

Two Ways to Live

Isa 8:11-22 – Holy, Wholly, Holy Part 6 – Dec 10, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Reading Isa 8:11-22.

Life choices. With used cars, the choice is, TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY? Last winter I faced that choice w/ 2001 Honda Civic. Now, this was an online auto auction. Minimal description. I had already been outbid on half a dozen cars. Here was a Honda Civic. Price was low. Honda, *how could it be bad?* It was.

My mechanic loved the car. A lot and often. Through a "series of unfortunate events" sold it for price I paid for it. Also price of repairs I made. And...kept making payments for months afterwards. It was awesome.

Today's sermon is not about financial life choices—that's a relief! The ultimate life choice we face: TO FOLLOW CHRIST OR NOT.

Passage is early section in the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah's talking to the people in his day. Holds up to them TWO WAYS TO LIVE. CHOOSE THE LORD!

Prayer – Bruce Chick is the senior pastor of Roanoke Church – spoke at our leaders retreat this summer and here – Wife Hien Chick diagnosed with serious form of cancer this fall – same kind that took life of her mom at same age – This Fri has surgery – pray for her now – and for family of Roger Pavone/Perniciaros.

TWO WAYS TO LIVE (8:11-13)

First need to remember the context. Isaiah in Judah (south). To the north is Israel and above them Syria. Israel/Syria are threatening. Israel/Syria already devastating military victories. Not complete, but devastating. Now Lord speaks.

Verse 11—shows us there are two ways to live. "WALK IN THE WAY OF THIS PEOPLE" or walk in the way of the LORD. "WALK" in the Bible almost always shorthand for a way of life.

Starts with "THE WAY OF THIS PEOPLE." Given in **verse 12**.

THIS PEOPLE have rejected God and his purposes and his promises. They have chosen to go their own way. They are not living according to faith in God. Because of that, they have lost the ability to interpret the world around them rightly—they see conspiracies and fears and dread even when they're not there!

Maybe you've seen the iPhone X commercials that talk about its new camera features. They call it "AUGMENTED REALITY." In the example they show a typical scene but then a dinosaur drops into the scene. And apparently gamers are developing ways to play games with the landscape around you.

But it's not reality. To call it "AUGMENTED REALITY" isn't accurate. It's really "DISTORTION OF REALITY." The apps allow you to create dangers and threats and fears that aren't there.

Isaiah telling us that the THIS PEOPLE around him also have an AUGMENTED REALITY that is a DISTORTION OF REALITY. They see CONSPIRACY, FEAR, DREAD. But they are seeing things that aren't there.

In rejecting the LORD they have lost the ability to interpret the world around them.

With one way to live, our rejection of God leads to a DISTORTION OF REALITY. It's like we look at the AUGMENTED REALITY on our iPhone and say, "THAT'S THE REAL THING!" And the world around us and say, "THAT'S THE FAKE!"

Another way to live is in **verse 13**.

The remedy is to find a new center in your world. Even a new FEAR.

"The LORD of hosts" is to be the center of our lives and thinking. The phrase speaks of his sovereign reign over heavenly and earthly powers, over all earthly and heavenly armies, over all angels. He is the true King and rules over everything. Remember 6:3:

And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isa 6:3)

He is to be our **"FEAR"** and **"DREAD"** and the one we see as **"HOLY."** Similar to the words of Jesus in Luke 12:4-7:

"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.⁷ Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Luke 12:4-7)

Jesus gives us a vivid picture of choosing the right fear. When we fear the big thing—GOD!—and not the small thing—those who merely kill bodies—then we need not fear at all. "Fear not!" (v. 7).

Alec Motyer (Moh-teer)¹ →

Those who lived under the word and promise of God were thus called to hold aloof from popular clamor for the supposed safety of political alliance and worldly armed strength....Isaiah and his disciples are to have no part in a fear-ridden society but to be conspicuous for a different life-style, unmoved by the fears around; a calm in the midst of life's storms and menaces.
Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*

Isaiah holds up TWO WAYS TO LIVE: Fears of this world or the fear of God. Choose the fear of God!

¹ *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 95.

TWO CONSEQUENCES TO RECEIVE (8:14-15)

Now we see that our TWO WAYS TO LIVE is like a FORK IN THE ROAD. Each road leads to a very different CONSEQUENCE.

Important point. Because easy to imagine that a Jew at the time of Isaiah would ask Isaiah, "WHAT'S THE POINT?" "What difference will it make to my circumstances if I fear the LORD?" "Will it change anything?"

Here we learn that it makes ALL THE DIFFERENCE—Verses 14-15.

Either way we go at this fork in the road, WE FIND THE LORD. But what we find the LORD TO BE changes radically. TWO WAYS TO LIVE—(1) WAY OF THIS PEOPLE (v. 11) and (2) WAY OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

If we choose WAY OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD, we find the LORD as "**A SANCTUARY**." Word for "SANCTUARY" (mikdash) and "HOLY" (6:3, kadōsh) closely related. "SANCTUARY" here is "a holy place." In OT, word often used of the tabernacle and temple and God's heavenly dwelling place. Starts in **Exodus 25:8** →

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. (Exod 25:8)

You see the connection. When we call him "holy" (kādash, **v. 13**), he becomes for us "a holy place." A place where we can meet with him. Encounter him. The Holy One of Israel that appeared in chapter 6 as, "Holy, holy, holy" (kadōsh...).

But if we take the other road in this fork in front of us, we also find the LORD. Only this time he is a "**ROCK OF STUMBLING**," "**SNARE**," "**TRAP**."

Again see how CONSEQUENCE fits the WAY WE CHOOSE. If you see him as HOLY, he becomes a HOLY PLACE. If you choose the way of **FEARS** and **CONSPIRACIES** and **DREAD**, he becomes for us SNARES, TRAPS, ROCK OF STUMBLING. Eventually "**FALL AND BE BROKEN**," "**SNARED AND TAKEN**."

Alec Motyer (Moh-teer)² on these words:

The stress in these verses is that what gives most offense to the sinner and what at the same time constitutes his greatest danger is the presence of the divine. The same God in his unchanging nature is both sanctuary and snare; it depends on how people respond to his holiness.
Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*

All of the OT points ahead to Jesus Christ. It all testifies about Jesus, but each passage does it uniquely. In this passage it prophesies about Jesus. **1 Peter 2**:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," ⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Pet 2:4-8)

Peter starts out with a word picture—Christians are living stones in a spiritual house. We are the holy place! Then he uses 3 OT "stone" passages to develop it. Isa 28:16 (cornerstone); Ps 118:22 (stone rejected). Isa 8:14 (stumbling).

But once again—how we approach Christ affects what Christ is to us. If we approach him in faith—Cornerstone and whoever believes unashamed. If we do not believe—stone rejected is stone of stumbling.

TWO TRUTHS TO PURSUE (8:16-22)

Third aspect of TWO WAYS TO LIVE has to do with TRUTHS WE PURSUE. Each path has a TRUTH WE PURSUE.

² *Prophecy*, 95.

One "WAY OF THIS PEOPLE" is in **verse 19**. Superstition and witchcraft. Ahaz and others in Isaiah's day were turning to "mediums and necromancers." Attempting to commune with the dead. Or spirit world. Looking for guidance.

Isaiah mocks them and says they do nothing but "chirp and mutter"—likely imitating the sounds they make as they go through their rituals and incantations.

Easy to assume such superstitions no longer an issue. But everyone has the desire for guidance beyond themselves. Connect their situation to a larger story, a larger truth. We can turn away from the LORD, but that desire still there.

That's part of the reason for the increase in people using horoscopes. As people turn away from the church they still want guidance and connection. New Yorkers in their 20s are becoming increasing fans of items related to the occult.

NYC storeowner selling occult items: *"Whether it be spell-casting, tarot, astrology, meditation and trance, or herbalism, these traditions offer tangible ways for people to enact change in their lives. For a generation that grew up in a world of big industry, environmental destruction, large and oppressive governments, and toxic social structures, all of which seem too big to change, this can be incredibly attractive."*

Creator of astrology app: *"There is a belief vacuum: we go from work to a bar to dinner and a date, with no semblance of meaning. Astrology is a way out of it, a way of putting yourself in the context of thousands of years of history and the universe."*³

NY Times this week cited NYU prof trying to explain horoscope fascination: They "offer some order in an otherwise chaotic city and volatile world." *"What makes us feel safe in the world is order, boundaries and sequence, and those three things are things that astrology can give us. Especially in a time when the world doesn't feel safe, we tend to search for an order that makes sense. That's not a*

³ www.Marketwatch.com, "Why Millennials are ditching religion for witchcraft and astrology," Kari Paul (Oct 23, 2017).

*negative thing. The more secure we feel in the world, the more we're able to be productive—to live fully, to love and to work."*⁴

But whole thing suspect because of what Thomas Gilovich, Cornell prof, called "The Trap of Confirmation Bias."⁵ Essentially, if you believe there's a message in the stars and an explanation for your existence there, you'll find just that. And because horoscopes are always just vague enough to fit anyone's life somewhere, you find exactly what you were hoping to find and then your life confirms it.

In Isaiah's day, "**MEDIUMS AND NECROMANCERS**." In our day, horoscopes and astrology. Or maybe you have your own source of truth and guidance. Key issue is that all these sources of truth are built on human imagination. Not built on anything solid. Not built on clear sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

Isaiah is telling us to turn away from all human imaginations to TRUE TRUTH TO PURSUE. The living God provides the truth we need. **Verses 16, 20**—"teaching" (*Torah*) and "testimony" (that given to prophets to speak orally) comes from God. "Signs" (**verse 18**) come from the Lord.

Our God speaks! He speaks to his PROPHETS! He speaks in the SCRIPTURES! **Verse 11** reminds us of the role of the prophet. He speaks in "SIGNS."

Through God's Word and God's Spirit and God's People we can find the truth and guidance we need. We just need to have ears to hear.

The difference between God's truth and the truth invented in the minds of men is the difference between LIGHT and DARKNESS. **Verse 20**—"THEY HAVE NO DAWN."

⁴ Alexandra S. Levine, "Leaning on the Stars to Make Sense of the World," Dec 8, 2017.

⁵ December 22, 2015.

The light of dawn, the light of a new day, that's what awaits the person who turns to the living God for truth. Light to see by, light to live by, light to make sense of the chaos and pain.

All those desires that motivate people to turn to their horoscope are met in the living God. Not in some self-appointed prophet who knows how to give you just enough pop-psychology, just enough positive thinking, and just enough ancient common sense to sound philosophical and profound.

We want TRUE TRUTH! Francis Schaeffer speaks of Christianity being "true to what is where."⁶

The final great concept of truth is that Christianity is true to what is there. I often think that one of the reasons there is such an air of unreality in much of the church, and for many people, is that they do not understand what is really meant when we say Christianity is true. It is not that it is merely true to a creed, though we should be true to our creeds. It is not even that it is true to the Bible, though certainly our Christian should be true to the full inspiration of Scripture. But it is rather that Christianity is true to what is really there. It explains why the universe is here and why it has its complexity and its form. It gives us the truth about who man is and the great requirement, the truth that God is there. It tells us that the final environment is not impersonal, but personal. We have an intellectual knowledge which in the middle of the 20th century we can hold with intellectual integrity.

Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century*

Isaiah trying to do more than simply save us from feeling stupid. Listen to the sobering words of **Verse 21-22**.

Don't go looking for truth in the wrong places. Look for truth in God's Word, in God's people, in God's Spirit.

⁶ *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* (5th ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 45-46.

CONCLUSION

On the night before Jesus died he told his disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). To know the truth that is true to what is there, you must start with knowing Jesus.

Don't know Jesus then can't know truth. Even if right in front of your face. It'll be like a foreign language you don't know. You could have a private meeting with Isaiah the great prophet, but you'd turn right around and read your horoscopes.

Step out of the darkness and turn to the Light. Step out of the lies and turn to the Truth.

The main burden of this text is a salvation one, turn to Christ.

But it also speaks to us about the normal anxieties that plague us. Being a Christian is not a light switch to turn off fear. It takes time to learn to fear God and not the smaller things of this world. But Isaiah speaks to us here as well—let your fear of God be the way you interpret your fears in this world! Fear God, and you won't fear the things of this world in the same way.

Prayer & Song ("In Christ Alone")