

Isaiah

Sermon 25

“The Sure Foundation”

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Romans 9:27-33
Isaiah 28:14-29

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[27] And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, [28] for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” [29] And as Isaiah predicted,

**“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”**

[30] What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; [31] but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, [33] as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;

and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

(ESV)

Isaiah 28:14–29

**[14] Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers,
who rule this people in Jerusalem!**

[15] Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death,

**and with Sheol we have an agreement,
when the overwhelming whip passes through
it will not come to us,**

**for we have made lies our refuge,
and in falsehood we have taken shelter”;**

**[16] therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
“Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,**

**a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:**

‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’

**[17] And I will make justice the line,
and righteousness the plumb line;
and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
and waters will overwhelm the shelter.”**

**[18] Then your covenant with death will be annulled,
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
when the overwhelming scourge passes through,
you will be beaten down by it.**

**[19] As often as it passes through it will take you;
for morning by morning it will pass through,
by day and by night;
and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.**

**[20] For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on,
and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.**

**[21] For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim;
as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused;
to do his deed—strange is his deed!
and to work his work—alien is his work!**

**[22] Now therefore do not scoff,
lest your bonds be made strong;
for I have heard a decree of destruction
from the Lord GOD of hosts against the whole land.**

**[23] Give ear, and hear my voice;
give attention, and hear my speech.**

**[24] Does he who plows for sowing plow continually?
Does he continually open and harrow his ground?**

**[25] When he has leveled its surface,
does he not scatter dill, sow cumin,
and put in wheat in rows**

**and barley in its proper place,
and emmer as the border?**

**[26] For he is rightly instructed;
his God teaches him.**

**[27] Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin,
but dill is beaten out with a stick,
and cumin with a rod.**

**[28] Does one crush grain for bread?
No, he does not thresh it forever;
when he drives his cart wheel over it
with his horses, he does not crush it.**

**[29] This also comes from the LORD of hosts;
he is wonderful in counsel
and excellent in wisdom. (ESV)**

I. Introduction

A. Where Is Your Security?

Tornado sirens are a very eerie sound. They are a clear warning that danger is on the way. Take shelter. And where do you go? Right to the very foundation of the building. But if you're in a mobile home or a tent, then watch out. Their foundations are not firm, and they cannot survive such a storm.

Day to day, where do you find your security? When you ask yourself, “am I going to be alright?” where do you find comfort? Is it from your family? Is it from your house, or your job, your appearance, or your finances? Is it your ability to do something? Be honest, where is your trust, really? And if the answer is anything other than God himself, we need to ask the further question—“what would I do if I lost *that* thing that I’m trusting in?” And if you respond, “well, that would never happen,” then that’s not good enough. For in today’s passage, we read about ancient Jerusalem, threatened with conquest by an evil, sadistic empire. How did they deal with that threat? They said, “We have an alliance with Egypt!” But in the face of God’s judgment, human alliances won’t be any good at all. Only God himself can save. So where is *your* trust? If it’s not in God himself, it’s time to *put* it there. If *he* is your foundation, then you cannot fall, no matter how strong the storm. And if he is *not* your foundation, then you will not stand, no matter how pleasant the weather.

B. Context: Assyrian Conquest of Israeli (Isa. 28:1-13)

Isaiah 28 begins with the condemnation of the northern kingdom of Israel (sometimes called Ephraim.) God condemns them for their pride, their rejection of his word, their false sense of security, and their self-indulgent lifestyle. They were partiers, drunkards, and practitioners of sexual immorality. Only a remnant of the whole nation would be saved. Seeing this, would the southern kingdom of Judah take heed from the

terrible fate of their northern neighbor? No. Judah's leaders reject God's word, especially as given by Isaiah the prophet. They ignore the tornado sirens. "It's just a test. We can ignore it."

More literally, they did not believe the Assyrians would come after them. Of, even if they did, the people of Judah trusted in their political alliance with Egypt. "The Egyptians will save us!" They had a reckless confidence, thinking that they had a sort of covenant with death and that they were saved by their own clever geo-political deals. How foolish. Even the best health insurance and a fully-stocked retirement account cannot keep you alive, in the end. Make no covenant with death, for God is life, and death is simply the absence of his presence. Rather, make a covenant with life—with God himself, for in Jesus Christ, we have life itself. *He* is our security—every other footing will eventually give way.

II. False Foundation: A Covenant with Death (vv. 14-15)

The people of Judah took God's word as a joke. They scoffed at Isaiah's warnings. Be careful that we do not do the same. We must fear the Lord, reverence him from the heart, and be careful to obey his Word. We must avoid the temptation to become proud and dismissive of God's judgment. We may feel safe and secure right now, but that can change at any moment. We must not trust in anything but God for our wellbeing. Even in the very heartland of America, we are not safe from God's judgment.

The leaders of Judah trusted in an alliance with Egypt, rather than in God himself. They believed the Egyptians would protect them from an Assyrian invasion, and that they had nothing to worry about. But in verse 15, Isaiah declares that the men of Judah are taking refuge in lies, rather than in the true God. For Egypt would *not* rescue them—and so they'd be left with nothing. In the same way, let us examine our own hearts, to make sure we are not seeking refuge in something other than God for our wellbeing. Anything other than God can be taken away from you. You may try to convince yourself that that would never happen in *your* case. But it can. Face the truth of that fact now, and build your faith, your hopes, your eternal security on the only solid foundation there is: Jesus Christ himself. No one else and nothing else will be there to save you at the grave.

III. True Foundation: A Covenant with Life (vv. 16-17)

Rest your soul on the true foundation—on God's precious cornerstone, even on Jesus Christ himself. Only God can save you. He is your real security—not yourself, your schemes, your doctor, your parents, your financial advisor, or anything else. Isaiah already made this point way back in chapter 8:13-15:

[13] But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. [14] And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap

and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. [15] And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” (ESV)

Now Isaiah makes the same point again, from a different angle.

Whereas in Isaiah 8, God himself is the sanctuary and the stone, in Isaiah 28:16, he is the one who *lays* the foundation stone. He *is* the stone, and he is the one who *lays* the stone—we see here a hint of the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ.

[16] therefore thus says the Lord GOD,

“Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,

a stone, a tested stone,

a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:

‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’

The only secure foundation for our bodies and souls is God himself—he is the foundation stone, and he is the one who *lays* the foundation. He is our refuge, our sanctuary. He is the cornerstone who binds the differing walls of the structure together. He is immovable, and solid. We don’t have to rush around in haste and panic—rather we trust steadfastly in the Lord and wait on his sovereign timing for all things. Christ himself is the foundation for the redeemed people of God. Only those who have faith in Jesus will be saved—that is, forgiven for their sins, and given life beyond death in the perfect, holy, eternal life and joy of God. Those who fail to do this are many—even among the very tribes chosen by God from of old. And now the Lord has graciously extended salvation

beyond those tribes to even Gentiles like us. Paul teaches on this very Isaiah passage in Romans 9:27-33, saying,

[27] And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, [28] for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." [29] And as Isaiah predicted,

*"If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah."*

[30] What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; [31] but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, [33] as it is written,

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

We must trust in God, and not in ourselves, our allies, the government, or anything else. And when we trust in Jesus as our solid rock, God makes us secure in him, and also unites us with others who are in him. The stones in a building are solid on the foundation, and solidly

connected to one another. When you trust in Jesus, your life itself is based on union with God and union with other believers. And that's exactly what the two greatest commandments describe—for you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is the focus of the Apostle Peter's teaching, in 1 Peter 2:4–10. He says, *As you come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [6] For it stands in Scripture:*

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

[7] So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone,” [8] and

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” (cf Isa 8:14)

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

[9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy,

but now you have received mercy.

In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus brings us forgiveness of our sins, reconciliation with God, and peace with one another. Jesus achieves the salvation God had earlier promised to Abraham. For when God spoke to Abraham, Genesis 15:6 says, *he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

God himself in Jesus Christ is our only security. Faith in him is our confidence. And in this, we do not have a false covenant with death, as the leaders of Judah imagined—but rather, we have a true covenant with life—for Christ is Life Itself! He said, *I am the way, and the truth and the life.*¹ We do not rely on men, as the people of Judah did, but on Christ alone. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23: *So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, [22] whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, [23] and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

God builds rightly, truly, and honestly. Goodness and life and justice are in him. Isaiah 28:17:

*And I will make justice the line,
and righteousness the plumb line.*

Likewise when he brings his judgment against Judah via the invading Assyrians, he would show up their false sense of security for the lie it really is. The invaders would come upon the land like a storm—like a

¹ John 14:6. See also 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

mighty flood. Isaiah 28:18: *and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter.*

If you put your security in anything other than God, then one day, one day, God will bring disaster and death upon you. Take refuge in the Lord, even now!

IV. Workmanship Revealed: God Decrees Destruction (vv. 18-20)

If you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then no storm, no fire, no disaster will be able to destroy you. Even if you die, you have salvation with the Lord. And only the things in your life that flow from faith in Christ will endure. He is the foundation—build carefully on him, through a life of grateful good works that honor God. Nothing else will last, and Judgment Day will clearly show this. The Apostle Paul teaches on this in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15, writing,

[10] According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—[13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is

burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (ESV)

God is patient and merciful. He often gives a long time for repentance and obedience. But judgment does eventually come—and it came indeed for Judah. God declares the falseness of their trust in Egypt and their own prosperity. He calls them to faith in himself. And then he visited destruction upon his own people, and on their false foundation of lies and rebellion. For they wanted to go their own way, and would not accept the authority of the prophet God had placed over them to guide and correct them.

*Isaiah 28:18 Then your covenant with death will be annulled,
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
when the overwhelming scourge passes through,
you will be beaten down by it.
[19] As often as it passes through it will take you;
for morning by morning it will pass through,
by day and by night;
and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.
[20] For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on,
and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.*

When you try to find security in anything other than God, it won't work. You will be subject to terror, sleeplessness, and worry—for good reason! You will never be able to get comfortable. Our only comfort is

in God himself. Whether you are proud because of abundant resources, or fearful because of scarce resources; whether you are well-connected or hated by everyone—you will not have peace unless you entrust your soul to the solid foundation of Jesus Christ—God himself in human flesh who died and rose again for your salvation. For personal destruction will come for each of us—if it is not through warfare, as with Assyria, it will come from another source—for even those who live to a great age here in our country undergo suffering and loss. I have heard on more than one occasion that the Golden Years are not so golden. For the body gives way to decay and pain, and the world starts to ignore you even before you're gone—and even beloved grandchildren can be so wrapped up in their own lives that they have little time for grandma and grandpa—let alone *great*-grandma or grandpa!

V. God's Strange Deed—His Alien Work (vv. 21-28)

A. Redemptive Pain

And this trust in God for our eternal security is so important that God sometimes allows pain and wreckage in our lives in order to get our attention and call us to himself. If we have false foundations, sometimes he will rip them away to show us the danger. This is God's strange deed, as it says here—or his alien work. God will sometimes use personal hardship or tragedy to get our attention—to make us rely on him in a new and deeper way. Or this can happen spiritually as well if we read his Law with tenderness and sensitivity—for an honest look at the Ten Commandments as expanded by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount

shows our deep inability to please God based on our own merits. This drives us to humility, and trust in God.

This is God's strange work. At Mt. Perizzim and Gibeon,² God fought against *Israel's* enemies. But now, God would use Assyria to fight against his *own* people. In so doing, he brings a wrecking ball to their false assurances that are built on false foundations apart from him. And after bringing wreckage into their lives—as he can do in our own as well—he calls on us to trust in Jesus, and thus find security on the true foundation. Sometimes God will give us a temporary injury for our eternal good—this is his strange work of humbling, by which he drives us to his proper work, of saving. May we always repent and trust in God, for this is the right response in every situation before him. And may we not turn bitter, or recoil in hard times. For the Lord is merciful and kind—he is swift to relent, and his purposes are for our good. Consider how the farmer treats his fields—for we are indeed God's field! Take lessons from the Lord of the harvest, and have perspective on God's judgment, and see how he brings mercy even in harrowing times.

B. The Farmer's Pattern

Isaiah 28:23 *Give ear, and hear my voice;*

give attention, and hear my speech.

[24] *Does he who plows for sowing plow continually?*

Does he continually open and harrow his ground?

² 2 Samuel 5:17-21, Joshua 10:1-11.

We are God's field, and if our hearts are hard, unfruitful soil, then sometimes God, in his strange, alien work, comes and plows them up through suffering. His judgment, when it does not destroy us, is meant to lead us to repentance and renewed faith in him. Hear Psalm 103:8-14:

- [8] *The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*
- [9] *He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.*
- [10] *He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.*
- [11] *For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*
- [12] *as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*
- [13] *As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.*
- [14] *For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.*

Back to Isaiah 28. What does a farmer do after he plow—after he harrows the field? Verse 25: *When he has leveled its surface,
does he not scatter dill, sow cumin,
and put in wheat in rows
and barley in its proper place,*

and emmer as the border?

[26] For he is rightly instructed;

his God teaches him.

After the farmer breaks up the ground, he plants the seeds. Sometimes your heart needs to be broken and harrowed before you are ready to accept the seed of faith. And if God never brought the suffering that broke you, you never would have received the seed of faith, and never would have been saved. And so to save you from an eternity in hell, the Lord may have allowed a terrible breaking to take place in your life at some point. Don't get me wrong—there are many who go to hell, and there are many he simply destroys in his judgment. But there is an elect, who turn and repent and trust in God and ride out the bad times, clinging to the Lord in faith. When your world is falling apart, never forget that God is kind and merciful and that it won't last forever.

Isaiah 28:23 Give ear, and hear my voice;

give attention, and hear my speech.

[24] Does he who plows for sowing plow continually?

Does he continually open and harrow his ground?

The answer is no. Indeed, God moderates his judgment and uses only enough force to accomplish his purposes. Consider:

[27] Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge,

nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin,

but dill is beaten out with a stick,

and cumin with a rod.

[28] Does one crush grain for bread?

No, he does not thresh it forever;

when he drives his cart wheel over it

with his horses, he does not crush it.

God uses just enough affliction to attain his good purposes. If he wishes to destroy you, he will simply do so. But if he is refining you for his own glorious use, then he will show mercy and restraint. He will moderate his severity, and he will moderate the duration of your affliction. For after the plowing comes the planting, and after the planting comes the growth, and after the growth comes the fruitfulness and the harvest. God may use his strange work of judgment and suffering in your life to drive you to his proper work of mercy and forgiveness and sanctification. There are certain types of pinecones that lie dormant for years, and it's only when fire comes that they become fruitful and grow. Sometimes that happens with us, too. I once knew a little old lady who would pray this principle over her unbelieving son. She'd pray, "Lord, knock him down, so he'll look up."

Do not forget God's promise in Romans 8:28 *that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* In all circumstances, repent of sin, trust in the Lord, and give thanks.

VI. Conclusion: God's Wisdom

Do not forget that God is wise, and he is good. Isaiah 28:29: *This also comes from the LORD of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.* As Isaiah 9:6 puts it, he is the Wonderful Counselor. He sees all ends, and acts to glorify his name. We do not always see what he is doing, but we shall trust him nonetheless. Have you seen his merciful hand already in your own present affliction, whatever it may be? We will listen carefully to his word, and never scoff at it, or pridefully imagine that his judgment could never fall here. Rather, let us fear the Lord, and put all our trust in him. Jesus Christ alone is the solid foundation on whom we can rest. Everything else will fail us. Everything else will break and give way. Indeed, your earthly disasters may end up leading to heavenly blessings. Therefore, *Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Revelation 7:12: *Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*