

Title: Afraid of the Dark
Text: Isaiah 9.8 – 10.4
Theme: Anatomy of Sin
Series: Isaiah #13
Prop Stmt: The demise of culture is the opportunity for the church.
Aim: I aim to call my people to trust in Christ and see our calling as a church to be truly counter-cultural by being a reflection of the true culture.

God made people for his pleasure. Because God is a good God, he gets pleasure out of the glad trusting and loving obedience of his children. He is right to demand this. It is for our highest pleasure and good. But, if we rebel against him, he cannot deny his own goodness and righteousness and pretend that your rebellion is “no big deal.” If we refuse to turn to him, he cannot and will not turn to us, but will rather turn against us. He does this reluctantly. He does this with great angst. He does this with repeated warnings. He does this slowly, but he does it. His slowness to anger is viewed by many as a reason to keep on rebelling. But, as this text reveals, that is a grave mistake on two levels. 1) There comes a point where God turns his hand against you and just as his mercy was long, his wrath can be relentless. 2) The longer a person stays in sin, the more deceived, entrenched, arrogant and blind he becomes. Sin is initially seen as a toy to be played with, something in which to find a thrill, not realizing that like a Boa Constrictor it is winding its way around your affections and thinking until what used to be wrong, is now right and what was right is now wrong. This giving over of a person, a group, even a nation to their vices results in complete social implosion, chaos and destruction. This is exactly what this text is speaking of.

Read Text:

It is helpful to know the historical setting of this. But historians do not look deep enough. For example, God has just promised Judah that the dual threat of the Syrian-Israeli coalition will be wiped out. But, one could argue, it was because Assyria was stronger and able to defeat them. No! The problem was not with Ephraim’s (n. kingdom/Israel) lack of military power and strategy, but because Ephraim rebelled against God. Isaiah’s main audience is in the southern kingdom. He uses the northern kingdom as an example of what is going to happen to Judah unless they repent of their rebellion. So, while he writes this prophecy with the N. Kingdom as the immediate audience, he writes ultimately for Judah. Look at Israel. Learn from their failures. Don’t repeat them! Just as Assyria is not the solution to Judah’s problem (God is), Assyria is not the real problem to Israel; Israel’s rebellion against God is the problem. Assyria, for all her might, intimidation and barbaric cruelty is nothing more than an instrument in the hand of God.

Who are you going to trust? God or Assyria? God’s way or man’s way? Look at what God puts forth! Look at the signs that he gives to demonstrate that he controls events. If he can determine the birth of a child and the outcome of wars and the establishment or demise of empires and the coming of the KING, then you had better trust him! What other evidence could you want? Look at how God has gone on record to show you that he is God and he is in charge. If you have a heart to trust him, then these promises and their

fulfillment are satisfying and encouraging to you. If you don't then it doesn't matter how much evidence God puts in your face, does it? These signs that Isaiah wrote about that were fulfilled so obviously, are arrogantly dismissed by cynics as mere coincidences, who themselves, like Ahaz presume to sit in judgment of the Judge!

When we next study Matthew, we will see that this problem of cynics was not resolved. These Jews did not learn their lesson. In spite of the coming of Christ, there was the same response! What other evidence could you want? The sick are healed. The blind see, the lame walk and even the dead are raised again! How do you explain this? And how can you go on rejecting Christ?! Sin does not make sense. People mistakenly believe that they can flirt with it, dabble in it, and before the bottom drops out, go back and patch things up with God. What makes you think that God will tolerate rebellion indefinitely? The zeal of the LORD (of hosts) is a double-edged sword. Review 9.6-7. The coming king (returning King) is guaranteed. We see now, what even Isaiah did not know, and that is how this was going to happen (first advent). Now, we do not know how this is going to happen exactly in his return, but we know that he will.

This warning to Israel comes in the form of a poem. The poem has 4 parts, each concluding with the same refrain: "*For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.*" Each of the 4 parts shows the relationship between the judgment themes of this book. 1) Arrogance is the root problem of man. It leads to 2) corrupt leaders. This leads to 3) anarchy, which is the loss of basic care for one another. The end result is a barbaric culture that is marked by two options: 4) destroy or be destroyed –complete social injustice.

1. **The announcement: Judgment upon arrogance is certain.** (8-12)

A. **The Lord has sent a word** (8)

When the Lord sends a word, it is not an idle threat. Were you ever on a vacation, and doing something that you shouldn't, when your dad or mom said, "If you don't cut it out, we are turning around and going home."? You knew full well that wasn't going to happen. The fact is, one of the worst things that you can do as a parent is to make idle threats or empty promises. Of course that means that you have to be very careful about your words. But, if you say that you are going to do something, you need to follow through. Why? As a parent, you are a representative of God in your child's life. Your child needs to know that God does not give out idle threats or empty promises. His promises to bless, to help, to forgive and to love those who trust him are absolute. But in order for those to be true, you must understand that his promises to judge, to oppress, to crush and to reject are also true. When God makes an announcement, that announcement is tied directly to the event. Unless something drastic happens, that event is going to happen. But, that announcement is given from a God who loves to be merciful. And there are times when God turns an announcement of judgment into a message of hope.

B. **"But we"** (10)

Do you see what is happening here? The Israelites are so arrogant that some of them are saying that it really doesn't matter if the Assyrians come in here. If they knock down our mud-brick walls, we'll just use that as an opportunity to renovate and rebuild with designer stones. WE will turn disaster into progress!! What bravado! What arrogance! What foolishness! Like the guys sitting in a bar in Key West, FL daring a category 5 hurricane to hit them, and drinking to it! Man does not have the final word. God does...

C. **“But the LORD”** (11-12)

Man is full of words, but the LORD has THE Word because He is THE Word. The Bible records a number of “but the LORD” moments. In 2 Samuel 11, David thought that since he was the king he could have any woman in his kingdom, but the LORD thought differently. Belshazzar thought that as the King of Babylon he could mock the God of Israel, and in a hedonistic banquet he ordered that the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem be brought out so that he could drink from them in a show of his bravado! Then, inexplicably a human hand appeared on the wall and began writing a message to the king! That is what you call a “but the LORD” moment. God always, always, always, always has the final word. Always! Here, his final word upon Israel is judgment. All that talk about what we will do is a joke. Man's glory, ceremonies, titles, applause, power and speeches are nothing more than the flicker of a frail candle wallowing in a few remaining drops of wax. When the Sun of God's glory arises all of man's lights are nothing! And yet, most of this world is marked by bravado. Most would rather go to hell singing, “I did it my way” than enjoy God since that means submitting to him. Does that make any sense? No. Pride never does. God has to respond to rebellion and he does. So, then, why do people continue to rebel? Sin is irrational. The poem (song) is clear. Judgment on Israel is certain. Judah: pay attention. Learn! Here are 3 reasons for the judgment: Keep in mind that these sins not only bring judgment, they are part of God's judgment.

2. **Judgment Reason #1: Leaders who won't speak the truth.** (13-17)

I have had couples ask me to marry them. In some cases, they should not get married and I tell them. I do not enjoy doing that. But, one day I will stand before God and give an account of my life and ministry. In those times when I have shown from God's word, with mercy, love, and pleading, why they should not get married, it usually does not go well. Sometimes entire families have left the church, which is grievous. What is worse, is that often they will find a minister who will do the wedding, no questions asked. Of course, that is the problem – no questions asked. The title, minister implies something – doesn't it? (just like the title “prophet” in Isaiah's day) If one says that this is wrong, but another says, that it is fine, then it only appears to be a matter of preference, personality, or some other minor issue. And when I am compared to the other, I appear to be the narrow-minded, old-school, when I am simply attempting to be honest with the text and loving to the people. But some of you are in the same boat – aren't you? If you have joint custody with children and you are the parent who really seeks to protect your child from a lot of the garbage in this world, your children are likely to compare you with the other parent who lets them do whatever they want – no questions asked. Or, your kids may compare your parenting to the parenting of some of their friends and they say things like,

“Do you realize that I am the only kid in the state of Michigan that has a curfew!?” All of my friends get iPhones, cars and expense accounts – and you, you expect me to make my bed? You expect me to go to school, do my homework? I thought you loved me! Does that sting? Yes! But step back for a minute and look at the situation from outside of it.

Parents, ministers, government officials and in our text, prophets are supposed to provide leadership for the people who are under their care. Leadership is NOT taking a poll of everyone all the time and asking them what you ought to believe and what you ought to be doing. If you do not know what you believe and what you ought to be doing, you are not leading, you are only taking a walk. Leaders have to lead. But, that exposes the problem. Many do not want leaders to lead; they want leaders to follow. They want leaders who will tell them what they want to hear and they will vote such people into power. And there are plenty of people who have no integrity and will tell people what they want to hear, in order to get into that position of power and they use that position of power only to stay in power.

In Isaiah’s day, and in our day, this is not only a serious problem in the government, it is a serious problem with religious leaders. I am frustrated with government leaders who pander to the self-centered interests of people by promising that the government will take care of them from the cradle to the grave. For decades, the government has been writing checks that it cannot cash and there is not enough money to sustain it. But, if anyone dares talk about cutting benefits, or cutting services, or being fiscally responsible, they get crucified in the media. And yet, I am not surprised by that. I get frustrated with it, but am not surprised. However, when the church caters to the wishes of the people, and only tells people what they want to hear (under the guise of being relevant or practical), and only preaches on topics that make people feel good about themselves, then the church is no longer a lighthouse, but a canyon that simply echoes the lost-ness and empty sounds of the culture. That is exactly what Isaiah is not only talking about here, but what he faced. There were prophets who in contrast to him told the people what they wanted to hear. They were lying, but the people would rather listen to the lies because it made them feel good rather than listen to Isaiah who was calling on them to repent. If the leaders are off course, where is that going to take the country? Sin is deceitful. We would rather believe lies, than deal with the truth. The weight of this text is heavy. Leaders who lie are part of the consequences of rejecting God’s word. If you won’t listen to the One who loves you enough to tell you the truth, then there will always be those who disdain you enough to tell you lies. Leaders who lie are not part of God’s judgment but it leads to worse things.

3. **Judgment Reason #2: Every one lives for self.** (18-21)

Note the relationship. When you realize that leaders lie and that you cannot trust them, who do you trust? Yourself! That is called anarchy. Verses 18-21 describe a society that is beginning to unravel. The last phrase of v.19 captures it well. (Note v.20-21) Once sin is unleashed, there is no stopping it. The wickedness of a society that is cannibalizing itself is described as a consuming fire. But that is not all that is at work. V.19 speaks of the wrath of the LORD as a fire as well.

What is sin? It is rebellion against God. Since God is the creator, God has made things, ordered things, named things and defined them. For example, God made marriage as part of his order to creation. God then defined marriage as one man and one woman in a covenant relationship. Of course, in our day we know better than that – don't we? We are obviously superior in our experience and knowledge to God and believe that marriage should be able to be defined how we want. New York State voted to redefine marriage. The New York Times from Friday, December 2, reported that four Republicans voted with the bill and are showered with cash from the gay community). This means that if you open up the definition of marriage to be re-defined, not only do you open it up, but you cannot close it. If you think you can declare that marriage can be between two men or two women, then why not between a man and an animal? Why not between a man and a boy or a girl? Who are you to impose your values on someone else? Who are you to say if a cow does not have feelings? It is madness on a social level, but there is something fundamentally deeper that is going on. This is ultimately a rejection of God's order of things. Sin says, "I am not satisfied with God's order. I will seek satisfaction by means of denying God's order." There is no satisfaction with that. Rebellion against God never satisfies, it only fuels the desire. Anarchy never leads to order, but only chaos. This chaos is like a frenzied mob that burns and pillages just because. There is no goal other than utter destruction. There is no loyalty, no true friendship, brother destroys brother. This too, is part of God's judgment. And it does not end there.

4. **Judgment Reason #3: The weak are destroyed.** (10.1-4)

This is where it comes to. The vulnerable are crushed. The needy are exploited. The weak are killed. Now, we have other names for it. We call it abortion. We call it giving women the right to choose. And while Isaiah was writing about his day, it is more than uncanny to see how this describes us. It is sobering to realize where we are in this scale. Later in this book Isaiah asks the question, "*Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?*" (49.15) The obvious and natural answer is – No! But, when a society gets to the place where women are forgetting their children, it speaks to the end of the line of moral decay. This is where a society arrives at, when it has thrown out all true morality. Do you realize that our country, our beloved United States of America, the land of the free and the home of the brave ranks as the highest in child homicides among industrialized countries? In fact, 3 out of 10 child homicides are carried out by the mother. "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees!" Abortion laws were passed under the guise of eliminating unwanted children who would only be subjected to abuse and neglect. So, what did we do? We tolerated, codified, sanctified, and attempted to moralize child homicide. We have said, "Murder is legal." Just because man's court says it, doesn't make it legal. This does not show our progress, this reveals how deep our rebellion is against God. We are not only rebelling against God's revealed law, we are rebelling against basic natural, common law. And the result? All we did was help create a culture where killing children is tolerated and acceptable. This is our country. Now some of you know this firsthand. When you are expecting a child, some physicians really urge you to have an amniocentesis in order to find out before birth if there is anything wrong with the child? The obvious question is, and if there is, then what? I have listened to some of you tell me the pressure that you were

under to abort the child because the test results came back suspect. Fascinating technology, sophisticated terminology, impressive educational degrees does not matter. We are a barbaric nation. We murder babies for convenience, but become fixated on Casey Anthony. I think the reason so many hated her, is that she is us. Again, I am frustrated with a government that promotes a culture of death and politicians who defend it. I cannot ever, ever understand how someone could vote for a pro-death politician. There is no justification for that. Do you see the connection? You cannot get to this point in your position of tolerating the killing of the weak without accepting the things like leaders who lie and everyone in it for self. Because any politician who tells you that abortion is a woman's right is lying to you. Anyone who says that it should be legal is lying to you. Anyone who thinks that it should be legal is deceived and does not possess a moral compass. But what is worse, far worse is when the church will either tolerate abortion, or will refuse to speak up about it, because it is controversial. If we are controversial then people will not want to come back to church because they will feel uncomfortable.

10.3 echoes 9.8. Judgment is coming. But the judgment is not coming from a selfish, temperamental deity whose creepy advances have been spurned. This is the broken-hearted response of the Artist, whose very creation has turned on Him, rejecting in suicidal rebellion its own nature and existence. Unless God responds, there will be no world. The text is clear. Every person who gained power at the expense of others will suffer the same fate. How will they die? Afraid of the dark! There is no bravado before God. And while this is the sad story of Israel and the sad story of our own nation, it doesn't have to be that way. Are you ready for some good news?

- 1) Into this mess and "to us" the Christ-child was promised and has come!
- 2) He redeemed us from this, but has called us to represent him in this messy world. We are here to be life in the midst of decay. That sounds noble, but what exactly does that mean and how do we do that? Well, let's look at the 4 points of this text and why God pronounced judgment upon these people.

- Instead of being arrogant, we are called to be humble. This starts by humbling ourselves before God, which then leads to being a people who tell the truth. We have to have leaders who tell us the truth about God and about ourselves. The truth is, we are sinners. We are a mess. We are not inherently better than anyone else. We cannot preach ourselves, commend ourselves or promote ourselves. We can only preach, commend and promote the only One who can rescue us and that is Christ! Those who have trusted in Christ truly become part of his family, his people, his nation, his kingdom! This kingdom is not marked by power, as the world understands it, but is marked by love, serving and genuine care for each other. No, we do not do it perfectly, but, this is true family. This is where we connect, where we care, where serve, where we stick with and do not abandon. We do not do charitable things to make ourselves feel good about ourselves or to take pictures and impress ourselves with how well we take care of the less fortunate. We are the less fortunate! We are all beggars who, by the grace of God stumbled upon the riches of Christ and here is what we discovered, there's enough for every beggar! That is why we care for the weak. Our world is imploding; our country's future is in peril. But there is

a refuge in Christ that will stand forever. Come to him, trust in him. His kingdom, and only his kingdom, is forever.