

No congregational handout; reconstruction of sermon outline follows (computer collapsed!)

—{1}. **Isaiah 10:5-19** **The Boasting Stick**

A. Introduction

1. the recent storms around here have caused significant damage
 - a. one of yesterday's headlines was 'The Aftermath'
 - b. it showed pictures of 44 houses so damaged that they had to be condemned as unfit for human habitation
 - c. trees have been blown down around this region
 - (A) on our property we have had two trees suffer
 - (1) one of our willows blew over a couple of weeks ago, but it had a rotten spot in the trunk
 - (2) a healthy maple split down the middle, and I had to cut up the one half and try to save the other
 - (3) so the chain saws have had a good workout
 - (B) then in Lynn's yard a much larger tree had some limbs split off, taking out the telephone and cable lines
 - (1) Mike and Carlos went there to clear it all up
 - (2) my part was minor: to provide the chain saws and the truck to take away the branches
 - d. well, after putting them away in the barn I overheard the electric and gas saws having this conversation
 - (A) electric: boy, I sure did a good job – did you see the way I took off all those limbs
 - (B) gas: what do you mean; those were just little twigs
 - (C) electric: oh no ... I could have done the whole job
 - (D) gas: no way ... you would never have got through those 12" thick limbs that I had to work on
 - (E) that's a pretty preposterous story, isn't it? ... well maybe not ... let's
2. « read Isaiah 10 »
 - a. so I put my head back in the barn and called out to those two boasting saws, and told them, Quiet up you two; it was Mike and Carlos who did all the work!
 - b. well, that's just my imagination, but I hope it helps you to see how ridiculous Assyria's boasting was

B. Why was Assyria and Its Army in Israel & Judah?

1. preceding our text for today

- a. there is a poem of destruction, Isaiah 9:8-10:4
- b. these verses actually consist of 4 stanzas
- c. the theme being God's use of and dealing with Assyria
- d. each of those stanzas ends with the same refrain
- e. this refrain is actually first used in Isaiah 5:24, but in this poem of destruction we find it first in 9:12b –'... In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away And His hand is still stretched out.'
- f. in our adult Bible class we concluded that the meaning of this refrain was simply this:
 - (A) God has kept on chastising, warning, punishing Judah
 - (B) as in God's words through Jeremiah, 'Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers.' (Jeremiah 7:25-26)
 - (C) Judah just does not learn
 - (D) God is not going to give up on His people
 - (E) 'For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.' (Proverbs 3:12)
 - (F) and if that means further punishment, then further punishment there will be
- g. and for this purpose,

2. Assyria was God's stick Isaiah 10:5-6

- a. 'Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation And commission it against the people of My fury To capture booty and to seize plunder, And to trample them down like mud in the streets.' (Isaiah 10:5-6)
- b. that word 'woe,' often used to introduce the utterance of a prophetic judgement, combines a warning against as well as a tinge of sadness for, man's persistent rebellion
- c. the judgement announced in our passage this morning is against Assyria, but to make clear to Isaiah's audience why Assyria is still prevailing, God's purpose is explained

- d. Assyria was God's stick
 - (A) the rod of His anger
 - (B) the staff of His indignation
 - (C) Assyria was being used to express God's wrath against the people against whom His hand is still outstretched
 - (D) Assyria was but a tool of God, commissioned by God against the people under God's wrath
 - (E) against whom Assyria would be free to plunder and to trample them down like mud
- e. who is this people that this rod is being used against?
 - (A) it is 'a godless nation'
 - (B) and that would prick up Judah's ears
 - (C) for there were many godless nations about Judah
 - (D) but, as verse 12 will show us, Judah is that nation
 - (E) so Assyria as God's stick can only operate within the very strict bounds set by the Sovereign Lord, to go so far and no farther, that God's people should prevail
- f. but that is not what Assyria thinks:

- C. Assyria, God's stick, speaks: 'Look what I am doing!' Isa.10:7-11
1. 'Yet it does not so intend, Nor does it plan so in its heart, But rather it is its purpose to destroy And to cut off many nations.' (Isaiah 10:7)
 - a. Assyria had an agenda
 - (A) in the pride of its heart it was to amass an empire
 - (B) to destroy its enemies, wasting them away
 - (C) to cut them off from being nations – by repopulating the conquered lands with other conquered people, any sense of nationality was effectively removed
 - b. but nowhere on their agenda would you find the item, 'serve as the Lord God's stick to punish His people Judah'
 - c. no, Assyria thought itself as being in control; hear his pompous, satisfied d statements Assyria makes in his heart

2. 'For it says, "Are not my princes all kings?"' (Isaiah 10:8)
 - a. look at me ... I have princes leading my armies
 - b. those princes are either kings that I have already subdued
 - c. or, they are so great that they are superior to the kings against which my armies are marching
 - d. so, what are those nations to me? ... nothing!

3. 'Is not Calno like Carchemish, Or Hamath like Arpad, Or Samaria like Damascus?' (Isaiah 10:9)
 - a. Assyria lists of the victims of a 20-year march of conquest
 - b. and none of these had proven particularly difficult
 - c. so, what possible problem could Samaria – that is the northern kingdom or Israel – or little Judah pose?

4. 'As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, Whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,' (Isaiah 10:10)
 - a. these were great nations
 - b. some of them had some pretty impressive-looking idols
 - c. but all there idols did them not one bit of good
 - d. Jerusalem and Samaria – their god's are comparatively pitiful, so what hope have they against me?
 - e. in fact, I have already dealt the death-blow to Samaria
 - f. what I have done to all these other nations, then, 'Shall I not do to Jerusalem and her images Just as I have done to Samaria and her idols?' (Isaiah 10:11)
 - g. now I'll deal with JERUSALEM
 - h. and with this statement, Assyria blasphemes, for it ignores that the real God of Israel is the Yahweh, the true God, as though He were a mere graven image; and it ignores God's purpose for Judah; so now ...

D. God speaks

1. Assyria - you are just a tool; when I am finished using you I will finish you Isaiah 10:12
 - a. 'So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness."'
 - b. Assyria, says God, you have conquered so easily because you are the tool that I am wielding for my

purposes

- c. but when I lay you aside from that task
- d. then I will deal with you
 - (A) with your arrogance
 - (B) with your haughtiness
 - (C) just as I have with those of my own people; because

2. Assyria - I see and hear you Isaiah 10:13-15

- a. listen to just how ridiculous you are
- b. 'For he has said, "By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this, For I have understanding; And I removed the boundaries of the peoples And plundered their treasures, And like a mighty man I brought down their inhabitants, And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest, And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth; And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened its beak or chirped." Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it? That would be like a club wielding those who lift it, Or like a rod lifting him who is not wood.'
- c. remember those chain saws boasting in my barn? ... well that just how preposterous it is for Assyria to boast
- d. wisdom? understanding? only because it was so designed by God in order to accomplish his purposes
- e. removing boundaries to unite them into an empire? only because God was wielding them as a stick
- f. plundering? reaching riches? only because God was hiring them as His instrument
- g. all this self-congratulatory talk of Assyria is as ridiculous and a boasting stick; as if an axe were greater than the woodsman or a saw than the carpenter
- h. Assyria, you just a silly stick; such as I might throw for the dog to fetch; and, ...

3. Assyria - Here is how you will be finished - I have used you to punish, you will be punished by me Isaiah 10:16-19

- a. 'Therefore the Lord, the God of hosts, will send a wasting disease among his stout warriors; And under his glory a fire will be kindled like a burning flame.' (Isaiah 10:16)
 - (A) the first part of that verse suggests that God can use plague to carry out Assyria's punishment;

when, Lord willing, we come later chapters of Isaiah, we will see that the plague was the Angel of the Lord, himself

- (B) and, if I were to paraphrase the last part of the verse, to give you a gist of its flavour, the statement would be 'you are going to burn, burn, burn, burn'
- (C) if you scoff at then, then the Lord goes on
- b. 'And the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame, And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in a single day.' (Isaiah 10:17)
 - (A) God Himself is going to see to their punishment
 - (1) God is the light of Israel, leading, protecting him
 - (2) Israel's Holy One is his covenant God
 - (3) certainly the destruction of Sennacherib took place in a single day (actually in the night time of a day)
 - (B) the later prophet, Nahum, gives a graphic prophecy of the details of the destruction of Assyria and of Nineveh its capital city, but the next verses summarize it
- c. 'And He will destroy the glory of his forest and of his fruitful garden, both soul and body, And it will be as when a sick man wastes away. And the rest of the trees of his forest will be so small in number That a child could write them down.' (Isaiah 10:18-19 NAS95)
 - (A) in figurative language, using the analogies of forest, and field, and a person, the message is given: all that Assyria now glories in will cease
 - (B) so reduced like a forest that has been left with so few trees that a child could list them
- d. it was complete – Nineveh and Assyria never returned – Babylon took over and, after her, other kingdoms

E. There are still boasting sticks in the world

1. those who deny God

a. we find these among the educated

- (A) the intellectuals who fail to perceive their need of God
- (B) even, sadly, those seminary professors, who by their humanism and criticism have so reduced God's word to agree with their own opinions they deny its power
- (C) these are the theoretical atheists and agnostics

- b. but there are also the practical atheists
 - (A) those who live as though there were no God
 - (B) even giving Him lip-service
 - (C) yet because of affluence – being self-made men (who if truth be known must be poorly constructed – or poverty, are more concerned with this present world
- c. but the worst kind of boasting stick is ..

2. the self-righteous

- a. who like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who thanked God that he was not like other men, and then rhymed off to God just how wonderful a man he was; his attitude: 'how fortunate you are, God, to have me as your man!'
- b. Israel often though the same sort of thing, 'You are fortunate to have us as your nation...'
- c. as thousands today think how pleased God must be with them for their external religious acts; for the fact that they belong to this or that church

F. Conclusion

- 1. God's grace is found in the Scriptures from the first chapters of Genesis to the closing chapters of Revelation
 - a. the story of redemption; salvation by grace
 - b. Noah – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Egypt – the judges – the repeated warning and even the sending into exile in order to bring His people and the nations to their senses
 - c. the remnant returning to the land
 - d. by God's grace, the coming of the Son of God, his death, resurrection, ascension and coming again for those who have been saved by His grace
 - e. 'So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.' (Romans 11:5 NIV)
- 2. Don't be a boasting stick
 - a. you cannot save yourself by your good works
 - b. God has given faith as the channel by which we can appropriate his grace
 - c. it isn't grace plus, but only grace; grace alone

d. Jesus words 'It is finished' shows salvation complete in Him

Jesus paid it all,

All to Him I owe;

Sin had left a crimson stain—

He washed it white as snow.—{2}.

e. so accept and testify to this fact: 'I am only a sinner saved by grace' to the glory of God; don't be a boasting stick!

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. *Jesus Paid It All*, by Elvina Mabel Hall (1820-1889)