

Text: Isaiah 23

Title: Tyre and things more valuable than gold

Time: 8/23/2026

Place: NBBC

Introduction: This past week we had the privilege of ministering the gospel to children at our summer Bible camp. We had a western theme, which included the California gold-rush. Each night we tried to teach the children about something that the Bible says is more valuable than gold.

On the first night, we saw that the Bible itself is more valuable than gold. David spoke about God's law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear, and judgments as more valuable than gold: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold" (Ps. 19:10). God's Word, the Bible, is more valuable than gold. Our world needs a Bible-rush, not another gold-rush.

On the second night, the lesson was about Peter's reluctant ministry to the Gentile Cornelius. The Lord sent Peter a sheet full of unclean animals and told him to eat from them. Peter refused with his oxymoronic "Not so, Lord," after which the Lord explained to Peter that he should not call unclean what the Lord has cleansed. The Lord was teaching Peter more about his attitude toward Gentile people than toward Gentile food. Peter would learn for the first time the truth he confesses in Acts 10:28, "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Simply put, every person is equally more valuable than gold.

On the third night, we saw that Peter compared Jesus's work of redemption to gold: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The Bible

is more precious than gold; every person is more precious than gold; and the redeeming blood of Christ, spilled to pay the ransom penalty for our sins, is more precious than gold.

Thursday night we emphasized that obeying God and doing right are more precious than gold. Our glorious Savior, who always obeyed God and always did what is right, taught us: "Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek). For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:31-33). To seek first God's kingdom is to obey Him as a first priority. We seek His righteousness when we do right. These are more valuable than gold: the Bible, every person, the blood of the Lamb, and obeying God and doing what is right.

On the final night, we learned that the trial of our faith is more precious than gold—all of those difficult times in which we find ourselves helpless and fully dependent on the Lord. Peter spoke of the value of our trials: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory and the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

The Bible teaches that at least these five things are more precious than gold: the Bible, every person, the blood of the Lamb, obeying God and doing right, and the trial of our faith.

Isaiah 23 is about the burden that Isaiah had from the Lord for Tyre. God's burden for Tyre can be summarized very simply as, "Tyre believed that nothing is more valuable than gold." This is a passage about shipping goods, merchants, and money-making. It is a burden about what the Lord Jesus

called *the deceitfulness of riches* in his parable about the soils. The third soil type had a lot of thorns in it, which choked out the word, and many of those thorns are planted in hearts by the deceitfulness of riches.

Tyre was a town with that kind of thorny soil. This is a burden about Tyre and things more precious than gold. It includes a poem in the first 14 verses, and then a prose conclusion in the last four verses. The poem warns that Tyre's hold on financial security was an illusion. Tyre would soon learn that the stronghold of financial success is not very strong. The prose warns Tyre about the seductive attractiveness of financial success. It uses the metaphor of prostitution to teach that money can be a powerful tool of the seducing spirits of which Paul warned young Timothy (1 Tim. 4:1).

I. Tyre's stronghold of financial success was not very strong (vv. 1-14; note "stronghold" in vv. 4-sea, 11-city, 14-ships).

Illustration: Tyre was a Phoenician city located on the Mediterranean coast of today's Lebanon (today's Sur). In the days of Isaiah, the town consisted of a main settlement on the coast along with an island fortress. Isaiah would have remembered Tyre as both the home of the friend of David and Solomon – King Hiram, and of the hometown of Jezebel who married Ahab and introduced Baal worship to northern Israel. By Isaiah's day, Judah found no friend in Tyre.

In fact, after Judah fell to Babylon under the judgment of God, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied about the destruction of Tyre, who had rejoiced over the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was first general—he said that many nations would come against Tyre. But then he also got specific. He said these nations would destroy the walls of Tyre, break down her towers, scrape even the dust off of her, and make her once thriving settlement like the bare top of a rock (Ezek. 26:2-6).

The nation that fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy on behalf of the nations was Greece, led by Alexander the Great. He destroyed the coastal settlement of Tyre, and then scraped it bare to build a causeway in the sea that reached the island fortress, which he also destroyed. That part of Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled in 332 BC.

Application: Isaiah's burden about Tyre was written just under four hundred years earlier. In Isaiah's day, Tyre still had their island fortress in the sea. Tyre was a contemporary economic superpower for Isaiah's Judah.

But in the face of this success, Isaiah's poem issues some commands to say that Tyre's economic stronghold was not really very strong. In verse 1, he tells a trading partner, Tarshish, to howl. They must howl because Tyre is laid waste. In verses 2-3, he tells all the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea that they can no longer count on the merchants of Sidon – Tyre's Phoenician partner to the north. The grain trade from Egypt is going to end when Tyre and Sidon go out of business.

In verse 4, He tells Sidon to be ashamed, because their stronghold of the sea, that had given birth to tremendous prosperity for them, would now fall barren. Tyre's devastation would match Egypt's after the ten plagues (v. 5). In v. 6 ships return empty to Tarshish, and the coastlands are again commanded to howl. The good times are over according to verse 7.

Of course, it is the God of heaven, not merely his prophet, who is issuing these commands to Tyre and her trading partners. Verses 8-14 make clear that both the prosperity of Tyre and her coming poverty were the Lord's sovereign plan. These nations did not credit Him for their prosperity. Instead, they saw themselves as the kingmakers of the world.

Illustration: Our nation is celebrating the 250th anniversary of our *Declaration of Independence*. Of course, it was not the

*Declaration* that made us free, but rather winning the Revolutionary War. One of the three signatories of the *Declaration* from New Hampshire was Matthew Thornton, after whom Thornton, NH is named. He was a faithful Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, and while serving as the President of his colony's Provincial Congress, he wrote in a letter to his fellow New Hampshireites a word of encouragement about the coming conflict. The letter was dated June 2, 1775, and in it Thornton recognized that only the Sovereign God of heaven determines whether the cause of a nation shall prosper or not. He wrote:

"In a word, we seriously and earnestly recommend the practice of that pure and undefiled religion, which embalmed the memory of our pious ancestors, as that alone upon which we can build a solid hope and confidence in the Divine protection and favor, without whose blessing all the measures of safety we have or can propose will end in our shame and disappointment."

There was no such practice of this pure and undefiled religion of the Bible in Tyre. They did not think they needed that. Their confidence about their future prosperity lay in themselves, not in the true God's divine protection.

Today, our state has become much more like Tyre than like its colonial days. We live in a world in which people prosper, and as they do so they believe that this prosperity has nothing to do with the God of the Bible, much less their faithfulness at practicing His religion. May we be different than Tyre and the town we live in today. May we recognize our need for our Savior's daily provision, "without whose blessing all the measures of safety we have or can propose will end in our shame and disappointment." Isaiah next talks about this coming shame and disappointment in the case of Tyre.

II. The seduction of financial success was very strong in Tyre (vv. 15-18).

Illustration: In 701 B.C., the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib defeated Tyre, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah's poem in verses 1-14. The good times for Tyre were over, and they stayed that way for the seventy years mentioned in our passage, at which point Tyre began to resume independent operations with the decline of Assyria around 630 B.C.

Application: So the *one king* mentioned in verse 15 is Sennacherib. His *days* contrast Tyre's *70 years*. It took Sennacherib mere days to bring about years of loss for Tyre. Isaiah's assertion that Tyre's stronghold of financial success was not very strong proved to be true. Loss can come just as quickly to us and our land should the Lord decide to make it so. Our prosperity is only as strong as the Lord's desire to bless us with it.

One would think that once Tyre experienced these 70 years of financial ruin, they would have learned their lesson about the deceitfulness of riches and the importance of things more valuable than gold, but that was not to be. In the end of verse 15 and in verse 16, Isaiah predicts that the opposite would happen. After 70 years of being forgotten, Tyre would act like a prostitute singing a song of seduction in pursuit of restored financial success.

They would act this way in spite of the love of God, who spoke this burden for them. It was the Lord who would put an end to the seventy years, for it is His prophet who prophesies this number of years. This was God's plan for Tyre. At the end of the 70 years, the Lord visited Tyre (v. 17). God visits Tyre with renewed freedom and opportunity, but sadly Tyre would slam the door on the Lord's visit. Like a prostitute trying to earn her hire, Tyre returns to financial fornication with the kingdoms of the earth, seduced away from the true God by the deceitfulness of riches.

Verse 12 refers to Sidon as a *daughter*. Unfortunately, Tyre and Sidon were daughters of the mother of harlots of

Revelation 18. In that coming day, the one world economy of the antichrist is going to combine man's prideful blasphemy with man's love for the things of this world in an unprecedented way. God shall bring an end to this future mother of the harlot Tyre, and the howling and wailing of our chapter will be heard again then for the last time.

Our New Testament warns us against the seduction of loving the world and the things of the world more than we love the Lord. 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." James 4:4, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Jesus told the man who tore down his barns to build bigger ones: "Thou fool. This night your soul will be required of you, and then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20).

In our last verse of Isaiah 23 (v. 18), Isaiah's burden for Tyre becomes his hope for them. It is the Lord's mighty work of salvation that He can bring His good out of man's evil. In the end, all the treasure accumulated by the prostitution of Tyre is going to be laid up for the Lord's use, not theirs. God is going to set it aside as holy, that it might in the end belong to those who dwell before Him.

Proverbs 13:22 says this truth plainly: "the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." The problem with our loving the world and the things that are in the world is that we lose the Lord Jesus and our soul in the process. The great joy of loving the Lord Jesus more than the world and the things that are in the world is that we are blessed not only with the Lord Jesus, but also an inheritance of eternal life in the future world too.

Jesus explains this blessing in Matt. 6:19-20, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth

corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

Conclusion: So, the question for us this morning is: where is our heart? Whom do we love more, gold or the One more valuable than gold? This is often the choice in our lives – more money or more love to the Lord. What will we choose? Tragically, Tyre made the wrong choice. Have we?

The memory verse the SBC children learned was John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus Christ did not love the world or the things in the world, or even His own life. He loved us, His friends. Jesus even rejected the things He possessed in heaven that we might be saved: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). In light of this amazing grace, may the Lord's burden for Tyre never be a burden that he feels for us.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*