

Whose Wisdom are we Trusting in?

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[0 : 0 0] Great. Well, it's a privilege to be here this evening and I'd just like to extend again a warm welcome to you all. Let me just pray for us as we begin.

God and Father, we thank you that we can meet freely in this country in public and can read your word and can study it. And we just ask your blessing on it and pray that you'll speak to each one of us.

We pray all this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. So thank you to Andrew Neller for reading for us. So we are in Isaiah chapters 28 and 29.

It would be great if you could have it open as we'll be referring to it throughout. So just as a way of a catch up or an introduction, I'm not sure if you've been following along, whether you've been in the other series in this, but we're in Isaiah.

So we are about 700 BC. That is the timeline we're at. The nation of Israel is split into the two kingdoms. We have the north or Israel.

[1 : 0 9] And in here it is referred to as Ephraim. Well, it is the capital Samaria that is the focus. And in the south, we have Judah and we have the capital Jerusalem, which is called Ariel in this passage.

And Isaiah, you know, he is speaking in this book to the covenant people of God. He is speaking to the line of Abraham, to God's people. And, you know, tonight we're going to see a snapshot into what this nation is all about.

You know, it was my cousin's wedding the other week and I was asked to, she got married 18 months ago, but this was the ceremony. And I was asked to do a slideshow of our wedding photos for the event.

And, you know, we weren't there, but we got this real insight into what the day was like. We could see the joy in their faces. We could see what went on. And that is what we will have tonight. We will see this snapshot into the state of the nation.

We see God's people, they are just going through the motions. They are doing technically what they should be doing. In many ways, they have their religion.

[2 : 1 9] And yet, God sees the heart. God sees the motives behind it all. And there's a lot of things that they're doing that is just plain wrong. And, you know, it is the state of the leaders of the people that has got them to this point.

And today, we will have a big challenge to the leaders of Christians. The leaders and the people, well, they were trusting in themselves.

They were trusting in their own wisdom. They were not relying on God. And that brings us to the question of what are we trusting in? Are we trusting in the wisdom of the world?

Are we trusting in our bank accounts? Are we trusting in our job being secure? Or are we trusting in other people in relationships? Or are we trusting in the wisdom of God?

Are we seeking first his kingdom? So tonight, we have a big passage. I don't know what you guys are like, but when you read something like this, and especially Isaiah, for some reason, I just read it and go, whoa, judgment, judgment.

- [3 : 25] That's all I can see. But, you know, we're going to dive in. And there's many challenges in here, but there's also encouragement. So we're going to look. And I want you to keep the lens on the whole time of are we trusting in our own wisdom or in God's.
- And we're going to look in four twos. Hope you're good at math. Four twos. So we're going to look at two wreaths. We're going to look at two promises. We're going to look at two judgments.
- And we're going to look at two worships. So let's start with the very first verse. So first of all, two wreaths. Now, our first wreath is in the very first verse.
- Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty. This first wreath is talking about Samaria, the capital of this northern kingdom.
- Now, Samaria, it was physically on a hill. It was physically at this head of this valley, this fertile valley, and actually resembled a crown. But, you know, it was also regarded as such to the people.
- [4 : 36] The equivalent today would be, oh, Edinburgh. Edinburgh's the place to be. Love Edinburgh. Edinburgh's great. That was what was happening here. But we see in this that there is drunkenness.
- There is pride of this as well. The people here, they had embraced the world. They had embraced the things of this world. We see in here the dangers of excess.
- The dangers of excess. You know, this disobedience here has turned this glorious beauty, as said in verse 1 and verse 4, into a fading flower.
- You know, we have these horrible images of tables covered with vomit. There is not a spot without filth. I hope you've never seen something like that before.
- And you know, Judah is just as bad. So we have Judah in verse 7, and these also stagger from wine and real from beer.
- [5 : 42] Judah is just as bad. And you know, how have they got here? Well, there has been terrible leadership. The leaders of the people.
- Verse 7 again. Priests and prophets stagger from beer. They're befuddled with wine. They reel from beer. They stagger when seeing visions. They stumble when rendering decisions.
- That's the leaders of this people. No wonder the people are in this state. You know, this chapter 28 here, this really starts a new section of Isaiah where the leadership is challenged.
- It's going to be a real challenge for us as people who are leaders of Christians here today. It's going to be a real challenge these next few chapters. And you know, Jesus saw this in the Pharisees.
- He saw that they were leading their people in a way that wasn't good. We have in verse 9, there's quotation marks here. So this is the people speaking. The leaders speaking.
- [6 : 46] They say, who is it he is trying to teach? We're talking about Isaiah. We're talking about Isaiah's teachings. Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children wean from milk?
- To those just taken from the breast? For it is do this, do that. A rule for this, a rule for that. A little here, a little there. They are mocking God's teachings. And you know, they aren't listening.
- Verse 12. To whom he said, this is the resting place. Let the weary rest. And this is the place of repose. But they would not listen.

You know, leadership encouraged particular responsibility. Don't get me wrong. The people have followed along. They're in the wrong here as well. But the leaders have led them down this path.

And you know, earthly wisdom, it tells us to follow the crowd. To do what the popular leaders, the strong and mighty, to follow them. To do what they would say.

[7 : 46] Go with the flow. That is the first wreath that we see here. You know, our second wreath couldn't be more different.

We see in verse 5. In that day, the Lord Almighty will be a glorious crown. A beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people. What a contrast.

What a difference. The Lord Almighty. And what leadership do we see there? Well, we see in verse 6. He will be a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment.

A source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. Justice and strength. And you know, this crown, this wreath, the Lord Jesus, this does not fade.

The Lord does not fade. The Lord Almighty. I was reminded of the hymn lyrics, I will not boast in anything. No gifts, no power, no wisdom. But I will boast in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

[8 : 54] Godly wisdom tells us to follow the Lord. To trust in him and to do as he would have us to do. What are we trusting in? What are we boasting in?

So that is our first two. We've had our two wreaths. So in our second two, we've got our two promises. The first promise is found in verse 15.

You boast. Once again, they are boasting. You boast. We have entered into a covenant with death. With the realm of the dead, we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us.

For we have made a lie our refuge. And falsehood our resting place. Our hiding place. So the historical context here, this covenant of death.

So what this was, was that the people of the southern kingdom, they had made this arrangement with Egypt, which was a major power of the day, a battling nation. But the main threat of the day was from the east.

[10 : 00] It was Assyria. Assyria. And the agreement that the people of Jerusalem had made, the leaders had made, was that if Assyria was to attack and to defeat the northern kingdom, then the southern kingdom would be safe because they'd made this pact, this covenant with Egypt.

And you know, they were boasting in it. But we see in 18 and 19, that although this was a great idea, according to man, you know, this was a great idea, it seemed the best thing to do.

Why wouldn't you do this? And yet we see in 18, your covenant with death will be annulled. Your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you'll be beaten down by it.

As often as it comes, it will carry you away. Morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through. This earthly covenant was going to fail. And you know, verse 20, it mocks man-made covenants.

Verse 20, we read, the bed is too short to stretch out on the blanket, too narrow to wrap around you. What's this saying? Well, it's saying that there's not adequate comfort or protection in this earthly promise.

[11 : 12] It fails to protect. You know, this was a terrifying message for the people, the leaders of Jerusalem. Terrifying. 19b says that at the end of 19, the understanding of this message will bring sheer terror.

They were trusting in earthly things that were going to fail. But you know, this is so familiar. We are also in this precarious position. If we are trusting in things of this earth, if we are not trusting in God, then we have this false security.

We are trusting in things that will fail. Once again, earthly wisdom, it tells us to trust in human packs, trust in others, trust in the strong and mighty.

And are we liable to do that, to put our trust in these things? And once again, this is contrasted with the promise of Jesus.

So this is our second promise, the promise of Jesus. In verse 16, So this is what the sovereign Lord says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation.

[12 : 23] The one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. The cornerstone. We know that to be Jesus. We know that. We can read in 1 Peter 2 verse 6, if you want to look that up later on, about the cornerstone.

The promise of Jesus here. And what is the promise? Justice. Righteousness. You know, this promise of Jesus is sure.

It's not a promise with Egypt. It is a promise that is guaranteed. You know, that means that we can truly rest in Christ if we have put our trust in him.

Not panic like the leaders of Jerusalem. You can imagine when the northern kingdom falls, and the leaders of Jerusalem turn and go, Egypt, now's the time. And they're not there.

You can imagine the panic. But we read a sure foundation. The one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. What relief, what joy, we can have by trusting in the one who is the cornerstone.

[13 : 30] We have that firm security in him. You know, God in his wisdom, he sent Jesus. God, Jesus didn't come into this world triumphantly. He didn't come in as a king.

He came in weakness into a manger. Vulnerable. Jesus lived a life of humility and meekness. And yet through that, he conquered.

He conquered the grave. Jesus was risen again from the dead to show that victory. Have we put our trust in him?

So we've had our two wreaths. That's been our two promises. And now we're going to see two judgments. Two judgments. So first of all, we have a judgment against God's own people.

So first of all, the thing to know about judgment against God's own people is that it is alien to God. God doesn't want to have to judge his own people. Verse 21, God doesn't want to have to.

[14 : 53] This is an alien thing to God and yet he has to because as we saw in verse 12, they would not listen. They would not listen. But you know, we see God's wisdom in judgment.

We have this farming imagery going on in 23, so this is still in chapter 28, but verse 23 down to 29. And you know, what we see in here is that when it comes to discipline, God gives us what we need.

but is the gentlest possible touch. We see in 24, when a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually?

Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil? The answer is no. You know, the soil is broken up. It's to give fertility. It's to allow things to grow.

That is why it happens. And you know, sometimes we need to be made smaller so that we are submissive to God and so that we can be fruitful. And you know, during this, we can take comfort that God will not push us beyond where we can go, beyond what we can take.

[16 : 14] If we are facing trials, it will not be too much for us. It's not to say that it's easy, but God will not push us beyond what we can take.

In 27 and 28, it says, Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is the wheel of a cart rolled over cumin. Caraway is beaten out with a rod and cumin with a stick.

Grain must be ground to make bread. So one does not go on threshing it forever. However, the wheels of a threshing cart may be rolled over it, but one does not use horses to grind grain.

Now, I'm no farmer and I take it you're not either. So this might be foreign to us and it probably is not even what happens nowadays. But what this is basically saying is that it's the gentlest possible way of getting out the various grains or to getting to the point that it needs to be in order to be useful, in order to be eaten or used.

And that's the comfort that we can take, that God uses the gentlest touch possible. And you know, another encouragement is that God places his people orderly and he places them carefully.

[17 : 31] If God is using us, then we see in 25 when he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin, does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot and spelt in its field?

Now, have you ever walked past a farmer's field and just seen a mishmash of crops, loads of wavy lines because the farmer has not bothered where he's put them? No, we don't. You know, it's quite a beautiful thing to see a field and you see these straight lines of all the different crops and you can walk through them because they're planted so carefully.

You know, God taught people to do that and that's because God does the same thing with us. He has a plan for each one of us. He uses us in different ways.

It'll be different for each and every one of us. So we've seen God's judgment here, this first judgment and we've seen that his wisdom and judgment is perfect. That leaves us with the question, do we trust in God's plan even during a season of trials, even when it's difficult?

And our second judgment, so our second judgment is judgment against the nations. So at the start of chapter 29, we see the judgment against Ariel or Jerusalem and we have that I will besiege, so this is verse 2, yeah, I will besiege Ariel.

[18 : 57] She will mourn and lament. She will be to me like an altar hearth, so like a, like a sacrifice. I will encamp against you on all sides. I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you.

Brought low, you will speak from the ground. Your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth. Out of the dust your speech will whisper. When all seems lost, the enemy is at the gate.

They've just about broken in. They are surrounded. Jerusalem is surrounded. The battle is nearly over and yet what do we see? Verse 5, But your many enemies will become like fine dust, the ruthless hordes like blown chaff.

Suddenly in an instant the Lord Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire. God destroys the enemies of his people.

God steps in and saves his own. You know, this was, comes down to the near and far prophecy that we often see in prophecy in the Old Testament.

[20 : 14] What that means is that there's often, so this was speaking to the people of Israel and you know, so then there was a near prophecy which we would have in our past but then there was also a far prophecy which is still to come for us.

And you know, this here was partly fulfilled with the attacks of Assyria and Babylon. Assyria attacked, they surrounded but then they were defeated but they were not absolutely destroyed as we saw in verse 5, will become like fine dust.

And so this part is still to be completely fulfilled in the future. If you're interested, you can read about that in Zechariah 14 and 2 and in Revelation chapter 16.

Bit of homework for you if you fancy it. And you know, the dreamers here, so the dreamers here are the enemy of God's people. We have that these people are dreaming and they're, it's a hungry person and they're dreaming of eating but they wake up and they are hungry still.

And what this is saying is that the enemies of God, they attacked and yet they were sent back and it was as if they hadn't attacked at all. They achieved nothing. That is God's judgment against the nations.

[21 : 27] You know, the world will tell us that we can do what we want, that there's no consequences. But you know, God is judge. God is judge.

Are you ready for that? God is judge. So finally, we've had our, we've had three twos. So for those that are good at maths, this is the last one. Our fourth two.

We have two worships. So we've had our two wreaths, our two promises, our two judgments, and now we're going to see our two worships.

First of all, the first worship is empty religion. We see in 29 verse 1, add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on.

Add year to year, let your cycle of festivals go on. This is just repetitive religion. You know, this is getting to the certain point of the year and going, well, this is what we do every year so we will do it again.

[22 : 33] You know, we have that to some degree. We have Christmas, we have many services, we celebrate with family, same with Easter. But you know, the Jewish calendar was full. You could hardly get by a week without doing a festival.

They were celebrating things that had gone on in Israel's past, things that God had done for them. You know, these things weren't wrong, but it was the thought behind them.

We see that, you know, these people were doing these things, but this is just before we see the judgment that came upon them. So, you know, these repetitive festivals, they did not stop God's judgment.

And we see in verse 13 of the complete and utter empty worship of the people. The Lord says, these people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. These people were doing the right things. They were attending the festivals. They were doing the things they should have done, but it was just human tradition.

[23 : 45] There was no heart behind what they were doing. You know, this was the epitome of the Pharisee. Jesus called out the Pharisees in the New Testament for what they were.

They were just doing intellectual exercises. They were doing things to be seen. There was nothing behind what they were doing. Matthew 15, if you want to look at that.

There was no heart in what the people were doing. And you know, this earthly wisdom is shown to be completely useless before God in verse 14.

Therefore, once more, I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder. the wisdom of the wise will perish. The intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.

Men prefer their own wisdom. They prefer their own way of doing things. But before God, these things are shown to be complete and utter foolishness. Are we just making sure that we're being seen to be doing the right things?

[24 : 55] Is our Christian life just a tick-the-box exercise? Are we just talking the right talk? But our second worship, we see true faith.

Our second worship is true faith. We see and we can be so encouraged that the weak in earthly terms, those that are deaf, blind, poor, and meek, they will see and rejoice.

verse 18, in that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord, the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

You know, God uses those who are weak in earthly terms. the poor are often afflicted by men and yet they are blessed by God.

We see this here, but we see this throughout the New Testament as well. Those that others would have watched straight by, God uses for His work. And you know, true faith, true worship of God.

[26 : 10] It starts with a fear and reverence of God. Verse 23, when they see among them their children the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy.

They will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. True worship begins with the reverence of God.

Let's have that appropriate reverence for God which brings out true and loving awe and worship of Him and all that He has done for us. True faith rather than empty religion.

So we've seen this snapshot of the nation. We've seen where their heart is. We've seen behind it all. The people here, they had embraced the world and all it had to offer.

They had taken things to the excess. They had made promises and they had trusted in these promises, these earthly things that were going to fail.

[27 : 18] This brought panic, this brought distress when judgment came. This judgment was necessary because they just wouldn't listen. And you know this was all brought about through empty worship.

worship. They were technically doing the right things but there was no heart behind what they were doing. You know we've seen God's wisdom in these things. Isaiah here, he's writing because he wants to build the faith of the people and he does that by showing them that they need to run to God.

They need to trust in God, not in themselves or not in others. we can take comfort that if we are in a season of trials then God will not go beyond what we can take.

And God is looking for true faith, not this empty religion, but true faith. That's what he wants in his worshipers. I'm going to leave us by reading a New Testament passage.

It's actually so it quotes verse 14 of chapter 29 in it. So it's 1 Corinthians 1 if you want to look it up. 1 Corinthians 1. I'm going to read verses 18 to 31.

[28 : 39] You know Archie actually had a bit of an embassy leaders get together the other week and he read this passage to us as an encouragement and as a challenge. And I trust that it will be the same for you tonight.

So 1 Corinthians 1 in verse 18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law?

Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him.

God was pleased to the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs, Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

[29 : 42] But to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

I just ask that God will bless the reading of his word.