

How Shall We Escape?

God's Justice and Mercy

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... in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 19. We are slowly making our way through this great Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah, one that I consider to be as full as what we would find even in the book of Romans written by the apostle Paul. Of course, we can't put one Scripture above another. It is all God's inspired Word. But actually I want you to look at Isaiah chapter 20. I said 19, but 20, a short chapter and one question. And that is the title of this message and that is: How shall we escape? You can put an emphasis on that question depending on what word you emphasize? *How* shall we escape?

It is a blessing when the Spirit of God brings a sinner to ask that question in grace and not in the face of judgment. Here in this chapter, the very last verse the question is asked out of fear of judgment. How shall we escape? It could be emphasized: How shall *we* escape? To be of that number who have never known the way, be of that number who are in false worship and suddenly every prop knocked out. You are never alone. There is always a we. How shall *we* escape? But then the great question. How shall we *escape*? And what is that escape for sinners? What is that escape which God has decreed and provided and opened and established and accomplished for sinners? There is a message of hope, but none find that way unless God is gracious in his mercy to point the way, to draw sinners to that we.

Let's read this chapter. Remember chapter divisions were put in to make it easier to read the Scriptures in public. They weren't part of the original text. So sometimes chapter divisions can give us an idea that there is a new thought beginning when, in reality, it is not. It is a continuation and that is how I would have you look at this as we begin it. This is a summary of the chapters that we have been studying to this point of how the Lord raised up this evil nation of Assyria and would use that evil nation to come in to that land of Israel and take away into captivity 10 tribes from the north who after Solomon's death formed a coalition purposely to join together in false worship against the way that God had ordained that they would be worshipped. They are going up to Samaria and establishing that. Their stronghold in that city was for the purpose of bringing back again the worship of the golden calf. The only thing is that they doubled it. Now they would have two calves. And for years the Lord allowed them to continue on in that false worship even prospering the 10 northern tribes.

And you can understand, then, why when the Lord raised up a prophet like Isaiah to go and stand before this people and tell them, “Your days are numbered,; it would be difficult for them to accept it, because everything seemed to be prospering all around them and yet all the while the Lord was raising up an enemy, raising up a nation stronger than they who would come down and who would totally wipe out and destroy that ... those 10 tribes.

The Assyrians did a little differently than the Babylonians who would come later. They would come and take away what remained and took it into captivity, destroy the temple which was at Jerusalem and then would... the Lord would later release them. That is in the book of Daniel. Isaiah was before that time. He was dealing with Assyria. At that time Babylon wasn't even a power. And yet it was prophesied, as we saw already in Isaiah, it was prophesied that Babylon would, indeed, be raised up against Judah. How can it be prophesied except for God decrees it? God determines these things. Does not he raise up one nation and put another one down? Is not promotion from the Lord? And so we see that very clearly set forth. But what we are going to see here, because, remember in the last chapter we saw some prophecies against Egypt. We saw some prophecies against Ethiopia. These are two nations in the continent of Africa, if you look on the map, that are right up there next to the Mideast, very much a part of the history of the Bible.

You say, “Well, why Egypt? You know, why Ethiopia?” Well, it is because when Assyria began to grow in power these 10 tribes rather than look to the Lord, rather than seek him and renounce their false worship, they looked to these nations. Egypt was a power at the time, Ethiopia a power. And so they thought that a coalition with those nations would, indeed, help them defend themselves against Assyria. But the Lord here shows his might in his power against any coalition of man—I don't care how strong it is—that would come together with purpose of endeavoring to thwart what God had decreed, what God had purposed. I wouldn't want to be in that line of fire. But that is what we read here in verse one of Isaiah 20, this prophecy now against Egypt and Against Ethiopia.

“In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it...”¹

These were the beginnings of the dismantling, if you will, of the 10 tribes of the north. Ashdod was along the sea. It is what is known today as the Gaza Strip. You probably have heard the war in Gaza. That war continues today, these battles have continued. But it was in this time that one of their strongholds was taken. Well, that, you know, the Lord didn't just send Assyria in there to take them all out at once. He chipped away. They came down and took one city. They came down and took another. They would lay siege. It took place over a period of three years. But all the while the Lord was doing his will. And at that same time, you see, verse two:

“...spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz.”²

¹ Isaiah 20:1.

² Isaiah 20:2.

There were a lot of preachers in the day probably telling people it is going to be all right, just like today. People that look for a preacher just to kind of put a nice smooth balm over the problem. Some look to preachers. Some look to politicians. Some look to educators, you know, to fix these things. But if it is the Lord dismantling it, we dare not speak peace where there is no peace. And here was one man, Isaiah, who stood out, I believe, just like any preacher of the gospel of the truth in our day. They are going to stand out pretty much like a sore thumb because they are not going the way of these other preachers. They don't associate with them. We don't read anywhere where Isaiah attended preacher's fellowships to try to, you know, stay in the loop. Any man that the Lord has used, you are going to find in Scripture. The Lord has always separated them out. And that is what I see here, one man against so many and yet given a message that he could not resist declaring. It affected his very lifestyle and how he presented himself before these men.

“At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.”³

Some question whether he would have been completely naked or whether in this particular culture just taking off your outer clothes, walking around in your undergarment would have been a form of nakedness. I don't know. It just says that he was naked and barefoot, a very unseemly way of having to walk around.

And verse three:

“And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners...”⁴

Now you have to be in this culture now thinking Egyptians. So shall he lead them away. Think of every person who had hoped that Egypt would be their deliverance now hearing this message. It would either cause you to tremble or it would cause you to doubt. No. Can't happen.

I get people upset at me when they hear me saying that such could very well be the demise of the United States of America. I have had people get angry and say, “You can't talk about the United States of America that way.” Well, let me ask you this. Who made the United States of America almighty? What makes us think that any power that we have earned or developed over the years will be here 100 years from now? For all we know, you know, that is the thing that people boast in. These are the United States you are talking about. Well, you know, this was Egypt. This was Ethiopia. Who thinks about Ethiopia today? You know, you go over there today and there are still marauders out

³ Ibid.

⁴ Isaiah 20:3-4.

there. There is civil war. It is just total chaos. But remember. There was a day when that country, these countries were powers in the world. And yet brought low.

It says in verse four.

“So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered.”⁵

So there is a pretty good idea of what kind of nakedness that Isaiah would have been exposed to, maybe just a loin cloth walking around, buttocks exposed.

...to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day...⁶

Of this country might be another way to put the word isle. Isle gives you the idea of being surrounded by water. Certainly Israel has water on one side, so perhaps the word country would be a better word.

“And the inhabitant of this [country] shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?”⁷

Good question, but wrong time. And I compare it to people just like yourselves or myself who have the privilege of understanding a little bit of God’s holiness, understanding in measure, I say, a little bit of his justice and hearing a message, week in and week out that talks to us about how unless there is a mediator to stand between us and this holy God that we will most certainly be destroyed.

And what do men do? They run to the arm of the flesh. They have got their Egypt. They have got their Ethiopia. They have got their denomination. They have got their pastor. You know, they get feeling a little bit uneasy inside so they want to see the pastor. They want the pastor to pray for them. They want their friends. Let’s get a prayer group started, a Bible study.

It is like a drunk, people trying to feel better about themselves and they look to all of these ways and means that men have established to make people feel better about themselves and to be less concerned about whatever fears they might have. Let’s just get a therapy group going when, in reality, their hope is stayed on something else than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. That is an important situation.

And I have said it. While we are feeling good, while we are in good health. While we are prospering in our jobs, it might be easy to fall back on some of those props and think, ok,

⁵ Isaiah 20:4.

⁶ Isaiah 20:5-6.

⁷ Isaiah 20:6.

tomorrow will be a better day. But let the Lord take away your health. Let him take away your livelihood. Let him put you face to face with the one thing that most people don't want to talk about today and that is death. Come and join in. Suddenly not having the temporal benefits and blessings that we enjoy day in and day out. I would ask you then. What would be your hope and stay? You know, if it is not Christ, if he has not been revealed to you heart and has not given you that persuasion that nothing else will satisfy but his blood and righteousness alone, I will guarantee you. Your cry will be much like these when it became apparent that this was a time that the Lord had ordained for their destruction. How shall we escape?

And notice. They confess it to have been a false hope. Maybe at the time it didn't seem so false. You know, I hear people say that all the time. Well, you know, God is merciful. God is loving. Maybe it won't be so bad after all. There is a little expectation there. Their cry was:

“Behold, such is our expectation.”⁸

Now that the Lord has taken that prop away:

“...whither we feel for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?”⁹

What we see here, dear friends, again, is how God is the king of nations. You can use the word sovereign. Some people, you know, that has been a popular word today. So I am trying to find another way to say it. Make sure it gets home. He is the king of nations. These different movements that we read about in verse one. It says it was:

“In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod...”¹⁰

That was a strong city of the Philistines in the day. But it was besieged and taken away by an army of the Assyrians. Who was directing all of that history? Who was directing all of that activity? The besieging, the starving out is what happens in a siege. They would just surround a city and starve them to death until they either surrendered or they died, you know? That is how the Lord purposed that this judgment begin. And yet the time was fixed. Here it is described as when the King of Assyria, here he is called Sargon. They had different names. It may have been the same that we have been seeing up to now, Sennacherib. I am not going to dwell on these names. But different kinds that were in prominence in that time. Who raises up kings? Who puts them down? Is it not the king of nations?

But secondly here we see the making of Isaiah as a sign. Do you see that in verse three?

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Isaiah 20:1.

“At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.”¹¹

And then verse three says that that whole scenario was to be a sign, an example, notice, and wonder. Just like Egypt’s fall would be a sign and a wonder. Ethiopia is a sign and a wonder.

Well, the Lord places preachers in a place where they are often exposed to men’s ridicule to the message they have to declare. That is something you accept. I find it interesting and somewhat amazing that Isaiah did not even halt when the Lord told him to do this. You know, he was being brought to change a lifestyle for the gospel, for the message that he had to declare. And what it was was to be a sign to that people of really the melancholy of the time, the sack cloth. Evidently he had been wearing sack cloth already because it says:

“Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins.”¹²

So already this was not a time of rejoicing. This was not a time to be wearing the latest designer suit, driving the Bentley. This was a time of consideration, soberness, sober mindedness. And we see that at every level Isaiah was wholly committed. That is the way a man is when the Lord has taught him the truth of Christ. There is no compromise. There is no backing down. There is no deviating or negotiating. What is vital and what is important is the souls of men and the glory of God. And that is how we see the Lord strengthening Isaiah to do this.

You talk about, you know, a discomfort. He had a family. He had a wife. He had children. And yet for these three years, this was to be his mission to walk about. When people would ask, “What are you doing with your clothes off? What are you doing barefoot?” Well, this would be the end. This is the ultimate end of those who stand against the very purposes of God and the way that God has ordained that we worship. So a show, a sign.

And, you know, often the ones who mourn are the ones that ... or don’t mourn are the ones who should. You think about Isaiah walking around naked and barefoot during this time. Who should have been walking around naked and barefoot? Wouldn’t it have been the people? And yet they had no regard for it. It is like in the days of Noah when he was building that ark. You know, they ridiculed. They mocked him. They hadn’t seen rain on earth. What would be the purpose for such an ark? And yet Hebrews 11 says that Isaiah or Noah fearing the Lord obeyed and went out and built that ark. What did that ark represent? Well, salvation in type, salvation through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this was the message that Isaiah was brought to have to declare.

¹¹ Isaiah 20:2.

¹² Ibid.

We see the same thing if you look in Matthew chapter three concerning John the Baptist. How was he in his day? Well, he was a man who stood alone. He was a man who did not walk with the religion of his day. The Lord had separated him out. He was a man who had a message that was distinct from what was being popularly preached in the synagogues of that day. Theirs was a message of works. What was his? Behold the Lamb. His was a Christ work. There is a huge difference. You know, they all the same Scriptures. The Scriptures were read every sabbath day in the synagogues and yet they missed Christ. It is like today. You know, people will tell me, "Well, where we attend, you know, we read the Bible. We have someone come up and read the Bible. Our preacher opens the Bible to ... when he preaches. So we use the Bible." Well, the question is: What is the message? You know, you can give a kid a pair of scissors and he can take a magazine and cut out sentences. You know, have our ever done that? Try to write a story from the words that are on this page of this magazine right here. Just cut out different words and put together a story. Paste it.

You can, in the end, take the exact words that have already been printed and paste them together in a certain way to come up with a completely different story than what was originally intended. That is what people do with the Bible. Turn here. Proof text here. Take this verse. They are quoting a part of it, patching it together with something else. Trying to prove a point. And people follow along. They are enthralled. They think that is creative preaching. Boy, what an outline. You know, you can alliterate your outline to the point where when people walk out they are more enthralled with how the preacher put the outline together. Man, he must have studied homiletics. And, believe me, I did. Before the Lord taught me the gospel, I used to try to put together outlines where every point was somehow there was a link in how it was put together. Maybe the first word stated with the same letter. Men are taught that. But do you know what? It is smokescreen away from what this Word has to say. I would much rather stand up here without an outline and point you to Christ and have you consider this Word than have you walk away thinking, wasn't that a great message? Why? Because of the outline, because of the illustrations.

You know, there is a time to rejoice, but there is a time to mourn. And that is what we see here in Matthew chapter three. It is interesting. You know, he didn't have a popular message. Just like Isaiah didn't. Here, verse one.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea."¹³

And it was a wilderness, not only physically, but spiritually.

"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."¹⁴

You know, Isaiah is walking around naked and barefoot with a message of repentance. What is it that has brought this nation to this particular point in time facing God's judgment? Is it not its false worship? You know, our problem isn't education. Our

¹³ Matthew 3:1.

¹⁴ Matthew 3:2.

problem isn't the drug dealer down on the corner. Our problem is what is being preached from pulpits across the United States of America, people lying on God and all the while men and women flocking, following after.

I will tell you what. If they are not being pointed to Christ then it is only one message, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

“For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one...”¹⁵

How many preachers were there? Probably many. But:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness.”¹⁶

You know, Isaiah was not only a sign for his day, but he was a sign looking forward to the day when Christ would come, because what is being quoted here is out of Isaiah 40 and verse three. His message was for all time, but he prophesied concerning John the Baptist.

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.”¹⁷

Why do you suppose that he dressed that way? Was it his preference? Don't you suppose that the Lord purposed that he do it? Don't you suppose that hose that he would have addressed even now, you know, quoting from Isaiah 40 would have thought back to those Scriptures that are read? This one here looks an awful lot like how Isaiah was described back in the day. Don't you suppose that somebody would have caught on? But they didn't. They became enthralled with how he was dressed. They went out to see him.

But John the Baptist did not take any of that glory to himself. When they came and tried to exalt him he said, “This one that I preach must increase. I must decrease.” That is what we see even in how Isaiah was dressed. You know, it was a humiliating of the prophet. It was a laying low of the preacher before the people that their eyes might not be on him, but on the message that he had to set forth. I believe there is a lot there.

We see, coming back to the text here in Isaiah chapter 20 how this all played out. And we won't need to dwell long on it, because I have already given the details. We read down through it, but this was purposely to signify that the Egyptians and the Ethiopians would be led away by the King of Assyria, stripped or in rags or very shabby clothes just as Isaiah was dressed. And this was the message that was to be declared, you know that, you know, one way or another a sinner is going to be stripped before God. It will be either in judgment or it will be by grace. I pray it is by grace. You know, there are going to be many in that day that are going to stand before God having been religious, having been

¹⁵ Matthew 3:3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Matthew 3:3-4.

professed Christians. So we are not just talking about other religions in the world. People like to do that. They say, well, that is talking about those other religions in the world. No. We are talking about Christendom, what is so-called Christendom today, people that hold a Bible just like you do, but they are clothed in a garment that is made of their own hands and they are proud of it. It could be their profession. It could be their baptism. It could be their, what they call historic faith. But all of that will be stripped away if that is your cover. It is nothing but fig leaves before a holy God. That is the message. And Egypt and Ethiopia are given here as examples. They had some glory. You go back and read the history. You read something of how they were built up as nations. They were in the day examples to the world. And yet in a moment in time completely that glory was stripped away, taken away. We are talking about the carrying away of captives in one of the most barbarous manners.

I don't really like to go watch those kinds of movies, you know? It is just I don't like the sight of blood anyway. But I don't care if they do paint it. You know, it is still that it is just a barbarous way of doing battle. And yet who ordained it? It was the Lord. He is going to use every way necessary to bring low any who think themselves wise and yet, indeed, are fools.

But where is... what is the sum of it? Down here in verses five and six of Isaiah 20 here is the difference. You know, it says:

“And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.”¹⁸

We are talking about preachers who have stood before people. Imagine with a long ministry, if you will, and told them how to live, told them how to get along in life. They call themselves life coaches. You know, helping them get through situations. That is what most preaching is about today. It is a psychological session. People leave feeling better about themselves like some of the most popular preachers say. We don't mention sin. We are not there to discourage anybody. You know? We already know what we are. What we need to do is be positive.

Do you realize that hell will be full of those preachers right along with their congregations? That is an astounding thing when you think about it. That is what comes to mind.

“And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.”¹⁹

Where is your confidence? What are you putting it in? Are you putting it in your profession? I have had some tell me that. I don't care what you believe or say about it being the work of Christ alone. I know I made my decision and I know God will honor it. That is the way they reason. I wouldn't want to stand before a holy God with that sort of

¹⁸ Isaiah 20:5-6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

reasoning. That prop will not stand. You will be found just like one of these, being afraid and ashamed of that profession and of that your glory. ‘

I will tell you. If it is not Christ alone, if that is not where your thought goes in this matter of considering standing before a holy God, I can tell you. It is a false hope. It is an expectation that will evaporate when the sun rises, the Son of God’s judgment and condemnation. It is a glory even though it sounds... people like to go back and talk about their profession, talking about having walked the aisle, talk about all these things when they shook the preacher’s hand. But do you know what? That is a glory that will be burning them if that is your hope.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust even the sweetest frame. And now I am speaking of myself, because I have told you over and over again one of the most precious things for me is having been lost and having been found. But do you know what? That has been over 22 years ago. Where I stand before you, I put no confidence at all, even in the beginning workings of God’s grace in my life out there isolated somewhere in Africa. I come before you today telling you that unless right now my hope is in Christ and his blood and righteousness alone, that will not stand. That will not stand. I dare not look even to the Spirit and his workings as something that I am trying to find comfort in, you know. The Spirit will work always to draw this heart to Christ and to his death. And if that is not where your heart is, you have reason to be afraid.

See, I am not one to try to soothe your fears. When people come to me and say, “Well, you know, I have got some doubts.” Look to Christ. “I have got some fears.” Well, look to Christ. You know, I am not a counselor to try to soothe men’s consciences. I just know this. That is where I am looking. It is very simple. That is where I am looking. That is where I tell you to look.

As I said in the beginning, I will close with this. You know, there is two ways of asking this question here in verse six. How shall we escape? I don’t want to wait until the day of judgment and in ignorance have to cry: How shall we escape? In fear. Can we know? Yes. If you look over in Hebrews chapter two.

You notice who this is addressed to. It is addressed to those who profess to know the Lord. Therefore... and it goes back into chapter one where it speaks of Christ having all the glory and honor.

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed...”²⁰

Just like Isaiah prophesying, “Give heed.” John the Baptist, “Give heed.” Ken standing here pointing you to Christ, “Give heed.”

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard.”²¹

²⁰ Hebrews 2:1.

²¹ Ibid.

I don't want anybody sitting here in lethargy. Ho hum. I know this. What else do you got? What else do you want? I don't want anything else, because it says here:

“...lest at any time we should let them slip.”²²

It is like the word slip there is like having a leaky vessel. You have heard it, but as soon as you get out that door it is gone. It is no hope to you. You sit and say amen, but as soon as you get out that door you are back to your works. You are back to trying to bolster up your life. You are trying to work things out. You are trying to do all these things in your own strength and power.

“For if the word spoken by angels...”²³

The messengers that the Lord used to bring his Word in the Old Testament, if that word was steadfast, in other words, actually came to pass and it did just like these prophecies of Isaiah. They came to pass.

“...and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...”²⁴

Great because of its author, great because of its ... of the one who worked it out, the price of it, great because of its power to deliver.

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”²⁵

How is this Word received? How do you hear it? Scripture says take heed how you hear. I pray that that answer—How shall we escape?—can be answered with some measure of confidence on each of you sitting here. Either way it is going to be answered. I pray that it be in grace. How shall we escape? I have none except Christ and him crucified, his blood and righteousness. That is all my hope.

All right, brother Mike.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hebrews 11:2.

²⁴ Hebrews 11:2-3.

²⁵ Hebrews 11:3.