

Isaiah 8:1-10
Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz
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What does it mean to trust God? What does it mean to live a life of faith? In the most basic sense, trusting God means looking to Jesus alone for salvation, looking to Jesus alone for forgiveness for our sins and for deliverance from our sins. The person of faith recognizes that he can't do anything in his own power to undo his sin or to make up for it. The person of faith recognizes that he can't do anything in his own power to free himself from sin's grip upon him, to deliver himself from sin's control over his life. So the person of faith looks to Jesus to do this for him based on Jesus' sinless life and Jesus' finished sacrifice upon the cross. That is what it means to trust God in the most basic sense.

In a secondary sense, trusting God means bearing the necessary fruit of that faith relationship with Jesus. That necessary fruit are repentance and new obedience. We simply can't be in a faith relationship with Jesus without its having this effect upon our lives, both definitively at faith's initiation and progressively over time as faith grows and strengthens. The person of faith looks to Jesus to enable him to keep covenant with God on a daily basis. To keep covenant with God means to obey God, to seek to do that which will please God as indicated by God's revealed will. To keep covenant with God is to do what is right and to trust God to work everything out for His own glory and our good.

When a person is under sin's dominion and in sin's iron grip and what that person has not experienced the delivering power of Jesus, he just cannot keep covenant with God. He just cannot believe that doing things God's way as indicated by God's revealed will is the way to live life. He thinks that living life God's way would spoil his life and even ruin it. For example, some believe that limiting one's sexual experiences to a marriage relationship is an unbearable restriction. Some believe that intoxicating drugs are a necessity if one is to really enjoy life. Some believe that success in life is impossible apart from some dishonesty and deception. Some believe that one can't regularly worship God on Sundays and still have time for all in life that is really important. And so on and so on and so on.

In our passage for today, King Ahaz is the king of Judah. He is not a man of faith. He does not trust God with his welfare, and he does not obey God as a way of life. A crisis can come into a person's life and provide a window into that person's soul. A person's reaction to a difficult situation can make a person's true inner character pretty obvious to other people. That happened in the life of King Ahaz. The king of Israel, the nation consisting of the ten tribes to the north of Judah, and the king of Syria, the pagan nation to the north of Israel, joined together in an alliance against the king of Judah. Their purpose was to conquer Judah and to install a puppet king of their choosing who would join with them in a defensive alliance against the rising Assyrian Empire. King Ahaz's response to this crisis in his life revealed his true character.

Let me read for you the summary account of the reign of King Ahaz as found in the book of 2 Kings:

2 Kings 16:1-20

- 1 In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign.
- 2 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done.
- 3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel.
- 4 And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.
- 5 Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war; and they besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him.
- 6 At that time Rezin king of Syria captured Elath for Syria, and drove the men of Judah from Elath. Then the Edomites went to Elath, and dwell there to this day.
- 7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me."
- 8 And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria.
- 9 So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin.

- 10 Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship.
- 11 Then Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Urijah the priest made it before King Ahaz came from Damascus.
- 12 And when the king came from Damascus, the king saw the altar; and the king approached the altar and made offerings on it.
- 13 So he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar.
- 14 He also brought the bronze altar which was before the LORD, from the front of the temple -- from between the new altar and the house of the LORD -- and put it on the north side of the new altar.
- 15 Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, "On the great new altar burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt sacrifice, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by."
- 16 Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded.
- 17 And King Ahaz cut off the panels of the carts, and removed the lavers from them; and he took down the Sea from the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pavement of stones.

- 18 Also he removed the Sabbath pavilion which they had built in the temple, and he removed the king's outer entrance from the house of the LORD, on account of the king of Assyria.
- 19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 20 So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

That is the summary account of the reign of King Ahaz. Let me also remind you of what happened in Isaiah chapter seven. At the point of time in chapter seven, the armies of Israel and Syria had already invaded Judah once and had withdrawn. King Ahaz expected them to return, and he was inspecting the water supply for Jerusalem in case there was a siege. God told Isaiah to go there and to confront King Ahaz. Isaiah assured King Ahaz that God would not allow Israel and Syria to succeed in their plans to destroy the dynasty of King David in Judah. Instead these two nations would soon fall. Regardless of appearances, their heyday was already over. And not only would God preserve the lineage of King David, God would also one day in the far future raise up a miracle Child from the royal lineage of David. A virgin would conceive and bear a Son, and call His name Immanuel, which means "God with us." And in about the span of time that it would take for this miracle Child to develop enough to eat simple foods, in about the span of time that it would take for this miracle Child to develop enough to understand basic moral concepts (in other words, within about two or three years), the threat posed by Israel and Syria would

be over. God will bring the king of Assyria against Israel and Syria and cause them to forsake their plans to conquer Judah and to replace King Ahaz. Isaiah goes on to say that because King Ahaz would not trust the promise of God and because King Ahaz was going to grovel before the pagan king of Assyria, God was going to bring Assyria also against Judah in judgment.

With that background, we will now examine Isaiah chapter eight. We will use three headings: the sign, the siege and the salvation.

First, we will look at **the sign**. Probably shortly after Isaiah's confrontation with King Ahaz recorded for us in chapter seven, God commanded Isaiah to make a sign to signify and seal God's message to King Ahaz recorded in chapter seven. God told Isaiah to take a large writing board and to write on it "with the pen of a man," that is, to write on it in popular characters which everyone could easily read and not in any fancy, stylized, esoteric script which only the educated could read. God commanded Isaiah to write on this large writing board only four words, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. The American Standard Version translates this, "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." The less formal Today's English Version translates this "quick loot, fast plunder." The purpose of these four words written so everyone could see them and read them was to document for everyone that God had indeed prophesied that the King of Assyria would quickly reduce to nothing the nations of Israel and Syria, the two nations which everyone in Judah then feared so greatly. At that point in time, such good news was very hard

to believe. Yet when this prophecy came true and everyone started to take this deliverance for granted, God wanted everyone to remember that He had prophesied it when it seemed impossible. So God commanded Isaiah to get two prominent men to witness that Isaiah had indeed written these four words on a large writing board and displayed them in public. These two prominent men were Uriah the priest and Zechariah the prophet. This was not, of course, the Zechariah who authored the book of prophecy by that name. That Zechariah was not yet alive; he came a few generations later. We know little about this prophet named Zechariah. We know from 2 Kings that the priest named Uriah is the one who set up an idol in the temple at Jerusalem when King Ahaz told him to do so. He is obviously a man with no conscience, a “yes man,” a spineless toady who would do whatever King Ahaz told him to do. Probably both of these men, one a priest and the other a so-called prophet, were prominent but corrupt men of Judah whom King Ahaz had in his hip pocket. With a note of irony and humor, God chose them to be the witnesses that His true prophet Isaiah had written these four words back when they were hard to believe.

That is not the end of the sign. God had told King Ahaz that there would one day be a miracle Child born whose name would be Immanuel, which means “God with us.” We know that that prophecy refers to the birth of Jesus which would happen years later. God then enabled Isaiah’s wife to conceive and bear a son at that crucial time in history, the time recorded here in Isaiah chapter eight. Isaiah’s wife is here called a prophetess, which probably means simply that she was the wife of a prophet. Her child’s name is to be not Immanuel but Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,

the very words which God had commanded Isaiah to write on that large writing board for all to see. What a name! Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz! You know, I am happy with the name Grover now. Johnny Cash had a song called “A boy Named Sue.” Here we have a boy named not Sue but Quick-Loot Fast-Plunder.

Both Isaiah’s sons had symbolic names. The oldest son was named, in English, “A Remnant Will Return.” The message of his name was that whatever else happened, God would preserve a remnant of His people and would fulfill His promises made to Abraham and David through them. The message of his younger brother’s name, Quick-Loot Fast-Plunder, was that God would quickly bring down the enemies who were planning to disrupt and foil the fulfillment of God’s promises.

God had promised a miracle Child in the distant future, One who would be born of a virgin and named Immanuel. In chapter seven, God had said that the future miracle Child would be both a message of hope and a measure of time. Before the span of time it would take for the miracle Child to develop enough to eat basic foods and to understand right and wrong, Israel and Syria would be eliminated as threats. God then caused this contemporary child to be born; there was the future child and this contemporary child. This second son of Isaiah was to be a type of that coming miracle Child. Isaiah’s son, Quick-Loot Fast-Plunder, will be there as a reminder of the prophesied measure of time. Before Quick-Loot is old enough to say Mama and Dada, the King of Assyria will have plundered Israel and Syria and will have eliminated them as threats to Judah.

We have looked at the sign. Our second point is **the siege**. What we have here next is a prophecy of the coming siege of Jerusalem by Assyria. This will happen later during the reign of King Hezekiah, the son of King Ahaz. The King of Assyria would think that this invasion was his idea and plan, but our passage makes very clear that this would in the final analysis be the Lord's plan and the Lord's doing. Look at verses 7 and 8:

7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty -- the king of Assyria and all his glory; he will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks.

8 He will pass through Judah, he will overflow and pass over, he will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel.

This specifically says that this coming invasion is something the Lord is going to bring about. The prophet uses a metaphor for this coming invasion. Every year when the mountain snows melted, the Euphrates river would flood and overflow its banks. This was always a localized annual flood, but the prophet envisions these flood waters rising and rising until they reach even the land of Judah. The nation of Judah is personified as an individual caught in these flood waters. The waters rise and rise, but they rise only to the neck. The personified Judah is seriously threatened, but he does not drown. The head of the personified Judah stands for the city of Jerusalem. During the reign of King Hezekiah, a massive Assyrian army invaded the nation of Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem. Judah was indeed like a man with water rising up to his neck. But unlike King Ahaz, King

Hezekiah was a man of faith. In answer to his prayer, the Lord sent an angel who slew overnight 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and delivered Judah from the Assyrians. But that is another sermon for another time.

In verse 8, the metaphor changes from a river flooding the land to a bird of prey overshadowing the land with his wings. This is the fearful picture of the Assyrian hordes flooding into the land of Judah as an invader.

Now before we go on to our third point, let me point out that our passage gives the reason for this coming judgment. It is found in verse 6:

6 Inasmuch as these people refused the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son;

The people of Judah would rejoice when the power of Israel and Syria were broken and they were no longer threats. There is nothing wrong with that. That is only natural. The problem is that they put their trust in the pagan king of Assyria to bring this about and they had not put their trust in God. They had rejected the gentle waters of Shiloah and so God brought against them the flood waters of the Euphrates, which here represented the armies of Assyria.

What is the significance of the waters of Shiloah? In the Greek translation of Isaiah, the word “Shiloah” is rendered Siloam. We read about the pool of Siloam in John chapter nine when Jesus healed the man who was born blind:

- 6 When [Jesus] had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.
- 7 And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

Siloam referred to this pool and more generally to the whole water supply system in Jerusalem through which the water of the spring Gihon was brought into the fortress area of Jerusalem. This manmade water conduit was greatly improved by King Hezekiah, but it existed in a more primitive form earlier. This system which brought drinking water into Jerusalem represented God's rule through the house of David, and especially that coming Son of David whom God would send to bring His people the water of life. We see an ever greater connection between this water system and the rule of King David when we remember that Solomon was crowned king at the spring Gihon, which was just east of Jerusalem. This also is the very area of the city where Christ would enter the city at His Triumphal Entry on the week of His passion when the people hailed Him as the coming Son of David. Jesus is our Siloam, our Sent One who brings to us from God the water of life.

When the people rejected Siloam, they got the Euphrates. When the people rejected the coming Christ, they got instead the cruel King of Assyria.

That brings us to our last point, which is **salvation**. Even when the prophet prophesies that the King of Assyria will invade the

land of Judah, he points out that this land belongs to Immanuel, the prophesied miracle Child of the house of David, the coming Jesus of Nazareth. Look at the end of verse 8.

Immanuel means “God with us.” Because God is with His people, the plans of their and God’s enemies will always fail.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q.26. How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies.

Verse 9 in our passage addresses the enemies of God and of his people. In our translation, verse 9 begins with the words, “Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces!” There is another possible translation which I prefer. It is “Be evil, be wicked, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces!” In other words, God is saying to the pagan nations, “Give it your best shot and do your evil worst. You are going to fail.”

Assyria and the other pagan empires think they are in control of history when they are doing well. God in heaven laughs and holds them in derision. They are but His instruments. God uses them as a woodsman uses an axe to chop down a tree. When the tree is chopped down, the woodsman throws axe down. God will raise them up to be His tools of judgment against His rebellious people, but God will not allow them to foil His sovereign plans. When God is through with them, God will overthrow these pagan kingdoms and judge them for their sins. They can never

destroy God's program or eradicate God's people because of Immanuel both as a Person, which is Jesus, and as a principle, which is that God is with His true people.

Let me close by reminding you that Jesus, Emmanuel, is the sovereign Lord of history. We need to submit to Him in faith. We need to be faithful to Jesus even when it appears that the forces of evil are overwhelming us and controlling the world and history. Their evil success is but temporary. In the mystery of His providence, God will use even the deeds of His enemies for the advancement of God's kingdom and for God's ultimate glory and for the ultimate good of God's people. Always remain faithful to Jesus, even in the difficult times.

Be a people of faith. Look to Jesus for forgiveness for your sins and deliverance from your sins. Look to Jesus to enable you to bear the fruit of faith, which are repentance and new obedience. Through the power of Jesus made available to you through faith, seek to do that which pleases God and trust God to work everything out for His glory and your good.