

—{1}. **Isaiah 20** **The Isaiah Spectacle**

A. Introduction

1. self-consciousness is pretty well a universal feeling
 - a. Thomas Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson is probably the best known of the Confederate general of the Civil war. He got his nickname from his dogged determination in the face of battle. But it wasn't always that way —{2}.
 - (A) Stonewall Jackson never used to take a glass of water to his lips or seal a letter without asking God's blessing. Jackson was a timid man. Shortly after his conversion he attended a midweek prayer meeting. The pastor asked him to pray, without consulting him. He tried but broke down completely. He made a failure at this first attempt at public prayer.
 - (B) The pastor rebuked himself for placing Jackson in this predicament. The next morning before breakfast a loud knock at the door was heard. It was Jackson. The pastor timidly opened the door. With tears in his eyes Jackson said, "Pastor, I'm sorry I made such a miserable failure at my first public prayer. I came over to ask you if the Christians would be willing to have you call on me for prayer every Wednesday evening until I overcome this foolish timidity and fear of man."
 - b. if you are any sort of a golfer, then you know that the first hole is always the most difficult one on the course. It's not because it's the longest, or has the most traps, or a green with the hole in the worst location. No it is because of that first tee: there is always a crowd there, and every one of them is watching what your tee-shot will be like. And most of us flub that short fearing what people will think of us!
2. Today, we are going to look at the message which I believe God has for us in Isaiah 20
 - a. because of the nature of the passage
 - (A) I am going not begin by reading it through in entirety
 - (B) that's not because it's too long; it's only six verses
 - (C) but because to do so might cause an inaccurate image to be formed involuntarily in your mind
 - b. so, I will read through the passage, perhaps changing a word or two, so as to be more suitable for public

reading

(A) but, more importantly, explaining the circumstances and situation being described

(B) so that we may conclude with an application of the truths that are to be found in the chapter

B. What is the situation in which this chapter takes place?

1. Assyria continues to pursue her plan of world conquest

a. early in Isaiah's ministry, Judah under Ahaz had looked to Assyria as its saviour – rather than God – from the attacks from the north by Syria along with its sister nation of Israel

b. Isaiah preached how wrong that was, and this became all too apparent by the end of Ahaz' reign

c. Assyria's goal was world conquest, and to that end she also sought to subjugate Egypt, the other great power

d. a step in that plan was her taking control lands on the east coast of the Mediterranean sea: Phoenicia and Philistia which she had done by 715^{BC}

e. but, with the promise of help from Egypt, Ashdod one of the cities of the Philistines led the others in revolt in 713^{BC},

f. verse 1 relates Assyria's response: 'In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it,' – the commander, who held the title of 'Tartan' which means 'second' was the viceroy or deputy of the king, Sargon II. He came against this rebel city of the Philistines – a city which had taken one Pharaoh of Egypt 29 years to conquer – and subdued it by the year 711^{BC}

g. within three years, Assyria put down this revolt, and had established Asdod as a base from which she would later successfully make Egypt a tributary state

h. now let us return to the subject this verse introduces

2. God had a message to make known through Isaiah

a. Isaiah 20:2 – at that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, 'Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips and take your shoes off your feet.' And he did so, going *stripped* and barefoot.

b. this does not mean that Isaiah was totally naked

c. the term 'stripped' or 'naked' is used a number of times in the Bible to describe something other than

the picture it brings to our mind

- d. the story of Noah and Ham which is found in Genesis 9:20ff, where Ham looked on the nakedness of his father when he was lying in his tent, make it very clear that such nakedness was neither socially nor religiously acceptable
- e. yet we find the word naked being used of king Saul, of Peter fishing in the boat, and by Paul of himself
- f. in these cases, as here, it meant being stripped down to a tunic or undergarment, to only the poorest of coverings; the fact that a note is added about his going barefoot confirms this interpretation of the verse
- g. this act differed from common custom, it was humiliating and demeaning, but it was not obscene
- h. some other comments on this verse
 - (A) literally it reads, 'the LORD spoke by the hand of the Isaiah ...' – it was by Isaiah's actions that God would first make his message known
 - (B) also we find Isaiah wearing sackcloth; that may simply have been the traditional garb of a prophet as we see in Elijah and John the Baptist, or it could reflect that Isaiah was mourning – certainly, as Isaiah pronounced judgement on the nations around, he wept in doing so
 - (C) and finally, there is no long debate with God about this – the prophet who committed himself by saying 'Here I am, send me' obeys what he is told
- i. but what does this act, which God commands, mean?

3. God's message by action is completed by His Word

- a. Isaiah 20:3-4 – ³ And the LORD said, 'Even as My servant Isaiah has gone *stripped* and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush, ⁴ so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, *stripped* and barefoot with *their seats* uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.
 - (A) what Isaiah portrayed in a symbolical fashion – and he was not the only prophet called upon to act out a message to catch the attention of God's people – was to be fulfilled in a more intensive fashion on that second great power, Egypt-Cush, i.e., Egypt-Ethiopia
 - (B) the story is told in 2 Samuel of some of King David's servants who were treated in the same fashion and of what a deep shame it was to them – that is the heart of this message: Egypt-Ethiopia is

going to be defeated shamefully by Assyria, God's instrument

- (C) it comes most strongly, as the history is examined, that during the three-year period from the rebellion of Ashdod to its conquest, Isaiah is walking through the streets of Jerusalem, a spectacle for people to behold, an object of curiosity and questioning, so that anyone who should enquire 'why did you do this?' can be told this message: 'What you have seen happen on your borders in the city of Ashdod, is the work of the LORD, against Egypt and Ethiopia.'
- (D) Has God got your attention!? God isn't done yet with the defeat of Ashdod. As I was just a sign and a token, so this is but a sign of the wonder that God is going to do with the great and powerful land of Egypt-Ethiopia!
- (E) now, why did God's people need this message?

4. God's People Need to Trust in God, and in God Alone

- a. Isaiah 20:5-6 – ⁵ Then they will be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and Egypt their boast. ⁶ So the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, 'Behold, such is our hope, where we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and we, how shall we escape?'
- (A) the inhabitants of the coastland – those living on the plains bordering the Mediterranean – are people of Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) and the people of Philistia
- (B) but the message is not just for them alone
- (C) there was another nation living in these parts – a nation whose border was to go to the Mediterranean or Great Sea; a nation who in their idols and paganism were hard to tell apart from the Phoenicians and from the Philistines – that nation is Judah
- (D) this was a nation had already sought help from Assyria rather than from God
- (E) let this be a lesson to Judah, as they see the failure of Egypt to be of any help to Ashdod
- (F) How can you hope to escape by trusting Egypt?
- (G) there is, then a lesson for us too in these verse; but there are some other lessons from this chapter

C. The Isaiah Spectacle has a lesson for us today

1. First, Christians are called to be a spectacle to the world

- a. I don't mean that God is going to call you to parade around in your undergarments

- b. rather, it is in the way that Paul describes this role, as he defends his ministry and methods against the self-righteous superiority of the church at Corinth
- c. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 – ⁹ For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honour. ¹¹ To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed *{literally, we are naked}*, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; ¹² and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.
- d. do you see the parallel to Isaiah's being a spectacle?
- e. so that the gospel of Christ might be proclaimed
 - (A) self-consciousness and bashfulness are set aside
 - (B) make me a spectacle, an object of ridicule
 - (C) let me be counted as a fool
 - (D) all for the sake of the Lord, Jesus Christ

2. Second, Christians serve Christ, not custom nor tradition

- a. our God is the God of the unexpected
 - (A) you only have to follow Christ through the gospels for a few chapters in order to discover that truth
 - (B) look, for example at the way He healed people – Carlos has touched on some of these in recent sermons
 - (1) he forgave them of sin
 - (2) he deliberately healed on the Sabbath to confront the hypocrisy of the Jewish rulers
 - (3) he sent asked them to carry off their sleeping pad
 - (4) he argued that since they were not Jewish, they should not expect to be healed
 - (5) he spat on them
 - (6) he may an ointment of spit and clay
 - (7) he tried their faith
- b. never let your theology – your private interpretation of what the Bible means – shape your expectation

of what God would (or should!) do or of how you should pray

- (A) Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad, were very correct and orthodox in their theology
- (B) if you compare their statements to Scripture, you find that they had sound Scriptural ground for their position and for what they said
- (C) they were sanctified, evangelical, Bible-believing men
- (D) and, according to their theology, and according to their interpretation of events based on Scripture, they could only explain Job's suffering as being caused by his being sinful
- (E) and they were one hundred percent incorrect: God's words in Job 42:7 are key to the understanding of the dialogue that goes on throughout that book: *It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.'*

c. God calls and indicates how people should serve him by His will and wisdom, not ours; that is why,

3. Third, God's people should be ready to act when He calls

a. in the 20th chapter of Isaiah we read those simple words about him: *'and he did so'*

- (A) no argument
- (B) no doubtful hesitation
- (C) God said it, Isaiah did it

b. how often, like Moses, we question

- (A) how could God possibly use me
- (B) bashful, self-conscious, like Gideon, we set out fleece after fleece, test after test for God to fulfil just so that we can be sure
- (C) the amazing thing really, is that God should call on us at all to do the work of a disciple; yet he does!

c. Paul was constantly amazed that Christ had called him

- (A) amazed because he had been Christ's enemy
- (B) amazed because he was weak, yet Christ performed His ministry in and through Paul on account of that very weakness in which Christ's strength was perfected
- (C) so he understood what he was writing by inspiration with these words:²⁷ *but God has chosen the*

foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

d. if we are, like Isaiah, to realize the majesty and power of God, we need to forget how we may appear to others and be ready to answer yes when He commands

D. Conclusion – we are going to sing a hymn of consecration, 'Take My Life' – but I want us to do it in a special way, singing the first verse aloud, reading silently and meditating upon the next verses and then singing together that last verse as a prayer.

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2. ‘Stonewall Jackson’s Timidity’ in the Fredericksburg Bible Illustrator Supplements, May, 1997 – Kerux illustrations #15614