipping Jesus and praying for strength, help, hope, and peace to be given to you. It means seeking godly counsel from trusted brothers and sisters in Christ. It means faithfully being in God’s word.*

However, if we will not listen to Jesus, then v. 16 will be true for us. Look in vv. 15b-16:

*But you are not willing.”¹⁶ You say, “No!
We will escape on horses”—therefore, you will escape!—and, “We will ride on
fast horses”—
but those who pursue you will be faster.*

In other words, what Isaiah is saying is that if we think we can come up with our own means of deliverance, then we will be destroyed because we are not big enough, nor are we fast enough to outrun the Lord’s coming judgment.

If you are here and not a Christian and you believe one religion is as good as the other and being sincere is all that is important, then you are mistaken. Because only biblical Christianity is true, all other religions are false, and none of them will save you from the coming judgment.

Only those who repent and trust in Christ alone for salvation will be saved. Are you trusting in Him today?

Finally, I want to ask how this text applies to the lives of those who trust Christ. The thing is, even followers of Jesus will sometimes struggle to repent and rest in Christ. Often times Christians may struggle to listen to Jesus and therefore lose their peace in Christ.

For example, let’s consider a Christian in the workplace. He or she starts out being thankful for their job, but after a while, dissatisfaction creeps into their hearts. Then they stop resting in Jesus and finding their

³ Ray Ortlund, *Preaching the Word Series: Acts*, 173.

contentment in Him. They begin to say to themselves, *“If only I had this position or this job, then I would know I had arrived. I would feel good about myself and be satisfied.”*

Have you ever been there? You may be there right now. Here is the deal, without trusting Christ, you will never be satisfied with any promotion or position you receive. You’ll never relax because the old Rolling Stones song has come true for you, *“You can’t get no satisfaction.”*

Do you know why? It is because you are not seeking the Kingdom of God first. When you seek the Kingdom of God first, all of these things you need will be added to you. Only when you seek the Kingdom of God first will true contentment and satisfaction fill your heart. So brother and sister in Christ, who are you listening to?

III. What are you waiting for? (Is. 18-26)

Brandon read the text for point number three earlier. I love this passage. I remember many years ago committing v. 18 to memory. It was during a season of discontentment in my life. Through this verse, I learned to wait on Jesus.

Let’s read v. 18 again, and I want you to underline it in your Bible:

*Therefore the Lord is waiting to show you mercy,
and is rising up to show you compassion,
for the Lord is a just God.
All who wait patiently for him are happy.*

I just remember preaching it to myself over and over. I remember praying it over and over, and sometimes I would conclude by saying, *“Lord! What are you waiting for? You know my situation. Please, Lord, show mercy to me?”* Have you ever been there? Man! I have, and it can be difficult.

Let’s look at the reason the Lord was waiting. Look in v. 19-21:

He will show favor to you at the sound of your outcry; as soon as he hears, he will answer you.²⁰ The Lord will give you meager bread and water during oppression, but your Teacher will not hide any longer. Your eyes will see your Teacher,²¹ and whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: “This is the way. Walk in it.”

The Lord is waiting to be gracious to us at the right moment. The *“outcry”* is when we cry out to Him in full repentance and faith. In other words, God is being patient with us while we are not listening.

So, while we are doing everything except trusting Him, He is waiting for us. He is waiting for us to stop our efforts of self-salvation. He is waiting for us to trust and obey Him. He is waiting for us to get rid of the idols in our hearts. He is waiting for us to listen to Him.

When we do that, our Teacher will not hide from us anymore. We will hear Him say to us, *“This is the way. Walk in it.”* In other words, here is what I want you to do; now, get after it. I am with you. I have made straight your paths; now follow Me.

IV. Who or what do you fear? (Is. 30:27-33)

This last section of Isaiah 30 begins with fire in v. 27 and ends with fire in v. 33:

²⁷ *Look! The name of the Lord is coming from far away, his anger burning and heavy with smoke.*

His lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a consuming fire.

³³ *Indeed! Topheth has been ready for the king for a long time. Its funeral pyre is deep and wide, with plenty of fire and wood. The breath of the Lord, like a torrent of burning sulfur, kindles it.*

In this last section, God is deliverance, or He is destruction. His fire is your deliverance, or it is your destruction. This text is a very graphic depiction of the beauty of deliverance of your life for all eternity or the terror of His destruction of your life for all eternity.

For those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, seeing the fire of God will be like being at a holy festival with singing and joy. There will be music and dancing on the mountain of God as we hear the splendor of the voice of our God.

But for those who fail to turn to Christ, the voice of the Lord will be the sound of terror, and the arm of the Lord will be a consuming fire, and the breath of His song will be like a torrent of eternal burning sulfur.

If you have been reading ahead in Isaiah, then you know what is coming after these poetic prophecies that summoned Judah to trust Yahweh. The Lord is going to destroy the Assyrian army as it was camped outside of the walls of Jerusalem. These six poems of warning and judgment remind Judah to turn to God in their distress. They remind them what God will do if they will return to Him and what He will do if they do not.

Here is the ultimate application of this last question. There is a greater deliverance and destruction put before us this day. Something greater than deliverance from Assyria is here, and it is salvation from eternity in Hell by the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The wrath of God is camped outside the walls of our lives because of our sin. The only way to be delivered from it is by repenting of our sin and trusting in Christ alone. Jesus is our only hope. We must look to Him, listen to Him, hope in Him, and trust only in Him.

However, if you fail to turn from your sin and in Christ alone, then a greater destruction than the Assyrian army awaits you. Friends, the Assyrian army was the most brutal army that has walked the face of the earth. They made the Nazis look like preschoolers. After they conquered a nation, they would impale thousands of soldiers and citizens to show them what happened to those who stood against them. If there was ever a Hell on earth, it was the Assyrian army. And yet, a greater destruction awaits those who do not trust in Christ, and it is under the wrath for eternity in Hell. God's wrath is infinity worse than the Assyrian army.

The warning in Isaiah 30 is not just some old Bible story. It is an old story, but it is a story that points to the ultimate story of destruction for those who reject Jesus and deliverance for those to trust in Jesus.

Friends, for those who trust in Christ, He has quenched the fires of Hell of the wrath of God on the cross. Jesus Christ freely gave His sinless life on the cross to pay for our sin. Jesus, by His resurrection from the dead, secured eternity in Heaven for those who place their faith in Him. This is the good news of Jesus Christ. We must trust in the Rock of Israel.

Rock of Ages

1. *Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save from wrath and make me pure.*
2. *Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*
3. *Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;*

*Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

4. *While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*