

8:1 Then the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: *Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.* (NAS)

8:2 And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me." (ESV)

8:3 And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name *Maher-shalal-hashbaz*;" (ESV)

8:4 for before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria." (ESV)

8:5 The LORD spoke to me again: (ESV)

8:6 "Because this people have refused the *waters of Shiloah* that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, (ESV)

8:7 therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them *the waters of the River*, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And *it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks*, (ESV)

8:8 and *it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.*" (ESV)

8:9 Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armor and be shattered; strap on your armor and be shattered. (ESV)

8:10 Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for *God is with us.* (ESV)

8:11 For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: (ESV)

8:12 "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. (ESV)

8:13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. (ESV)

8:14 "Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, *And* a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (NAS)

8:15 "And many will stumble over them, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught." (NAS)

8:16 Bind up the *testimony*; seal the teaching among my disciples. (ESV)

8:17 And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him. (NKJ)

8:18 Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. (NAS)

8:19 And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? (ESV)

8:20 To the law and to the *testimony*! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them. (NKJ)

8:21 And they will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. (NAS)

8:22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. (ESV)

“History is a gift of God to his Son the Lord Jesus Christ”

## A Plea to the Nominal Christian

*Isaiah 8:10-22*

Five hundred years ago, just prior to the great Reformation a romantic notion abounded that if you weren't a heathen or a Mohammedan that you were automatically a Christian. They called the vast landscape of Europe: **Christendom**. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* explains that in its broader meaning, Christendom is "used to describe the part of the world which is inhabited by Christians, as Germany in the Middle Ages was the country inhabited by Germans."<sup>1</sup> I want to help you see what the comparison of Christendom to Germany means. In a time of tribalism where there was absolutely no "breeding" between races, if you were in the territory of "Germany," then you were a German. Your identity was not like it is in America, where a hundred different ethnicities are all considered "Americans." In those days your nationality was identical to your ethnicity. When you take this idea across religious lines you can easily see how the thinking became that if you were in the place called Christendom, then you were a Christian. In Christendom, people are born Christians just as they are born Germans. Isaiah chapter 8 strikes deep at the heart of such an idea by telling us that God has a vast distinction in his mind between those physical people (who really are his people in a sense that is distinct from the rest of the world) and those who are his in a spiritual sense. God's spiritual people only get that way through faith in Christ. Isaiah 8 is thus a warning to the nominal Christian.

### History of the Concept of Christendom

But let us look a little deeper into the history of this concept. The idea of Christendom seems to have gained favor after **312AD** with the swift and sudden change in the status of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Previous to this date, Christianity was viewed by many of the Roman emperors as a dangerous cult to the Empire. Since Christians would not bow and worship the Caesar, they were seen as more than a little unpatriotic. This is why you had several periods of intense persecution during those first 300 Years of the Martyrs. If you won't bow to Caesar, maybe you would to a lion in the arena. Rome needed citizens who were wholly patriotic and in line with her ideals.

The years just prior to 312 AD were tumultuous, because Rome was rotting away from the inside. It saw several men vying for the seat of Emperor. Two men in particular, **Constantine, the son of Constantius Chlorus** and **Maxentius from Italy** were about to engage in battle at the **Milvian Bridge**, just outside the city of Rome. To the winner would go the spoils of Rome. Constantine had the inferior army and it is said that he had a dream the night before the battle. Historian Bruce Shelly recounts the event, "In [the] dream [Constantine] saw a cross in the sky and the words, 'In this sign conquer.' This convinced him to advance. When on 28 October 312 he achieved his brilliant victory over the troops of Maxentius, Constantine looked upon his success as proof of the power of Christ and the superiority of the Christian religion... From the year 312, he favored Christianity openly. He allowed Christian ministers to enjoy the same exemption from taxes as the pagan priests; he abolished executions by crucifixion he called a halt to the battles of the gladiators as a punishment for crimes; and in 321 he made Sunday a public holiday... Christianity *had been outlawed* and persecuted. Suddenly *it was favored* and pampered."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03699b.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Shelly, *Church History In Plain Language*, p. 108-110.

Certainly, there were many truly good benefits to this event. But there is one outcome of Constantine's vision that is particularly important to the idea of Christendom. I hope you can see what such State favor to a religion like this would do to the thinking of the Roman citizen. If Christians get all sorts of favors and benefits that other citizens do not get, then why not convert to Christianity in order to get those benefits for yourself? This meant that suddenly you do not have a church that is full of people ready to die for the Faith. Rather, you have an increasing mixture of sheep and goats and wheat and tares. Because of Constantine's favors, many people were converting to Christianity for purely political or economic reasons. But they were completely dead spiritually. This was a brand new phenomenon in Christian history.

It is important to see that this general *attitude* actually became *law* 68 years later. In 380, "emperor Theodosius made belief in Christianity a matter of imperial command:

It is Our Will that all the peoples We rule shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans. We shall believe in the single Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity.

We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with divine judgment.<sup>3</sup>

Suddenly, the imperial command turns the tables on pagans and others. If *you* do not become a Christian, *you* will face not only God's justice (which you would not care about as an unbeliever), but more importantly the State's justice (which you would care about!). And if you knew anything about the history of the Christians, you knew full well what the Empire was capable of doing. In this way, with the tiniest stroke of the pen, emperor Theodosius ensured that Rome and Christianity would be forever tied together; and the concept of Christendom has been a permanent belief in the minds of Europeans (and their offspring) ever since. The emperor saw to it that by force, he would make pagans take the name of Christ whether they believed in Him or not. I believe that one of the primary factors to the rise of the dark ages (a term quite appropriate to our text this morning) was this prostitution of the church with the state and the sudden conversion of millions of pagans into a faith that they never did believe in.

To be sure, the church has always had a mixture of sheep and goats in it. Jesus promised as much until the time when he would separate them himself. It is important for the spiritual purist to remember Jesus' own words, "Let both [the wheat and the tares] grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters [the angels]: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Matt 13:30). And Jesus later says, "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world'... Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 110-111.

prepared for the devil and his angels'... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt 24:32-34, 41, 46).

As individuals, we dare not think we have it within our power to know for certain who among professing believers are actually faking it. On the other hand, the elders of the visible church dare not take the keys of the kingdom (church discipline) lightly because they are afraid of judging someone – when in fact it is their duty to judge and excommunicate when the point is biblically reached for such a thing to take place.

But it is one thing to know that there will be sheep and goats in the church and try to live with that in a biblical way. It is quite another thing to invite as many goats into the church as possible because you are zealous to make everyone convert to Christ. Rome accelerated nominal Christianity, even as she does to this very day with all of her blasphemous doctrines. Nominal Christianity and Christendom are extremely dangerous beliefs that far too many "Christians" actually believe is all that matters to God if one wants to wake up on that last great day to the light of God's love and good pleasure.

### **Isaiah 8**

Let us go now to the Scripture. The most prominent feature of Isaiah 8:10-22 is the notion that **Jehovah's people must be people of faith** if they want to wake up to that great final Day of light. Darkness and light will in fact end our text this morning. The Jews must choose the ways of the nations (including all of the external rituals of Judaism that they held in tact at the same time as they followed after other gods as we saw back in chapter 1) or they much choose the ways of God. There may be no in between. It is written specifically with the purpose in mind of showing nominal Jews (and in our day, Christians) of their desperate need for faith in Christ.

This may surprise you if you remember the text, because the word "faith" is not actually used. However, there are great contrasts here. And these contrasts prove the point. In our text there is **a people within a people** (thus we see that there in fact are two people's of God). There is the contrast between **faith and faithlessness**, between Christ as the **sanctuary** to the one and the **stumbling stone** and a snare to the other, between living in the **light** and living in the **dark** ages. This text is a call to repentance for all who are playing the Christendom game. It is a warning that one day God will separate the wheat from the tares, that this day is coming and that it is sure to happen. So in a day when there is so much Christendom thinking in the church, in a day when so many people are playing the game and putting on the pretty face for others, this is a warning that is most necessary and must be heeded by all.

### **People Within a People**

I think that the best way to understand this passage this morning is to look at it through the lenses of the contrasts. First, you should see how it is that God has a people within a people. Keep in mind this essential truth that has not changed from that day to this: both are God's people. Though in our day it is no longer a nation but a visible church, God still has a people within a people. But Isaiah makes it plain here that God is not with these two groups in the same way.

We have seen that the message of Isaiah is written to Judah (1:1). The people of Judah are the Jews is the most consistent sense of the word, for "Jew" comes from "Judah." Judah was the land that contained the promised city and it held the throne of the king who would continue the line of David – through whom Messiah would eventually come. Remember, it was to the nation that it was said, **"God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession"** (Deut 7:6).

But we have seen something vital happen in Isaiah's book that many people are not willing to look at. In the New Testament, this idea is made much clearer than the Jews of Isaiah's day ever saw. And yet, the New Testament uses this very book of Isaiah to make the point clear. There is a reason why Paul picks up the text of Isaiah throughout his treatise to the Romans as he describes the two peoples of God in the church age. In fact, Paul quotes from [Isaiah 8:14](#) in [Romans 9:33](#) when he says, "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." Paul argues there that the Gentiles (as a group) have obtained righteousness by faith, but Israel who pursued a law of righteousness has not attained it because they sought it by works. And so Israel stumbles over Christ. In keeping with the great Christ themes of this book already ([think of the "light of the Lord" - ch. 2; the "branch" - ch. 4; the "seed" - ch. 6; "Immanuel" - ch. 7; and "Shiloah" - ch. 8](#)), Paul explicitly calls the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14 Jesus Christ! So we have one more title of this great coming servant of God. We are going to come back to this idea when we get to faith and faithlessness.

The point for now is that Isaiah (and later Paul) has increasingly argued that there is a division being revealed in an ever-increasing level within God's people. This division has always been there, but now it is coming to the surface of revelation at this time. Isaiah is starting to make clear what has previously been hidden by shadow.

We have seen divisions take place in this book and we see it here as well. We have seen "my people" ([3:12](#)) become "this people" ([6:9](#)). In this way the people are forsaken in some sense (that is covenantally). We have seen "your [Ahaz's] God" ([7:11](#)) become "my [Isaiah's] God" ([7:13](#)). In this way Ahaz is also forsaken by God. Now, in [chapter 8](#) we see God contrasting "this" people that God is no longer with, with the people that God is with ("God with us"). Notice, "This people has rejected the gentle waters of Shiloah" ([8:6](#)). He says, "Do not follow the ways of this people..." ([8:11](#)). But in contrast to "this" people we learn that God is with "us" ([8:10](#)). Who is the us? It is the remnant ([Isaiah 1:9](#); cf. [Rom 9:29](#)). Isaiah here calls the remnant "my disciples" ([8:16](#)). "Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples." My disciples are a different group from "this" people (vs. 6, 11). Yet, the disciples come from within "this" people. You see? They are a people within a people. They do not yet (in Isaiah's day) include Gentiles as they do in Paul's argument.

You need to understand that "this" people and "the disciples" throughout history are always related to each other organically. Too many people confuse this in their minds. So I call it to your attention again by repeating what we have just said. The disciples *always* come from within "this" people. [In the New Testament, the "disciples" come not from a nation, but from among all the nations; and, just as it was in the OT, the disciples may not convert to Christ and then exist apart from God's assembled corporate church.](#) I bring this up because some of you may be tempted to think that because God is calling the nation of Jews "this" rather than "my" people that he has *utterly* forsaken them – that there is no physical people in Isaiah's day after these things are said, after the exile. But we know from history that it was not the case. Read Ezra and Nehemiah and the latter prophets and you see that this is not the case. God restored this same *physical* people to the land, didn't he? I want you to be clear about this. [Isaiah is not making the point that the physical people are turning into a spiritual people, but that there is a spiritual people within a physical people.](#) If you can't grasp this point, then you will not be able to follow Paul's argument in Romans 9-11, and it is here in Isaiah that the beginning of that argument is made clear to us by God. God has a people within a people here in Isaiah's day because this because this is what God has always been pleased to do, even before the days of Abraham.

Prior to the nation, God did the same thing within families. The entire family was under the covenant, though some were not faithful believers. Think of Cain or Ham or Ishmael or Esau. They were all in the covenant, but they were not the chosen ones. They were not the people within the family. Because God has always worked like this, first with families, then with the nation, we must understand that God is not without a physical people anymore now than he was in the past. It is just that the physical people of God extends now to more than just national Jews or individual families. We call this people the church, including sheep and goats in this age. In *this way* and this way only we may rightly speak of something like Christendom.

And yet, God has a spiritual people who are his in a very important sense that the physical church is not. This was true in Isaiah's day, as it was in Adam's, Noah's, and Abraham's, and as it is true in our own. And this is where you must not get confused. I'll tell you why I am making such a big deal of this. You must not get this confused – especially you who are nothing but a pew sitter - because the ultimate difference between the two peoples is the difference between light and darkness, between having God as your sanctuary or God as your snare, because living by faith and living according to the pattern of this world. This is serious business.

### **Faith and Faithlessness**

In Isaiah's day, the people were living according to the pattern of the nations around them. But Isaiah clearly says that if God is going to be with you, you must live by faith. Notice what "this" people were doing at the time. Outwardly they practiced the true religion. But they were hypocrites as all who fake faith in Christ have to be. First, we are told that they call conspiracy what which was not in fact conspiracy (**vs. 12**). The verse actually says, "**Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy.**" There are two possible understandings of this. It is possible that the people were simply paranoid of the events of their day. Everyone was out to get them and no one would be trusted. Conspiracy theories abounded because the people refused to trust that God was directly leading the events of history. You see, when a people lose faith in God, conspiracy theories always begin to rise for if you can't see God at work, you have to find someone else to explain events that are going on.

But the other option is perhaps even more to the point. If your nation is on the brink of war, and you have lost faith in God, then you are going to trust in powerful nations to protect you (in our day it is the UN). Imagine the prophet entering into this situation and telling the people to trust in God and not rely upon the nations. He would be seen as *conspiring* against the king and the people even as Jeremiah was accused of conspiracy with the Babylonians against Judah. You see what this means then? The conspiracy that the people thought was taking place was with the prophets are against them. It is quite possible that they viewed the preaching of repentance and turning back to God as treasonous and Isaiah was not to be swayed by their public opinion of him. **It seems to me that there is a great warning to the people of our day who refuse to listen to God's preachers and his word but instead seek to silence them by tickling their ears with other things.** The idea is that God messengers to you are not out to get you, they are not out to create unnecessary division, they are not being mean for the sake of being mean. They are trying to get you to see that your only hope is God and that you had better begin to listen to God lest you become like Judah, lest God come to destroy you, lest you never wake up from the long night that is coming upon the world.

We read another thing about this people. The people were not fearing what they should fear or dreading what they should dread. **Verse 12-13** goes on to say, "Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." This goes hand in hand with the conspiracy discussion. As Alex Motyer says, The people were no longer driven "by a theological awareness of the Lord, Yahweh, the exodus God, who redeems his people and overthrows his foes. He is the Lord Almighty of hosts, the omnipotent God, the holy One."<sup>4</sup> They did not fear God but feared men and a future that they did not understand. And so what did they do? Well, on the one hand when God gave them signs (like Isaiah's children and Immanuel) (8:18), they refused to acknowledge them. Perhaps it is not unlike our own day that despises the foolishness of preaching and the sacraments, God's signs that he is with us, that he is near to us. On the other hand, they went searching for their own signs. **Verse 19** says they, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter, but they would not inquire of their God."

It is simply a fact that when people lose faith in God they turn wholesale to the occult. Paganism is a metastasized cancer that can no longer be eradicated by spiritual treatment in our societies. It has overwhelmed both society and the church. Why? Because we do not live by faith in God but seek to listen to the chirpings and mumbblings of the dead who are worse off than the living. "In the Bible, to die is not to acquire powers or wisdom beyond those of earth. The dead greet the king of Babylon with, 'You too have become weak as we' (14:10). The dead Samuel (1 Sa 28:16ff) knows and says nothing other than what he knew and said on earth. Indeed, in the OT the dead are weaker than the living for they are but shadows (14:9) of their former selves, half persons, souls without bodies."<sup>5</sup> How foolish then is the occult knowledge that we are so eager to place on the altars of our lives?

If you will not fear God, then you will fear all sorts of superstitious things. But the fear of the Lord alone is the beginning of knowledge. Superstitions are not knowledge. They are utter nonsense. Now you can begin to see what I told you that this is a text about faith. For what is the fear of the LORD? It is faith. Isaiah tells us that the remnant, the disciples are not to live like the peoples of Judah in conspiracy theories and in fear of men. They are to live by faith. But faith in what? Faith in something irrational, something ghostly, something absurd? No! Christian faith is never, ever this – despite what the skeptics teach.

Friends, I want to defend our faith for a moment. Van Til was right when he said that the Christian faith is the only rational thing to believe in all the world. Compared to God's word, prophesy, Christ, and the outworking of history, all else is *irrational*. Atheism is irrational because it claims that order came from chaos. That's irrational. Islam is irrational because it claims that the resurrection was not an historical event. Hinduism and Buddhism are irrational because they believe that god (you and I) actually loses his memory and is trying to get it back through doing good works. Mormonism is irrational because it believes in an infinite regression of gods.

Instead of these irrational, skeptical giant leaps of faith in the dark, the disciple of Christ is to live by faith in the law and the testimony. This is the meaning of both verse **8:20** and **8:16**. The law of God and his sure testimony of his promises through prophesy and fulfillment are the only rational things to believe in all the world. **This is why the disciples are to bind up the testimony and seal the teaching of God's revealed word upon our**

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<sup>4</sup> Motyer, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 97.

hearts, because only this word is light. Only this word proves itself true time and time again. Only this word is open and plain for all to read, for all to test, for all to understand. Only this word is clear. Only this word is life. Most translations say (8:20), "If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." If this is the correct translation, it means that there is no light in false prophets, in necromancers, in Darwinian naturalists, in pantheists... because everything they say is mixed with a lie. This meaning is perfectly acceptable and justified. But I rather like another translation option for 8:20. The Hebrew literally reads, "To the law and to the testimony! If they will not say as this word, which there is not to him it dawn." That's pretty cryptic.

One viable option for translation is for the verse to read not that "there is no light in them" but that "there is no dawn for them."<sup>6</sup> In other words, "to refuse to live by the word is to condemn oneself to a night from which there is no morning."<sup>7</sup> This would mean that the problem is more than that people do not have enough information. The problem is that people are dead. They will not wake up from their slumbering darkness to see God's light. This is a highly biblical idea. For the dawn of the New Morning is seen only by those who live according to the light of God. For those who do not, there will only be everlasting darkness.

Darkness is a theme that culminates at the end of the chapter. Those who do not live by faith will "pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their god as they face upward" (8:21). And then Isaiah continues in verse 22 by saying, "they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness."

### **Sanctuary and Stumbling Stone**

Does this remind you of anything in the NT? Jesus said that outside the kingdom there is "darkness, and weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). Why? Because apart from God there is no light. In the beginning of creation there was darkness. Only when God spoke, was there light. Apart from God and his word and his Spirit, there is only darkness. Is it any wonder then, if people are fumbling around in the darkness that they cannot see the stone of Christ? Is it any wonder that the capstone becomes the stone of stumbling to those in darkness? This is what is meant in 8:14. "Then He shall become a sanctuary, but to both the hoses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem." If the people are going to refuse to live by the light, then thick darkness will surround them. This was both their own doing and God's predetermined plan. They will not be able to see God's signs for what they are, but instead will plunge headfirst into them, tripping over them and falling down so that they cannot get up.

But for those who live by faith in Christ he shall become a sanctuary. The very same stone is for one a refuge, for the other a rock to make you fall into a bottomless pit. So here is the warning. It is the continual warning of Scripture and it is the warning of Isaiah here. For any of you who continue to live in unbelief though you try to fool men, it is time for you to repent now. I do not know your heart, I cannot tell if you are faking this whole Christianity thing or not. You have to stop playing games with God. Trust in Christ today and have him as your sanctuary. For those of you who may openly be rejecting Christ, it is time for you to stop living by your most irrational faith in that which does not exist and it is time for you to trust in Christ so that for you he may be a sanctuary. And for those of

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<sup>6</sup> See Oswalt, p. 230 n. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 238.



you who do profess Christ and who think yourselves Christians, you must understand that faith is not a one-time event that takes place at conversion. It is your duty to make sure that you are doing everything in your power to strengthen and increase your faith, lest on that last day you be proved faithless. You must recognize that your profession of faith is to be a long distance race, not a quick sprint which begins and in a moment is over. This is the continual warning of the Scripture to all who profess to trust in Christ or who take upon themselves his name. None of us can afford to take for granted that we are saved and that continual calls to repentance and trust in Christ are no longer for us. This is in fact a sure sign that we need the call most of all, for we prove ourselves among those who have truly not trusted in Christ in the first place.

Finally, know that the power to do these things is within earshot and that faith comes by hearing. The message is powerful to save, though the vessel that speaks to you is weak and powerless. What is it that we hear and believe? Let us conclude with the words of Matthew which are taken from Isaiah in reference to Jesus' relocation from Nazareth to Capernaum in the upper regions of Israel after he heard that John the Baptist had been put into prison. "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matt 4:16). Do you see Isaiah 9:1-2? How beautiful are those most precious words. "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

May your prayer be that of Isaiah in 8:17. "I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him."

SALVATION IS NEVER NOMINAL. YOU MUST TRUST IN CHRIST BY FAITH ALONE. ELECTION IS NEVER GIVEN APART FROM FAITH. ETC...

Before we get to Isaiah's text this morning, we need to make one more comment. This is a comment that Isaiah does not deal with, but I fear that in making Isaiah's point that some of you may be tempted to continue in your neglect of the visible church. You see, Isaiah ..... . It is easy for many purists to denounce these political acts as completely and in every way detrimental to the Church. In the minds of many, the Church is in *no* sense visible or corporate or political or even national (an idea that ignores a thousand or more years of "church" history before Christ). Or to put it another way, the church in no sense after Christ's death may be seen as having unbelievers in it. Such purity, while noble and while having a sincere commitment to the spiritual side of the new covenant, must be understood as being an incomplete view of the church *in this age*. It is this view that leads to spiritual only (Gnostic) Christianity that we see so pervasive in our own day in many circles. Let me explain. One day, it will be true that the church will consist only of true believers. On that day the visible church and the invisible church (the physical church and the spiritual church) will be perfectly wedded together as unbelievers are excommunicated by God himself. But this day has not yet come. To think it has come now in every sense is to have an overly realized eschatology. It is to make the return of Christ in glory and in judgment and separation of the sheep from the goats a reality *now*, when in fact Christ has not come back the second time to purge his church of those who do not have faith.

It is this double idea of the church as both corporate and individual, of both visible and invisible, of both physical and spiritual, of both local and universal that has been the hallmark of Reformed theology ever since the days of Luther and Calvin. If you make the church only visible you turn Christianity into Christendom. But if you make Christianity only spiritual, you bring Christ out of heaven to be the physical ruler of this earth here and now.

And so what we have everywhere in Scripture is this dual perspective of the church. In this age there are believers and unbelievers in the visible church. This cannot be avoided and it is only God and his angels who will ultimately be able to determine who is a sheep and who is a goat. Now it is very important for you to listen to Jesus words of what will happen on the last day, but which has not yet taken place as you prepare to examine Isaiah's text this morning. Jesus said, "Let both [the wheat and the tares] grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters [the angels]: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " (Matt 13:30). And Jesus later says, "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' ... Then he will say to those

on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matt 24:32-34, 41, 46).

The ministers of God’s word have a dire responsibility in regards to these things. And each person who is a true believer, has a similar responsibility. God will hold none of us guiltless for failing in these things. We must walk the razor’s edge of the visible and invisible church. The edge is as follows. We must not pretend to be God, deciding for ourselves who is a wheat and who is a tare, who is a sheep and who is a goat. This is God’s job. We do not have omniscience. We do not know God’s ways or his plan and these texts make it crystal clear who it is that will do the judging on the last day. So in our personal relationships with others in the church, we need to be extremely cautious of judgmentalism among those who profess faith in Christ.

Yet, the other side of the edge must also be avoided, lest we fall and splice ourselves into two pieces. This is the edge of failing to execute the commands that God has given to the visible church, particularly in the area of discipline and preaching the desperate need that nominal Christians have for exercising true faith in Jesus Christ. God both warns the nominal (‘name only) member of Christendom of the need for faith and the great seriousness that is involved in playing the game of Christianity when there is no rebirth involved. And God warns the church that he has given recognizable marks that the Spirit of God indwells a person.

Those of you who want to cut yourselves on this knife edge because of some New Testament idea that you have need to understand our text this morning, for this idea that we are talking about is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. It has always been the case that God has a physical people and a remnant. Both are his people, but they are his people in different sense. One carries the promises of the gospel down through the ages, while the other (which are always members in the former) are God’s spiritual and elect people who alone will see him in heaven.

I want to go back to those fruits of the Spirit for a moment. Notice that the fruits of the Spirit are not “he doesn’t play cards, she doesn’t wear cutoff shorts, he doesn’t go to movies.” These are laws, and man-made laws at that. Rather, the marks of the Spirit are explained in Galatians 5 as, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22). Paul then makes sure that we understand that against such things there is no law. The problem we face is that for a season, the goats can fake such fruits of the Spirit just as the seed falls upon the soil and for a time the grass grows and then withers because it has no root. But God has given his church the responsibility to ensure that those who are bearing fruit are remaining in the vine (for who bears fruit if he is not in the vine?) And so we learn that it is the Churches responsibility that if a brother or a sister is caught in a genuine, biblical sin (as opposed to a man-made taboo) that he is to be restored gently. And if he is not willing to be restored, he is to be treated like a sinner or a tax collector and thrown out of the church to live like the heathen in order that the Spirit might show him how great his sin is, bring

him to repentance and draw him back into the fold of the church where there resides the primary blessings of God to his people.