

High and Exalted (6): When the Blind Lead the Blind

(Isaiah 28)

I. Introduction

- A. Years ago, Jenna Bush accompanied her father on a trip to Europe
 - 1. Someone in the crowd was wearing a university of Texas sweatshirt
 - a. So she pointed at them and flashed the Texas “Hook-‘em-Horns” sign
 - b. Her Dad saw and he flashed the Hook-‘em-Horns sign as well
 - 2. This, of course, created something of an international incident
 - a. Wherever they were in Europe, that was seen as an obscene gesture
 - b. A whole crowd thought the leader of free world was flipping them off
 - 3. Hey, I’m a Razorback fan; I think “Hook-‘em-Horns” is obscene gesture
- B. Symbols often have more than one meaning, and that can be confusing
 - 1. Here’s a list of several such symbols (these are true; found them on web)
 - a. **Ichthys**: Symbol used by early Christians... and by pagan fertility cults
 - b. **Upside-Down Cross**: Satanic symbol? Petrine cross of humility?
 - c. **Caduceus**: Army Medical Corps mixed-up gods Asclepius and Hermes
 - d. **Star of David**: Symbol of Judaism, right? And Hinduism. And Jainism
 - e. **OK Sign**: Everything is OK or obscene reference to part of the anatomy
 - f. **Peace Sign**: Required for hippies; logo for British nuclear disarmament
 - 2. So sometimes the same symbol can have radically different meanings
- C. We continue this morning in our look at Isaiah, “High and Exalted”
 - 1. One of the reasons the prophetic books seem so strange... they are poetry
 - a. I know that some of you read poetry... or maybe probably write poetry (*Lynn fell in love with me because of poems/songs I wrote for her... or was that “despite”*)
 - b. But to many people, poetry is a very strange and foreign language
 - 1) It is a language of exaggeration, of hyperbole, irony and paradox
 - 2) It is a language of symbols that speak to the heart, not just head
 - 2. Our text will talk about wreaths, like the one on the front of the pulpit
 - a. It will sound like God doesn’t much like wreaths; like the one on pulpit
 - b. Isaiah is speaking in symbols, and his message is an important one

II. Israel and the Wreath

- A. Isaiah begins by pronouncing woe on a wreath (**Reading: [Isaiah 28:1-4](#)**)
1. The wreath here is a symbol for Samaria, the capitol of Northern Kingdom
 - a. King Omri set up Samaria as capitol in the hill country of Manasseh
 - b. They were a city on a hill surrounded by 3 walls (*looked like wreath*)
 - c. His son Ahab turned Samaria into a center of trade and wealth
 - 1) Remember when he killed Naboth for vineyard on ancestral land?
 - 2) That was part of the process of making Samaria the city of kings
 2. Wreaths were worn in ancient times by revelers as party hat (**put on**)
 - a. Not only did Samaria look like a wreath; it was a place to wear them
 - 1) The ruling rich enjoyed their wealth while ignoring the poor & God
 - 2) They're either literally drunk or drunk on wealth/power (all above)
 - b. This was one of the things the stress hard and often (**[Amos 6:1,4-6](#)**)
 - 1) They were focused on partying, not on doing the right thing
 - 2) Amos had gotten pretty ugly stressing this same point (**[Amos 4:1](#)**)
 - c. They focused on their freedom and happiness and ignored the poor
 3. Do we ever focus on our freedom while ignoring the plight of the poor?
- B. There's something else you do with wreaths, in ancient times and now
1. You throw them on the graves of the people you have just buried
 - a. Wreaths were symbols of partying, but also of funerals and death
 - 1) The people of Samaria thought their party would last forever
 - 2) They didn't know their party would soon turn into a wake
 - b. God is singing Samaria a verse or two of old Willie Nelson song--
*Turn out the lights, the party's over; they say that all good things must end
Call it a night, the party's over; tomorrow starts the same old thing again*
 - c. Of course, He skipped that last line; the party was over for good
 2. God will always RELENT when God's people will REPENT (**[Isa 28:5-6](#)**)
 - a. God never gives up on his people; He is the Father of the prodigals
 - b. When we return, He forgives! The imagery of wreath is flipped here
 - 1) God himself would be the wreath and the crown of the remnant
 - 2) They had to take off their party hats... and put on God Himself!

III. When the Blasted Try to Lead the Babies

- A. God and Isaiah have two basic problems in communicating with Israel
1. **First**, her leadership was loaded, or at least acted that way (**Isaiah 28:7**)
 - a. Law given right after Nadab and Abihu fiasco-- *no drinking on duty*
 - b. Does that mean that the priests and prophets are literally drunk?
 - 1) Maybe, but more like this is a symbol for worldliness in general
 - 2) Religious leaders are not serving God but themselves (**Micah 3:11**)
 - c. This is a common accusation of leadership, even in church (**Jude 12**)
 - d. Isaiah says there was crisis in Israel and the leadership was at fault
 2. **Second**, the people were all acting like big babies (**Isa 28:9-10**)
 - a. Not all the prophets were bad (Isaiah), but the people were all babies
 - 1) If people aren't ready for God's truth, preaching is like herding cats
 - 2) I recently ran across a cartoon of a preacher making announcement:
"Adults complaining my sermons are too complex are dismissed to Children's Church."
 - b. The folks to whom Isaiah preached wanted to be babied (**Isa 28:10**)
 - 1) Transliterated Hebrew: *tsav latsav, tsav latsav, qav laqav, qav laqav*
 - 2) This is likely Isaiah doing gibberish "baby talk" that people hear
 - 3) *"They will hear meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling"* (NET)
 - c. Leaders didn't speak truth and people wouldn't understand if they did
- B. There is one more thing that Isaiah mentions that we'll touch on briefly
1. He switches audiences and therefore switches problems (**Isa 28:14-15**)
 - a. Now he is talking to Judah, which is really his main audience anyway
 - b. They were scoffing at Isaiah message of *"repent so God will relent"*
 2. Israel was too drunk and too dumb to understand-- Judah just scoffed
 - a. They heard Isaiah; they just didn't think his message applied to them
 - 1) They had no use for Israel and no problem with it being destroyed
 - 2) They probably told jokes about Israel the way we joke about WVA
They just passed a new law in WVA; when a couple gets divorced, they're still cousins
 - b. As we'll see later in Isaiah, Judah made an alliance with Babylon
 - 1) They thought the threat of Assyrian invasion didn't apply to them
 - 2) That is why Isaiah tells them that they are trusting in a lie

- C. God would give them something that they could trust in (**Isa 28:16-17**)
1. God offers them both hope and terror-- which it would be was up to them
 - a. Their “cornerstone and sure foundation” (as we sang) is found in God
 - 1) It is to be found in following God’s righteousness and judgment
 - 2) Those who rely on that foundation will never have to panic
 - b. What they thought was a refuge and hiding place would not stand
 - c. It would be beaten down by hail, and swept away in a flood
 2. Talk about scoffing! This is irony and absurdity of highest order, right?
 - a. They thought they were safe because of an alliance with Babylon
 - b. But Babylon would destroy Jerusalem and take its people captive

IV. Conclusion

- A. What is the point? What is the message here for us as Christians today?
1. We have to decide who we are going to trust; who will be our foundation?
 - a. The leaders of Israel trusted themselves; they were drunk with power
 - b. They people of Israel blindly and uncritically trusted in their leaders
 - c. Judah trusted in their “enemy of my enemy” alliance with Babylon
 2. Do we make the same mistakes today? What is it that we really trust?
 - a. **Money:** We know money can’t buy happiness; we act like it can rent it
 - 1) **Study:** Family make \$60,000 are happier than if they make \$30,000
 - a) But those who make \$250,000 are not one bit happier. Why?
 - b) Once you have enough money to meet needs, loses it’s power
 - 2) Do we focus on making more-n-more of what satisfies less-n-less?
 - 3) Do we trust in things to give meaning to life rather than God?
 - b. **Education:** We make sure that our gets get the best education, right?
 - 1) Why do more than half of our kids never come to Sunday school?
 - 2) The benefits of good education help for the 40 years of working life
 - 3) They need to build a relationship with God that will last for eternity
 - c. **Politics:** Some Christians have allied themselves with political power
 - 1) The more and more they seek that power, the less Christian they are
 - 2) Like Judah, we can make alliance with the very thing that destroys

B. Let's allow Isaiah to have the last word this morning (**Isaiah 28:27-29**)

1. Grain must be broken to be useful; bread comes from broken grain
 - a. Each kind of grain is harvest and ground in a particular way
 - b. The process of grinding and threshing doesn't last forever
 - c. Hard times of their own making were coming for Israel and Judah
 - 1) But it was God who would be in the middle of those hard times
 - 2) He'd not allow them to last forever; He's use them for His purpose
2. Are you going through hard times today? *Then this is good news!*
 - a. God is in the middle of hard times; God can use it for his purposes
 - 1) Even if those hard times have come through your own making
 - 2) Especially if those hard times come from your own making
 - b. If you will repent, then God will relent and receive-- "Just As I Am"

*I come broken to be mended; I come wounded to be healed
I come desperate to be rescued; I come empty to be filled
I come guilty to be pardoned by the blood of Christ the Lamb
And I'm welcomed with open arms; Praise God just as I am*