

The Battle for Faith

Isaiah 31-32

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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Have you ever driven a vehicle, and the check engine light came on while you were driving it? What did you do when that happened? Are you one of those persons who see the check engine light and just keep driving the car? You don't tell anyone, and you don't take the car to the shop?

Some of you remember the Ford F-150 I owned a few years ago. I bought it from Stacy's uncle. He told me that the check engine light would come on from time to time but not to worry. It would go off because the pickup was "*self-healing*." He had been driving it for a few years and was somewhat of a mechanic, so I believed him. Sure enough, the check engine light came on, and eventually, it would go off. This happened four or five times until one day, I was driving to the office, and the thing died. I finally got it started and barely got it home. I took it to a reputable shop here in town, and they told me that the code said I needed a new motor. I took it to the Ford dealership, and they told me the same thing. I found out the timing chain was bad, the cam-phasers were out, the oil pressure was low, and so the main bearings were shot. In short, I really did need a new motor. I could have kicked myself for listening to Stacy's uncle's advice and not have taken it to the shop when the check engine light came on the first time. I'm enough of a mechanic to know better, but I did not listen to the warning signs. It was a very expensive lesson learned.

This morning we are considering the fifth check engine light that has come on for Judah or, as I called them last Sunday, warning sirens.

So, let's look at Judah's situation in Isaiah 31-32. Assyria is at the gates of Jerusalem, or they are about to be. As a result, the men of Judah are scared stiff because the most wicked army that has ever walked the face of the earth is knocking on the gates of the city. They are so scared; Isaiah 31:1 says they are considering making an alliance with Egypt, the very nation that enslaved them for 400 years.

However, while the men are shaking in their boots, it seems the women of Jerusalem are going on with business as usual. God says in Isaiah 32:9-14 that the women of Judah were ignoring the Assyrian danger. He called these women complacent, overconfident, self-indulgent, and apathetic.

This is what they were doing. They were like me and my Ford pickup; they saw the check engine light on the dash, but they just kept going. They simply turned up the music in their cars so they would not hear the engine knocking and the clanking of the wheels that were about to fall off. If they lived in our day, they would soothe their concerns with online shopping, going out to eat, and playing games on their phones.

Let's press pause right here. This is how I want us to think about this situation in Isaiah 31-32. If you remember, I've used the illustration of the two ditches before, and it will help us get our minds around what was going on here so we can see what God is saying and help us make application.

Remember, we have an enemy in Satan, and he does not want us walking with Jesus on the gospel road. Right. So, he tries to get us to drive our lives into either one of the two ditches on either side of the road.

In this situation, we want to keep walking with Jesus on the road of faith, but the enemy wants to get us into the ditches of unbelief. He does not care which ditch we are in, as long as we are in one ditch or the other.

In Isaiah 31-32, we see how our unbelief can land us in one of these two ditches. Think about it this way. The unbelief of the men drove their lives into the ditch of *anxiety*. They were trying to save themselves by seeking peace, security, and protection from Egypt. So, instead of trusting in the name of the Lord God, they were trusting in horses and chariots.

The women, on the other hand, drove into the ditch of *apathy*. Instead of trusting in the name of the Lord God, they were pretending there was not a problem, so they kept on indulging in the pleasures of life.

You see, the enemy does not care which ditch of unbelief we're in as long as we are in one. If we are stuck in the ditch of unbelief, we are not walking with Jesus on the Gospel Road.

It is like this; the real issue is not that crises come into our lives but what we do when the crises come into our lives. Bottom line: God is always at stake when crises hit our lives. The question is: Will we trust in Jesus when that crisis comes into our lives, or will we wind up in the ditch of unbelief?

Brothers and sisters, there is a battle for faith when crises come into our lives. The lessons from Isaiah 31-32 will help us understand *how the battle for faith is won*. I have two points this morning to help us work through these two chapters.

I. Don't lose your battle with unbelief

The true battle for Judah was not with Assyria but with unbelief. As I mentioned earlier, the people of Judah were falling into one of the two ditches of unbelief: The ditch of *anxiety* or the ditch of *apathy*.

Think about it this way. *Here is the deal about these ditches of unbelief*. It is not that men tend to fall in one ditch and the women in the other. Bottom line: Sin is sin, and men and women fall into one of these two ditches at some time or another. Sometimes we even get in one ditch only to cross the road to get in the other ditch. It is like we can't keep the car of faith on the gospel road. Do you know what I mean?

Let's examine these ditches of unbelief. See if you can tell in which one you might be driving the car of your life or which one you might be prone to get stuck in from time to time.

1) The Ditch of Anxiety (Is. 31:1-3)

Isaiah 31:1-3 is basically a recap of Isaiah 30. It was fear that was driving the men of Judah into the ditch of unbelief. Look in vv. 1-3:

*Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
and who depend on horses!
They trust in the abundance of chariots
and in the large number of horsemen.
They do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
and they do not seek the Lord.
² But he also is wise and brings disaster.
He does not go back on what he says;
he will rise up against the house of the wicked
and against the allies of evildoers.
³ Egyptians are men, not God;
their horses are flesh, not spirit.
When the Lord raises his hand to strike,
the helper will stumble
and the one who is helped will fall;
both will perish together.*

Fear of the Assyrian army and the anxiety of being destroyed by them was causing the leadership not to look to God for deliverance but instead look to Egypt for deliverance. Their fear and anxiety were the results of unbelief. It was "*a lack of faith in God*." Judah was not consulting the Holy One of Israel in their moment of crisis.

Instead, Judah was impressed by the strength of men. Their faith was in the horses, chariots, and men of the Egyptian army. They wanted their help to come from Egypt.

Think about it this way. There are some kinds of help and assistance that are inconsistent with how the Lord works in our lives. Let's say you are short of money and you need to pay some bills. It is okay to get a job or perhaps even get a second job to provide for your family, but it is not okay to steal or increase your debt by maxing out credit cards in order to pay other debts.

Fear and anxiety will drive our lives into the ditch of unbelief. *Unbelief will cause us to take all kinds of sinful shortcuts in our lives instead of trusting God to prove Himself to be our Provider and Deliverer.*

2) The Ditch of Apathy (Isaiah 32:9-14)

In Isaiah 32:9-14, we see how Isaiah addressed the complacent women of Judah.

⁹*Stand up, you complacent women; listen to me.*
Pay attention to what I say, you overconfident daughters. ¹⁰*In a little more than*
a year
you overconfident ones will shudder,
for the grapes will fail, and the harvest will not come.
¹¹*Shudder, you complacent ones; tremble, you overconfident ones! Strip*
yourselves bare
and put sackcloth around your waists.
¹²*Beat your breasts in mourning*
for the delightful fields and the fruitful vines,
¹³*for the ground of my people growing thorns and briers, indeed, for every*
joyous house in the jubilant city. ¹⁴*For the palace will be deserted,*
the busy city abandoned. The hill and the watchtower will become barren
places forever,
the joy of wild donkeys, and a pasture for flocks

Isaiah is not picking on women, but he is confronting the women of Judah for their sin of apathy. Yet, it was not just women who got complacent or apathetic when their crisis hit. Men will become apathetic as well.

We all have the tendency to be like the ostrich, don't we? At some point, we will all want to get away from all the stress and anxiety and just bury our heads in whatever pleasure we can find. We will bury our heads in entertainment or vacations or shopping or hobbies or drinking alcohol or even work. None of these things is sin when taken in their proper place, but when they become a means of escaping for deliverance from our problems, then they become sin. These things destroy our hearts. They turn our eyes from Jesus, and we drive our lives right into the ditch of unbelief.

What's the solution? James 4:9-10 says:

Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and
your joy to gloom. ¹⁰*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

This is the place to start. Humbling ourselves before Jesus helps us get our lives unstuck. Now, let's see what Isaiah says about how we win the battle for faith.

II. Faith is the victory over our sin of unbelief

There are lots of analogies for the Christian life in Scripture. We hear Jesus compare God's Kingdom to farming and trees and soil, and even investing. However, one of the most prominent is that of spiritual warfare.

Often when a crisis blows into our lives like a derecho, there is a battle going on in our hearts. It is the battle to have faith. It is spiritual warfare, and it is warfare for which Jesus has equipped us because He has defeated our enemy. Listen to Ephesians 6:10-18:

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. ¹¹*Put on the full*
armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²*For our*
struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the
authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual
forces in the heavens. ¹³*For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that*
you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to

take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, ¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

When you read this text, you need to realize you didn't bring anything to this fight. Jesus is the One who has equipped you with everything you need. Then, on top of that, He does the fighting for you.

This was what Isaiah was telling the people of Judah in Isaiah 31-32. I want you to see the *four ways* the Lord fights for us and how He has won the battle to give us faith in Jesus.

1) We must understand that the Lord fights our battles (Isaiah 31:4-5, 8-9)

*⁴ For this is what the Lord said to me:
As a lion or young lion growls over its prey
when a band of shepherds is called out against it,
and it is not terrified by their shouting
or subdued by their noise, so the Lord of Armies will come down to fight on
Mount Zion
and on its hill. ⁵ Like hovering birds,
so the Lord of Armies will protect Jerusalem;
by protecting it, he will rescue it;
by passing over it, he will deliver it.
⁸ Then Assyria will fall, but not by human sword;
a sword will devour him, but not one made by man.
He will flee from the sword; his young men will be put to forced labor. ⁹ His rock
will pass away because of fear, and his officers will be afraid because of the
signal flag. This is the Lord's declaration—whose fire is in Zion and whose
furnace is in Jerusalem.*

In other words, before Judah did anything, the Lord God came down and fought for them. Even while they were still sinning against Him in their anxiety and apathy, He fought for them. He condescended to them.

Then like a lion guards its prey, the Lord growled over His people to protect them. Neither Egypt nor Assyria are a match for God. The Lord of Armies fights for His people, and so the battle belongs to the Lord. Judah was not delivered by human hands but by the sword of the Lord. We know from Isaiah 37 that it was the sword of the Lord that swept through the Assyrian army and killed 185,000 soldiers.

The battle truly belongs to the Lord. Even before the battle was fought, Yahweh told Judah what would happen. These poems were not written after the battle but before the battle. It was the Sovereign Lord who saw the ends from the beginning. It is the Sovereign Lord whom we can trust.

We need to press pause right here and let this sink deep into our hearts. How often do we miss a great deliverance from Jesus because we take our eyes of faith off of Him and try to solve our problems in our own strength? How often do we miss the blessing of God's great deliverance because of our unbelief? Jesus has already won our battle with unbelief on the cross. He won it while we were still sinners. He paid our debt for our sin of unbelief and purchased our faith, and when He rose from the dead, He rose as the King Victorious.

Brothers and sisters, we serve the Lord of Armies who fights for us. He knows the ends from the beginning. Judah didn't know what the Lord of Armies was going to do to save them, but all He required of them was to trust Him, and then what we will see later in this chapter is that He gave them the faith to believe.

2) Repentance is a gift of grace (Is. 31:6-7)

When the Lord saves us, our hearts are transformed. This is the biblical pattern: salvation and then transformation. Salvation first, and then transformation follows.

Now we see it when Yahweh alone delivers Judah from both Egypt and Assyria. When the people of Jerusalem saw their salvation, they were going to repent. Look in vv. 6-7:

⁶ *Return to the one the Israelites have greatly rebelled against. ⁷ For on that day¹, every one of you will reject the worthless idols of silver and gold that your own hands have sinfully made.*

Last week we saw that these idols of silver and gold were actually idols of the heart that manifested themselves in these images. The Hebrew word for *idol* here is the word *elilim*. It sounds a lot like the Hebrew word for God—*Elohim*. Isaiah's point is that idols have no place in the hearts of God's people.

True worship of Jesus includes faith in Christ that drives out the idols of the heart. *Then we live a life of repentance* by continually turning from the idols that seek to rule and reign in our hearts.

This is one of the more important acts of worship we practice every Sunday in spending time in confession of sin and repenting of our sin. Why? It is because idols have no place in the worship of Jesus.

Friends, it is not a negative thing to confess your sin and repent of that sin every Sunday morning. Instead, it is a very gracious spiritual habit given to us by the Holy Spirit. I hope and pray repenting and believing in Jesus is not just something you do on Sunday mornings but something that is a part of your daily spiritual life.

3) Transformation of the heart is the victory of faith (Isaiah 32:1-4 & 15-20)

This summons concludes with more promises than a warning. The first promise was that the Lord fights our battles. The second is that repentance is a gift of grace and this final promise is that the hearts of God's people are transformed when the Lord pours out His Spirit upon them.

Look in vv. 1-4 & 15-18:

¹ *Indeed, a king will reign righteously, and rulers will rule justly. ² Each will be like a shelter from the wind, a refuge from the rain, like flowing streams in a dry land and the shade of a massive rock in an arid land.*

³ *Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen.*

⁴ *The reckless mind will gain knowledge, and the stammering tongue will speak clearly and fluently . . . ¹⁵ until the Spirit from on high is poured out on us. Then the desert will become an orchard, and the orchard will seem like a forest.*

¹⁶ *Then justice will inhabit the wilderness, and righteousness will dwell in the orchard.*

¹⁷ *The result of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quiet confidence forever. ¹⁸ Then my people will dwell in a peaceful place, in safe and secure dwellings.*

¹ "That day" was the day of deliverance from Assyria.

We began this sermon by examining the two ditches of unbelief God's people can fall into when crisis hits. In this last section of the summons, God's people have been filled with His Spirit, and now they are out of the ditches and on the gospel road once more.

The outpouring of God's Spirit changes everything. In v. 1, we learn that the king and the rulers will lead the nation in righteousness and justice. In v. 2, they will guard and protect the people, so the nation flourishes. Then in v. 3, the eyes of the blind will be opened, and they will see. The ears of the deaf will hear. Finally, in v. 4, those who were slow to understand and speak with the knowledge of God will speak clearly and accurately.

Then v. 15 tells us the desert becomes a fruitful orchard and not just an orchard but a forest that is an orchard. God's people are many, and they are very fruitful when the Spirit of God invades their hearts.

Then we see in vv. 16-17 that the community of faith is transformed. Where there was a wasteland of injustice, now justice and righteousness fill the orchard of God's community of people. Now they have confidence but not confidence in themselves but in their Living God who dwells in their hearts by His Spirit.

Finally, in v. 18, the peace, security, and safety they longed for have arrived. It arrived not by anxiety and apathy but by repentance and faith in the God who fights for them.

Ancient Judah only got a taste of what we know in Christ. In Christ, these promises have been fulfilled. He is the King of Righteousness who guards and protects His people. He opened the eyes of the blind and ears of the deaf. It is by His Holy Spirit that we all can understand the word of God and teach others the good news of Jesus.

In Jesus, when the water of the Spirit falls on the dry desert hearts of sinners, Jesus raises those dead hearts to life. He fills them with His Holy Spirit, and they become exceedingly fruitful. If you are in Christ, then you have had this promise filled in your life.

Yet, there is more to come. The Holy Spirit is a deposit of even greater fulfillment of an even sweeter fellowship with Jesus that is to come. Friends, it is only going to get better. I know we live in dark, desperate times right now, but there is a day coming when the Sovereign Lord will transform everything.

The last two verses remind us of the importance of being ready. They are a poetic way of saying when the temptation to unbelief comes; you don't need to run to Egyptian slavery but remember God will save you.

Verse 19 tells us of the destruction of those who trust in man-made means of salvation:

*But hail will level the forest,
and the city will sink into the depths.*

In other words, judgment and eternal death await those who do not turn to Christ in faith.

Then in v. 20, He reiterates what He has been saying:

*You will be happy as you sow seed
beside abundant water,
and as you let oxen and donkeys range freely.*

Now sowing seed, abundant water, and oxen and donkeys roaming freely may not sound like paradise to you, but this is poetry. The imagery is that of Sabbath Rest and abundance. It is when you lack no good thing. It is when Jesus has fully and finally fulfilled all the promises of God, and you are part of it. It is when we are caught up in the experience of sweet fellowship with all that God is for us in Jesus. This is God's plan for His people.

Friend, is the check engine light of your life on right now because you do not know Jesus? Do not simply ignore the warning. Do not keep driving your life in the ditches of unbelief. Jesus is calling you to repent of your sin of unbelief and place the faith He gives you in Him.

Jesus has already won the battle when He gave His life on the cross for sinners. He won the battle when He died for our sin, and then He rose victoriously on the third day. We can trust Him. He will save you and transform your life. He will set you on the gospel road. Then come and walk that road with us at Grand Avenue.

19th-century pastor and theologian Charles Spurgeon summarizes our battle with unbelief well when he says:

God's people will not be in a hurry to run away, for they shall not be overcome with the fear which causes panic. When others are flying here and there as if their wits had failed them, believers will be quiet, calm, and deliberate. And so they will be able to act wisely in the hour of testing.

They will not be in a hurry with their expectation, craving their good things at once and on the spot. Instead, they will wait [for] God's time . . . They will not be in a hurry to plunge into wrong or questionable actions. Unbelief must be doing something, and thus it works its own undoing. But faith [means we do not hurry but go at God's] speed . . .

What about me? Am I believing, and am I, therefore, keeping to the believer's pace, which is walking with God?

[I must say to myself]: "Be at peace, [my] fluttering spirit! Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him!"²

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Promises of God*, Nov. 29.