

## What's the Message – Lesson 68

We continue our study of the prophets with the first part of the book of Isaiah.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning. Though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. We give You thanks, yet ask for Your blessing that we may serve You in willing obedience. Amen.

In our three previous lessons we have seen four different prophets give us lessons on the same subject: God's judgment and His salvation; both Law and Gospel. Today we see what one of the most well-known prophets has to say on this same topic, as we study the first 39 chapters of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah is such a rich source of prophetic teaching that it calls to us to give it the attention of greater detail than our purpose and time allows.

This is an overview course, one intended to give you the framework and the major themes that tie the Bible altogether. So we will not go into the book of Isaiah and study it chapter by chapter. For that our listeners are urged to participate in a class such as the LifeLight series of Bible studies from Concordia Publishing House.

Isaiah introduces himself in chapter 7, where we read: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. . . . Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. . . . Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Isaiah now begins the years of his ministry. He warns Judah that there will a day of judgment and chastises them for their sins, but then he brings up a new idea, the idea of a faithful remnant that will survive the time of punishment, and will carry forward the house of David. This theme of judgment for their wrongdoings and the counter theme of the mercy and

forgiveness of God are contrasted many times, back and forth. For example, Chapter 5 of Isaiah is a message of “woes” much like the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 23, where Jesus pronounces woes upon the Pharisees, scribes, and hypocrites.

The first event in which we see Isaiah is told in chapter 7, and we see King Ahaz so troubled by the threat of the kings of Syria and the Northern kingdom of Israel, that he was about to plea to the king of Assyria for help. Isaiah urged him not to take that desperate step, that Assyria would eliminate those two burnt out stubs of firewood anyway.

But Ahaz would not listen, and called for Assyria to help. It was something that Assyria was only too happy to do. However, it carried a high price tag, and Judah became a vassal of the King of Assyria, having to pay large amounts of tribute. Even worse, Ahaz was now a puppet king, and also had to make concessions to the Assyrian religion, even bringing elements of paganism into the temple in Jerusalem.

Then Ahaz died, and his son, Hezekiah came to the throne with a spirit of independence and nationalism. And the present king of Assyria, Sargon, was much too busy elsewhere putting down rebellion to be concerned with little Judah. While political intrigue roiled in the nations around him Hezekiah accomplished the reforms we have talked about previously.

Then, Sargon died and was succeeded by his son, Sennacherib. A coalition of states, including Egypt, Syria, and Judah, thought this was their opportunity to throw off the Assyrian yoke. But Isaiah, the prophet who had opposed submission to Assyria in the first place, now opposed rebellion against them. This time it was a stubborn Hezekiah who would not listen to the Lord’s prophet. The army of Assyria came down “like a wolf on the fold” to wreak bitter vengeance. The attack razed the 46 fortified cities of Judah, and Jerusalem was besieged. Sennacherib boasted that he had Hezekiah shut up “like a bird in a cage.” But then unconditional surrender was demanded, and Hezekiah resolved to defend Jerusalem, or die trying.

And with that Teacher, I have laid the background of the environment in which Isaiah worked. It must have been a very difficult time, but what is

the significance for us. Teacher, what's the message we want to draw from all of this?

My first illustration in answer to your question is the time when Isaiah told Ahaz not to be concerned with the kings of Syria and Israel, but should trust in the Lord to protect Judah. However, as John Bright says: *Ahaz would not listen; the narrow walk of faith was not for him.* All too often we do not listen to God and His word, so it definitely applies to us also.

There are many here who find the walk of faith too narrow, too restrictive and demanding. But there is a heavy price to pay for such disobedience. And this price is both temporal and eternal.

The second illustration is the time when Sennacherib's mighty army besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem were in desperate straights, facing sure destruction. Once again I will cite John Bright. He says about this episode: *Isaiah's attitude in the course of all of this is truly remarkable. In view of his previous attitude we might expect an "I told you so" coupled with advice to give in. But instead he emerges as a tower of courage to king and people. Have faith, he says, do not fear! The Assyrian has blasphemed God in his pride and will surely be cut down to size. He will not take the city, but will be sent limping home with his tail between his legs. God will by all means defend Zion! . . . For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.*" (II Kings chapters 19 and 20, Isaiah chapter 37.)

From this episode we can only draw the conclusion that God will act on behalf of His people, in His own time, in His way. It is for us to remember that the kingdom of our Lord *is one entered by the humiliated – that small remnant who in suffering and tragedy have been purged of their sinful ways, who in that suffering have learned obedience to the will of God.*

Next time we will study some of the sermons of Isaiah.

