

**Different** - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Isaiah 8:11-22** (#483)

**Introduction:** When I was growing up in the 80's and 90's, one of the main desires of children like me was to be "different." We were fed a constant diet from advertisements, school guidance counselors, and the world around us that we needed to be "individuals" and that we had to express "our unique personality" however we could. As a kid, this was accomplished most often through what you wore, but it also was visible through your hobbies, how you spoke, and how your circle of friends identified.

Once I got a little older, I began to realize how goofy such thinking really was. If you were a skateboarder – for example – you could be picked out of a lineup because of the uniform you wore: trendy vintage t-shirts, overly baggy pants, and a certain haircut and vocabulary. Hardly a unique individual! The same was true for sports people – though it was easier to pick them out because they all wore Nike and made sure to tell you how athletic they were at every opportunity!

Now, a couple of decades later, we simply assume that everyone is a unique individual. Yet, just as I noticed years ago, "unique" is more of a branding and marketing opportunity for big companies rather than anything substantial. And in this vein, I've noticed something disturbing: many Christians look little different from everyone else in the world. Here I don't necessarily mean with how we dress – though that may be true also – but with how we speak, with what entertainment we watch, with how we spend our money, and with our views on society. I call this disturbing because we Christians are called to live and believe and speak differently than everyone else in the world. I call it disturbing because it means that we are being more influenced by our culture than we realize. And I call it disturbing because by not living differently, we present a shallow picture of the Gospel to our neighbors who really need Jesus, and – just as importantly – it reveals something troubling about who we actually trust and follow in this world.

Isaiah has a challenge in store for us this morning. Rather than shying away from it, let's do what Christians throughout the centuries have been called to do: look

to the Word and ask the Lord to change us. We'll do that in **Isaiah chapter 8** this morning, starting with **verse 11**...

**8:11-15** Remember where we've been: in **chapter 7 and the first part of chapter 8**, the challenge for God's people was to trust Him. That trust was put to the test because while God was going to rescue them from their enemies, He was also going to use that very rescue to judge them. This correction was for their own good, but I think most of us would agree that correction is rarely our idea of fun. In these verses, we read how actions show who we trust and who we don't. Here, I want you to see how *different fears lead to different reactions*.

First, *different fears*: the Lord speaks to Isaiah with a warning: don't walk in the ways of "this people." We should be specific here, which people is the Lord warning against? Answer: the wayward hearts of the people of Judah (look back to **verse 6 and also to 7:17**). Their judgment is coming because, even though they are in great danger from those around them, they have – ironically – turned from God. So their danger wasn't only political, but spiritual as well. The call to Isaiah and the faithful like him? Repent. Turn from the ways of this world. But how?

Look at the examples given here: "do not call conspiracy" what these people call conspiracy, and "do not fear" what these people fear. Why those two things? Because conspiracies speak to what we believe and think we know, and fears speak to what we see as more powerful than us. If you are a person who doesn't respect the Lord, then your fears will be related to something other than Him. If you think you are wiser than God, then you'll see things around you as empty, foolish conspiracies to try and trip you up. As I describe those two traits, I'm saddened to say that they seem like they could describe many people in 2020 as well – and certainly Christians are not exempt!

What is the correction to these problems? We find it in **verse 13**: honor the Lord as holy. I think those words go deeper than we might think at first glance. Honoring the Lord isn't like how we honor local civic heroes or even returning veterans – a nice little parade or a discount at the local diner. And holiness isn't

something minor, as if we are talking about a really good or moral person. No, honoring the Lord as holy means that we recognize His perfect greatness and our wretched sin. It means that we see His words, His actions, His character as the absolute standard; everything and everyone else as lesser. We don't give honor as if God were equal to us; no, we give honor as the very highest and best and greatest of what we are able to offer, knowing full well that it is still not enough to even begin to capture God's power and might. In some ways, I think that understanding would be a good definition of what it means to "fear the Lord," which is something that we Christians really struggle with these days. Yet, as **verse 13** notes, fearing the Lord is exactly what His faithful people are supposed to be doing. That is a characteristic that should single us out.

What's the motivation for all this? Let's be honest: if you and I live this way, not only will we seem utterly different and out of step with the world around us, but also with our coworkers and friends and neighbors. With family members. And I dare say, even with many calling themselves Christians. This is no small change that the Lord is calling us to – instead, there is to be a massive difference that can't be missed between us and those who don't trust the Lord. So what's the reasoning? Is there a benefit? Isaiah answers: when we fear God rather than all the other things of this world, when our greatest desire is to see His glory and His plans made known, rather than our own worries about fitting in, being liked, not sticking out too much with our friends – then, and only then, will the Lord be to us as a sanctuary. Our protection. Our shield and defender. Said another way: when we have *different fears*, then we will also have *different reactions*.

Isaiah records for us words that end up being crucial in the New Testament. The "stone of offense and the rock of stumbling" is how Christ describes His own teachings in **Luke 20**. It's how Paul describes the futility of Jewish people trusting the Law over the Law-giver in **Romans 9**. And Peter brings it up in **1 Peter 2** as an indicator of whether people trust the Lord or not. Said most plainly: those who fear the Lord find His actions to be comforting even though they bring hardship. Those who trust the Lord trust His judgment and correction even when it doesn't feel good. But those who do not trust the Lord, those who oppose Him or aren't

fully committed to Him, stumble over such things. These same stumbles are evident today: “how could a good God allow such things to happen?” “If God really is gracious, then why...?” It’s not that the questions can’t be asked, but rather that some ask those questions without faith, looking for excuses to ignore the Lord and His commands rather than in an effort to learn how to trust Him.

This, then, is the challenge we must see before we move on: who or what do you fear most? Disappointing your family, or disappointing the Lord? What motivates you in your decisions, wants, and daily living: the desire to honor the Lord and display Him to the world, or your own fear of being bored, insignificant, not getting the recognition you deserve? Friends, the pursuit of the Lord must be what drives us in life – nothing less will do. And, ultimately, only the pursuit of the Lord will lead us to true comfort. Everything else will leave us stumbling about, with our hearts being constantly pulled to see God’s actions as something to be avoided or even mocked.

*Different fears lead to different reactions. Let’s conclude with a second picture: different actions lead to different destinies...*

**8:16-22** Isaiah is commanded to “bind up” these truths and to “seal” them amongst the Lord’s disciples. This doesn’t mean to “hide them,” as if these teachings are somehow secret and the Lord doesn’t want people to know the grave danger they are in. Instead, it is to “bind up” and to “seal” and to make solid, to publicize what the Lord has said in a definitive manner, in a way that the people who respond to the Lord will see as something that should drive their living and doing. Thus, Isaiah’s response to God’s holiness is to live with hope in the Lord, even as the Lord brings judgment to the door of His people.

Similarly, Isaiah and his children are to be living signs of what the Lord has said and will do. Their very actions will reflect what they believe about God, just as their names do. Notice, however, that those who don’t trust the Lord will act very different: they will seek out mediums and necromancers to try and discern the future. They shall turn to anything and anyone other than God in their desire to

have knowledge and to make decisions. Isn't this what drives a lot of thinking in our world? Rather than acknowledging the first chapters of **Genesis**, for example, many will turn to all kinds of wild explanations for life on earth – “aliens have formed our planet” and some such. Why not simply trust what the Creator says?

Note, then, how foolish such thinking is: “should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?” The living God has cared enough to communicate with His people – why won't we be glad of it? Why would we seek answers and wisdom elsewhere? It's an idolatry every bit as foolish as it is wicked. And this foolishness leads to a picture that is poetic yet devastating: “they have no dawn.” There is no new hope, no great future for those who reject the Lord. God's people are called to live differently – to have *different actions* – precisely because they will have a *different destiny* than this hopeless picture.

To the people of God, a child will be born – the Immanuel, the God with us. We'll save that glorious description for next week. Instead, we leave off with the warning in **verses 21-22**: the destiny of those who seek anything and anyone other than the Lord are distress and hunger, anger and hopelessness. When they look up, it isn't the God of the Bible they seek. When they look around, it isn't His goodness that they see. Instead, they find only darkness and hopelessness.

Friend, is that what your life seems like these days? Be honest with yourself. If all you see is darkness, then I urge you with the Good News of Jesus Christ: there is light! And it is found not by raising your fist against the Lord, but instead by trusting Him. By admitting that you are a sinner in light of His holiness, yes; but also by admitting that He is God and you are not. The way to have hope, then, is to trust in this all-powerful, all-knowing God's plan for you and for me: that His Son, Jesus Christ, died in our place, taking the punishment that was due for our law-breaking. Therefore, we trust in Him – not in ourselves – and we follow Him, not the ways of this world.

Dear church: this is our confession, isn't it? That we trust this Jesus. That He is the stone who determines reactions and life and destiny. To reject Christ is to be crushed by that stone. But to trust Him... in that case the stone that the builders have rejected becomes the cornerstone – the very foundation of our faith and salvation, the immovable reminder of our hope. Do you trust God more than yourself? Do you follow Christ even when you don't have all the answers? Are you willing to stand out in a world that loves to conform? The only way that you will be willing to do so is if your vision of Jesus is bigger than your vision of this world – if your fear of God is greater than your fear of man. Ask the Lord to give each of us that picture, that fear, and that hope. Let's pray...