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Sermon Notes

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The God Who Tests Motives

Isaiah 10:5-34

Deep mystery the night before Jesus was crucified... the difficult case of Judas

Matthew 26:21-25 And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." ²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?" ²³ Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." ²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

Astonishingly deep moment... far beyond our ability to understand

Jesus said that He would be betrayed by one of His disciples... that that disciple's actions had been written about in Scripture before he was even born (thus it was foreordained by God); but Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man

It would be better for him if he'd never been born

So God wills a man's birth, despite the fact that it would be better for him not to be born

Second, God wills that Judas betray Jesus

Third, God will judge Judas for doing what He ordained him to do

How? How is this just?

Our passage today helps answer this difficult issue! The key passage is verse 7... what does the evildoer intend? What are his motives? Why does he do what he does?

Isaiah 10:7 But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy

In our passage, Isaiah calls Assyria God's rod of punishment for Israel... He sends Assyria to punish Israel, then punishes Assyria for it!!

How?

Because of Assyria's motives!!!

I. God's Surprising Messengers: The Assyrian Army

Isaiah 10:5-6 "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! ⁶ I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me

A. Assyria: On Mission from God?

1. Isaiah plainly addresses "The Assyrian..." representing the Assyrian king and his army
2. He is portrayed amazingly as "on mission from God"
3. He is called "the rod of my anger" and he wields the club of God's wrath
4. He is clearly sent by God:

Vs. 6 "I send him... I dispatch him..."

- a. He is the "sent one"... sent by God himself
- b. He is "dispatched"... Hebrew = to command, to lay a charge or commission upon
- c. God has work to do against His own people

Isaiah 10:12 When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem

B. The Shocking Mission: Destroy Israel

Isaiah 10:6 I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.

1. God has ordained the destruction of Israel... the devastation of the Promised land
2. God dispatches these wicked, violent Assyrians to trample the Jews down like mud in the streets
3. Why? Because Israel has broken the covenant with God for centuries

C. The Even More Shocking Assessment of Israel: “A godless nation”

1. vs. 6 Yahweh calls his own people “a godless nation”
2. why? Because they had turned their backs on the true God for false gods who were no gods at all

Isaiah 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.

Israel had exchanged the true God for idols of gods who are no gods at all, who don't even exist... therefore the HORROR of it... Israel was a godless nation

II. God's Even More Surprising Message: Woe to Assyria!

Isaiah 10:5 "Woe to the Assyrian

- A. Woe: Judgment is Coming
- B. Why? For Doing Precisely What God Sent Them to Do!
- C. Judgment Declared: vs. 12

Isaiah 10:12 When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

Summary: God sovereignly ordains, commands, sends, dispatches Assyria to do a certain thing... to destroy Israel for their godlessness, for their rejection of the Mosaic covenant

THEN God turns on Assyria and punishes them for doing the exact thing He sent them to do!!!

III. The Key Issue: “What He Intends” (vs. 7)

Isaiah 10:7 But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations.

- A. One of the Most Important Principles in the Bible
 1. God is sovereign over the evil actions of godless people like the Assyrians and uses them to do His will
 2. God orchestrates the flow of their evil actions and evil intentions for His own sovereign purposes
 3. BUT God weighs the heart at every turn of the road
 4. Here the issue is the motive of the Assyrian God brings to judge Israel

B. Central Issue: Motive! Why You Do What You Do

1. what motivated you to come to church today?
2. why do you give someone a compliment?
3. why did you choose the car you chose?
4. why do you spend your time the way you do?
5. why did you put an offering in the plate today? Or why didn't you?
6. God studies this extremely carefully, and it matters to Him immensely

C. God's Motive: His Glory in Human Salvation

1. Almighty God orchestrates all of human history for His own pleasure, according to His wise purposes
2. God can bring an earthquake on a community and seek to accomplish many different things at once
 - a. In the death of a stubborn rejecter of the gospel, He may be bringing judgment in wrath
 - b. In the death of a Christian, that same earthquake may bring a godly person to his heavenly reward to be spared further suffering
 - c. In the life of a surviving non-Christian, He may be working to bring that person to Christ through the loss of property or loved ones
 - d. In the life of a surviving Christian, He may be working to bring that person to a deeper sense of dependence on God
3. But God's ultimate purpose is always the same... he does all things for His own glory in working out a grand salvation plan

***Isaiah 43:6-7 Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth--
 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."***

In short, God brought the Assyrian army into Israel to crush them for their sins so that He might be glorified by punishing, purging, and ultimately by restoring Israel

Those are God's motives... but what were Assyria's motives??

IV. Assyria's Motives Displayed (vs. 7-14)

A. Vicious Cruelty (vs. 7)

Isaiah 10:7 his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations.

1. Assyrians simply enjoyed viciously crushing other nations
2. they were implacably cruel!!

Nahum 3:1-3 Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! ² The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! ³ Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses—

Illus. Nazi bloodlust... the joy of conquest

B. Arrogant Empire-Building (vs. 8, 13-14)

Isaiah 10:8 'Are not my commanders all kings?' he says.

Isaiah 10:9-10 Has not Calno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad, and Samaria like Damascus? ¹⁰ As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria

Isaiah 10:13-14 he says: "... I removed the boundaries of nations ... like a mighty one I subdued their kings.

The lust of power... the delight of domination, being in charge... extending the empire as far as it will go; as greedy as the grave... arrogant, too

It was like taking candy from a baby!! It was like gathering abandoned eggs... they laughed at fortified cities and overran national boundaries

C. Covetousness (vs. 13)

I plundered their treasures

Ah, yes... the gold, the silver, the bronze, the fine clothing, the exquisite jewelry, the material delights of possession

D. Pride of Heart, Self-Worship (vs. 12-14)

Isaiah 10:12 willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

Isaiah 10:13 "'By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding.

1. In love with his own wisdom, power, understanding
2. Marvels at his self-achievement

3. Never realizing God enabled him to do it all!

E. Missing Motive: God's Glory

V. Assyria's Judgment Described: (vs. 15-19, 24-34)

A. Human Arrogance Over God is Insanity

Isaiah 10:15 Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood!

1. God absolutely despises this kind of pride... Assyria was merely a tool in His hand... but at the very gates of Jerusalem, the Assyrians boasted against God

Isaiah 36:18-20 "Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The LORD will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

The Lord's response:

Isaiah 37:23-24 Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²⁴ By your messengers you have heaped insults on the Lord.

2. it is actually insane... we are created beings, our very atoms are being held together by Almighty God; this is the God who holds our lives and all our ways in His hands

3. Death stands over all of our achievements and laughs them to scorn

4. all we do is as dust in the wind

5. God is enthroned in the heavens, ruling over all nations

Isaiah 40:12-15 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? ¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

This is the God against whom Assyria was boasting

B. Specific Judgment: Wasting Disease, Dead Soldiers, Single Day

Isaiah 10:16-19 Therefore, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame. ¹⁷ The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briars. ¹⁸ The splendor of his forests and fertile fields it will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away. ¹⁹ And the remaining trees of his forests will be so few that a child could write them down.

1. one of the most dramatic moments in the Bible... arrogant Assyria, right at the walls of Jerusalem
2. the Lord sends out the angel of the Lord and in one single night a great slaughter occurs

Isaiah 37:36 Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning-- there were all the dead bodies!

3. yes, but it is Isaiah 10 that explains HOW... it was some sort of fast-acting plague that wiped out these troops like some virus, some fever... likened to the effects of a forest fire sweeping through a dry forest

‘wasting disease’... ‘fire’... ‘a single day’... ‘as when a sick man wastes away’

C. More Descriptions of Judgment (vs. 24-34)

1. vs. 25 very soon my wrath against you will end and be directed to their destruction
2. like the day he struck down Midian
3. like the Red Sea crossing
4. specific details: vs. 28-32... towns in Judah, falling one after another to Assyria, but don't be afraid... don't fear... because in the end

vs. 33-34 See, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. ³⁴ He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One.

D. Effects: Assyria Loses an Empire

1. Assyria was the greatest empire in the world at that time... it covered all of the Tigris and Euphrates region down to Babylon, down through Palestine to Egypt... such power...
2. But, because they refused to glorify God, they lost it all

VI. Israel's Future Foretold: "A Remnant Will Return" (vs. 20-23)

Isaiah 10:20-23 *In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. ²¹ A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. ²² Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. ²³ The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.*

A. Remnant Chosen by Grace

1. this remnant has been the focus all along
2. Isaiah has already mentioned it

Isaiah 1:9 *Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.*

3. Isaiah will mention it again

Isaiah 37:31-32 *Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. ³² For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

4. Paul will mention it as well

Romans 11:5 *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*

5. it is a remnant chosen only by the sovereign grace of God

B. Key Characteristic: Trust in the Lord

Isaiah 10:20 *In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.*

1. this is the heart of the matter...the faith of God's people
2. they had many false trusts, false hopes
3. they had been trusting in idols... those idols could not deliver them

4. they had been trusting in Assyria to protect them from other local kings and kingdoms... but then Assyria turned and invaded them; Assyria was a failed hope
5. now at last the remnant will trust only in God, the Lord, the Holy One of Israel... all other false trusts will fall by the wayside

application: so also we can have many false trusts... our own righteousness, our cleverness or intelligence or education or family or money or experience or piety

our medical system or military might or technological knowledge

none of these things can save us... they are all false trusts, and God means to expose them and overthrow them

He wants instead for His people to put their trust in Him and in Him alone

C. God's Judgment: Overwhelming, Righteous, Restrained

Isaiah 10:22-23 *Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous.* ²³ *The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.*

1. The thrice-holy God is seriously offended by the sin of His people
2. so God begins by cleansing the household of God

1 Peter 4:17 *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

John 2:14-17 *In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.* ¹⁵ *So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.* ¹⁶ *To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"* ¹⁷ *His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

3. In some senses, sin among the people of God is far more serious and offensive than that among pagans
 - a. The more knowledge we have of the will of God and yet violate it by sin, the greater the sin is
 - b. We Christians in the New Covenant era have available to us more of the full counsel of God both in Scripture and in the unfolding of redemptive

history than any generation of God's people in history... therefore our sin is all the more serious

- c. We Christians ought to detect and hate our sin more than any other people
- 4. so in Isaiah's day, God pours out judgment on Israel to cleanse his house and uphold his holy reputation among the nations
- 5. through the Assyrian invasion, this judgment is clearly overwhelming
- 6. it is totally righteous... deserved... validated by God's clear prescriptions in the law of Moses and the consistent warnings from prophets like Elijah and Elishah
- 7. BUT this judgment is also measured... a remnant will be protected and preserved by God's grace

Illus. "Collateral damage"... The indiscriminate damage done by bombs; terrible issue in WWII—carpet bombing of Dresden, London, Tokyo, wiped out whole regions of the city, including cultural sites and civilian areas, thousands lost their lives who were innocent bystanders in the war; in modern warfare, laser-guided bombs... marvels of modern military science... first Gulf War, able to be guided down the intake air shaft of an office building in Baghdad

Boasting: Great reduction of 'collateral damage'... but not entirely removed still

In God's omniscience and omnipotence, there is no such thing as collateral damage... everything that happened with the Assyrian invasion was willed and purposed by God

It was perfectly measured out to achieve God's ends

VII. Christ's True Deliverance

A. Israel's Experiences a Spiritual Lesson

Isaiah 10:27 In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck; the yoke will be broken...

- 1. they were facing literal invasion, a literal oppression by Assyria
- 2. the yoke on their shoulders was going to be the rule of a vicious, pagan empire that intended to make them slaves
- 3. the deliverance God would work for Judah would free them from Assyria's power and oppression
- 4. all of this happened in space and time, a matter of physical history
- 5. BUT the lessons are lasting spiritual lessons for us today

B. True Oppression: Sin's Crushing Yoke

1. sin dominates like a tyrant, crushing our hopes, ruining our lives, exercising a Nazi-like, hobnail boots, goose-stepping dominance over the world
2. we were all born slaves of sin and lived out that bondage

John 8:34, 36 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

C. True Deliverance: A New Yoke

Matthew 11:28 - 12:1 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

VIII. Applications

A. Salvation: Come to Christ for true deliverance

B. Understand: God uses the godless to accomplish His purposes, then judges them for doing precisely what He ordained them to do

1. the key issue is always, "What is their motive?"
2. God channels the flow of water to turn the wheels of His redemptive plan, but He doesn't make any evil person do any evil thing
3. however, it is not unjust for God to use Satan, then judge him for it; it is not unjust for God to use Judas to do exactly what He foreordained him to do, then judge him for it

C. Search Your Hearts: God tests every action based on motive

1. theology of motives and judgment day
2. highest motive: the glory of God

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

3. key verses

1 Chronicles 28:9 "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Romans 14:23 ...everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Revelation 2:23 I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

4. examples:

- a. if you give to the needy so that you can be noticed and praised, Jesus says you have received your reward in full
- b. if you pray or memorize scripture or preach or evangelize for some selfish motive—so that people will notice or praise you, or so you can become a deacon or elder in the church, or so you can get a plaque up on the wall or have a hospital named after you—Jesus says you have received your reward in full
- c. if you volunteer for urban ministry, or give some time to internationals, or go on a short term mission trip, be certain that your motive is the glory of God, the advance of his name, his reputation
 - i) one diagnostic... if you do some sacrificial thing and don't get praise or noticed, and you get a little upset, that's a good indication your motives are off
- d. recognize there is a little selfishness and worldliness and falseness in everything we do... our pride is a constant companion
- e. if the glory of God should be our highest motive, realize how little we do actually is so that others may see your good deeds and glorify God
- f. learn to focus your heart above all on God: His kingdom, his purposes, his glory, his plans

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

D. Do not boast when God chooses to use you

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

E. Do not fear the arrogant empire-builders of the world... their time will come

Isaiah 10:12 When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

So, do not fear, do not be anxious over politics or current events

Isaiah 10:24 "O my people who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians

God reigns!!!