

Text: Isaiah 25

Title: "The Lord and two kinds of strongholds"

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Place: NBBC

Illustration: At the end of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples about two kinds of builders building the same kind of house on two different foundations. The house building was a metaphor for building a person's life. In this sense, we are all building one of these houses by living our life.

They are the same kind of house in that the floods and winds beat against both with equal force. Each of our lives faces difficulty and trouble at times. The stability of the houses was different, however, because one house was destroyed while the other stood secure.

This difference in outcomes was due to the different foundations on which the homes were built. One man built his house on the rock, and that is the house that stood secure. The other man built his house on the sand, and that is the house that fell down. Jesus preached the Sermon He did because He wanted the lives of people to be built on the rock of His words. He wanted people to obey His commands. He wanted the lives of people to be secured and not destroyed in this way. He said that the key to building your house on the rock was hearing His words and obeying them. To live differently is to build on the sand.

In a similar way, Isaiah mentions in our passage two kinds of strongholds to encourage those who have heard his sermons to the Gentile nations to apply what he has said to their lives. Similar to Jesus's house on the sand, one of Isaiah's strongholds will be brought down (v. 12). This is the

“city,” “defensed city,” and “palace” of verse 2. Isaiah gives it three names for emphasis. It is the same place we saw in Isa. 24:10, “the city of confusion,” which I would translate “the city of nothing worthwhile.” This city is a worldwide village that is void of faith in the God of the Bible. Lives lived in this place are lives that refuse to hear and obey God’s word.

Isaiah’s second stronghold is the refuge of those helped by the Lord (v. 4; KJV *strength* = *stronghold*). Like the house built on the rock, this fortress stands secure in spite of our real poverty, need, distress, flood, drought, and storm. This refuge cannot be touched by any external trouble.

It is the place Isaiah found himself, and so he thanks the Lord (v. 1). It is also the place Isaiah found his people, the people of God (v. 9-10a). Thanksgiving to God in this stronghold happens both individually and corporately. Those who live there worship God privately and with their brothers and sisters. This stronghold is like Jesus’s house on the rock. It is the place the Lord wants Isaiah’s readers, including us this morning, to build our lives.

Our Isaiah-passage is about the Lord and two strongholds. I would like to organize our thoughts from it with the help of this contrast – the Lord’s victory over the stronghold of the strong, and the Lord’s blessing for the stronghold of the weak. We will consider these strongholds in that order.

I. The Lord’s victory over the stronghold of the strong (vv. 1-3, 5, 10b-12).

Illustration: Election Day draws closer, and I would encourage you to vote. Socialism and other ills are gaining political strength in our day. At some level we all feel a bit hope-

less in the face of these sad developments. But it is one thing to see socialist tyranny in charge of our country in spite of my prayers and voting record to the contrary, and quite another to see that happen when I have failed to pray and failed to vote. I do not know whether or not I can stop the rise of evil in our land so that my grandkids can live as free as I have, but I do know that I can pray and vote against tyranny and sin. You can pray and vote too. God has given us this privilege and duty.

As we voters have been bombarded by the political ads of this season, have you noticed that none of the candidates have announced their five point plan for glorifying the Lord? Not one has cited the things that must change because we should fear the Lord. Those who ask us to give them power in our world rarely mention glorifying the Lord or fearing Him.

Application: Isaiah tells us about a time when that is going to change (v. 3). The “strong people” mentioned here are the opposite of the poor and needy of verse 4. They are the politically powerful, the self-sufficient. The word translated *terrible* means *oppressive* or *tyrannical*. Those glorifying the Lord and fearing Him here are some who used their strength to oppress others. Isaiah sees that changing.

The Apostle Paul tells about this change as he looks back to the ascension of Christ, when God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name. Philippians 2:10, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This includes the knees and tongues of the strong ones of verse 3, who refuse to glorify and fear Him now.

These strong tyrants will glorify and fear the Lord because His judgment will bring an end to their power (vv. 2, 5). This stronghold will be brought down in great heat. It will be hot even in cloudy shade. 2 Peter speaks of this heat: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (3:10). I believe newer translations are correct to translate the Hebrew word for *branch* in the KJV as *song*. In other words, there is a noise, a musical song, sung by the godless powers of this world, which the Lord shall bring down in judgment. Our musical choices must not sound like this song.

As a godless power of Isaiah's day, Moab is the representative of this kind of stronghold in our passage (vv. 10b-12). The picture here is that of the Lord treading down Moab like straw in a pool of manure. They are in this mess because they trusted in their own hands and their own fortress. They determined not to listen to the Lord, to build their house their own way on the sand. And as they sink into the mire of the consequences of their unbelief, their response is not to call out in faith for help and salvation, but rather to try to swim their way out.

Isaiah, on the other hand, trusts in the Lord. He begins the chapter, O LORD – all capitals meaning, O Yahweh. Yahweh is God's covenant name, the name by which He fulfills His promise to save His people. It is the name the angel gave to Jesus, meaning *Yahweh saves*. Jesus was given this name because He, Jesus who is Yahweh, "shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Isaiah confesses Yahweh as his God, for He alone is God.

Who is your God? Do you know His name? Do you know what He has done for you? Do you trust Him to save you?

Isaiah built his life on the rock of knowing his God. He commits to exalting Yahweh, not himself. He commits to praising Yahweh for what He has done, which he could never have done for himself. He has received God's mercy.

What Isaiah's God has done is the wonderful counsel of the Wonderful Counselor, the promised Child of Isaiah 9:6 (v. 1). He executed a miraculous plan to save us from sin. His plan to save those like Isaiah who trust in Him is a very old one, and a very faithful one. Jesus executed this wonderful counsel to save when He declared from the cross, "It is finished." He finished paying the penalty for your sins and mine. He finished making it possible for us to build our lives on Him and His work as our Rock.

This is the Lord's victory over the stronghold of the strong – that life that demands to live life its own way. Jesus said, "Whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them," builds on the Rock. The songs of the world say, "I did it my way." How shall we build our lives?

Isaiah gives us further encouragement to choose wisely with his description of the second stronghold.

II. The Lord's blessing for the stronghold of the weak (vv. 4, 6-10a).

Illustration: I had a nice visit with my dad last week. He is doing much better, so much so that he invited me to go golfing with him and a couple of his friends. It was a beautiful day in South Carolina for golf. The temperature was in the high 70s, and there was not a cloud in the sky. I enjoyed the warm sun, but after a while, I began to enjoy the shade more. A number of times I asked Dad to move our golfcart into the shade as we waited for others to hit.

Application: Isaiah tells us that Yahweh, his God, is like that shade from the heat. He is a stronghold for the poor and needy in his distress, and a shelter from the storm. We do not read about the strong people in this stronghold of protection. No, we read about the weak as protected there. When Jesus said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3), He was referring to people in this stronghold.

These are those who see that they are weak and in need of one stronger than they. They are distressed over the pool of the manure of their lives, and they have given up trying to swim out of it on their own. Simply put, they are sinners who knew they needed a Savior. Has that ever been you?

This stronghold of salvation can be found in a place Isaiah calls "this mountain" (v. 6a, 10a). This mountain is the one he told us about in the previous chapter (24:23). It is Mount Zion. It is where Yahweh reigns with a brilliance that outshines the sun and the moon. There is a great covenant feast in this mountain (v. 6). Unlike the feast on Sinai (Exod. 24:11), at which only the elders of Israel were invited, this feast will be attended by all people, and it will be the celebration of Yahweh's marriage to a bride that is finally made ready in white linen, clean and washed in the blood of her Bridegroom:

Revelation 19:6-9, "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And he [the angel] saith unto me [John], Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." The Lamb invites us to answer His invitation to be clothed in white and to be part of this feast.

Also in this mountain, death will have died (vv. 7-8). Verse 7 describes death as a shroud strewn over all the earth. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that the devil uses this power of death to create fear in the hearts of men. Verse 8 is the promise of the resurrection of Christ – "He will swallow up death in victory." Paul credits Christ with winning this victory for us: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through out Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Tears disappear when death dies (v. 8). Persecution of Christians will never happen again. And in that day, every faithful Isaiah will find that he is far from alone – the *I* of verse 1 becomes the *we* of verse 9. Yahweh will save. Our part is to wait and trust that we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation.

Illustration: Vernon J. Charlesworth was the headmaster of Spurgeon's Stockwell Orphanage in London from 1869 to 1914, a ministry of 45 years. Charles Dickens wrote about the conditions of orphans in that day, and Pastor Charlesworth was one whom God called to do something about those conditions. Orphans needed shelter, and Charlesworth wrote a hymn about life in the stronghold of God's blessing titled, "A Shelter in the Time of Storm":

The Lord's our Rock, in Him we hide, Secure whatever ill betide.
A shade by day, defense by night, No fears alarm, no foes afright.

The raging storms may round us beat, We'll never leave our safe retreat.

O Rock divine, o Refuge dear, Be Thou our helper ever near.
Jesus is a rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm.

Conclusion: This is the choice Isaiah lays before us this morning. It is the same choice Jesus gave us. Every person's life resides in one of the two strongholds Isaiah tells us about in this chapter. Our trust is either in the Lord as our stronghold and our shelter in the time of storm, or it is in our own strength. The world celebrates those who say, "I did it my way"; "I don't care what you say anymore, this is my life. Go ahead with your own life. Leave me alone."

This morning, the Lord has refused to leave us alone. Jesus has been clear with us: we are building on either the rock of God's truth, or the sand of living life our own way. We must hear His word and obey His word to build on the rock rather than the sand. Isaiah is also clear – the stronghold of the strong will be brought down. The stronghold of the poor and needy is the Lord, who will not fail us. We must make our choice carefully, "for the Lord has spoken" (v. 8).

"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