

“Take Courage in the Everlasting Arms” (Isaiah 9:8-10:34)

Isaiah: Trusting the God Who Judges, Saves, and Renews

Zionsville Fellowship | October 25, 2026 | Danny Strong

Intro:

When People Are Big & God is Small

- *Last week* – Drew alluded Ed Welch’s book *When People are Big and God is Small*. When other people and our problems look massive and God is relatively small, then our hearts are filled with fear.
- *The antidote* – is to see God according to His proper proportions and see our problems dwarfed in comparison.
- But how big exactly is God? What are His proportions? What are His proportions in your heart?
- In our passage this morning, Isaiah shows us two problems of massive proportions and a God who is even bigger.
- It’s one thing to say God is big when my life feels out of control, but what when the world IS seemingly out of control?
- *Main Point* – *When evil is seemingly out of control, God is in total control.*

The Two Problems

- *Michael Obrien (A Father’s tale)* – two images of evil. A python and a crocodile. *The python* – slow, mesmerizing a society, wrapping itself around it, slowly squeezing and killing. *The Crocodile* – is the brutal, violent, powerful evil that just crushes, oppresses, kills.
- The python more the problem we face in the West. The Crocodile more the problem you find in the East.
- Isaiah is dealing with both the python and the crocodile.
- *First*, moral collapse of Israelite society. *Second*, the brutal and evil threat of Assyria coming to devour them.

I. God is in control over the evil within – moral collapse (9:8-10:4)

Psalm 96 – Ultimate Justice

- One of the greatest hopes in all of Scripture, “The Lord reigns, He will judge the peoples with equity.”
- The Lord reigns and so their will be ultimate justice. Do you believe in ultimate justice? Not the justice of this world that we can get through law and courts.
- But ultimate justice that will avenge every victim. Deal justly with every oppressor. Heal all the wounds of the world. And fix everything that is broken in this world.

A Moral Collapse – As we read notice...

- There is a progression of moral collapse
- Nevertheless, the whole section begins with “The Lord has sent a word against Jacob...”
- And there are 4 stanzas that each end with “For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.”
- The real power player behind everything is God.
- We’ll see 4 steps in this digression – and 4 ways God is in control

First, society the believes we are the ultimate deciding factor

- Vs. 9-10 – “This crisis is really an opportunity.” “We’ll build back better.”.

Free will

- Whenever we are talking about the sovereignty of God, inevitably we’re going to veer into discussions of free will.
- Personally, I don’t find the term “free will” very constructive. It requires a very precise definition to be helpful, which we normally don’t give.
- Here is what we can say, and what I think every Christian agrees with. Being made in the image of God, we were made with the capacity for meaningful action.
- *1) Our choices are real and meaningful. 2) They have real effects on the world around us. 3) We are responsible for our choices*
- So we aren’t puppets or machines following our programming.
- *Non-Christian view* – If you don’t believe in God and that we’re only a result of natural processes, then I think you do have to say we are machines. We’re the result of our chemicals and genetics. We just follow our programming. Which is why we can look at someone whose made horrific, evil choices and say, “Well, they were born that way.” They don’t really have meaningful choice.

Ultimate self-determining power

- Here is what we can't say, though. We can't say that humans have ultimate self-determination. That we have ultimate deciding power over history, over our future, over our destiny.
- God is the only ultimate deciding power
- Isaiah says acting as if we have ultimate deciding power is arrogance.
- **James 4:13-16** – "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."
- My entire ground of being is dependent on another. I didn't choose to exist, when I'd exist, what culture or family I'd be born to. And I'm going to be the ultimate deciding factor of my life?
- Taking responsibility, initiative, being hopeful are good things. But believing that initiative and positivity are ultimate in my life puts me at odds with God
- When a whole society that believes this has functionally rejected God

Secondly, a society that trusts in bad leaders (9:13-17)

- "Head and tail, branch and reed" – way of saying "all of them from top to bottom." The totality of Israelite leadership.
- Modern thinkers say, "We don't believe in God, so now we decide." But do you?
- When we remove God as the authority we don't just have a void. We back fill it with another authority.
- We throw off God, but gain new masters. Political parties, government leaders, college professors, influencers, podcasters. I'm so unique.
- No longer guided by God, but by people who didn't design us or this world, don't know us, and don't love us.

Thirdly, a society that turns against one another (9:18-21)

- *Wickedness is the fire that consumes ...through the wrath of God*
- It sounds like the wrath of God is all mixed up with Israel turning on one another. That's because their turning against one another IS the wrath of God against them.
- Wickedness is all-consuming. It wants and wants and wants and is never satisfied.

- *James puts it like this*, “What causes...fights among you? Is it not that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” We fight because we don’t get what we want.
- *Whenever you are in a fight* — you can just stop and ask, “What do I want that I’m not getting?”
- All the bloodshed in the world, and it can be boiled down to this — we don’t get what they want, so we devour one another.
- And God’s wrath is simply giving them over to their sinful desires. Sinful desires unrestrained don’t just destroy a person. They destroy society.

Fourth, society legalizes injustice

- *The evil* — “who keep writing oppression”
- It’s one thing when we are unjust by breaking laws. Human trafficking is horrible, but it’s much more horrible when a society says, “This is ok. You can own, buy and sell other human beings.”
- It’s horrible when murder happens, but much more horrible when a society says, “Well, you can murder these people.”
- *Climax* — begins with “woe” and ends with total national defeat. The end of Israel is that either you’ll end up in the pile of the slain or as a prisoner of war.
- This is society that was so convinced of it’s ability to determine it’s future is now in total ruin.
- *We can see the marks* — are we of the same degree, I can’t say. But this is the story of human civilization. And this story is not sovereign.
- *There will be a reckoning* — The moral decline we live, even participated in is not ultimate. God’s justice is ultimate, and He will have the final say.

II. God is in Control Over Monstrous Evil Without (10:5-19) – The Crocodile of Assyria

- *Historical situation* — Israel (north and south) is roughly the size of New Jersey. Assyrian empire was the size of Texas, California, and Montana combined. It was on the cutting edge of military technology, particularly siege warfare. It created these massive siege machines. And if the Roman empire was a 5 out of 10 on the brutality scale. Assyria was a 10. They did things that would never make it on to any HBO series, Hollywood movie because they were too horrific.

God's intentions differ from Assyria's (10:5-11)

- 10:5 – God intends to use Assyria as the rod of his anger and fury.
- 10:7 – “But he does not so intend...” God’s intentions are to bring justice to totally corrupt Israelite nation.
- *God intentions* – to use Assyria as his rod of judgment on the totally corrupt society of Israel.
- *Assyria's intentions* – are world domination.
- In the same event, God is operating, and his intentions are good, and the [Assyrians] are operating, and their intentions are evil.”
- Assyria intends evil, but God is the ultimate deciding power.

Yet Assyria is still accountable for it's actions (10:12-13a)

- God doesn't say, “Well, Assyria really didn't have a choice, did it. They were following my plan” No. God says they had real choices. And they choose to act in arrogance and brutality.
- Notice their greatest sin – “By the strength of my hand I have done it.”
- **10:15-16** – They think they are the mighty warrior determining their future. When in reality, they are just an axe in the hands of God.
- For this pride God will judge them for it.
- **10:28-34** – The chapter actually ends with the dramatic play by play as Assyria invade in blitzkrieg fashion mowing down tribes from north heading to Jerusalem, and right at the outside the walls of Jerusalem, as they lay siege, God will cut them down.

Putting it all together

- Wicked people, making horrific moral choices contrary to the heart of God, contrary to the goodness of God, contrary to the commands of God are making real choices for which they are responsible. Nevertheless, they are still operating according to God's sovereign will. And He will judge them.
- *The Gospel* – It's not just true here. It's actually how God brought salvation into the world through Jesus.
- **Acts 4:27-28** ““For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take”

III. God is Sovereign Over Our Salvation (10:20-24)

What is this all working toward? – Salvation

- **10:22** – “Destruction overflows with righteousness.” There are righteous purposes behind all of this.
- Goes back to Isaiah 6 – Isaiah’s mission was to proclaim God’s message, but it won’t soften hearts to repentance but harden them further against God. Therefore, increase the severity of their sin, hasten their downfall and judgment.
- Why? So that God can cut down the tree of Israel and start afresh with a faithful little remnant.

The Remnant

- Where does the remnant return to?
- The remnant is not all physical Israel, but a remnant of faith – They don’t return here to the land. They return in **10:21** “to the mighty God.”

Romans 9:27-28 quotes 10:22-23

- Paul quotes vs. 22-23 as part of an extended explanation of God’s mysterious work of salvation in his day.
- Many Jews were not turning to Christ in faith, and so the question was whether God was being unjust or untrue to His promises to Israel.
- Paul says, “No, look at Isaiah 10:22-23. Even though there would be many physical Israelites only a small remnant would turn to faith.”
- Paul is careful to point out the personal responsibility of all who fail to believe in Jesus, and the availability of Christ to everyone. Yet he insists, just like Isaiah, that God is sovereign over salvation.
- “He has mercy and whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.(9:18)”

Only a Few

- *Why only a small remnant?* – I think we ask, “have you read chapters 9 and 10?” If Israel is a lost cause, how are any of them saved at all?
- We’ve all lived either the python or the crocodile, we’ve been part of the slow decay or brutal injustice. How did salvation come to any of us?
- Nearly 2800 years ago in the days of Isaiah, God was doing this so salvation could come here. That remnant was the apostles and the church in Jerusalem. And through them salvation has come to us all.

- I know we all have loved ones, friends, children, parents, who don't believe yet – and it's scary not knowing the future. But here is the hope. Their sin and their unbelief is not the ultimate deciding factor.
- The God who works and works and works thousands upon thousands of years to bring His salvation into the world. He is sovereign.
- George Mueller – praying for two men in his town for 50 years. And he was asked if he thought they'd ever come to Christ. And Mueller said, "I don't think God would have me pray for them for 50 years with no plan to answer my prayer."
- Our loved ones are not in their own hands. They are not ultimately in our hands. They are in God's hands.

IV. Response – Courage through faith in a Sovereign God (10:24-27)

How do we respond to a world full of evil seemingly out of control?

The Hiding Place

- I finally read *The Hiding Place* this year. Written by Corrie Ten Boom, who with her sister and father helped hide and smuggle out Jews in Nazi occupied Holland during WW2, which inevitable lead to the getting arrested and sent to death camps.
- Here is how she described their lives in a Nazi death camp, "Life in Ravensbruck took place on two separate levels, mutually impossible. One, the observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived with God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory."
- Her father to a pastor who said he couldn't risk his life for to save a Jewish child, "You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family."
- Where did that moral courage come from? Here is what her father told her, "Don't forget, Corrie—underneath us are the everlasting arms. We won't fall."
- Not we won't die, won't get arrested, horrible things won't happen to us. But no matter what happens, underneath all of it are the everlasting arms, and so we won't fall.
- Courage comes from faith in absolutely sovereign God.
- Courage comes from faith
 - Faith not in what you can see, but what you can't see
 - Not from the future that you can work out, but faith in the one God will work out

- In short, faith in the everlasting arms underneath it all that is the ultimate deciding factor