



## Sermon, Sunday, December 31, 2023

### “Speak to us smooth things and prophesy illusions!”

**SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 30:8-18** <sup>8</sup> Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it on a scroll, so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever. <sup>9</sup> For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the LORD; <sup>10</sup> who say to the seers, “Do not see,” and to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things; prophesy illusions; <sup>11</sup> leave the way; turn aside from the path; let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.” <sup>12</sup> Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you reject this word and put your trust in oppression and deceit and rely on them, <sup>13</sup> therefore this iniquity shall become for you like a break in a high wall, bulging out and about to collapse, whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant; <sup>14</sup> its breaking is like that of a potter’s vessel that is smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a sherd is found for taking fire from the hearth or dipping water out of the cistern. <sup>15</sup> For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused <sup>16</sup> and said, ‘No! We will flee upon horses’— therefore you shall flee! and, ‘We will ride upon swift steeds’— therefore your pursuers shall be swift! <sup>17</sup> A thousand shall flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you shall flee until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill. <sup>18</sup> Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

#### Introduction: The Holy One of Israel

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas and the last day of 2023. To understand today's text, we must have background knowledge about the history of ancient Israel.

After the death of King Solomon, Israel was divided into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Northern Israel was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire before the southern kingdom of Judah in 721 BC. After the fall of Northern Israel, Southern Judah also faced a national crisis. However, the national power of the southern kingdom of Judah was too weak to deal with Assyria. At that time, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah was Hezekiah. He asked Egypt for help to prevent Assyria's military oppression. He tried to fight Assyria through a military alliance with Egypt. However, those efforts ultimately failed.

At that time, the prophet Isaiah shouted that Southern Judah should not rely on Egypt's military power to deal with Assyria. However, From King Hezekiah's perspective, it was difficult to judge whether Isaiah's prophecy was the word of God or not, so he chose not to follow Isaiah’s words.

But why was it difficult for the people of Judah at that time to accept Isaiah's words as the words of God? On the outside, it seemed like they were serving God, but they were only interested in themselves. They did not listen to or follow God's words if it meant even the slightest loss to them. Verses 10 and 11 of today's text clearly describe the hearts of the Jewish people as follows; **“who say to the seers, "Do not see"; and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”**

So what are the smooth things and prophesy illusions that the people of Judah, led by King Hezekiah, wanted to hear?



## **Body: Speak to us smooth things and prophesy illusions!**

That is, Assyria can be defeated through a military alliance with Egypt. At that time, Assyria was in trouble due to the anti-Assyrian revolution following the death of King Sargon. So, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, raised an army and suppressed the anti-Assyrian revolution. In this situation, they wanted to hear that Southern Judah could become an independent country in name and reality if it joined hands with Egypt to fight against Assyria.

At that time, many prophets and officials would have told King Hezekiah, **“God will help the people of Judah, so you should be confident and make an alliance with Egypt.”** If we tell people that 'everything is going to be okay', and if that's what we want to hear, the impact it has on people is enormous. Long ago, King Hezekiah and the people of Judah listened to these words because that is what they wanted to hear. We also want to hear these words.

However, Prophet Isaiah believed that it was a nonsensical and ungodly idea that Southern Judah could seek safety through an alliance with Egypt. This is because the mission of a proper prophet is to see the history of God's reign and declare God's will.

However, most people are more interested in sweet and seductive words that satisfy their hearts than in God's will and government. I don't mean to criticize politicians, but politicians are good at saying sweet things like that. But such words cannot bring us true happiness. If we only listen to sweet words, we will find that even if we get what we want, our lives will still go back to the way we were before.

The prophet Isaiah clearly describes this human condition in today's text. **“Therefore, this iniquity shall become for you like a break in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse, whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant” (v.13).**

In fact, the words of the prophet Isaiah in this verse undermine the wishes of King Hezekiah and the people of Judah to restore the glory of the era of David and Solomon through a military alliance with Egypt. These words of Isaiah were not welcomed by most of the people of Judah, so why does he say this? Also, can these words of Prophet Isaiah be an alternative to saving the people of Southern Judah in a difficult situation?

In today's text, Isaiah 30:15, Isaiah declares: **“In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused.”** What does this verse mean? Do you perhaps understand this verse to mean that if you read the Bible, pray, and worship instead of being swayed by worldly problems, all your problems will be solved? In other words, do you think that if you live religiously, all your problems will work out the way you want?

However, what we must clearly understand is that no matter how hard we try to live a religious life, all our problems will never be solved by themselves. Even if we lead a good religious life, we may encounter unexpected accidents or lose our job. On the contrary, even if we do not live by faith, we can live well in this world without any envy.

What Isaiah is trying to say through this verse is not that if we quietly believe and rely on the Lord, we can defeat Assyria and regain the glory of David and Solomon. As we know, there were many prophets in Israel's history, but they could not prevent the decline of the Israelites.

So, what is the prophet Isaiah saying? First, I encourage you to think about our concerns to understand these words. Is our primary concern the expansion of our business, the well-being of our children, or social accomplishments? If so, we must turn our minds away from these concerns and be able to quietly believe and rely on God.

So what was Hezekiah's problem in today's text? Hezekiah's heart depended on foreign policy alone to determine the country's fate. These problems are found equally among us. There are many times when we are always preoccupied with something to fulfill our desires.



In fact, the problem with our lives is that we do not care what the source of life is or how God's grace comes to us. Today's text makes a promise to us. If we can fully rely on God even in difficult conditions, we will enjoy the true joy of salvation. However, if our hearts are focused on something other than our interest in the Lord, the result is like a wall that was about to collapse suddenly bulging out and collapsing in an instant.

**Conclusion: Blessed are all who wait for the Lord.**

Now let's summarize today's sermon. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Today is the last day of 2023. How did you live during this year? Was it a year when you were excited by smooth things and prophesy illusions? Or was it a year where you truly trusted in God?

Please remember. Salvation comes only from the Lord, and only from the Lord does the power of true life come. I pray that our lives lived with this faith will make 2024 more prosperous. Amen!

