

"Bypassing God"

Isaiah 28:13-16

INTRODUCTION:

1. Along cross-country highways, one often sees a sign: "Truck Bypass" or "Business Bypass." The weary traveler anxious to miss congested downtown areas learns the importance of these signs. Although advantageous for cross country traveling, the same procedure can be disastrous in one's spiritual pilgrimage. There are some tempting bypasses there which bring tragic results.

2. Men are often tempted to bypass facing up to their relationship to the living God. Occasionally, you find a man who is well versed in the Bible, but who has spent hour upon hour reading it, not to find direction, but to look for loopholes by which to justify himself and to provide grounds for argumentative activities.

3. The context of this passage is to be found among the first years of King Hezekiah's reign, prior to the fall of Samaria. While predicting the fall of Samaria as God's judgment on their sin, Isaiah at the same time addresses Judah who is guilty of the same sin - that of bypassing the holy law of the Lord. Dark is the future when one turns off the road of life at the sign: "Exit here to bypass God."

I. BYPASS A CROWN OF GLORY FOR A CROWN OF PRIDE (Isa. 28:1-5).

It is impossible to travel in two directions at the same time. Every cross. road involves a decision. To turn to the right means that one must give up that which lies to the left.

A. A Crown Of Glory.

1. God breathed into man the breath of life that he might someday wear a crown of glory. Isaiah, in referring to the faithful remnant, promises: "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people" (Isa. 28:5).
2. Nothing so crowns a life as the blessing and fellowship of God which shall, on that final day, be fully revealed for all eyes to behold.
3. Every person is traveling toward his day of coronation. He awaits a crown. As the death of winter quietly touches the leaf and bush on the mountainside, creating a radiant beauty, so the end of life can likewise be made into beautiful praise to the Lord. Even death can be a silent witness to the grace of God when faced in the quiet assurance of faith. But alas, the multitudes are turning off the road of life and bypassing the crown of glory.

B. A Crown Of Pride.

1. Using "Ephraim" to denote the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Isaiah sternly warns: "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower . . . the crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: and the glorious beauty . . . shall be a

fading flower" (Isa. 28:1-4).

2. Sitting upon a hill surrounded by rolling green slopes, the city of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, resembled a beautiful crown resting on soft velvet. Though as radiant as a flower in full bloom, its beauty was doomed to fade.

- a. To begin with, the people are drunken with pride and the exhilaration of their own self-sufficiency. No doubt, this had given way to literal drunkenness as human appetites were given full sway.
- b. In but a short time, Samaria would fall victim to the cruel Assyrians. Their luxurious way of life would soon be given over to slavery. Their families would be ravished and their nation would forever be scattered and lost. Isaiah tells them ahead of time the reason for it all: they have bypassed God.

II. BYPASSES SCRIPTURAL INSTRUCTION FOR WORLDLY INSTRUCTION (Isa. 28:11-13).

There is a sense in which the Scripture and the world both teach the same lessons. The difference is that the Scripture seeks to prepare men ahead of time that they may know how to live, while the world makes men aware of their mistakes after it is too late to make a difference.

The Bible affirms that life is always empty when God is left out. Yet men prefer to learn from the world that life without God is empty. Yet, once having lived life out, the knowledge that it has been empty is poor consolation when nothing but an eternity of emptiness lies ahead.

A. The Scripture As An Instructor.

1. For some strange reason, men resist the teaching of God's holy Word. Although Isaiah is speaking specifically concerning the sins of Samaria, he is speaking to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and trying to make them aware of their similar sins. Yet Isaiah finds very poor response. Those who refuse to hear Isaiah's message accuse him of treating them like babies, of lecturing them on petty morality: "But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:13).
2. Isaiah's listeners are broad-minded men who have somehow managed to rise above the "simple" demands of holiness and have "seen" that these demands are rather unimportant. A literal rendering of the taunts thrown back to Isaiah might be rendered in terms of a mother's instruction to a young child: "Yes, yes; no, no."
3. They feel themselves to be beyond commandments, to have come of age so that they are quite capable of doing what they want to do without having any religious instruction. There are those who reason that a man's life is his own business and, after all, he has a right to do what he wants with it.

B. The World As Instructor.

1. To refuse God's teaching is to learn at the hands of the world. Of course, God is behind that lesson also. But when God must use the world as an instructor He must be present in wrath, not in mercy. Since men will not listen to God, they must suffer the consequences and learn from bitter experience.
2. When men, drunken with pride, reject the teachings of Scripture, they then can expect more severe instruction. Samaria, proud and self-sufficient, will learn her lesson from foreign lips that speak foreign languages: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to his people" (Isa. 28:11).
3. Isaiah refers to the wicked and cruel Assyrians. Though their speech is foreign, yet they will teach Samaria a sobering lesson. Samaria may well take lightly the message of God's prophet, but when the fierce invaders stand within the city walls and their language controls life in the streets, Samaria will then have learned the hard way the lesson God sought to teach her gracefully. The Bible reminds men that: "The way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

III. BYPASSES CHRIST FOR HUMAN ALLIANCES (Isa. 28:16-17).

Isaiah turns from the discussion of the sin of Samaria to the immediate problem near at hand—the sin of the men of Jerusalem. Hear him as he says: "Therefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem" (Isa. 28:14). They too are guilty of bypassing God.

A. Christ the Foundation.

1. Isaiah, more than any other Old Testament prophet, looks ahead to God's promised redemption. We see in his words the promised Christ: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16).
2. Christ is not only a foundation stone for life that has withstood every test, but He is also a stone that in turn tests every character. Isaiah's hearers knew much about corner stones. Those in Solomon's temple were as much as thirty-eight feet long and weighed over one hundred tons each. A life, like a temple, must have a firm foundation. Men cannot refuse the Gospel and be at peace. They can not reject God and stand on firm ground.
3. Christ is the only safe guide. The Lord warns, "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet" (Isa. 28:17). What God is saying is that His rule of measurement will be divine justice and that the plumb line by which He will judge every man will be that of His righteousness. Man builds his life much like the brick-mason builds a wall. The foundation, the method of building, and the plumb line are all important. When life is built apart from the law of God, it resembles a wall laid by an inexperienced craftsman. The bulge gets larger and larger until at last life comes tumbling down.

B. Self the foundation.

Men do not deny the presence and certainty of death, and yet they seem to feel as though they have by prior arrangement made everything all right, without having to

become involved with God (Isa. 28:15).

1. Back of Jerusalem's self-sufficiency lies her secret weapon. They have quietly made an alliance with Egypt and therefore feel no need of prayerful supplication for God's deliverance. (Isaiah 30:2 speaks of this alliance specifically.) Evil men always suppose that they have an ace up their sleeve.
2. An old proverb reminds us that we must live with the results of poor bargains: "You have made your bed, now you must lie in it." Isaiah warns, "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it" (Isa. 28:20).
3. When a man chooses to live without God, he is condemning himself to a future as cramped as a coffin. The bed he is making will provide neither rest nor protection from winter's night. The Jewish people as a whole, by rejecting Christ, made for themselves a bed in which they have never found rest.

CONCLUSION:

God has many signposts in this world. The Church stands as a visible testimony to God. The Bible stands pointing men to Jesus Christ. History proclaims day by day Biblical truth that sin brings judgment. The wise man reads the road signs. The foolish rush madly on, bypassing God.

— Author unknown