

Text: Isaiah 8:1-22

Title: The law and testimony of Immanuel's land and love

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Introduction: Presbyterian Scotland has produced some great heroes of the faith. Samuel Rutherford began his career as a Humanities professor at the College of Edinburgh in the 1620s. Later, Rutherford took the pastorate of a small country church, where he became known as an outstanding evangelical preacher. It was once reported of Rutherford's preaching, "Many times I thought he would have flown out of the pulpit when he came to speak of Jesus Christ."

It turns out that the State Church of Scotland at the time did not appreciate that kind of preaching. In 1636 they banished Rutherford to Aberdeen, where he was allowed to live in a hired house but not allowed to preach. During those days of imprisonment, Rutherford wrote his 220 "prison epistles" to nonconformist leaders throughout the country, which became classics of Christian literature.

Finally in 1638, Rutherford was allowed to return to the ministry as attitudes toward independent churches began to change prior to the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant, which united England, Ireland, and Scotland under the Reformed faith against the Papacy. But when Charles was returned to the throne in the Restoration of 1660, Rutherford was charged with treason and summoned to appear before the British parliament. This elderly saint by that time was on his death bed, and so he answered the summons: "I behove to answer my first summons, and ere your day for me arrive, I will be where few kings and great folks come."

His "first summons" was that of the Lord calling him home to a place he called "Immanuel's land." His last words

uttered were, "Glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's Land." The poem on his rough-hewn tombstone includes a line about Immanuel's love: "He did converse with things above, acquainted with Emmanuel's love." Samuel Rutherford was a hero of the faith who looked forward to his summons to Immanuel's land, because he knew Immanuel's love.

Isaiah was like that too. His focus in our chapter is Immanuel's land (v. 8) and Immanuel's love (v. 10). You may remember that we were introduced to Immanuel in chapter 7. He is the promised sign to be born of a virgin whose lowly birth would come after Judah's enemies are long gone.

So our chapter is about Immanuel's land and Immanuel's love in its first fifteen verses. And then beginning in verse 16, we read about His law and His testimony (vv. 16, 20). The light and hope Rutherford looked for in Immanuel's land and love can be found only in God's law and God's testimony. Those themes will organize our thoughts today.

I. The law of Immanuel's land: Immanuel's land shall be plundered (vv. 1-8).

Illustration: This past weekend we celebrated our nation's Independence Day once again. Lord willing, we will do so next year in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. As we enjoy that independence at the beginning of this 250th year of our nation's freedom, we do well to remember that this freedom has not been free. One British combat veteran of WW1 expressed the cost of freedom in a poem:

"As a lad in my teens I went to war.
I was too young to know what for.
They taught me to fight and harry the foe.
I was prepared to give it a go.

The training was good and rather fun.
I was disillusioned when we faced the Hun.
Across desert, mountain, river we went.
I was getting exhausted and nearly spent.
They taught me to blend with the ground like a viper.
I was not going to be a target for the sniper.
The bullet is quick; it travels like lightning.
I was not going to stop one and miss the fighting.
The shelling is different; it's sheer bloody hell.
I was heartbroken when my best friend fell.
We were attacking the Boche with artillery support.
I was shocked to see our shells fall short.
Ken died instantly with three or four more.
I was a lad in my teens when I went to war."

That soldier's name was Cyril Leonard Neville (d. 1988), and according to his son, prior to writing the poem, all that he would ever say about his experience in combat was, "I was up to my neck in muck and bullets." Evidently, that was a common expression among WW1 combat veterans.

Application: God's word to Isaiah prophecies that Immanuel's land, Judah, would be up to its neck in the threat of war (v. 8). This enemy would be like a rising flood water from the river Euphrates (v. 7). This prophecy came true. "In 734 BC Tiglath-Pileser marched down the Israelite sea-coast, through Philistia, to the Egyptian border, cutting off Egyptian aid to the treaty powers. In 733 BC Israel lost Galilee, Transjordan (2 Ki. 15:29), Megiddo and other cities, and it was only the hasty submission of Hoshea which saved the kingdom for a few years more. Damascus fell to Assyria in 732" (Motyer, 91). Samaria fell completely 12 years later.

This prophecy was an unheeded gracious warning to Judah. The warning was on a billboard and written in plan language (v. 1). *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* means *rush the spoil; the*

plunder hurries. The idea is a simple one – God has commanded that the prosperity of a nation be turned into plunder and spoil, and so it is going to happen very quickly. Our prosperity as a nation does not depend on the passage of a “One Big Beautiful Bill,” but on the Lord’s mercy to us in answer to our prayers (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Isaiah’s warning had two witnesses assigned to it (v. 2). Uriah and Zechariah saw Isaiah make and post his billboard years prior to the judgment it described. Later, after the judgment fell, they could point to the warning that went unheeded and lament the nation’s sinful unbelief. We too are witnesses to this truth as we read here about Immanuel’s law about the sin of a nation. We know this sin will be judged.

The warning had another witness, Isaiah’s infant son (vv. 3-4). *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* may not be our first choice for the name of our newborn, but it is wonderful how supportive Isaiah’s wife and two sons were in his ministry (remember Shear-Jashub, 7:3 meaning *a remnant shall return*). They believed God’s warning. They were willing to do their part to communicate the warning with their father in ministry.

Sharing the name posted on the billboard, this infant son added a detail the billboard did not include – time is short. None of us knows how much longer we have before we must give an account to our God. James 4:14 warns us, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” We have only now.

Finally, the goal of the warning was salvation (vv. 5-7a). Rezin was the king of Syria, and Remaliah’s son was the king of Northern Israel, which had rebelled against the house of David. These prophecies simply call Pekah “son of Remaliah” to emphasize that he was not the son of David.

The people of this northern kingdom had chosen these pagan kings instead of what the prophet calls “the gentle waters of Shiloah.” Those waters were located in Jerusalem, where the Davidic house reigned. God’s gentle waters at Shiloah were not nearly as impressive as the mighty Euphrates in the eyes of Northern Israel. They preferred the raging river over the gentle waters.

But God knows that we sinners need His gentleness, not our own human might to deal with the need of our hearts. The Bible ends with an invitation to drink from these same gentle waters of grace: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:16-17).

The law of Immanuel’s land is that those who reject the gentle waters of God’s salvation in the offspring of David, Jesus Christ, are doomed under God’s just condemnation.

II. The testimony of Immanuel’s love: – His people will be saved (vv. 9-15; here Immanuel speaks to their enemies).

Illustration: On June 12, CNN published an article entitled, “Iran threatens nuclear escalation after UN watchdog board finds it in breach of obligations.” The article began, “Iran has warned it will ramp up its nuclear activities after the United Nations nuclear watchdog’s 35-member board of governors adopted a resolution Thursday declaring it in breach of its non-proliferation obligations. Tehran retaliated by announcing the launch of a new uranium enrichment center and the installation of advanced centrifuges – an escalatory move likely to complicate nuclear talks with the United States set to resume this weekend.”

Looking back, of course, we know now that Tehran's plans became very complicated after that hostile response. Today, they not only have no new uranium enrichment center and advance centrifuges, they have no nuclear program.

Application: At the end of verse 8 of our passage, Immanuel's land has muck and bullets up to its neck. By the time we come to verse 15, however, it is their enemies, the peoples and far countries of verse nine, which are broken in pieces. Girding themselves for battle did no good. Taking counsel together did no good. Like the threats of last month from Tehran, their words spoken did not stand. All this happened for one simple reason – "for God is with us" (v. 10). That is, of course, what *Immanuel* means. In other words, Immanuel's land shall be saved because of Immanuel's love.

The Lord told Isaiah how to be a part of Immanuel's loving victory for His land. First, we must not fear what everyone else fears (vv. 11-13). We must fear God, not other things. Jesus preached this truth in His Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewith all 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).

Second, we must not stumble the way others stumble (vv. 14-15). The LORD of hosts himself (Yahweh/Jehovah) would be a holy sanctuary for some, but a stone of stumbling for others. Peter explains how to choose the sanctuary so as not to stumble over the stone. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of a spiritual house, a sanctuary, with a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:4-6). "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the

builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto they were appointed" (vv. 7-8). To believe on Jesus Christ is to enter the sanctuary of v. 14. To disbelieve is to stumble and fall, to be broken, snared, and taken.

This is the testimony of Immanuel's love. Immanuel's land will be saved because of Immanuel's love. We must not fear or stumble in unbelief. How shall we respond?

III. How to be Immanuel's disciples (vv. 16-22).

Application: Those who respond in faith become Immanuel's disciples (v. 16). They have found their salvation in Immanuel's law and testimony (vv. 20-22). The word *disciple* in verse 16 means *learner*. Those who follow Immanuel must be teachable. They must bind up the law in their hearts so that it is not tampered with, and they must seal it as final without addition or subtraction (v. 16). Additions and subtractions always come from seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (v. 19). We are Immanuel's children who bring God's truth to a sinful nation just like Isaiah's family did (vv. 17-18; Heb. 2:13). Like Samuel Rutherford, Isaiah's family had chosen the glory of Immanuel's land and His love. So must we.

Conclusion: What choice have we made? Have we committed ourselves to Immanuel's law and testimony? Are we His learners? Have we chosen the gentle waters of Shiloah over the representations of human might that tempt us today?

Like these first readers of Isaiah's billboard, we too may not have much time. We have in our hymn book a song that reminds us that "The Sands of Time are Sinking." It was written by Anne Ross Cousin, a pastor's wife in the Free Church of Scotland, who served the Lord some 200 years after Ruth-

erford's last words: "Glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land." It was those words that inspired her song.

We have five verses in our hymnal, but Anne's song originally had 19 verses. The last verse of her song is about Rutherford's summons from his persecutors to face the charge of high treason. May it encourage us as Immanuel's disciples this morning, as we anticipate hearing the same summons to Immanuel's land that Rutherford heard:

"They've summoned me before them,
But there I may not come,
My Lord says, 'Come up hither,'
My Lord says, 'Welcome home!'
My king, at His white throne,
My presence doth command
Where glory – glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land."

"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