

“Dancing with the Devil”

Isaiah Chapter 33

Sunday, January 15th, 2023

In 1939 just before the outbreak of World War II, Germany and Russia signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. This treaty promised that neither nation would attack the other, and it laid out a plan for how they would divide the nations of Eastern Europe between them. Yet in 1941, without warning or provocation, Adolf Hitler sent his tanks across the Russian border in a sneak attack. Hitler had no interest in keeping his word; the treaty was meant only as a temporary measure until he could do what he wanted.

The devil will tell you anything you want to hear to get you to do what he wants you to do. He is a master liar; in fact, Jesus declared Satan to be “*the father of lies*” (**John 8:44**). The devil breaks every promise that he makes. He never delivers what he leads us to expect. While sin may be enjoyable for a little while (**Hebrews 11:25**), it always leads to a bitter end.

Each of us has at least one enemy. For Christians, our chief enemy is the devil. You know him also as Satan, the Deceiver, the Accuser, and the Father of Lies. Friends, *how well do you know your enemy?* Satan is **real**. He is not imaginary; but neither is he omnipresent. He is a created being, as such, he has limits, and he is ultimately answerable to God.

Even so, Satan is very powerful, *much* more powerful than any single Christian. It is his goal to separate Christians from the rest of the pack; to isolate us from the fellowship of the church. Satan knows that God made people for community - and he'll disrupt our faith by scattering us. Live-streamed services make it much easier for Satan to convince vulnerable believers to continue living apart from the rest of the fellowshiping body.

The name ‘Satan’ is nowhere found in this **33rd chapter of Isaiah**. But, his work and influence are found here. We'll begin by reading the first verse, then verses 5 & 6.

Isaiah 33:1, 5 & 6:

“1 - Woe to you who plunder, though you *have not been* plundered; and you who deal treacherously, though they have not dealt treacherously with you! When you cease plundering, You will be plundered; when you make an end of dealing treacherously, they will deal treacherously with you.”

5 - “The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; he has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.”

6 - “Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, *and* the strength of salvation; the fear of the Lord *is* His treasure.”

God had promised to help Judah. Even so, the leaders of Judah went down to Egypt for help, and Egypt let them down. So Assyria kept on coming for Judah. Ray Ortlund helps us imagine the scene:

“The hordes of the Assyrian army surrounding Jerusalem, filling the landscape out to the horizon. The officials of Judah stand there on the city wall, watching nervously as the chests filled with gold and silver are carried on carts out through the city gate to the Assyrian command center off at a distance. It is humiliating to Judah and doubly dishonoring to God. His people treat Him as a worthless ally and then make *Him* pay the bill for their disloyalty.

But they don't see it that way. Not yet. What they see is hope, “Finally those Assyrians will let up on us! This will all be over soon.” So there goes God's money, God's honor, and their integrity in the form of payment to the Assyrian mafia.

But as they watch from the wall, waiting for the foreign army to pack up their weapons and disassemble their battering rams and fold up their tents, the leaders of Judah begin to realize that the Assyrians aren't going anywhere. It's a double-cross. Assyria plans to attack anyway. Judah is dancing with the devil! As the truth dawns on them, they finally admit, “We've miscalculated. Our whole strategy has been wrong. We've offended God. We've weakened ourselves and gained nothing in the deal.” They finally realize that they have nothing left but the grace of God. Therefore, to God they go. They can't tell Him that they value Him as the One from whom all blessings flow. They only value Him as their backup plan. But God receives them even on those terms.” (Ortlund, 187-188)

Isaiah 33 is for those who've given themselves to all the wrong things. And, such people are seeing that their lives are fast becoming a lost opportunity. Even if you've deserted God to dance with the devil, He will come for You if you finally turn away from your folly and disbelief. *Isn't that a comforting reality?*

This is the sixth time in chapters 28 through 33 that a “woe” has been pronounced. The first five times “woe” was found in these chapters, it referred to Israel or Judah. This time, it has to do with respect to Assyria the superpower crouching at Jerusalem's door! So, Assyria is the plundering nation - “the Destroyer” - and it hadn't yet been plundered. But, God will make sure they are plundered and dealt with treacherously themselves!!

Especially for those nations in the Far East, Japan decided to break modern rules of warfare in its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The Japanese were gambling that if they cripple the US Pacific Fleet for a few years, they could cement such a hold on the Far East that it would be too expensive for the US to dislodge them. And who know how history would have been different if they had been able to destroy the fleets' aircraft carriers and not just its
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largely obsolete battleships. But they were not able to do so, and in the end all their plunder was wrested from their grip. God is still God, and the plunderer is still plundered, and the destroyer is still destroyed.

When God destroys a nation, He is doing two things. He is exercising judgment on a sinful people and He is displaying His love for His church by showing that even the greatest nations cannot keep Him from caring for His people. In **Isaiah Chapter 33**, Isaiah is proclaiming judgment against the Assyrians. Though they were the most powerful nation on earth, God would bring them down in a great display of His justice toward His enemies and mercy toward His cherished people.

Verses 5 & 6 list the gifts which the Lord, as the exalted, reigning King, will bestow upon His people in destroying Assyria - justice, righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, a stable foundation, the strength of salvation, and the fear of the Lord. It is the supremely precious thing (the key to this treasure) which crowns and sums up all His other gifts. "The fear of the Lord is the key to all blessing, but we do not have it except as a gift. Salvation is by grace from beginning to end." (Webb, 140)

Verse 15 lists several behaviors evident in the lives of those who've received the grace of God through eternal salvation. The conduct of the godly if you will.

"He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,
He who despises the gain of oppressions,
Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes,
Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed,
And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:"

These are reminiscent to Psalms 15 and 24. This is Psalm 15:

- 1** - Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?
- 2** - He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart;
- 3** - He *who* does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;
- 4** - In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;
- 5** - He *who* does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these *things* shall never be moved.

This is **Psalm 24:3-5**:

- 3** - Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place?
- 4** - He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully.

5 - He shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

God demands His children to be men and women of integrity and selflessness. We mustn't open our ears to juicy gossip, slander, and deceptions. Nor, must we allow our eyes to be cast upon evil matters. There it is - being a Christian means we'll be involved in godly pursuits, and resisting ungodly ones. If there is a disconnect between your behavior and what God reveals in His Word, draw closer to Him and His people. We can do this together...

Finally, I'd have you look at verses 22-24 and the gift of pardon for our sins - forgiveness!

22 - (For the Lord *is* our Judge, the Lord *is* our Lawgiver, the Lord *is* our King; He will save us);

23 - Your tackle is loosed, they could not strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail. Then the prey of great plunder is divided; the lame take the prey.

24 - And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick"; the people who dwell in it *will be* forgiven *their* iniquity.

Verse 22 indicates that all the functions of the new government will be centered in the Messiah King (Judicial - The Lord is our Judge); (Legislative - The Lord is our Lawgiver); and (Executive - The Lord is our King).

Verse 23 pictures Jerusalem as a ship that almost sank, but the Lord brought it through the storm.

Finally, verse 24 teaches that all who will inhabit the ideal world to come will be **forgiven**. "Only grace can get us from where we are to where we need to be. The blessings of God's rule are for those who know that they are sinners in need of God's forgiveness more than anything else. This is just as true for us, as it was for Isaiah's audience." (Webb, 142)

"Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honor and pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure and pays with pain; he promises profit and pays with loss; he promises life and pays with death." - Thomas Brooks.
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