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# When life is hard and God seems...slow

## Isaiah 30

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*(Introduction is to tease out the theme of impending danger requiring immediate protection. To where do you go? To whom do you turn? When you are insecure and God seems unhurried what are you tempted to do? what plans do you develop? What strategy do you follow? )*

In the 710 BC it looked dismal. Judah had some success. They enjoyed peace from their enemies. Rest on all sides seemed unending. But that is not how the brutal Assyrians saw it. They were on the march. Their sights set on little, vulnerable Judah. Their agenda was plain. They were about to sweep through the kingdom and conquer God's people. What should their king do for the people to provide national security and individual peace?

Deep in their hearts God's people knew they had not been faithful to the covenant the LORD made to their forefathers. They could recall the warning of Deuteronomy 32:30 that "one could chase 1,000 and two will put 10,000 to flight" if the LORD gives them over to the Assyrians.

But there's a problem. It's not just that the days were unpromising. It was not simply that life was hard for Judah. God seemed unhurried! He appeared slow in providing immediate protection from the impending danger. To whom will Hezekiah and his people turn for provision and protection? To where will they flee to get help?

Judah's politicians negotiated an Egyptian alliance. They forsook the faithful God and pursued Egypt as their promising protection. Under pressure and undergoing great insecurities they buckled and struck an alliance with the world.

Tonight we are to notice this negative example so that when life is hard and God seems slow we will not run in haste (cf. 28:16) to worldly ways to solve our problems. We will see clearly the stupidity of leaving God. We will be shown the folly of not listening to the Word of God and following the ways of the world.

But just a "don't do this" example will not win our hearts over. We will also be confronted with the grace of our LORD. We will see the faithfulness of God protecting His faithless people. We will witness the fact that God is not slow. He waits. He knows the exact time to move swiftly to carry out and uphold His covenant with His people – to protect them and deliver them from all evil. The wonders in store for His people stagger the imagination.

Tonight, let us be persuaded that *the solution when life is hard and God seems slow is not alliance with the world but rather reliance upon the Word.*

Please open your Bibles and turn with me to Isaiah 30 where we will notice cogent reasons for welcoming this solution. My hope is that all of us will be convinced that alliance with the world is to guarantee disaster and that reliance upon the Word is to guarantee quietness and rest for today and wonders of wonders in the day of eternity. <let's pray>

## **Alliance with the World (a misplaced trust)**

**1-17**

To be convinced that alliance with the World is sinful and stupid notice with me the first section of this chapter; v1-17. Here we find God's people as a faithless people. In this section Isaiah outlines the current political situation in which Hezekiah, king of Judah around 715 BC, has been pursuing an alliance with Egypt. The King anxiously sought assistance from Egypt to protect his country from the Assyrians. As I read this section think with me: What is Hezekiah looking for in Egypt. Why won't he find it there? What will he find? What do these verses teach us about the root of such recklessness?

When life is hard and God seems slow do you make God your last resort?

Listen to v1-7 and notice together two features of striking an alliance with the World (i.e. *misplaced trust*).

*“Ah, stubborn children,” declares the LORD,  
“who carry out a plan, but not mine,  
and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit,  
that they may add sin to sin;  
who set out to go down to Egypt,  
without asking for my direction,  
to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh  
and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!  
Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame,  
and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.  
For though his officials are at Zoan  
and his envoys reach Hanes,  
everyone comes to shame  
through a people that cannot profit them,  
that brings neither help nor profit,  
but shame and disgrace.”  
An oracle on the beasts of the Negeb.  
Through a land of trouble and anguish,  
from where come the lioness and the lion,  
the adder and the flying fiery serpent,  
they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys,  
and their treasures on the humps of camels,  
to a people that cannot profit them.  
Egypt's help is worthless and empty;  
therefore I have called her  
“Rahab who sits still.”*

### **Features of alliance with the world**

Verses 1-7 are organized into two sections. The first part (v1-5) talk about how Judah sought Egyptian protection from the Assyrian army. Then Isaiah in v6-7 uses a poem to communicate the irony of such a strategy.

## It is sinful

v1-5

The obvious feature of this misplaced trust is seen in v1. **It's sinful.** Isaiah calls Judah “stubborn children”. They fret over the future and for their safety. And what do they do? When life is hard and God seems slow they...make God their last resort. They lean upon their own plans. “Carry out a plan but not Mine” “Make an alliance but not of My Spirit” – these are ways Isaiah describes Judah’s deliberate action to seek protection apart from the Lord.

This sinful tendency always results in shame and never delivers help as v3-5 indicate. Isaiah paints in these verses a pathetic picture. Using the Exodus motif the prophet communicates a reversal of salvation. Instead of trusting the Lord and coming out of Egypt to experience life God’s people now are trusting in Egypt searching for life and entering into certain death. Placing themselves under Pharaoh, the genocidal king is stubborn rebellion. Expecting life in a place of death is sinful and as we will see in v6-7 it is stupid.

## It is stupid

6-7

The second feature of this misplaced trust can be seen in v6-7. We will summarize this characteristic as simply STUPID.

This poem could be titled “the irony of sin”. Thinking that sin is profitable is stupid because:

- *It is dangerous* as seen in v6a. “a land of trouble and anguish from where come the lioness and lion, the adder and the flying fiery serpent...”
- *It is expensive* as seen in the second part of v6. “they carry their riches on the back of donkeys and their treasures on the humps of camels...”
- *It is futile* as seen in v7. “Egypt’s help is worthless and empty...”

Here we see the politicians of Judah making their way down to Egypt to strike a deal with them. And the reader of this poem is to conclude – now that’s stupid!

## Its rejecting God’s word

8-17

The third reason for us to stay clear of alliance with the world as a solution to our problems is found in v8-17. In these verses we come to why they were acting this way. Here in this section we get right down to the cause of such activities. We get an up close look at the problem. Take a listen as I pick up the prophecy starting at v8.

*And now, go, write it before them on a tablet  
and inscribe it in a book,  
that it may be for the time to come  
as a witness forever.  
For they are a rebellious people,  
lying children,  
children unwilling to hear  
the instruction of the LORD;  
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,  
prophecy illusions,*

*leave the way, turn aside from the path,  
let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”*

*Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,  
“Because you despise this word  
and trust in oppression and perverseness  
and rely on them,  
therefore this iniquity shall be to you  
like a breach in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse,  
whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant;  
and its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel  
that is smashed so ruthlessly  
that among its fragments not a shard is found  
with which to take fire from the hearth,  
or to dip up water out of the cistern.”*

*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 were unwilling, and you said,*

*“No! We will flee upon horses”;*

*therefore you shall flee away;*

*and, “We will ride upon swift steeds”;*

*therefore your pursuers shall be swift.*

*A thousand shall flee at the threat of one;*

*at the threat of five you shall flee,*

*till you are left*

*like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,*

*like a signal on a hill.*

### **A refusal of general truth**

**v9-14**

After the LORD commands Isaiah in v8 to write down the warning of future judgment (due to refusal to listen) he explains this charge by describing a denial of God’s Word in its two forms.

The first form of rejection of God’s Word is a refusal of general truth as seen in (v9-14).

The southern kingdom Judah no longer wanted to hear God’s Word. They refused the Bible and replaced the Bible by a humanly contrived acceptable message. This message according to v10 is to be smooth. They did not want the surface of their lives ruffled in any way.

You can almost hear the Judean search committee looking for their new pastor say,

*“Young man hear us well. We just want a tad of trifle – just a smidgeon of superficiality – that’s all we want from you. No holiness talk here. We want our leaders to pioneer a new*

*type of morality for us. The Assyrians are threatening you know. And who knows the Babylonians may just get that way as well. We will not be light to the nations. We will be like the nations. That will make us friends and influence people. You must understand. We are a group that bind together and get leaders who will help us practice novelty (cf. 2Timothy 4:3-4). Now if you will neuter the gospel and be inoffensive and we will consider hiring you to be our new pastor”.*

Underneath rejecting the Bible we find something horrible. Last part of v11 we find the personal disdain for God. When people reject the Bible they hate God. There is nothing neutral about attempting to combine the Word with the World. Empowering this strategy is a disgust with God (see Genesis 3:1-7).

This refusal of general truth (we see today as the Bible) exhibits an active trust in alternatives as seen in v12. People never just stop trusting God. They replace God with something else. In this case Judah replaced the LORD with Egypt. And as a result they trusted in oppression and perverseness (two names for Egypt).

V13-15 continue the description of rejecting general truth by showing the consequences of doing so. The consequence of iniquity is complete devastation as noted by the word pictures of 13-15. People who reject the Bible in general are left in complete darkness and utter coldness. There is no method to alleviate this misery. People are left with their tongue pasted to their pallet for ever and ever. Awful far-reaching consequences await those who refuse to trust in the Word of God.

#### **A refusal of specific message**

#### **v15-17**

The second form of rejecting God’s Word is found in v15-17. Here we come to a specific message given to Judah. They must stop attempting to find a solution to national security outside of the LORD. They must turn specifically from Egypt and what it represents. They must come home now. They must come back to the LORD.

The message of repentance goes forth to those who reject the Bible as the Word of God. The invitation extends in these verses to receive the only active way of coming back to the LORD (cf. 1:27). *“In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”*

True trust is seen in v15. Rest down upon the Savior is a way of summarizing this verse. Then and only then will you receive quietness. This quietness (in light of 28:16) is the absence of frenzy, restless attempt to find help outside the Lord. This is gospel goodness. This is the only hope for those in rebellion.

And yet, in the middle of v15 we find Judah saying, “no”. They refuse this specific message; the gospel message of hope and rest that provides strength for battles and challenges.

V16-17 communicate the consequences of refusing the way of faith. (and the experiencing of Matt.26:52).

Notice clearly that when we refuse the way of faith it does not matter what we choose. For whatever we choose will eventually turn against us. We seek to be swift only to find out how swift the enemy is! ( a Leviticus 26:8 reversal – a Deuteronomy 32:30 realized).

V17 carries a cogent point describing the end of a nation; the disappearance of a people. Having just a monument erected but no signs of society and activity and joy await those who refuse the gospel.

Beloved, do not just sit tonight and hear English words in a nice auditorium. Hear the Word. Heed the Word.

## Reliance upon the Word

18-33

What will convince you that the solution when life is hard and God seems slow is not alliance with the world but rather its reliance upon the word? This chapter starts out with three powerful negative reasons to convince you of this solution. Now we turn the corner and notice one huge positive reason for believing this solution.

What will move God's faithless people to rely upon the faithful God? How will He change their hearts from alliance with the world to reliance upon the Word? And what will the results be when this transformation occurs? V18-33 give us the answers.

### The faithfulness of God

18

God longs to move in grace and compassion towards his people because of his steadfast love and His justice. Notice the center of this chapter; v18. The faithlessness of His people cannot stop the faithfulness of Him. We see in the second half of this chapter why God seems slow? He seems slow because He waits! His faithfulness works behind the scenes to secure what is best for His people. This faithfulness ultimately seen first in v19-26. And then we will notice His faithfulness immediately in v27-33.

Picking up the chapter in v.18 sense the shift in the chapter and notice what is highlighted.

*Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you,  
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.*

*For the LORD is a God of justice;  
blessed are all those who wait for him.*

*For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!"*

*And he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your livestock will graze in large pastures, and the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat seasoned fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. And on every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.*

### Seen ultimately

19-26

V19-26 gives us a spiritual Hubble telescope allowing us to see beyond the waiting period of v18. Notice with me what waiting upon the LORD yields. It is Messianic glory!

When the waiting is over... (Preach messianic glory)

**No more tears**

19

**Receptive to revelation**

20-21

**Freedom from idolatry**

22

<b>Abundance of food</b>	<b>23-24</b>
<b>Abundance of water</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Abundance of light</b>	<b>26</b>

## **Seen immediately** **27-33**

Though Judah flirts with Egypt and finds it futile; though Judah dallies with danger and offends the Holy One of Israel Assyria will not be allowed to defeat God's people. God's faithfulness remains and accomplishes what His faithless people could never do.

Under God's faithfulness Judah would experience protection. We see God's promise to accomplish three things.

### **Intervention – God's enemies slain** **27-28,31-33**

The Assyrians do not have the last say against Judah. Though Judah did not earn this protection, God is faithful to His promise. Anyone attacking His people is on the way to their pyre funeral; a heap of combustibles awaiting unbelievers to experience the misery of never being consumed in their private deep and wide spiritual crematorium – to hell they go – their own personal never-ending incineration with no hope of escape.

### **Exultation – God's people sing** **29-30**

But for His people there are songs in the night. For those who "in repentance and rest" find their salvation there is great joy. God's people are not waiting for the final consummation of God's great promise – New Heavens/ New Earth – in order to sing. Even when it is night (when we are still in threatening places and unpromising situations) God's people are met by God's grace. The results are joy and gladness. We ascend the mountain of the Lord; we go with great gladness to the Rock of Israel – Jesus the Christ (cf. 1Cor.10). We now have all the resources necessary to trust Him when he withholds and when he bestows.

This section; v18-30, is written for our instruction. We are to be convinced of God's grace and His judgment to make the right decision at the right time. We are called to quiet confidence and heightened expectancy that we once had the first day of salvation. Receiving the strength that comes from such repentance we will persevere to experience fully and finally v19-26!

To bring this colossal chapter home to our hearts here are a few reflections and applications.

*When life is hard and God seems slow...*

- 1. Don't trust in human policies over divine promises (30:1-2)*
- 2. Remember making God our last resort is both sinful and stupid (30:3-7)*
- 3. Remember rejecting the Bible guarantees complete devastation (30:8-17)*
- 4. Understand the faithlessness of His people cannot stop the faithfulness of God (30:18)*
- 5. Understand that when God seems slow He actually is waiting for perfect timing (30:18)*
- 6. The faithfulness of God is seen ultimately in full and final glory (30:19-26)*
- 7. The faithfulness of God is seen also in present provisions of joy amid unpromising times (30:27-30)*

**When life is hard and God seems slow the solution is never alliance with the world but rather it is always reliance upon His Word.**