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Sermon Notes

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## **Two Paths to Eternity**

### **Isaiah 8:1-22**

In 1916, Robert Frost wrote his most famous poem, “The Road Not Travelled,” describing a quandary he found himself in... he was walking through a yellow forest in the fall, enjoying himself until he came to a fork in the road... which direction should he go? He looked as far as he could down each path to try to decide which one to take, but could only see so far; each path seemed to have an equal claim to his affections... he wished he could do both, but he doubted he would ever have another chance

He decided in the end to take the road less travelled, and he said ‘that has made all the difference.’

Jesus Christ describes even more poignantly a far more significant choice... it has to do with the entire way you live your life, and the final destination of your soul

Every single person in this room is an eternal being... you will spend eternity in either heaven or hell... and our path describes our destination!!

### **I. Two Paths to Eternity**

#### **A. Christ’s Clarity: Two Different Roads, Two Different Eternities**

***Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

#### **B. So Also Isaiah: Two Ways Woven Together**

1. Side by side, running through the last two-thirds of this marvelous chapter, two different paths, two different ways

***Isaiah 8:11 The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people.***

2. I want to unravel them and look at them separately... but Isaiah has them in intimate connection

3. Appropriate... for the children of God and of the devil live side by side in this world... the wheat and the tares grow together and it's hard to tell them apart until Judgment Day
4. It is my privilege and duty as a preacher of the Word to make these two ways to live abundantly clear to you... and to warn you tenderly to flee to Christ
5. Christ is the only way to salvation

***John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."***

## II. Terrifying Context: Assyria Invades the Region

### A. Phase 1: Assyria Comes to "Deliver" Judah

1. Context: the alliance of two enemies... Israel and Aram against little Judah
  - a. Isaiah warned them not to fear, not to do anything stupid, but to trust in the Lord
  - b. BUT Ahaz refused this, and actually sent for the King of Assyria to help him against these two kings

Remember: it's like a small mouse, terrified of two large rats, asking a ravenous cat for help

### 2. A Mysterious Message Given Twice

- a. Written on a large scroll for everyone to read... like the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast... a mysterious warning

***Isaiah 8:1 The LORD said to me, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz"***

Translation: "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil"

- b. Then, a baby boy with the same prophetic name, born to Isaiah and his wife
  - i) The boy becomes a prophetic TIME CLOCK...

***Vs. 4 Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria."***

Literally in the Hebrew "abbi" or "immi"... those are among the first words a baby speaks...

I asked my wife... she said a year or two at the most

c. Within that brief span, Assyria will swoop down like a vicious bird of prey and destroy Ephraim and Aram... the two kings they dread would be destroyed, their land laid waste and Judah would be TEMPORARILY spared

3. BUT... Assyria will still be “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil...” and they will not stay away for long!!

#### B. Phase 2: Assyria Comes to Destroy Judah

1. The Reasons Given: what they rejected and what they rejoiced in

a. What they rejected

***Isaiah 8:6 "Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah..."***

- i) These gently flowing waters are contrasted directly with the mighty floodwaters of the King of Assyria, with all his pomp
- ii) They are overawed, deeply impressed with the POWER and POMP of the King of Assyria... evident, obvious worldly power
- iii) By contrast, the “gently flowing waters of Shiloah” represent God’s provision for His people... subtle, quiet, sufficient
- iv) It refers to a trickling stream from the Gihon River carried by an aqueduct that fed a small pool and met the water needs of the city of Jerusalem
- v) THEY REJECTED IT... God’s quiet, gentle provision

b. What they rejoiced in

***"Because this people ... rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah***

- i) The Hebrew implies a great exultation, a shout of elation and triumph
- ii) I believe it refers to gloating sinfully over the demise of these two dreaded foes, Aram and Israel

German word captures this: *schadenfreude*... delight in other people’s misery

So much of American popular culture is based on it: police shows in which real people are shown being arrested, fascination with bad news about other people’s suffering, rejoicing in the demise of a political figure you despise, delight in the injury of another team’s star player, the “Survivor” show when some prideful contestant finally gets voted off... etc.

God HATES it, because it is basically arrogance... not “There but for the grace of God go I” but rather “HA!! Their finally getting what they deserve!” or “Better you than me!”

***Proverbs 17:5 whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.***

***Proverbs 24:17 Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice***

Job in his defense of his godly life rejected *schadenfreude*.

***Job 31:29 "If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him... then [may I be cursed]"***

iii) especially evil in that the demise of Remaliah at the hands of Assyria represented the end of Ten Tribes of Israel because of idolatry...

iv) The people of Judah should have been weeping over the demise of their own brothers, and repenting of their own sin... more on this in a moment

c. Because of these things, Assyria is coming to DESTROY JUDAH as well!!!

***Isaiah 8:7-8 therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River--the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks <sup>8</sup> and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!"***

2. The Prophecy: Assyria is coming for you too, O gloating Judah, like a river overflowing its banks in a massive flood

a. Note the accuracy of the prophecy:

***It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks <sup>8</sup> and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck.***

Image: a man trapped by the legs, unable to escape... the floodwaters of the river come higher and higher, reaching even up to his neck... it speaks of the NEAR but NOT TOTAL destruction of Judah

C. Phase 3: Assyria Comes to Be Destroyed in Judah

1. Phase 1: Assyria the rescuer, delivers Judah from Israel and Aram... the very thing Ahaz asked them to come do
2. Phase 2: Assyria the destroyer... they turn their sights on the little kingdom of Judah next and seek to devour it as well... the destruction is ALMOST complete
3. Phase 3: Assyria itself will be destroyed... as will any nation that seeks to wipe out the people of God

**Isaiah 8:9-10** *Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered!*  
<sup>10</sup> *Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.*

4. Why? Because God is sovereign and rules the nations... and it doesn't matter how powerful they may seem!

The fulfillment of this will come when Assyria loses 185,000 troops in ONE NIGHT to the angel of the Lord in answer to the prayer of godly King Hezekiah... more in chapter 37!!!

D. God With "Us"... But Who is "Us"?

**Vs. 10** *Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.*

1. Key expression: God is with us... "Immanuel"
2. But the key question: who does God fight for? Who is the "us" in the term "God with us"??
3. The rest of the chapter answers that question... positively and negatively... woven intricately together, living side by side in the land
4. Our task... unravel the way of light from the way of darkness... eight descriptions of each from Isaiah 8

### III. The Way of Light

A. A Life In God's Strong Grip

**Isaiah 8:11** *The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people.*

1. The way of life begins with a sense of the hand of Almighty God upon you, keeping you from death and destruction... plucking you from the highway of hell
2. The "strong hand upon me" is God's... and he has taken hold of all His elect, in the grip of sovereign grace and He will never let us go

**John 10:27-30** *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."*

3. This sense of God's sovereign grip of grace is essential to the way of light

B. A Life Listening to God's Word... and Warnings

***Isaiah 8:11 The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said...***

1. Isaiah was a prophet and heard God speak to him
2. He heard God's promises and took seriously His warnings
3. This is the essence of the way of light: walking in the Lord of the Lord and His word... hearing His voice

***John 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me***

4. The heeding of the warnings is central to this life of faith... hearing the warning against a way that leads to hell

C. A Life Apart from the Crowd

***Isaiah 8:11-12 The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people.***

1. God calls Isaiah away from the lifestyle of the crowd
2. As Jesus had said, the road to destruction is broad and MANY enter through it
3. Isaiah was not to see the threat of Israel and Aram the way faithless, fearful Ahaz did... nor was he to be impressed with the King of Assyria, or to trust in the King of Assyria to deliver Judah from their enemies... nor was he to tremble at the threats they trembled at
4. It is a life of separation, a life apart from the crowd

***2 Corinthians 6:17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."***

D. A Life of Fearlessness... and Fear

***Isaiah 8:12-13 Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. <sup>13</sup> The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread***

1. The hearts of Ahaz and the people were trembling in fear and unbelief at the threat of Israel and Aram... at Rezin and Remaliah's son... because of the secret pact they had made, the conspiracy to invade Judah and destroy it
2. God warns Isaiah not to call conspiracy what his people did, and not to fear it or dread it

So many people spend much time fretting over conspiracy theories... the Illuminati, the Knights Templar, the cabal of clever men trying to take over the world's economies... the secret codes and handshakes... precursors to the "one-world government"

I know very well there is in fact a conspiracy to take over the world... it is led by Satan himself, and it has been striving for world domination for millennia

DO NOT FEAR THIS!!!

3. Rather, this is the one you are to fear... FEAR ME, the Holy, holy, holy God... the one who dwells in unapproachable light, the one before whom angels cover their faces
4. Fearing me, you need fear NOTHING ELSE... fail to fear me, and you need fear EVERYTHING ELSE!!!

***Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***

Too many Christians live in constant fear of men... fear of what others will think and do; God wants us to fear him and to hate sin... and thus to need to fear nothing else

**"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth" John Wesley**

E. A Life Resting in the True Sanctuary

***Isaiah 8:13-14 The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, <sup>14</sup> and he will be a sanctuary***

1. The way of light is a way of resting constantly in the safety and the security of God's protection
2. Ultimately, this is fulfilled in the finished work of Christ on the cross... the only safe refuge there can ever be from sin

***Proverbs 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.***

***Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

F. A Life in the Written Word

***Isaiah 8:1 The LORD said to me, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen***

***Isaiah 8:16 Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples.***

***Isaiah 8:20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.***

1. Isaiah focuses on the written word of God... the clear record of His will for His will... of His promises for them and of His warnings as well
2. True disciples of Isaiah, and of the Lord, will read constantly the word of the Lord which He has spoken through the prophets
3. The law of God they will read, and it will be written also on their hearts
4. As we will see in a moment, those on the road of darkness are constantly searching for other sources of spiritual wisdom... they are looking for mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter...

the only true spiritual wisdom and guidance available is from the written word of God

5. The centerpiece of the word of God is CHRIST

***2 Timothy 3:15 the holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.***

G. A Life Inquiring of God

***Isaiah 8:19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?***

1. Prayer is also at the center of the way of light taught in Isaiah 8
2. Searching for light, searching for truth, they seek it in the written word of God... but they seek it BY PRAYER... inquiring of God to show them the way
3. Perhaps behind these poignant verses is the terrible example of King Saul... in his apostasy, he never inquired of God, never sought His face in prayer, never asked Him what to do... David frequently did this!!
4. Seeking to inquire of the Lord... at the end of his life, the night before he died, King Saul inquired of a witch at Endor... more on this in a moment
5. True disciples will constantly seek wisdom from the Lord in prayer and in the study of the word

H. Ultimately: A Life of Faith in the Lord

***Isaiah 8:17 I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him.***



1. Waiting on the Lord... trusting in Him, even when it seems He is hiding His face
2. We are justified by faith in Christ... simply by trusting in Him

#### IV. The Way of Darkness

##### A. A Life Spent Rejecting God's Gentle Provision

***Isaiah 8:6 "Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah***

1. As we saw, the people of Judah rejected the gentle provision of God
2. The "still small voice"... the peaceful flowing waters of God

***Jeremiah 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.***

3. This rejection is no accident... it is a willful choice to hear the grace of God and turn away to something else

##### B. A Life of Rejoicing While Others Suffer Judgment

***Isaiah 8:6 Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah***

1. The people of Judah ENJOYED seeing their enemies fall... they GLOATED over the judgment of Israel and Aram
2. this is a great sin, as we've seen... rejoicing in the downfall of your enemies
3. It reflects a cold heart, total lovelessness
4. BUT even worse, it neglects the simple fact that the sinner deserves the exact same judgment!!!
5. When we see the tragedy of sin and judgment in other's lives, it should cause us to humble ourselves before God... we should REPENT or PERISH in the same way
6. Instead, we tend to watch some criminal at Enron, or some politician who gets caught with a high-priced prostitute, or some athlete who gets caught with drugs and cluck our tongues self-righteously and say "Serves them right!!"
7. This self-righteousness is the enemy of our souls... as Jesus pointed out

- a. Luke 13:1-5, some gloated over some Galileans who died while offering sacrifices... the assumption was they must have been really secretly wicked
- b. Jesus said

***Luke 13:1-5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish***

He said the same about some others who died when a tower fell on them

But people on the road to destruction gloat at the misfortune of others and never look inward to see that they deserve the same!!

#### C. A Life of Stumbling Over God... and Being Snared by Him

***Isaiah 8:14-15 but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. <sup>15</sup> Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured."***

1. God was meant to be a sanctuary for both houses of Israel... by simple faith
2. Instead He turned against them and was a stone that caused them to stumble and a rock that made them fall
3. They stumbled over His holiness, His jealousy that He be their only God, His covenant stipulations, His pure eyes that could not tolerate their wandering hearts and lives
4. So it is even today... those on the road to destruction hate God, and the things of God... they stumble in blindness and hate what they should love and love what they should hate... **they especially stumble over Christ, as we shall see**

#### D. A Life of False Spiritual Guidance

***Isaiah 8:19-20 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup> To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.***

1. People are desperate for spiritual guidance... they want to know what to do and what the future holds
2. Mediums and spiritists contact the dead on behalf of the living...like King Saul the night before he died... he consulted the witch at Endor, who conjured up an image of the dead Samuel... he told him he and his sons would be killed by the Philistines that very next day

3. They whisper and mutter... they look into crystal balls, they channel spirits and conjure up long dead relatives to give spiritual guidance
4. They use the Ouija board and open themselves up to evil influences
5. Why? Because the dead cannot speak to the living... the evil dead are too busy screaming in agony in hell, and the righteous dead know that God has spoken adequately in the word
6. Instead, it is demons who impersonate the dead and deceive those who consult them

#### E. A Life of Spiritual Famine and Restless Roaming

***Isaiah 8:21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.***

1. Having rejected the “gently flowing waters” of Christ, they are thirsty
2. Having rejected the “bread of life”—Christ—they are starving
3. They are abused by demonic forces, “harassed and helpless” totally at the mercy of demons who have NO MERCY... they become demonic themselves
4. They are hungry for wisdom, hungry for guidance, hungry for a touch from God, hungry for love, hungry for purpose in life...
5. They roam about like Satan and like the demons

***Matthew 12:43 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it.***

***Job 1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."***

So sad to see the roaming of lost people, hungry for something in life, but not finding it

They turn to alcohol, to sex, to pleasure, to drugs, to travel, to material possessions, to Eastern mysticism, to false religions, to ANYTHING but God

All those excursions leave them hungrier and hungrier

This is the way that leads to destruction

Soon, it leads them to rage...

#### F. A Life of Rage and Cursing

***Isaiah 8:21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.***

1. Instead of repenting for having rejected God's sweet provision, they actually become enraged... they live lives of anger, of frustration and cursing
2. They fight against God and against all God-ordained authority... they curse their king and their God
3. They are living like Satan who is the most rage-filled being

***Revelation 12:12 But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."***

4. Roaming the earth, restless and hungry, they are filled with rage and cursing
5. This is the life of the unbeliever

G. Ultimately: A Life of Darkness Now and Eternally

***Isaiah 8:22 Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.***

1. This is the way of darkness... fleeing from the light they live in darkness here on earth
2. The ultimate punishment... an eternity in utter darkness, thrust out from the presence of God Himself
3. the word "thrust" implies the forcefulness of compelling them on Judgment Day... of being banished, driven far from God

***Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

***Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.***

Thus we have clearly depicted the way of light and the way of darkness

But the heart of this passage is the word Immanuel, and Christ who fulfills it

## V. Christ (Immanuel) the Only Way

### A. Immanuel the Only Way

1. The word "Immanuel" means God is with us

2. Introduced in Isaiah 7, it is mentioned twice in Isaiah 8
3. Fulfilled only when Christ was born... Jesus was "God with us"
4. God on our side, defeating our worst enemies... sin, death and hell

***Romans 8:31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?***

#### B. Christ Represents His Children

1. Hebrews 2 quotes Isaiah 8 showing all that Christ was willing to do for us, His children

***Hebrews 2:11-15 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. <sup>12</sup> He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." <sup>13</sup> And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." <sup>14</sup> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- <sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.***

2. Christ took on a human body and died on the cross that we might not have to live a life of darkness and die and go to hell

#### C. Christ Causes Rebels to Stumble

***1 Peter 2:6-8 For in Scripture it says: "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.***

#### D. Justification by Faith: "I Will Put My Trust in Him"

***Isaiah 8:17 I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him.***

1. All sins forgiven by simple faith in Christ
2. "I will put my trust in him" is the only way of life
3. By simple faith in Christ we can be made right with God

***Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***

## VI. Application

### A. Understand We Are All on One of Two Roads to Eternity

B. Use this Sermon to Discern Which One

1. the Way of Light... characterized by being held by God's strong hand upon your life, listening to God speaking to your heart, a life called apart from the crowd, a life of fearing the Lord and fearing nothing else, a life resting in the Lord as a safe sanctuary, a life saturated in the written word, a life inquiring of the Lord in prayer... ultimately, a life trusting in Christ alone for all of this

OR

2. the way of darkness... characterized by rejection of God's gentle, quiet provision, of rejoicing in other people's misery, of stumbling over God and being snared by Him, a life of seeking false spiritual guidance, of spiritual hunger, of demon-like roaming searching for something worth living for, a life of rage and rebellion and ultimately of darkness here and eternally

WHICH PATH ARE YOU ON??

C. Repent and Come to Christ

***Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***