

If we want to understand our Old Testament reading for today from Isaiah chapter 29, we have to go back a bit to an earlier chapter, one that we are much more familiar with, that is, Isaiah chapter 7, where we hear the prophecy of Immanuel. And in that chapter, it says this: "In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, 'Syria is in league with Ephraim,' the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." So in other words, what the Bible tells us is that the northern kingdom of Israel, also called Ephraim here, had banded together with one of its neighbors and were preparing to attack the southern kingdom of Judah. And the king of Judah at that time, Ahaz, was afraid. He wasn't sure how he was going to take care of this. How would he be able to repel both of them at the same time? So he needed something to deal with this situation. He needed something to put his hope in.

But the Lord came to Ahaz at that time and said, "You don't need to worry. I'm going to take care of everything." In fact, he says in verse 8: "Within sixty-five years, Ephraim will be shattered from being a people." Within sixty-five years, he says, the northern kingdom of Israel isn't even going to exist. So there's no need to panic. There's no need to worry. Trust in me, the Lord says, and everything will be just fine.

But Ahaz didn't want to do that. Ahaz wanted to trust in himself. He wanted to trust in anything else other than the Lord. And as a result, the Lord promised judgment upon the southern kingdom of Israel. And we hear that judgment in verse 17, where it says: "The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah--the king of Assyria!" The king of Assyria was going to come, the Lord said, and he would destroy the northern kingdom, just like he said would happen. But at the same time, because of their faithlessness, Assyria would also destroy Judah. Everything would be wiped away before them. And this was coming no matter what. So now Judah is left with a problem. What are they going to do? Where are they going to turn? What future do they have in the face of such destruction?

But now in our reading for today, in Isaiah 29, it's been several years. And the things that God said were going to happen have started to happen. Because the king of Assyria has come, and he has destroyed the northern kingdom, an event which happened in 721 B.C. But Assyria needed some time to regroup before it continued with its invasion. And so during that time between the two invasions, Judah was left with a problem. What are we going to do? We can't avoid this invasion. It's going to happen. But maybe we can at least prepare for it. Is there something we can do to make sure that we have a future in the face of this destruction? Where are they going to go?

Christians, what they should've done in that time was to repent, to turn away from their sins and to turn back towards the living God. Because didn't God spare Nineveh, that great Assyrian city in the book of Jonah? When they turned away from their sins and turned towards God, God didn't destroy the city like he said he was going to. And if he spared Nineveh, how much more

would he spare his own people when they turned to him in true repentance, to come to him confessing their sins? Because God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love!

But that's not what they did. They turned to the world instead. They said, "The world will give us help. The world is where we will find our hope. The world is where we will find our future." And so during that time, they turned to Egypt--who was growing in power at that time--and said, "Egypt will help us! Egypt will give us a future! If we ally ourselves to Pharaoh, then Assyria will be defeated or at least kept away. And everything is going to be just fine." "We will have a future again," Judah said, "if we just ally ourselves with Egypt." And they had done this, Christians, in the face of that troubled future, and now they were looking to the world as a way of finding their hope.

But Christians, have we done the same thing when it comes to the troubles of this world? After all, we are not sitting around waiting to be invaded the way that Judah was, but there are certainly things that make us wonder about what the future may hold, that make us wonder if we'll have a future at all. Perhaps you're worried about the economy. There's shortages across the board still, even sometimes for very basic things. And the disruptions in the supply chains have made prices skyrocket, so that we're wondering, is inflation going to make it so that I can't even support my family? So that I can't even buy the most basic things that I need? In the face of that, we're left wondering, what can I do? Is there anything I can do to find hope for this future? Perhaps you are worried about your job. Is my employer going to make me do something that I don't want to do? And if it comes to that and I lose my job because of it, how will I be able to support my family? How will I be able to take care of those closest to me? In the face of that, we are also left wondering, what can I do to make sure that everything is going to be just fine? Or perhaps you are wondering about your children or perhaps your grandchildren. What kind of world are they going to grow up in? What kind of things are they going to have to deal with in the years ahead? Is it going to get better? Is it going to get worse? And we're left wondering, well, what can I do to help them in the future, to make sure that they have a future which is good for them?

And Christians, whatever the concern may be--and these are by no means all of them--the temptation is always there to turn towards the world as a way of finding hope, to turn towards the world as a way of finding a future. That's what Israel did, after all. They said, "We want a future! And we're going to do anything that we can to make sure that we have that future. So we'll turn to Egypt as a way of making sure that we're going to survive." And Christians, do we do the same? We'll do anything, we say, anything to make sure that we have a future! Anything to get back to normal! Just tell me what it is, and I'll do it! But the problem with that, Christians, is that that's a worldly solution. And being a worldly solution, it's not going to help us. If anything, it will fail us. Because eventually we're going to find out that that thing we put our hope in didn't help us as much as we wanted it to. It may have even caused more problems than it solved. Because that's the way of the world. The world will fail.

And in a way, Christians, these things that we are worried about, this normal that we might want to get back to, is not going to come back. And that's okay. Because God is greater than anything that the world might give to us. God can do far greater things than the world can. And that is

ultimately the point of our reading for today from Isaiah chapter 29. It shows us that the world will fail us. The world cannot help us. But God will help us in ways far greater than we can even possibly imagine. Because God's going to give an abundance so great, a field will be like a forest, Isaiah says. God will cause the deaf to hear. God will cause the blind to see. God will raise up the meek and the poor, and he will cast down the mighty and the wicked. Because God does all of these things for his people. Is that something that the world could do for us? Of course not. But God does these things for us.

And we know this especially, because God gives us a future. Because Jacob, it says, "when he sees his children, the work of the Lord's hands, in his midst, they will sanctify his name." They will see the children that they were so worried about, the future they were afraid was lost forever in their midst, because God is going to take care of them. God would give that future to them. So there is no reason to be afraid.

And we know this above all, Christians, especially in his Son, Jesus Christ. Because it was Jesus who gave sight to the blind. It was Jesus who caused the mute to speak. It was Jesus who caused the deaf to hear. And if he did all of those things for his people, he will do them again in ways far greater than we can even imagine. Because as Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2: "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

So don't be afraid, Christians. Don't worry about what may come. Turn to the Lord, because he is gracious and merciful, and he will care for you in all things. And even if things don't quite turn out the way we might like them right away, that's okay, because God is greater than the world. God has overcome all things. And nothing, absolutely nothing, will take you out of his hand. Turn to him, because Jesus Christ is your hope and your future.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to give us hope in the midst of all things. We pray that you would cause us always to trust in you, knowing that you will care for us through everything. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.