

ISA 3:1 For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah Both supply and support, the whole supply of bread,
 And the whole supply of water;
 [2] The mighty man and the warrior, The judge and the prophet, The diviner and the elder,
 [3] The captain of fifty and the honorable man, The counselor and the expert artisan, And the skillful enchanter.
 [4] And I will make mere lads their princes And capricious children will rule over them,
 [5] And the people will be oppressed, Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; The youth will storm against the elder, And the inferior against the honorable.
 [6] When a man lays hold of his brother in his father's house, saying, "You have a cloak, you shall be our ruler, And these ruins will be under your charge,"
 [7] On that day will he protest, saying, "I will not be your healer, For in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; You should not appoint me ruler of the people."
 [8] For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, Because their speech and their actions are against the LORD, To rebel against His glorious presence.
 [9] The expression of their faces bears witness against them. And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them!
 For they have brought evil on themselves.
 [10] Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, For they will eat the fruit of their actions.
 [11] Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him,
 For what he deserves will be done to him.
 [12] O My people! Their oppressors are children, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray,
 And confuse the direction of your paths.

ISA 3:13 The LORD arises to contend, And stands to judge the people.
 [14] The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, "It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses.
 [15] "What do you mean by crushing My people, And grinding the face of the poor?" Declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

ISA 3:16 Moreover, the LORD said, "Because the daughters of Zion are proud, And walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, And go along with mincing steps,
 And tinkle the bangles on their feet,
 [17] Therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion with scabs, And the LORD will make their foreheads bare."
 [18] In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments,
 [19] dangling earrings, bracelets, veils,
 [20] headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets,
 [21] finger rings, nose rings,
 [22] festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses,
 [23] hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils.
 [24] Now it will come about that instead of sweet perfume there will be putrefaction; Instead of a belt, a rope; Instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp; Instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth; And branding instead of beauty.
 [25] Your men will fall by the sword, And your mighty ones in battle.
 [26] And her gates will lament and mourn; And deserted she will sit on the ground.

ISA 4:1 For seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach!"

A Nation on the Brink of Disaster

I want to start off by telling your four seeming unrelated things. First, an incredible thing happened this past week. The United States of America saw the legalization of a wicked contradiction: **Gay "marriages" are now being performed legally in the state of Massachusetts and recognized as binding, sanctioned, lawful unions.**

Second, **"we are the greatest civilization in the history of the world."** People from every city and township in America repeat this mantra day after day. Even if true, such a statement is surly the opposite of humility. The arrogance and haughtiness that we exude to the rest of the world in virtually every aspect of our culture is one of the primary that we are the military target of other nations throughout the world. People in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, South America want America to fall.
(REV: ARROGANCE BABYLON)

Third, Americans are the fattest people in the world. The primary cause of illness in this nation is directly proportional to the size of our waist belts. Every time you go to a drive-through window, you are asked if you want to super-size you meal. Obviously, a BIG Mac isn't enough. We need to gorge ourselves Biggie fries and Super-size cokes as well.

Fourth, every day, millions of people spend hundred or thousands of dollars just to go to a ball game or to go skiing or to buy a new television or to get the latest Nintendo set. **We want our diversions** and our **easy lifestyle** and we are willing to sacrifice everything else in order to get it including church life, family health, personal devotion to God and vocational fulfillment.

Now, let me take you back many centuries, to another time and another place: a certain group of cities located around the region that we call the Dead Sea. The protection and acceptance of homosexuality and rape are the obvious sins that come to our minds when we think of Sodom and Gomorrah. But listen to the prophet Ezekiel's description of this place. "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy" (Eze 16:49). Sound familiar to anything we have just discussed?

Friends, there have been a lot of nations that have had sins like we have mentioned. Why, then, is it that we remember Sodom and Gomorrah? It is because there was a coming day that they would not escape. It was a day of judgment upon the people. Jesus said, "In the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30). We remember Sodom and Gomorrah because they were destroyed in a horrible way in an instant with fire and brimstone.

Let us now go to the book of Isaiah. We have already seen how Isaiah has called Judah's rulers Sodom and her people the people of Gomorrah (1:10). He brings this up again in chapter 3:9 (in our text this morning), "The expression of their faces bears witness against them. And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them!" It is the haughty, arrogant, "in your face" sinning that bubbled over throughout this nation that Isaiah, like Ezekiel, now remembers.

Thesis:

Because the comparisons are so close to our own society, what we are going to see here is a great warning to the mighty nation of America and all those nations who are following in similar paths, which unfortunately seems to be practically the rest of the nations of the world.

Isaiah 3 contains sobering words.

It is about the destruction of a nation. Do you want to know what the collapse of a society looks like? Here they are displayed before your eyes, like the confiscated instruments of in a trial. What lies ahead for a nation that falls? The most basic rudiments of life are taken away. "Behold, the Lord God of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water" (Isa 3:1). This can be likened to a famine of the worse possible kind.

Now, the prophet Amos talks about another kind of famine. He says, "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD. "And people will stagger from sea to sea, And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, But they will not find it" (Amos 8:11-12). There is a great lesson that God's people need to understand in our day that I am afraid many of us have exactly backwards.

This is the way of things in God's world. The word goes forth. People accept that word. As the word is believed and acted upon, nations are changed. Common grace

comes to a people in greater ways as a bi-product of the very special grace that he gives to the elect. Nations are blessed because of the faith and belief of God's people.

But nations fall. They collapse back into pagan superstitions, relativism, and tolerance of sin. We need to understand why this takes place this morning. **Why do nations that at one time were beacons of truth fall into error?** It is because God's church becomes complacent and begins to covet the very blessings that God gives to a nation. The blessings become idols. And the church falls away from speaking forth truth and from being light. She systematically begins to break each of the Ten Commandments. And God begins to withdraw his common grace until soon, there is no hope left for the future of that society.

In other words, nations fall because the church is unfaithful. First there is a spiritual famine. People don't even realize that they are starving, or if they do they have no idea where they might be able to get food and drink for their souls. Over the course of time, they become so **emaciated** that even when spiritual food comes, they are not able to eat it. Their **withered** bodies no longer hold up their own weight, so they can take the action that is necessary to carry out God's will. The sickness has metastasized. Death is a certainty.

But here is the thing. At the very same time, while the soul is withered and wasting away, the physical existence is still enjoying many material blessings. I hope you are listening very carefully to this. The physical bodies get fat and lazy and careless and complacent. Because the soul is no longer thriving, spiritual food that may be available for consumption is seen not with spiritual eyes, but with physical eyes. And so people are drawn quite naturally to pagan forms of worship, to hedonistic praise, to feel-good sermons, to spectacle and celebrity and influence. Though they think this is godly, they are gravely mistaken. They can no longer tell the difference between the Spirit of God speaking truth and the spirit of this age speaking lies.

After enough time of this, as the collapse into moral promiscuity and prideful boasting grows worse and worse, after the spiritual famine has done its worst to our souls, God sends another famine. But this one destroys our bodies as well. Actual nations collapse, first from within, then from without. It happened to Sodom. It happened to Israel. It happened to Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. America, Canada, Britain, France, modern Israel, Japan... none of these contemporary societies are immune from the same fate overtaking them.

Because the truth now spreads forth to Gentile lands, there is in some ways a very real connection between each of them and Israel. It happens for the reasons stated in **3:8-9**. **"Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah fallen because their speech and their actions are against the LORD. To rebel against His glorious presence. The expression of their faces bears witness against them. They display their sin like Sodom."**

I am not exaggerating when I say this: To hear people say, **"morality is private. It doesn't affect anyone. It should be kept out of public life,"** this is perhaps the most heinous, wrong-headed, ignorant and stupid thing anyone in a culture could ever possibly say at any time about anything! It is the word of a blind and ignorant fool. **This is surely the thinking that puts a nation on God's ten most wanted list.**

Look at what Judah was doing. Look at what we are doing. You tell me after reading the prophet that morality is private, that it doesn't matter, that it doesn't effect anyone, that the way our leaders act sexually has nothing to do with you and I, that religion and state are so totally separate that only the state is allowed to speak while religion must keep her mouth taped while she sits tied up in the corner. Hear the prophet now. How God tell you the truth of the matter.

"They do not conceal their sin" (vs. 9). This is Sodom. This is Jerusalem. This is America. When a nation begins to boast about her sin as we are currently doing, the end by definition is not far away. You can take that to the bank. The next words are telling for sure: "Woe to them!" Woe indeed.

"Their guides only lead them astray, and confuse the direction of your paths" (3:12). I hope your taking notes.

"The daughters of Zion are proud, and walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, and go along with mincing steps, and tinkle the bangles on their feet" (vs. 16). Listen to the list of things given that drive home what the priority and idol of these women is. They have their beauty in "their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings, festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses, hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils" (vs. 18-23). I think God is trying to make a point here.

I should mention in passing that God does not condemn and beauty and ornament as such. "It is not the various articles of jewelry in themselves which are reached by the condemnation. Something more serious has gripped his attention and drawn down upon itself his condemnation."¹ It is the inner pride that the idolatry of the hearts that exists in these women. Don't become a legalist about such things. "If the barn needs painting, paint it." If you want to impress your husband, impress him. The problem is not what goes into a man's mouth (or on a woman's body) that makes him unclean. It is what lies in the heart.

With that said, one of the sure marks that a society is near the front edge of disaster is the way the women of that society behave. There is an alarming trend in our own culture that was not even as bad 10 years ago as it is today. With increasing frequency and with bolder and bolder movement, the women of our culture are throwing off the shackles of morality, modesty, and decency and are rushing headlong into paganism, overt sexuality, body piercing, immodesty, barbarism, occult practices, horrible language, and the like.

Women see this as freedom. God sees it as treason. I liken the role of women in a society as the very foundation that undergirds the structure. If you think your role is not important to God, women, consider that. If it rots, the building must collapse.

The picture here is of women using their God given sexuality in perverse ways: to capture attention, to gain power, to become leaders, to get money, to rebel against God. In Noah's day, one of the very few reason that God gave for destroying the earth is that the daughters of men were being married to the sons of God. The most conservative interpretation of this is the idea that there was a wedding going on

¹ Ibid, p. 160.

between the world and God's people. The church of that time made its peace with their modernity, the world set the agenda for the church, and God destroyed every living thing that breathed upon the land because of it.

The women of our culture need to take heed of Peter's words. It is long, but worth quoting, "You are to live with purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (1 Pet 3:2-6).

Look at the picture that is given to explain what God thinks of these beautiful, sexual, brazen women. "The Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion with scabs, and the Lord will make their foreheads bare" (vs. 17). It's a disgusting picture. I don't see too many Cosmopolitan covers with pictures of women with scabs all over their faces.

As far as these women are concerned, the picture does not stop with scabs on the face. God says, "Instead of sweet perfume, there will be putrefaction" (vs. 24). The disaster that is coming will bring about a rancid odor that reeks of decay and rot. "Instead of a belt, a rope." The people will either hang themselves because of the gastly situation or they will be led out of Judah to Babylon by ropes. "Instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp." "Instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth. A branding instead of beauty," as they are herded out of town like cows on a cattle drive.

What comes to a nation that falls? Sickness, plague, slavery, bondage, and death. The food is taken away. People starve. The water is contaminated and polluted. People can't drink. Pestilence and disease sets in. From the mighty warrior to the judge to the prophet to the diviner to the governors to the captain to the honorable man to the counselor to the artist to the enchanter... from the rich to the poor, from the wicked to the righteous, from the greatest to the least, God will remove them all either in death or in captivity (Isa 3:1-3). I am not making any of this up. It is only what Isaiah is picturing for us.

Beginning in verse 4, something else is spoken of. "I will make mere lads their princes and capricious children will rule over them." During the captivity of Judah, even the rulers and governors are going to be removed. The image here is that little tiny children will rule the nation! As a matter of fact, after the deportation of the people into Babylon, only youths and the poorest remained to tend the land. There were the only people who could rule!

The Lord of Armies and legions of angels that do his bidding is going to bring to Judah incompetent rulers. "Youth" is probably not to be taken literally as much as it is to be a picture of incompetence. "It is the hotheadedness, the confidence and the recklessness of youth that re prominent there. The lack of maturity in judgment and decision could only work great harm to the state."²

² Young, Isaiah, p. 144.

This leads me to consider something that I believe is a tragedy in our day. It is made all the worse because we are desiring a state of affairs for ourselves that is here described as a curse and a result of war and captivity. **Our land is filled with leaders who flagrantly act like little children in office.** The mud slinging and name calling of our politicians is repulsive and childlike. The blatant disrespect and misuse of the office and position that so many of these judges, senators, congressmen, and presidents hold is a shame and a crime. These men think only of themselves, not the nation. They are bought off by special interest groups because they have no internal moral compass. They are not only caught in scandals, but in fact relish and revel in their scandals. They change political positions like we change our daughter's diapers. And they disgracefully try to separate moral values and actions from all political and corporate social life.

I tell you, these people have ruined our nation. And we voted them in or did nothing to prevent others from doing so by speaking up about truth when we had the chance. I also tell you what Isaiah told the people of his day. **This is God's doing to a nation. It cannot be argued against from this passage that the sort of political leaders that we have in office in our land is the direct punishment of God upon our nation.** E.J. Young sums it up, "When such a state of affairs has come, it is an evidence that God, who alone can raise up and depose rulers at will, has removed from the nation one of His greatest gifts."³ We have received nothing worse than what we have earned. Our society is not a good society. It is a disgraceful mockery of all that is sacred and honorable and true because you and I are being represented by men and women of who lie, cheat, steal, murder, and sleep their way into positions of power – not even for some ultimately good end -because they actually care about you and I - but because they want to become rich and powerful themselves. Don't tell me that churches should not speak up against such blatant immorality. This is exactly the meaning of Isaiah's words.

What takes place in Judah next is that the people begin to oppress *each other*. "The people will be oppressed, each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; the youth will storm against the elder, and the inferior against the honorable" (3:5). **Anarchy follows as a consequence from the poor government predicted in the preceding verses.** To put it in modern, American language, you get anarchy when you have a democracy that is run by opinion polls and super-minorities who reflect the values of tiny fractions of the overall public. Tolerance becomes a sword used by fellow citizens to cut down those who disagree with their personal interpretation of the way things ought to be. Everyone becomes his own judge, jury, and executioner. **This is exactly what we see in our own time as the gay agenda of 2% of the population is being violently forced upon the rest of society as morally good, where evolution is imposed upon the populace, where social engineering dominates education and the list just goes on.** Our society is on the brink of disaster, if it has not already gone over the edge. Everything about Isaiah's vision that applies to a nation exists in our own day.

One of the terrible things that is discussed here is how the people actually force incompetent people to become leaders. "You have a cloak, you will be our ruler, and these ruins will be under your charge." "He will protest, saying, 'I will not be your healer, for in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you should not appoint me ruler of the people'" (vs. 6-7).

³ Ibid, p. 144.

How this applied in that day was that the condition of the nation was so bad, the people so poor, the circumstances so dire, that anyone who stood out at all would be trust into leadership. What a horrible situation is described when a man who has only a garment to keep him warm is so much better off than the rest of the people that they urge him into leadership. Here, the man is reluctant because he knows he is both 1) not qualified and 2) he doesn't want to take over a heap of ruins.

I believe this applies to you and I in our day a bit differently. We have not been overthrown by Iraq (modern Babylon)... yet. But we still have incompetent rulers. It is because in our day people are little concerned with right and wrong. Instead, they are fascinated with looks and rhetoric and celebrity and wealth. How do you get to be in positions of authority and government (and most of the really big churches) in our day? Any of the above will do. And as the people of this nation lift up the celebrity to speak for them, they unwittingly lead themselves to the slaughtering house. A pretty face is no substitute for a strong and virtuous man who stands for truth and is after the best interests of the people. **Woe, Woe, WOE to us.**

One section of this text that we have not looked at is **3:13-15**. Here we get to the **nub** of the matter. All of this happens to a culture, to Judah, because the Lord arises to contend and stand against the people to judge them for their crimes against him. It begins with those who are held most responsible: the elders and princes of the people. It ought to be a stern warning to our own leaders (in the nation and the church) that judgment starts here (**vs. 14**).

It is the leaders who have devoured the vineyard (the vineyard is a symbol of the precious people of God). **They have plundered the poor to benefit themselves** (**vs. 14**). To these people God roars loudly, **"What do you mean by crushing My people, and grinding the face of the poor?"** (**vs. 15**). It is the Lord of Hosts who speaks.

Friends, the warning of Isaiah has continued now with few interruptions of grace for the first three chapters of the book. **God was angry with Judah. He wants them to know it and so he tells them – a lot!** This is a major theme of the Scripture. This particular text is given more specifically as a warning to our *culture* than it is to the *church*, even as ch. 1 was more to the church than to our culture. We cannot continue to defy God with our lax morals if we want to continue to prosper. Morality is not private. It is very corporate, especially as our representatives engage in it for better or for worse. **This is what it means to be a representative.** I fear that the prosperity we continue to experience in our culture is now physical almost exclusively, for there are very few in this land in God's church who are willing to be called out of the land to be different.

Since the church is in love with the world's ways, her things, and her ideas, the time cannot be far off when the physical prosperity will also cease. The famine of the word will eventually turn into a literal famine that brings death, decay, rot, slavery, and great torment and horror.

There is a word in **4:1** that finishes off our text today. **"For seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, 'We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name, take away our reproach!'"** The context of this plea from the women of Jerusalem obviously has to do with the great punishment that God is bringing upon them.

The time would come when so many of the men would be killed or taken captive ("Your men will fall by the sword... in battle – vs. 3:25) that the women, who needed a husband both to take care of their physical needs and to provide children for them, that seven women would all be grasping for the help of one man. **At any cost, these women would seek even the most undesirable of men, just so they might have their most basic of needs met.** It really is a horrific picture the prophet describes as scabbed up, sackcloth wearing, branded and roped up women are groping about for the help of any man who will take them in.

Dear Christians, this all happened to a nation that God covenanted with when she forsook him. God has not been pleased (YET) for the same thing to happen to our land or the lands where many of our forefathers came here from. Praise God for his infinite mercy. But, perhaps even in our lifetimes, such a thing could take place to our land. Physically speaking, the picture may be very much the same as it was in Judah's time of trouble. There may not be any man will take in the desolate women, allowing them to bear his name and so take away their great reproach.

Spiritually speaking, however, I pray that in the time of God's mercy, none of us here would be saying this about ourselves. There is one who even now takes away our reproach. For each of us, our sin remains before us, for we continue until we die to sin against God. There is one who even now calls his own by his name. To be a Christian is to bear the name of Christ who takes away our reproach by forgiving us of our trespasses, providing hope even for the here and now that all may not yet be too late. Let God's church call once again upon the name of the Lord as they did as early as the days of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam. Let us pour out our hearts in confession of our sins, not taking for granted his forgiveness and not allowing his grace to be an excuse to sin against him. Perhaps God may yet have mercy upon our nation for the sake of his people.

Take comfort in the story of Sodom. God promised Abraham that he would not destroy that place if there was even ten people to be found that were righteous in the city. There are still many pockets of righteousness left in our own society, probably more than I have given you the impression of here this morning. Yet, the overall trend is what is so alarming. We are not a culture that is growing spiritually, but shrinking and falling back. There are less and less churches desiring to follow God, while there are more and more that are desiring to follow man's wishes and man's goals. God often times has shown great patience to wicked societies for the sake of the elect remnant that remains faithful to him. His patience does not last forever. We must not continue in our complacency. We must work to build this church and God's church. We must find ways of engaging our culture for Christ in order to see some hint of redemption (in common grace terms) return to it. We have to stop living in our Christian bubbles, refusing to engage the culture for fear of it contaminating us. Let us live according to our theology, recognizing that we are already totally depraved, that the world isn't going to make us worse, focus on Christ's redemption for us that comes in spite of us, seek repentance and get on with the business of ushering in the kingdom of God on this earth. Take the Lord's prayer seriously: They kingdom come on EARTH as it is in heaven. Let us work diligently through prayer and repentance and action to uphold the values of God's law and set forth the only saving message that brings hope to a rebellious people, even our precious lord and savior Jesus Christ. And perhaps God will yet choose to send genuine, biblical, godly reformation and revival upon our land.

Amen.

“Once upon a time the Church was the moral conscience and spiritual lighthouse of the nation. Now, most congregations are impotent, pusillanimous minor-league social welfare agencies or mutual comfort societies with no impact on the world around their little enclave.” *Email from Tessa 5-22-04*