

(Isaiah) God's Word to Drinkers

by David Guzik

Isaiah 28 warns against the dangers of drunkenness, emphasizing the importance of delayed gratification and the power of God to deliver from sin and judge for sin.

Duration: 53:58

Topics: "Sin And Judgment", "Spiritual Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of immediate gratification and its negative consequences. He uses the example of drunkards who indulge in their desires without considering the long-term effects. The speaker emphasizes that God has the power to deliver people from their sins, but also has the power to judge them. He encourages the audience to seek God's power to free themselves from sin. The sermon concludes with a warning against mocking God and a reminder of the destruction that is determined upon the whole earth.

Transcript

Now, Isaiah chapter 28 begins an eight-chapter section in the book of Isaiah, from chapter 28 to chapter 35, and it's mostly directed to the southern kingdom of Judah. Now, have you ever noticed that a lot of times, if you want to speak to somebody about a sin that they're troubled with, let's say you have a friend and their besetting sin is biting their fingernails and you really want to address it to them and speak to them about it, you beat around the bush a little bit and you say, what do you think about this person X and how they bite their fingernails? Isn't that terrible? And most of the time you'll get them agreeing with you, right? Oh yeah, it's terrible, it's terrible. And then you say, well, what about your fingernails? That kind of principle, right? A lot of times that's effective.

Well, it's almost as if that's what the Spirit of God is doing right here in Isaiah chapter 28, because the focus is really to the southern kingdom of Judah. Again, we remind ourselves that at this time in Israel's history, there were two nations of the Jewish people because they had a civil war. There was the southern kingdom known as Judah and there was the northern kingdom known as Israel.

Well, most of this section, chapters 28 through 35, is addressed to the southern kingdom of Judah. But it starts out speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel sort of to make that point to Judah in the manner of which I just spoke of. You'll get the point here.

Isaiah chapter 28, verse 1. Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is as a fading flower, which is at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine. Behold, the Lord has a mighty and a strong one, like a tempest of hail, and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring them down to the earth with his hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, will be trampled underfoot, and the glorious beauty is a fading flower, which is at the head of the verdant valley, like the first fruit before the summer, which an observer sees.

He eats it up while it is still in his hand. Now, this first section, these verses and a few verses following, is not primarily addressed to the southern kingdom of Judah. It's addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel, and we know that because it says, Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim.

Ephraim was the predominant tribe. Ephraim was one of the twelve tribes. And it was the predominant tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel.

So whenever you're in the prophets, and it gives a prophecy to Ephraim, think the northern kingdom of Israel. And who is this to? Well, it's to the drunkards of Ephraim. Now, drunkenness was a significant problem, enough so in the northern kingdom of Israel, that the Lord directed Isaiah to directly address the drunkards of Ephraim.

And you should know that this is one of several passages of Scripture that speaks to drunkards. Proverbs chapter 23 speaks of the folly of drunkenness. Ephesians 5.18 tells us to be filled with the spirit instead of being drunk.

Romans 13.13, 1 Corinthians 5.11, 6.10 and 11.21, and Galatians 5.21 and 1 Peter 4.3, I should say, each contain commands against drunkenness. As a matter of fact, you should know that Jesus specifically warned against drunkenness in the last days. Maybe you want to take a look at that.

Keep your finger there in Isaiah 28, but turn to the Gospel of Luke chapter 21. Beginning at verse 34, Jesus says, again that's Luke 21.34, He says, But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life and that day come upon you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

Watch therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and stand before the Son of Man. Again, Jesus giving a very specific warning against drunkenness related to the last days. Friends, I believe that we're in the last days and I believe it's a more urgent need for us than ever to say that Christians and within the church, we have to take a stand against drunkenness.

Our society pays a terrible price for drunkenness. Now, the direct effect on the drunkard is bad enough. You take a look at anybody who has a drinking problem and see how it wrecks their life and it's just absolutely devastating to see.

But the extended costs of drunkenness are just as staggering. Do you realize that yearly in the United States, alcohol is responsible for almost 100,000 deaths? 25,000 people die by drunk drivers in the United States of America every year. There are 6 million non-fatal injuries stemming from drunkenness every year in the United States.

And there's more than a hundred billion dollars lost every year in economic losses such as unemployment and loss of productivity. And drunkenness is oftentimes behind many other crimes and many other sins.

Many drunkards either commit violent or sexual crimes or become the victims of violent or sexual crimes.

75% of the men and 55% of the women involved in date rape situations had been drinking or taking drugs just before the attack. And the FBI says that 50% of all rapes involve alcohol. And what's even more staggering when we consider this is the fact that drunkenness is so heavily promoted in our culture.

And what's staggering to me as I see the advertisements on the television set is how the advertisements for beer and such especially are so often targeted towards young people. Recruiting them to a future of heavy drinking. If you remember a while back, and this is just one of these double standards that astounds me.

A while back there was an incredible outcry because tobacco companies were accused of targeting their advertising towards young people using cartoon characters and funny things that they thought might grip children and make the advertising more appealing to children. Have you ever seen beer commercials on the television set? They constantly use cute animals and funny voices and happy things and so much of the advertising is so obviously presented at a child-like level to grab in children. And nobody says a word about that.

My friend, smoking may be a vice but drunkenness does a far worse damage in our culture and our society than smoking ever does. I mean, would you rather know that the guy coming down the other side of the road on you had just finished a six pack of beer or a pack of cigarettes? Nobody ever killed anybody after smoking a pack of cigarettes but alcohol is responsible for a huge destruction and damage in our culture. The average television viewer sees 90,000 incidents of drinking on TV by the age 21 and 100,000 beer commercials by age 18.

Again, they're so often targeted to young people. So friends, this is a serious issue. It was serious back in the days of Isaiah, it's serious today.

Verse 1, Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim! Now like any other sin, drunkenness is connected to pride. So much so that Isaiah likens the drunkenness of Ephraim to a crown of pride. Now for a lot of people it's not immediately apparent how drunkenness ties in with the sin of pride because a lot of people drink when they're depressed or they feel very low about themselves or they're looking for something to sort of soothe the pain or to, you know, massage the bad feelings that they have.

But friends, we need to understand that pride can come at us many different ways. I don't know if you ever remember the old Greek mythology stories where you have the dragon that has a lot of heads on it. Well, my friends, that's pride.

And pride can come at you a lot of different ways. Sometimes pride comes at you at the, you know, aren't I great? I'm better than everybody else. Yes, I'm number one.

That's the way we usually think of pride. But did you know that so often much of the self-hatred and self-despising that we feel is rooted in pride because what it's all about is too much of a focus upon ourselves. That's what it's all rooted in.

Woe is me. I'm so terrible. Doesn't anybody love me, me, me, me? And friends, that's a different kind of pride, but it's pride nonetheless.

And so often it's this kind of pride that feeds into a vicious cycle of addiction and dependency. So he says, woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim whose glorious beauty is a fading flower. Isn't that true? Drunkenness makes everything beautiful and good in our lives fade away.

Haven't we seen the story? Many men and women have gone from the top to skid row because of drunkenness. They've lost it all. There's the man.

He's living out of his car. He's lost his wife. He's lost his children.

He's lost his job. He's lost everything. Why? Because of drunkenness.

Because he can't lay off alcohol. We see it happening with men. We see it happening with women.

It's terrible. Their glorious beauty is as a fading flower. And it says in verse 1, which is at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine.

Now friends, when alcohol overcomes us, it's sin. When it impairs our senses, our thinking, our judgment, or our reflexes, we are then overcome with wine and it is sin. Now I need to speak on something that I'm almost a little bit nervous speaking about before you because in the minds of some people they might find it controversial.

But I need to stand before you tonight behind this pulpit as a man who says, I'm committed to God's truth and not to any other agenda. And even if I might wish sometimes the Bible said something different, I have to tell you what the Bible says. Friends, one might wish that there was a strict prohibition against drinking alcohol in the Bible.

But there's not. There's not. Now I'm free to speak to you on this in a very detached way.

Because whatever temptations I am faced with and whatever sins I fall prey to, and believe me, there are many, drunkenness is not one of them at all. I just don't like the taste of alcohol. It's never had any kind of attraction for me.

And with whatever bouts I had with drinking in my youth, it was almost always out of peer pressure and I hated it and I couldn't wait to stop. And it never got any hook in me whatsoever. And so it would be very easy for me to stand before you and come off very hard and say, Well, you know, no Christian who's ever Christian and should ever drink or this or that.

But friends, I have to stand before you as a man of God who honestly brings to you the Bible. And I just have to say that there is not a strict prohibition against drinking in the Bible. Jesus made wine.

That's in John chapter two. Jesus drank wine. We know that at least at the Last Supper he did.

And Jesus was even, might I say, unjustly accused of being a drunkard, but it meant that he drank wine at least. Paul, in First Timothy chapter five, recommended the use of wine to Timothy, knowing that it was more pure to drink than plain water. And the Bible regards drink moderately used as a gift from God.

That's in Psalm 104 verse 15. So while the Bible allows the moderate use of alcohol, friends, make no mistake about it, and I can say this with just as much conviction, it strictly condemns drunkenness. Strictly.

There's no two ways about it. The Bible strictly condemns drunkenness. Now, there may be somebody here this evening you say, Oh, wow, Pastor Dave, you know, as part of my recovery program or trying to be freedom from addiction, you know, they told me I can never take a drink.

And you're telling me that the Bible says I can't. No, you can't. Do you know why? You can't because it masters you.

And you can't be brought under the power of anything. Paul said that I'm free to do everything, but not everything blesses me. Not everything edifies me.

And so Paul says, even though I'm free to do that, I'm going to choose not to. Paul says, I'm free to do anything, but I won't allow anything to master me. My friends, if alcohol has the remote opportunity of mastering you, stay away from it.

Don't touch it. Not because there's a verse in the Bible that says you can never drink alcohol, but because there's a verse in the Bible that says you should never be mastered by any substance. We can say categorically, even if a person is not alcohol dependent or addicted, it's still not okay for them to go out and get drunk.

Not at all. The Bible strictly condemns drunkenness. Now, what is drunkenness? I've known people, and I'm sad to say, I consider this great sadness when I think of the lives of these people.

They only consider a person drunk if they're passed out drunk. I mean, that person has to be pickled, practically, before they consider them drunk. You know, I mean, I'm with them, and they're obviously inebriated.

But, you know, they can still walk, so they must not be drunk. And, friends, that's not what the Bible thinks at all. Whenever alcohol impairs our senses, our thinking, our judgment, or our reflexes, then, friends, you're overcome with wine.

Look at the verse here, Isaiah 28, 1, To those who are overcome with wine. It's overcome you. It's affected you.

It has impaired your senses, your reflexes, your judgment, your thinking, then you're overcome with wine, and you're in sin then. If you ever feel compelled to drink, or have difficulty not drinking, then you're overcome with wine, and it's sin. If we have to hide our drinking, or if we're secretly ashamed of our drinking, then we're overcome with wine, and it is not sin.

Excuse me, it is sin. You're not free to do that before the Lord. Now, I think it's very fascinating what the word overcome is in the original Hebrew.

The word overcome in verse 1, where it says, To those who are overcome with wine, is the Hebrew word *halam*, which literally means to strike down, and by implication it means to hammer, to conquer, to beat down, to overcome, to hit with a hammer. The same word is translated *pounded* in Judges 5.26, describing the incident when Jael pounded a tent peg through the head of Sisera. Friends, when you get drunk, that's what you do to yourself.

You pound a tent peg into your head. It's a serious sin. It's a serious thing.

Don't regard it as light. Oh, we're just out having fun. My, we just thought we'd loosen up a little bit.

Friends, it's sin. You're putting yourself under the control of another substance. It's sin.

Then he goes on and he says in verse 2, Behold, the Lord has a mighty and a strong one, like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring them down to the earth with his hand. And I think verse 2 gives something that the drunkard really needs to consider. The drunkard needs to know that God is stronger than the drunkard, that God is stronger than the power of alcohol, that God is stronger than anything.

The Lord is the mighty and the strong one. If the drunkard is powerless to stop his drinking, God has the power to help him stop. He also has the power to judge him.

As it says there, look at there in verse 3, The drunkards of Ephraim will be trampled underfoot. Friends, God has the power. He has the power to deliver you from your sin, but he's also got the power to judge you for your sin.

What power do you want him to use? Let's avail ourselves of the power to free ourselves from sin that God can give to us. I think it's very interesting what it says here in verse 4 as well. It says here at the end of verse 4, Like the first fruit before the summer which an observer sees, he eats it up while it is still in his hand.

You get the idea here? The idea here is plucking a piece of fruit and eating it as soon as it's in your hand. In other words, you don't have the discipline to pluck it, put it in a bag, take it home and save it for later. You pluck it and you eat it right away.

You see, the drunkard needs to learn the value of delayed gratification. The gratification of drinking may be intense and it may be immediate, but it fades quickly and it crashes hard. The drunkard must learn the value of delaying immediate gratification for a future benefit instead of eating the fruit while it's still in the hand.

Friends, isn't that something that each and every one of us have to learn? Doesn't it seem like our whole culture is almost like on a conspiracy to keep us from knowing the importance of delayed gratification? Everything has to be now. Everything has to be instant. You've got to get it, you've got to get it now.

Friends, the importance of appreciating the value of delayed gratification has been measured by sociologists, by researchers. One very interesting tool that they used was something that they called the marshmallow test. They got together a bunch of kids and they got together four-year-olds and they put before them two marshmallows.

There's a four-year-old, two marshmallows on the table. And this is what they said. They say, listen, I'm leaving for a few minutes to run an errand.

And you can have, excuse me, they only put but one marshmallow in front of the child. They say, I'm leaving to run an errand for a few minutes. Now, you can have this marshmallow if you want while I'm gone.

You can have it. But if you wait until I return, then I'll give you two marshmallows. And so they wait and they saw what the kids would do.

Obviously, as soon as the researcher left the room, some of the kids grabbed it. They eat it. They got the one marshmallow.

Other kids were more disciplined. And they said, you know what? I could have that one marshmallow now or I could wait. And when the guy comes back, then I'll get two.

That's way better. I'll do that. Researchers at Stanford did this test in the 1960s.

And 12 years later, they looked at the kids who were now 16. They took a look at their lives. They found that the kids who grabbed the single marshmallow tended to be more troubled as adolescents.

And they also scored an average of 210 points lower on SAT tests. And friends, because so much of our mentality, so much of our lives, so much of maturity is simply built on the idea of being able to delay immediate gratification for a better payoff down the road. Friends, that's what the problem that drunkards and so many of us have.

If you look at the end of verse 4, he says again, like the first fruit before the summer, which an observer sees, he eats it up while it is still in his hand. Now, if there's anything that somebody who is a drunkard or somebody who is captured by this sin should understand and appreciate, I think it's really the beauty of the Lord God. Look at verse 5. In that day, the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of his people for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

You see, my friend, it says that the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty. Sometimes when we see the faded glory that comes with sins like drunkenness, we can grow discouraged or depressed. You take a look at it and you say, look at how far my life has fallen.

Look at how I've been destroyed by this sin or that sin. It's taken such a toll. Can there ever be any restoration? Can there ever be rebuilding in my life or in how sin has ravaged the life of this other person? Friends, we need to realize that even if all the glory of man fades because of disobedience and sin, God's glory remains.

When we are completely ungloried because of the wreckage of sin, we can set our focus upon the glory of the Lord. You notice it too here in verse six, it says, for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment. When our glory has faded because of our sin, we may lose our judgment and discernment.

Friend, then you can receive it from the Lord. Look at what it says there in verse six. For a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment.

God will give you a spirit of justice. He'll provide it. You may have lost it through the wreckage of sin.

God will give it to you. God will honor you with that. And then it says at the end of verse six, and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

When our glory has faded because of our sin, we may lose our strength and our ability to fight, but you can receive it back from the Lord. You look at your life and the wreckage of sin, the devastation it's done. Maybe it's apparent.

Maybe it's written all over your face. Maybe it's not apparent at all. Maybe other people look at you and they just, oh, wow, their lives are so together.

But you know on the inside, your life has been made a wreckage because of sin. God can restore. God's a beautiful rebuild.

God will strengthen you and bless you and restore you. Even if you're short on glory and judgment and strength, the Lord isn't. He'll build that in you.

Now, this has all been addressed to the drunkards of Ephraim. But as I told you before, the real main focus of this section, this eight-chapter section in the book of Isaiah, is towards the southern kingdom of Judah. So I want you to imagine here Isaiah giving this prophecy to the people of Judah.

And here they are pacing back and forth saying, yeah, those Israelites up north, the Ephraimites, the people of the northern king of Israel, ah, a bunch of drunkards. Lay it on them, Isaiah. Yeah, they need to hear that.

But now look at how he turns it back here at verse 7. But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way. The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink. They are swallowed up by wine.

They are out of the way through intoxicating drink. They err in vision. They stumble in judgment.

For all the tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that no place is clean. You see what he's talking about here? He's saying, listen, oh yeah, those people in Ephraim, that's right. But they also, you people of Judah, you prophets who are in Jerusalem, you priests who are in Jerusalem, you're guilty as well.

And the focus comes back to the people of Judah. We know that again because he mentions the priest and the prophet. The they also refers to the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

If the people of Ephraim had a problem with drunkenness, so did they also. And how have they erred? They have erred through wine and through intoxicating drink. And they're out of the way.

Drunkenness will always lead to error. And it takes us out of the way. The way of wisdom.

And the way of God's will. Did you notice it here too in verse 7? The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink. Friends, drunkenness is something that can touch any person.

At any stage of life. Here's a man, he's a prophet. Here's a man, he's a priest.

My, they're exalted. My, they're servants of God. My this, my that.

Friends, they can be taken over by drunkenness just as much. And they need to confront that sin and deal with it. You know, so often, people who are trapped in addictions, I think it's very important for them to get particular help for their need.

Their problem, in many ways, isn't any different than any other sinner. Except it's so often that there's a physical dynamic in it that links them to the sin that just makes accountability and attention to a daily disciplined walk all the more important. And so I am all for groups and support things that can help people walk that narrow road of sobriety.

You know, some Christians that you hear and you talk to are very down on groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and the whole AA kind of thing. And I understand some of the criticism. They say, well, AA,

they're not Christians.

They're not leading people to the Lord. And your higher power can be anything you want it to be. And you know, you could say that doorknob is my higher power in this.

Well, I suppose that's true and some people take it that way. My friends, I want you to know that by and large, I think that the work of Alcoholics Anonymous and groups like it has been wonderful. If you can get a man to stop drinking, that's a good thing.

Now, you haven't saved his soul. I mean, you can be a sober man and still go to hell. You still need the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You need to trust in Jesus and not in a group like Alcoholics Anonymous. That's not going to save your soul, but it might stop you from drinking and praise God for that. But friends, how much better if you can bring a man to sobriety with a focus on Jesus Christ and folks like that.

And I have to say through some of the wonderful people in our church, like Chuck Carlson and such, have had wonderful ministries in doing that. And I would say that if anybody in our church family or extended family has that kind of need, that they should speak with Chuck. They should speak with somebody who will minister to them and share with them from his own life and from the own victory that God has given them and just be a marvelous place of accountability and support, and it's a beautiful thing.

Friends, you see how it says in verse 7, the priest and the prophet, no one is automatically immune. Matter of fact, it says here, and isn't this picturesque in verse 8, where all the tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that no place is clean. You ever walk into a Christian bookstore and you see the name things that they have, like you put on a door or a little plaque or something, there's the names, you know, Amy, Charles, you know, whatever.

And a lot of times they have a lifetime Bible verse under the name. I don't know how they come up with that. I don't want somebody else assigning me my lifetime Bible verse, but they come up with it, they have it there.

I wonder if Isaiah 28 is ever given for somebody as their lifetime Bible verse. That's just a little far out there, isn't it? Wow, yeah. And you look upon that, you almost say, what's that doing in the Bible for heaven's sakes? Friends, you know, I think it's very important.

Isn't Isaiah, isn't the Lord speaking to us and telling us that drunkenness leads to this kind of degradation and disgrace? You look at it and say, that's horrific, that's horrible. You ever been around a person who's been a drunkard? You ever seen the devastation that it works in their life? You know, it leads to this kind of degradation and disgrace because of the way that alcohol works. Alcohol is a depressant.

It makes people depressed. It loosens people because it depresses their self-control, their wisdom, their balance, their judgment. It leads to this kind of disgrace and degradation.

Now, one more thing before we move on, because Isaiah is going to kind of move on to a different, though related topic. I need to make sure, especially as we take a look at a verse like verse 8, it makes the idea of being drunk in the Holy Spirit especially unbiblical and offensive. I trust that it's dying out as a fad, that this wind of doctrine has blown its way through most of the church and it's on its way out.

But my friends, for a while there were folks going around advertising themselves, and maybe you've had the unfortunate incident to see them on the Christian television set, promoting themselves as Holy Ghost bartenders. And come on up to the bar of the Holy Spirit, and we'll make you drunk in the Spirit. And people would supposedly have these encounters with the Holy Spirit and act like drunk people.

Of course, they never acted like real drunk people. You know, they kind of acted like the Hollywood drunk. You know, just kind of walk around with a lampshade on your head.

You know, woo-hoo, that kind of thing. You know, the kind of Foster Brooks kind of drunk from Hollywood. You want to know what real drunks look like.

Verse 8, For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, that no place is clean. Can I tell you that's not the work of the Holy Spirit? Not at all. And I think it's terribly offensive to relate the filling of the Spirit to drunkenness in any way.

When Paul says, Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit, he's making a contrast. He's saying that drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit are not alike. Not that they are alike.

Friends, again, alcohol is a depressant. It depresses your wisdom, your self-control, your balance, your judgment. Is anybody going to say that that's what the Holy Spirit of God does in a person when he fills his life? That the Holy Spirit of God makes you less self-controlled, less wise, less full of judgment? Friends, these people who act silly or crazy claiming to be drunk in the Holy Spirit, the most charitable thing to say is that they're simply acting in their own flesh because they are certainly not being led by the Holy Spirit of God.

Coming on now to verse 9. Now, I need to set a scene here. Well, let me read the verses first and then we'll come back to the scene. Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.

Now, these seem to be the words of the drunk, ungodly prophets and priests described in verses 7 and 8. Picture this as Isaiah lays his eyes upon these drunk prophets and priests. They're in the midst of their degraded party. There's just filth everywhere.

And Isaiah has been preaching his message to them. And what's their response? Their response, well, whom will he teach knowledge? And to whom will he make to understand his message? Those just weaned from milk? What, little babies? Is that who you're speaking to, Isaiah? Little babies? And then they go in, line upon line, precept upon precept. Now, you don't catch it in the English, but in the Hebrew, these are very brief, monosyllabic words.

It's just like baby talk. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, that kind of thing. And they're mocking Isaiah.

It's a sarcastic reaction of the Judean leaders to Isaiah's words of rebuke. And all of this, all of this, they're saying, well, Isaiah, you're just teaching stuff for babies. You need to come up to the higher truths where we are.

You need to come up to the place of real liberty that we have. Precept upon precept, line upon line. You see, with all of this, the drunk, ungodly prophets and priests, they mock Isaiah's teaching.

It's too simple. It's simply precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. We're so smart.

We're so sophisticated and advanced that we can go on to the deeper things. Friends, don't you understand? That in their mocking of Isaiah's message, they actually pay him a great compliment. It's a beautiful thing for God's word, for God's truth to be presented.

Precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. When the word of God is properly presented, there's something both for the simple and for the greatly mature to receive. There's something for the great saint and the aged man of God who knows it all.

He can rejoice in it and be fed. That's the way God's word is. And so Isaiah's going to respond.

Look at verse 11. He's heard this mocking. He's heard these people reject his message.

Why are you just talking baby talk, Isaiah? Well, here's his reply, verse 11. For with stammering lips and another tongue he will speak to this people, to whom he said, this is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing, yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was to them.

Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they might go and fall backward and be broken and be snared and caught. Isaiah's warning of the consequences of rejecting the simple message of the Lord. He says with stammering lips and another tongue he will speak to this people.

If the simple, straightforward message is rejected, God will find another way to communicate to the hard-hearted. He'll send unusual messengers, perhaps messengers of judgment. And this message of rest and deliverance will be rejected.

But it wasn't the fault of the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord was to them, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Friends, this is the blessed way to present God's word, precept upon precept, line upon line.

Isaiah takes the taunt of the drunkards and he receives it as a compliment. You just present God's word, precept upon precept, line upon line, Isaiah. Do you really think so? Thank you.

I'm preaching it so simply that anybody could understand it. Do you think so? Thank you. Oh, God forbid those polished preachers who aim at the intellectual or the suave and the debonair.

They don't care about how the simple folk hear what they have to say. They dress it all up with fanciness and all this kind of cleverness. But the clear word of God is not presented line upon line, precept upon precept.

God's messengers are to present all of God's word. Don't skip a line. Right? It's not line upon, skip a line, line.

No. It's line upon line, precept upon precept. God's messengers are to present all of God's word and to present it simply.

Might I say also that this also implies that we can't receive all aspects of God's message at once. You got one line, then another line, then another line, then another line. One precept, another precept.

Charles Spurgeon said, It is an excellent thing that the gospel is taught to us by degrees. It is not forced home upon men's minds all at once, but it comes thus. Precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little.

God does not flash the everlasting daylight on weak eyes in one blaze of glory. But there is at first a dim dawn and then the soft incoming of a tender light for tender eyes. And so by degrees we see.

Now, I know this. I know this in my own life. But friends, I know it as a pastor too.

Sometimes I'm talking with somebody after the message. This is Pastor David. Oh, man, you know, when you shared about so-and-so, when you spoke on that, I never heard that before.

That's amazing. That just touched my heart so much. And I'm thinking, you know what? I've taught that ten times in the last two months.

Where have you been? And they've been here. They've been listening. But you know what? You can't receive it all at once, can you? I don't sit there and think badly of the person for that.

I thank God. They learn one line. God's going to put another line there.

And it's line upon line, precept upon precept. This is how we grow. You know, sometimes we get annoyed with other people because they're not up to the level of spiritual wisdom and knowledge that we are, right? It's all so clear to us.

Friends, please. God's dealing with them just like He's dealing with you. You want God to show you it all at once? You wouldn't leave this room alive, my friends.

Spurgeon's illustration is perfect. You know, it would be like a beam of totally intense sunlight right into your eyes. You'd be blinded.

So what does God do? He starts it out dim and He lets it grow brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter. That's how the Lord does it. And so, not only do we precious give our preachers the responsibility to give it to us line upon line, precept upon precept, but we say, that's how we receive it.

That's how God built us to receive it. And we accept that. We accept it for ourselves and we accept it for others.

Say, Lord, you just do your work. Now, the sinful leaders of Judah also had a false confidence. Look at verse 14.

Therefore, hear the word of the Lord, you scornful men, who rule this people who are in Jerusalem, because you have said, we've made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us, for we've made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we've hidden ourselves. Isaiah is laying it on the line, isn't he? You scornful men who rule this people who are in Jerusalem.

Some of the simple and immature, some of the people who needed to be taught were those who ruled this people. They needed to hear the word of the Lord just as everybody did. You know, there's no one too high, no one too exalted, no one too mature, too advanced to hear the word of the Lord and to hear it precept upon precept.

Line upon line, here a little and there a little. Do you hear what they said here? Verse 15, it's almost staggering, isn't it? We've made a covenant with death. The rulers of Jerusalem were so extreme in their rejection of God that they felt that they had an agreement with death and the grave.

That is Sheol there in verse 15. They proudly believed that the overflowing scourge of God's judgment and correction would not come against them. You know what a scourge is, don't you? It's a whip.

They say, oh yes, God's judgment is out, his whip is out, but it's just going to pass over us. We're not afraid. We're not afraid of death.

We're not afraid of the grave. We're not afraid of God's judgment. They had no fear of death and they thought that they had made friends with death and the grave.

Understand, my friends, that this same way of thinking is common in our modern world. The ungodly should fear death because with death ends all opportunity for repentance and their eternal doom is sealed. Friends, just as much as we blink our eyes with amazement at a Christian who fears death.

I'm not talking about fearing dying. We all fear dying. But death itself? Christians have no need to fear death.

Same way it seems strange to us that a Christian should fear death, it should seem strange to us that an unbeliever would be unafraid of death. They should fear death. Satan has a significant interest in making the wicked feel that death is their friend.

In 1996, a 15-year-old girl named Heidi Chamberlain lived in Rancho Palos Verdes. She attended one of the nation's finest public schools and she played soccer and she loved horses and she'd even recently been baptized into the Mormon church. She met a guy named Chris Mills who was a 16-year-old surfer from San Pedro.

He got A's and B's, took college prep courses and had a part-time job working at a gas station. His grandfather said he was a well-adjusted kid. When Chris played guitar in a garage band, he was deeply affected by the suicide of grunge singer Kurt Cobain.

He devoted his creative writing project to the subject of suicide. A friend of Chris's said he was kind of death happy. Not sad, but more like, the other side is going to be so much more fun.

More like, I can't wait to die. Saturday, March 16th, 1996, Heidi swiped the keys to her mom's white Plymouth Horizon. She sneaked out and she met Chris in San Pedro.

Late that night, Heidi and Chris hiked down a hundred foot down a path and then ducked through a hole in a chain link fence to get to a concrete spillway known as the diving board. Over the ledge, or on the ledge, they set down a blue cigarette lighter, cigarette butts forming an arrow pointing off of the ledge and they jumped off to the 150 feet. They both jumped to their deaths.

Both of those young people, like so many, are deceived into thinking that death could be their friend. Friends, the moment they passed into eternity, they would have given anything to go back to the world where they could repent, where they could get it right with God. That's how foolish the leaders of Judah were.

Because you've said we've made a covenant with death and with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us for we have made lies our refuge. What? This is their strength? This is their protection? What kind of confidence is this that lies are your refuge? Instead, there's a much better security that we can have.

Look at verse 16. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. Whoever believes will not act hastily.

Also, I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plummet. The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies and the waters will overflow the hiding place. Your covenant with death will be annulled and your agreement with Sheol will not stand. When the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it.

For as often as it goes out, it will take you. For morning by morning it will pass over, and day by night it will be a terror just to understand the report. You see, in contrast to the weak, narrow foundation of the wicked who say we have made lies our refuge and under falsehood we've hidden ourselves, God has a solid foundation for our lives, a stone for a foundation.

And you know who that foundation is, don't you? Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2, verse 6 quotes this exact same verse directly to Jesus. He is the foundation of our lives and only with Him can a secure, stable foundation be anything built in our lives.

By the way, anything added onto the house that's not built on this foundation, it's going to pass away. It's going to end up in wreckage. God lays the stone.

It's a tried stone. It's a precious cornerstone. It's a sure foundation.

You see, our Messiah is a sure foundation. We can build everything on Him without fear. And notice how God does His building too.

Verse 17, I'll make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line. You know, if you're going to build something straight and true, you need a measuring tape, right? And you need a plumb line. And God says, my measuring tape, that's justice.

My plumb line, that's righteousness. That's what I build my building with. And God keeps that building straight with justice and righteousness.

But the hail will sweep away the refuge of lies. The ungodly leaders of Jerusalem, they made lies the refuge, but the storm is going to come. And God's judgment will sweep away their refuge of lies and their hiding place.

They built on the wrong foundation and it's going to see direct destruction. And what's God going to do with their covenant with death? Did you notice that there in verse 18, your covenant with death will be annulled. Oh, we made a covenant with death.

It's not going to harm us and we're not going to harm it. You know what God says? God says, I just annulled your covenant, mister. Sorry, God makes the rules.

The ungodly leaders of Jerusalem thought they made a deal with death, but they'll find that God annuls their covenant with death. When the scourge of judgment comes, they'll surely be trampled down by it.

The chapter concludes with some advice to those who are ripe for judgment.

Look at it here, verse 20. For the bed is too short for a man to stretch out on, and the covering so narrow that he cannot wrap himself in it. For the Lord will rise up as at Mount Perazim.

He will be as angry as in the Valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his awesome work, and bring it to pass, his act, his unusual act. Therefore, do not be mockers, lest your bonds be made strong. For I have learned from the Lord God of hosts a destruction determined even upon the whole earth.

Isn't that interesting? They're lying down in a bed, but the bed's too short. The covering's so narrow. You ever try to sleep in a bed that's too small for you? Very uncomfortable, isn't it? You ever have somebody short sheet you? You can't cover yourself? You don't have anything to keep yourself warm? The rulers of Jerusalem had to realize that their present place was precarious.

They could find no refuge. Their rejection of God gave them no peace, no rest, and no warmth. What could be worse than trying to sleep in a bed that's too short? We're trying to keep warm.

We're something so narrow, you can't wrap yourself in it. Yet this is a picture of the world working, striving, longing for the bed. And when they gain it, it's too short.

It has no proper blankets. The child of God, on the other hand, He's given rest and peace and a covering by Jesus Christ. And let the world have their short beds and short sheets.

We've got something much better in Jesus Christ. The Lord knows He's going to rise up and judge these ungodly rulers. So the counsel to them is, do not be mockers, verse 22, lest your bonds be made strong.

And finally, ending the chapter, verse 23, give ear and hear my voice. Listen and hear my speech. Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the cloths? When he has leveled its surface, does he not sow the black cumin and scatter the cumin, plant the wheat and rose, then barley in its appointed place and the spelt in its place? For he instructs him in right judgment.

His God teaches him. For the black cumin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cumin. But the black cumin is beaten out with a stick and the cumin with a rod.

Bread flour must be ground, therefore it is not threshed forever, break it with his cartwheel, or crush it with his horsemen. This also comes from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance. Amen, huh? Well, do you understand what that means? Oh, it's a beautiful passage.

Isaiah is saying, look at the farmer out there. He's plowing his field. Now, what do you do? You walk by and there's the farmer plowing his field, right? You go by the next day, he's plowing his field.

You go by the next day, he's plowing his field. Six months from then, you walk by again, he's plowing his field. You want to shout out, hey, dummy! You don't just plow.

You've got to move on to something else. After you plow, you level the field. Then you plant.

Then you water. Then you harvest. Then you go and you ground in the flour.

You walk by the guy, ground in the flour, he's grinding it. You go back a week later, he's still grinding the same flour. Hey, buddy, give it a rest.

Move on. Now, farmers don't act that stupid way, do they? They know when to plow and when to stop plowing. When to level the ground, when to stop leveling.

When to plant, when to stop planting. When to harvest, when to stop harvesting. Friends, look at it.

Verse 29. This also comes from the Lord of Hosts who's wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance. The farmer doesn't know just how to use the plow.

He also knows how to use the leveler and the thresher and the mill and all the different things he uses. He knows what to use and in what timing to use it. Friends, the Lord is that smart in your life.

Tonight, can we give God credit for being as smart as a farmer? And that's what the Lord's doing in your life. Now, right now, I want to encourage you with something. You may feel, well, listen, you know, I mean, Lord, you're plowing and you're plowing and you're plowing.

Don't sweat it. He knows what He's doing. He knows the instrument to use.

He knows the timing to do it in. So don't sweat it. Let God do His plowing work.

When it's time to stop plowing, He'll know. When it's time to level it, He'll do it. Time to plant? He'll do it.

Can we just give God credit for being as smart as a farmer? He knows what He's doing in our lives. He knows what instrument to use and in what timing to do it all. So we just stand back and say, Lord, do Your work in me.

I want to bear fruit for You. It's just whatever it takes, Lord. If now's plowing time, then plow in my life.

If now's leveling time, level it out. Planting time? Whatever, Lord. You know what to use and when to use it.

Be Lord of my life.

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