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Sermon Notes

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God is Everything... So Trust in Him, Not In Your Schemes

Isaiah 31:1-9

A searching question... if your house were burning and you had only a few minutes to grab some things and run out, and supposing everyone were safely out of the house and all you had to save were some possessions, what would you save? Some would save photos or memorabilia; some would save priceless heirlooms, or works of art, or a box of expensive silverware... But none of this is the point. My point is that the stress of the imminent destruction of your house brings a clarity to your value system. What you value most is what you will try to save. The fire brings the truth to the surface.

So it is with any extreme trial that you see coming upon you; it EXPOSES, it BRINGS TO THE SURFACE what you are trusting in, what you are relying upon for deliverance. In short, the imminent invasion of an army into your home country exposes your SAVIOR.

Health: When you are faced with a scary diagnosis, and you are awaiting the results of a test to see if your symptoms line up with a life-threatening disease, as you are waiting for the results, your true "trust" will float to the surface in your thought process. If you are putting your ultimate trust in the expertise of the doctors or pharmaceutical researchers, that will come to the surface.

Economics: When you are faced with a very uncertain economic future, when the economic experts are predicting a severe recession, when your company has already laid off 30% of the workforce, and more layoffs are expected, when you look ahead to the cloudy future, your true "trust" will float to the surface in your thought process. If your dominant thought is "At least I have a year's worth of salary saved up," then that is your savior. If your dominant thought is, "I have wealthy relatives who will help me if I get laid off," that is your savior. If it is, "I have twenty years of experience in this field and a great resume, plus some excellent contacts at other companies," then that is your savior.

As you look ahead to a dark future, especially as you face the probability of great difficulties, your thought process will reveal your true savior.

And our God is a jealous God... He wants to be your ONLY SAVIOR. He wants your ENTIRE TRUST to be placed solely on Him. Because though you may be in good health, and the economy may be flourishing... yet an imminent danger does face us all: DEATH and the JUDGMENT DAY that follows. And Jesus Christ alone should be your only trust...

“See the incarnate God ascended pleads the merit of His blood. Venture on Him, venture wholly, LET NO OTHER TRUST INTRUDE!!!”

God is jealous for your TRUST, jealous for your HOPES... He brings smaller trials into your life to show you what you are really trusting in... and in this passage, God means to WEAN YOU OFF OF ALL OTHER TRUSTS...

“Venture on Him, venture WHOLLY... let NO OTHER TRUST INTRUDE...”

That’s what Isaiah 31 is about.

This is in a series of prophecies made by the prophet Isaiah in the years 705 to 701 BC, as both the wicked northern Kingdom of Israel and the not so wicked but still corrupt southern Kingdom of Judah braced for the onslaught of the Assyrians under their mighty Emperor, Sennacherib.

The Assyrians were the Nazis of the ancient world... an overwhelmingly powerful military machine... they were undefeated and seemingly undefeatable. They were building a mighty empire in that middle-eastern region... they were vicious, and they used psychological warfare to intimidate their smaller foes into immediate surrender. They were absolutely terrifying. And they were coming!!

God spoke these oracles to Judah through the prophet Isaiah while their godly king Hezekiah was seeking to purify their religion and learn to worship God as the Laws of Moses had commanded. He was getting rid of the evil high places where the Jews were worshiping in a pagan manner. But unfortunately, Hezekiah’s counselors, as they looked ahead to the imminent invasion by Assyria felt that they needed HELP or they couldn’t survive. So, they thought the best thing they could do was to send silver and gold down to Egypt to hire Egyptian cavalry as a harassing force against the Assyrians. And this DEEPLY OFFENDED GOD!!!

I. Woe to Those Who Trust in Egypt Rather Than God (vs. 1-3)

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.

A. Prophetic Woe

1. Fourth of six oracles of woe in Isaiah 28-35
2. The word is a word of prophetic judgment, of imminent SPIRITUAL DANGER by Almighty God
3. God sends a prophet (like Isaiah) to speak this word in advance, to warn the people that they are in trouble with God for a specific reason

4. God is OFFENDED by their overtures to Egypt... it is angering Him that they are putting their faith in Egypt's cavalry and forgetting God... so He speaks a word of warning: WOE TO YOU... WOE!!!
5. So, as they were terrified of Assyria and were making extreme provisions to meet the encroaching danger, the prophet was dispatched to warn them of a greater danger: God!!!

Isaiah 8:12-13 do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. ¹³ 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

6. In effect, you are afraid of the Assyrians, and you are MISSING THE WHOLE POINT... God is the one who is sending the Assyrians... if you are reconciled with God, you need fear nothing from the Assyrians; but if you are not reconciled with God, then nothing you do with the Egyptians will help you at all...
7. GOD IS THE ISSUE... and God alone!!!!

Simply put:

Romans 8:31 If God is for us, who can be against us?

BUT ALSO:

If God is AGAINST US, then who can be for us?

B. Key Question in this Passage: In What Are You Trusting?

1. Isaiah speaks a word of woe on those who make the journey back to Egypt, going backwards to a land God had delivered them from by His power and outstretched arm
2. To those who RELY on horses and who TRUST in Egypt for help and protection
3. The word RELY means "stay" or "support"... what you are leaning on and what is supporting your weight
4. As these leaders in Judah were looking ahead to the imminent invasion of Assyria, they schemed about how to defeat them militarily; the Jewish army was particularly weak in cavalry, but Egypt was overwhelmingly rich in horses
5. They figured the skillful Egyptian cavalry and their chariots would be just what was needed along with Judah's mighty infantry

C. Won By the Might and Number of Egypt's Cavalry

ESV **Isaiah 31:1** *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong*

Amazing, how they forgot the lessons of history

D. BUT... No Thought to the Lord's Might or Wisdom; or even Deeper, to God's Role in BRINGING the Assyrians

Isaiah 31:1 *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.*

1. In all their plans and schemes, they gave no thought to the Lord
2. They did not consider the fact that God has infinitely more power than Egypt
3. Even worse, they neglected the fact that it was God Himself who was bringing the Assyrians to begin with, to punish the Jews for their sins!!

E. This Was DIRECTLY FORBIDDEN by the Law of Moses

Deuteronomy 17:16 *The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again."*

F. No One Can Serve Two Masters, and No One Can Rely on Two Saviors!

1. God is not glorified by being an after-thought!
2. Rely TOTALLY on God or NOT AT ALL

G. God's Arithmetic Does Not Add Up

1. The battle is not always to the strongest!
2. The largest army does not always win
3. Gideon defeated the Midianites with just 600 men, none of whom carried a weapon into the battle
4. David defeated Goliath with a stone and a sling, while Goliath had a huge spear and a monstrous sword
5. Jehoshaphat

H. This Passage Does Not Reject Military Preparations... But TRUSTING IN THEM and Not Seeking the Lord

1. David called men together to fight against the Philistines
2. Battle preparations are well and good
3. As long as they are a SUBSET of your trusting in the Lord

I. Warning to America

1. America's astonishing military budget
 - a. The world governments spent \$1.7 trillion on their militaries last year; the United States spent \$711 billion of that!! Almost 42% of the world's military budget was spent by one nation—the United States of America!
 - b. US military expenditures roughly equals that of the next fourteen nations combined: China, Russia, United Kingdom, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, India, Germany, Brazil, Italy, South Korea, Australia, Canada, and Turkey
 - c. It is easy to believe that this alone makes our nation safe from attack!

Ecclesiastes 9:11 The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong

Psalm 33:16-17 No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. ¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.

2. This is where our secularism, pride, and wealth come to threaten our very existence
3. Secularism: keeping God out of the equation; never mentioning Him, essentially teaching that He is always irrelevant
4. Pride: America's determination to be the best, and have the best military systems
5. Wealth: we have the economic means to be able to afford nuclear powered aircraft carriers at \$4.5 billion each (we have 10 Nimitz-class carriers... just the ships alone are worth almost \$50 billion; but the carriers also carry 90 hi-tech fight jets worth a total of \$6 billion/ carrier... total cost for 10 carriers is well over \$100 billion)
6. Danger: forget the lessons of Scripture and think that this makes a nation invulnerable!!

II. The Greatness of God's Power Both to Destroy and Deliver (vs. 2-5)

A. God's Credentials as a Savior

1. Amazing that they forgot what God had done in the past
2. Some irony in the statement

Isaiah 31:2 Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words.

3. God is ALSO wise... not just the wise men of Egypt or the wise counselors of Hezekiah who were orchestrating this alliance with Egypt
4. God has "some wisdom, too!!" Actually, God is perfect in wisdom, and He has the power to bring disaster on anyone He chooses
5. Remember what He did to Egypt!! The terrifying ten plagues, and the devastating display of power at the Red Sea crossing

B. When God Speaks, That Settles It

Vs. 2 ... he does not take back His words.

1. God never changes His mind... He speaks, and that is final
2. God never has any need for further analysis

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

C. God Has Decreed Destruction for His Enemies

Isaiah 31:2 He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers.

1. God is not merely a theory
2. This is not the God of the deists or the stoics, who stays out of human affairs
3. God gets involved directly in human affairs and brings about His sovereign purposes
4. God's wise plan determines the end from the beginning; then God's outstretched hand settles every human encounter according to God's wise plan

Isaiah 14:24 The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

D. By Contrast, the Egyptians are Men and Not God!!

Isaiah 31:3 But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, he who helps will stumble, he who is helped will fall; both will perish together.

1. The contrast here is not between “flesh” and “spirit” in a dualistic sense, as though flesh is evil and spirit is good
2. Rather, it’s a contrast between man’s help and God’s; between man’s power and God’s
3. God is in the heavens:

Isaiah 40:22-25 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

4. The word “spirit” shows the troubling issue for unbelievers... God is like a wind that cannot be seen, and therefore His presence is open to doubt
5. God’s existence must be taken by faith; and in this passage, God claims infinite power over the fleshly Egyptians and their fleshly horses
6. He also declares that it is His will that BOTH those who help (The Egyptian cavalry) and those who receive the help (the Jews) will fall in battle together

E. God is Undaunted by Man in Achieving His Purposes

1. Image #1: A Mighty Lion who cannot be intimidated by men

Isaiah 31:4 This is what the LORD says to me: "As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey-- and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against him, he is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor-- so the LORD Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights.

God cannot be intimidated by any human being; if all the world of rebels gathered together against God and sought to topple Him from His throne, He would merely laugh at them and then destroy them! A lion looks out at the band of shepherds there gathered to rescue the sheep from Him and merely growls at them... they can yell as much as they like; they can

bang sticks together and clamor, but he is not moved at all!! Completely fearless !! So is the Lord as He looks out at a world that hates Him and seeks to move Him... UNDAUNTED!!

2. Image #2: A hovering bird, who cannot be stopped from protecting its young

Isaiah 31:5 Like birds hovering overhead, the LORD Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it."

3. In the first image, it seems that God is dealing with Jerusalem like a lion ripping a carcass to shreds; perhaps that is what God will do to the wicked among the Jews, these unbelievers who are idolaters and who hate Him

4. In the second image, the image is opposite: God hovering over Jerusalem to protect it: this is God's sovereign protection and care for His elect, His beloved remnant

5. Like a mighty eagle protecting the nest... God is untouchable and can descend any time he wants and attack any who would threaten His people

F. A Clear Reference to the "Passover"

Isaiah 31:5 Like birds hovering overhead, the LORD Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it."

1. Isaiah speaks the magic word that should have brought their minds back to what God did at the time of the Exodus... the exact same word is used here

Exodus 12:12-13 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn-- both men and animals-- and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

2. God will in some sense reenact that night for Jerusalem

Exodus 11:4-6 So Moses said, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. ⁵ Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. ⁶ There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt-- worse than there has ever been or ever will be again.

3. So it would be when He delivered Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrians

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!

4. Here we have God's credentials for delivering the Jews from Assyria... He has openly promised to do so again and again; why, then, are the officials of Judah seeking to make this alliance with Egypt... the very nation God defeated the first time in the Passover and the Exodus???

G. Very Much Like John 10!!!

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

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who is mightier than any enemy!! He is mighty to save His sheep from their attackers; the Father, infinitely above all human foes, has taken hold of the elect, and no one can snatch them from His hand... God's omnipotence is unleashed to protect us from all our foes

III. A Call to Repentance: Turn from Idols to the Living God (vs. 6-7)

Isaiah 31:6-7 Return to him you have so greatly revolted against, O Israelites. ⁷ For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made.

A. After the Warning and the Promise, God Calls them to Repentance

1. God has spoken a word of woe to the Jews who were trusting in Egypt and not in the Lord
2. God has also spoken a word of promise, saying He is mighty to save like a lion or an eagle, and will rescue His people from the hand of the Assyrians
3. Now, He calls on the people to turn away from their idols in repentance and to embrace Him totally by faith
4. This is the key issue anyway: it is because of their idolatry and sinful wandering away from the Lord that the Assyrians are coming to begin with

B. "Return":

1. The people's hearts have wandered from the Lord; they are distant from Him

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

2. The king wanted to make the people return to Egypt to get horses; the real "returning" they needed to do was to the Lord
3. This is the essence of repentance: a U-TURN...

C. Return to Him You Have So Greatly Rebelled Against

1. This statement is profound... true repentance means understanding HOW YOUR SINS have affected God's heart
2. This is a clear statement on the depth of Judah's sin...
3. The word is "revolt": the people have been in revolution against the rule of the Lord
4. And it is very DEEP: it is a rebellion to the very core of their being

Proverbs 20:5 The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.

5. Do not make light of your rebellion, but understand it is truly who you have been
6. False prophets were making LIGHT of Judah's sin... but it was a deep wound

^{ESV} Jeremiah 6:14 They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.

D. Hate Your Idols and Throw Them Away

Isaiah 31:7 For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made.

1. Idolatry is to give to a created being the place God was meant to have in your heart
2. The mission to Egypt was idolatry, because the people were trusting in Egypt's chariots and horses rather than the Lord
3. But there were many other idols beside this
4. They made literal idols with their hands and bowed down to them and worshiped them
5. But here God is saying they will totally reject them!! Despise them!! Hate them!! This is not a command but a prediction of future revival!!
6. They will despise what their sinful hearts have yearned for, what their sinful minds have devised, and what their sinful hands have crafted; they will reject them and throw them away!
7. Stated twice earlier:

Isaiah 2:20 In that day men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship.

Isaiah 30:22 Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"

E. This is Genuine Repentance

1. Turning away from idols with loathing... with genuine hatred
2. Understanding the we have rebelled against the Lord and feeling it to the deepest part of our beings... the rebellion has been deep, not superficial
3. Turning to the Lord with love and tears, yearning to be embraced by Him again

IV. Thus Says the Lord: Assyria Will Fall (vs. 8-9)

Isaiah 31:8-9 "Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. They will flee before the sword and their young men will be put to forced labor. ⁹ Their stronghold will fall because of terror; at sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic," declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

A. The Mission to Egypt is Worthless: God Will Deliver Judah from Assyria Himself

1. Assyria will fall; but by a supernatural sword... a sword "not of man"
 - a. He states it twice" "a sword that is not of man" a "sword not of mortals"
 - b. He uses the two common words for man... this is NO MAN'S DOING
2. God will act directly to bring the Assyrians down forever... He alone will get the glory; He will not share the glory of this deliverance with the Egyptian cavalry!!
3. The Assyrians will be DEVoured (eaten up) by this supernatural sword, and they will flee before it
4. The Assyrians that are left will be put to forced labor

B. Their "Rock" (i.e. Fortress) Will Fall from Terror

1. Not only will the Assyrians lose this battle; they will lose their entire empire
2. The commanders will see the battle standard raised against them and surrender in terror

3. They will lose the boldness and arrogance and power that enabled them to build such a mighty empire to begin with; and their days as a world power will end

C. God is a Consuming Fire; and the Assyrians Will Walk into the Oven in Jerusalem

1. Several times God uses this “fire” image for what He will do to the Assyrians

Isaiah 10:16-18 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 briers. ¹⁸ The splendor of his forests and fertile fields it will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away.

2. The “fire” may have been a wasting disease that caused the Assyrian troops to burn with fever and die in one night
3. In any case, fire consumes in wrath and judgment from the Lord... as in Isaiah 30

Isaiah 30:27-28 See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. ²⁸ His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray.

Isaiah 30:33 Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.

4. Assyria will be devoured by the holy zeal of God to defend Jerusalem for His own name’s sake

V. Applications

A. How Does this Passage Preach Christ Crucified?

1. All roads lead to the cross and empty tomb, and this one is no different
2. The sin is the same: idolatry
3. The impending judgment is coming: death, judgment day and hell
4. The false trust is the same: Looking to our own version of “Egypt” rather than to the Lord; to deliver ourselves by our own means
5. The Savior is the same: Almighty God Himself in the person of His Son

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

6. God wants us to TRUST IN HIM ALONE!!! To allow no other trust to intrude

B. Living Out That Trust Day by Day

1. Though we have learned to trust in Christ for the salvation of our souls, we are still tempted to trust in other things when facing lesser trials

2. As I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, look at the way you face smaller trials in life as a Christian

a. Is it your habit to bring those trials immediately to God in prayer?

b. Do you follow these simple but profound commands:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

c. God is using the smaller trials of our lives to teach us to glorify Him in the details as well as for the salvation of our souls

3. Study your own reaction to trials: do you have your own version of sending emissaries to the Egyptians?? Do you trust in your own stratagems rather than in the Lord?

C. Pray for Our Nation... That the USA would Not Trust in Chariots and Horses!!

D. Hate Idols More and More

1. An idol is any created thing that takes the place of God in your hearts

E. Understand Deep Repentance as Taught in This Passage

1. Their sin was called revolt against the Lord and it was DEEP

2. So also we have sinned DEEPLY against the Lord

3. Ask God to do a deep work of cleansing in your life; learn to hate the idols the Holy Spirit shows you: idols of money, possessions, power, pleasure, sex, entertainment, sports, praise from others, physical appearance, intelligence, etc.

F. Celebrate What the Passage Teaches About God

1. His power to judge His enemies

2. His foreknowledge to declare the end from the beginning

3. His grace in warning people ahead of time what is to come
4. His immutability in that He does not take back His words
5. His sovereign power in ruling the nations
6. His ability to work genuine repentance in our hearts
7. His utter fearlessness in being completely unmoved by human threats
8. His faithfulness to protect His children like an eagle protects the nest

What a GREAT GOD WE SERVE!!! Worship Him!!!

G. Let God's Fearlessness in the Face of Human Threats Make You Bold in Evangelism

Isaiah 31:4 "As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey-- and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against him, he is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor

Proverbs 28:1 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

Acts 4:10-13 know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." ¹³ ¶ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.