

The Folly of Trusting in Egypt

Isaiah 20:1-6

Halifax: 18 October 2009

Introduction

Today, we come to our third message about Egypt and Cush from the book of Isaiah.

- In chapter 18-19, we saw that Cush (which included present day Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan) had formed an alliance with Egypt in the later part of the 8th century before Christ.
 - Together, they were a mighty force to be reckoned with, a people to be feared.
 - But we also saw that in mercy to them,
 - God had purposed that He would humble them under the hand of Assyria.
 - Now you may say,
 - How would that be a mercy?
 - It was a mercy because it was part of the LORD's plan for Egypt over the centuries to humble them in order that they might turn to Christ.
 - They were, like so many mighty nations, a nation that supposed they could get along just fine without ever bothering to reconcile to the true God.
 - As long as they were prospering, they were deluded by Satan into supposing that they had no need to be concerned about this.
 - In mercy to them, God sent humbling judgements upon them to show them that until things were right with Him, nothing was right.

But the humbling of the African coalition was to occur over many centuries.

- And so it was that in 711 BC, when Tartan came to Ashdod,
 - It was the case that all of the petty Palestinian states were hoping that Egypt would be able to repel Assyria.
- Assyria was a terrifying thread as they were hungry for world dominion—and were very cruel in barbarous in obtaining that dominion.
 - They liked to boast about skinning kings alive and about piling up the heads of their enemies at the gates of the cities they had conquered.
 - As the African coalition of Egypt and Cush was the most likely force to check the Assyrian advance, and as Palestine was just to the north of Egypt,
 - It was only natural that these Palestinian states should look to Africa for protection.
 - Now of course Judah, along with Philistia, Phoenicia, Moab, and Edom were among the Palestinian states that were still standing in 711 BC.

- Syria and Israel had already been taken captive by Assyria at this time, but the others were looking to Africa for security.

The fallen human race is always looking for something secure to latch on to, because we are so very insecure.

- And we are insecure for good reason—
 - Together, we have rebelled against God and so are under His wrath and curse.
 - Death is a constant reminder to us of His displeasure, not to mention all the other ways that His curse is seen—everything from hurricanes to headaches.
 - We are restless and insecure because things are not right with our Creator and we know it.
- But instead of pleading with Him for mercy, we very foolishly go about looking for security in other places.
 - In our fallen condition, we cannot bear the thought of humbling ourselves before our Maker,
 - fully confessing our sin and our unfitness to have His favour...
 - and humbly casting ourselves on His mercy without any pretence of merit on our part, but coming rather as desperate beggars who have nothing to commend ourselves to Him...
 - We have to come to the point that we full acknowledge our wickedness to be so great that no one but Jesus Christ can atone for it,
 - and that He can only do that by the shedding of His own blood for us.
 - This is real help, but it is just too much for our pride to take!
 - So we gravitate to anything—anything at all—that looks like it might provide at least some sort of security... at least for the moment...a least a temporary diversion.
 - If that thing happens to be Egypt, we rely upon Egypt.
 - And we are even willing to humble ourselves and make sacrifices to obtain Egypt's favour—we will pay tribute or do all sorts of things.
 - Anything is better than the humiliation that God requires.
 - And because we are so desperate to find **something** to latch on to,
 - We are not very careful to test the real strength of whatever we come to rely on...
 - We just sort of take whatever we can get and try to make the best of it.
 - We don't look very far to see if it is something that can really support us...
 - It is just whatever seems best to us at the time.

- We just want relief.
- Just think of some of the things we resort to!
 - A woman will gravitate to a man who is abusive—because he seems strong and secure; or she will gravitate to a man she thinks she can control.
 - A nation will gravitate to another nation even though history shows that nations do not prosper for more than a few centuries at best...
 - A person will turn to idols—false substitutes for the true God that they do not have to humble themselves before as much—
 - and they will find security in them—in made up gods!
 - A person will trust in just being good—that he is just trying to be honest and not hurt anyone and just live a simple life.
 - and he will trust that things will go well for him if he does this.
 - A scientist will embrace some absurd theory to account for his own existence—self-creation by a big bang followed by evolution.
 - He will actually choose to believe that, even though it is absurd.
 - Another will continually go into debt to find temporal happiness until the bills start to pile up...
 - while another will rely on the sound investments he has laid up.
 - Yet another will give himself to some cause—saving the environment or saving the seals—he makes a righteousness out of such things...
 - Others will find delight in very temporal escapes—drugs, alcohol, a one night stand—stuff they know is not lasting, but in which they find a way of temporary escape—a kind of security by diversion.
 - And of course such things often become very addicting because they want them all the time.
 - The list is really quite endless and it is all very foolish for anyone to rely on such things.
 - These are, if you will, our Egypts that we resort to for safety.

But let me tell you where the greatest folly of all is to be found!

- It lies with God's covenant people who have His promises and His covenants and warnings, and yet for all that, still turn to Egypt!
 - We trust in Egypt—whatever our Egypt is—even though we know good and well that God is going to humble Egypt!
 - That is like a going to a fortress for safety when you know that the fortress is going to be blown up!

- But my brothers and sisters, our most gracious Lord comes to us and warns us not to trust in Egypt.
 - That is what Isaiah 20 is all about!
 - It's a warning for you and me and all of God's covenant people not to trust in Egypt—whatever our Egypt may be!

I want you to see first of all that:

I. Our gracious Lord uses current events to warn us about the folly of trusting in Egypt.

A. The event described is the coming of Tartan to punish Ashdod.

1. Ashdod was a city of the Philistines. (It was just to the east of Judah).

- Ashdod was paying tribute to Assyria in 713 BC,
 - but Egypt had encouraged Ashdod to rebel and had promised to support them if they would.
 - Perhaps Egypt wanted to find out if the Assyrians would be frightened off if they knew that Egypt was backing up Ashdod...
 - but whatever the reason may have been,
 - Ashdod raised the flag of rebellion in 713 BC because of Egypt's promise,
 - but received no help from Egypt in 711 BC when king Sargon of Assyria sent the Tartan to subdue them.
 - The Tartan was the one who was the king's right hand man—the sort of position Joseph had in Egypt.
- But when Tartan came to Ashdod in 711,
 - Egypt did not lift a finger to help...
 - In fact, Ashdod's King Jaman fled to Egypt for refuge and was actually handed over to the Assyrians by Egypt!

2. Now such an event as this surely ought to have awakened all the people of Palestine to the reality that there was no safety in Egypt.

- And it especially ought to have awakened Judah.
- But as I say, when people are clinging desperately to something for security, they are very slow about letting it go...
 - I can only think about evolution—there is much that is fatal to the theory, and many scientists know this and admit this,
 - but this is where they have put all their trust and they refuse to let it go.

TRANS> Nevertheless,

B. God does this kind of thing for His people all the time—

1. As the One who works all things after the counsel of His will,
 - He brings about circumstances that expose the weakness of whatever we are trusting in so that we have no more excuse.
 - He shows us the weakness of the foolish things we have taken security in.
 - He sends judgements upon those objects of our trust to teach us not to trust in them
2. Consider some examples in more recent history:
 - About 100 years ago, when men were getting proud and claiming that they would bring in world peace, He sent two devastating world wars...and one of the bloodiest centuries in the history of the whole world.
 - When men began to boast in their technological advances and boasted that they could build a ship that even God could not sink, He sank the Titanic.
 - When they boasted that public education would produce model citizens by which a utopian society could be established,
 - He sent confusion and social unrest into our society.
 - And more recently when we have come to rest in our prosperity and many consider it a right to retire at 65 or younger,
 - He sends turbulence into our economy.
 - And always, there are a million personal failures—in parenting, in marriage, in business, in our policies and in our plans...
 - And most of all, there is the constant reality of death that we cannot escape.
 - Our bodies are going to return to dust and there is nothing we can do about it.
3. All of these things come ultimately from God's hand and they are designed to humble us and to show us that we cannot find security in anything outside of Him.
 - They show us that we are fools to trust in Egypt—whatever our Egypt is.
 - And we are even greater fools if we keep on trusting after God has shown us the weakness of what we have chosen.

TRANS> But we are often very slow learners!

- Instead of humbling ourselves and turning all the more to the LORD, we simply hope that our object of security will prove to be more reliable in future days...
- It is very difficult to tear us away from those things we have found security in.

- Circumstances are not enough, so I want you to see next how...

II. Our Gracious Lord makes His message clear to us through His messengers.

- He sends them to drive home the lesson that there is no safety in Egypt when we are too bone-headed to learn from circumstances.
- A. Verse 2 tells us that the Lord speaks, literally, “by the hand of Isaiah” at the time of the demise of Ashdod.
1. This phrase to “speak by the hand of” is unusual,
 - but it is found elsewhere in scripture.
 - It is used to refer to God’s bringing His messenger into a situation to make a difference...
 - Here, in our text, He works through the agency of Isaiah to get His message across to His people to bring a stop to their reliance on Egypt.
 - God’s people are often so slow to learn from the events of the day that they have to have things spelled out to them by God’s messengers...
 - telling them what should have been obvious all along...
 - telling them that there is no safety in Egypt or in whatever else they have come to put their trust in.
 2. And look what the LORD calls upon Isaiah to do!
 - He tells him to take off his sackcloth and his shoes.
 - As a prophet, or perhaps because he was mourning over all the troubles that had come (and were coming) upon God’s people, Isaiah was wearing the sackcloth—rough clothing...
 - but now he was to become even more abased.
 - Now he was to put off these clothes of mourning and go about naked and barefoot!
 - And he was to do this for three years!
 - I tend to agree with most of the commentators that it is unlikely that he was stark naked...
 - The language simply means that he was uncovered and we are told expressly that it was his sackcloth and shoes that he removed...
 - He had the appearance of one who had been taken as a prisoner by an enemy nation.

TRANS> Before we examine the meaning of this action which we will do in a moment,

3. I want you to consider for a moment the obedience of Isaiah...
 - You will notice that the LORD refers to him in verse 4 as “My servant Isaiah who has walked naked and barefoot for three years.”
 - You can imagine the ridicule that the prophet would have incurred—the mocking and the laughter!
 - I want you to notice that the LORD refers to Isaiah, specifically with reference to this action, as “My servant.”
 - The LORD knew that Isaiah had borne this reproach for Him—and He remembered it and regarded it.
 - This was not something Isaiah came up with on his own, but he bore this reproach because he was obeying the commandment of the Lord...
 - It was not some sort of self-imposed foolishness on his part—it was obedient faithfulness—and the LORD says “My servant Isaiah!”
 - What an encouragement!
 - So my brothers and sisters, do not be ashamed of the gospel!
 - When the people around you are trusting in other things, they will laugh at you when you confess the truth before them...
 - but don’t let that stop you!
 - The LORD calls you to speak the truth—He calls you to bear reproach for Him...
 - And when you do it in obedience to His command, be assured that He will recognise you as His servant even though men have rejected and scorned you!
 - Take the words of Jesus to heart:
 - Matthew 5:11-12: Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
 - You take your place among the number of His servants.

TRANS> But now

B. Let us see what the meaning of Isaiah’s nakedness was.

- You see that the meaning is given in verse 3 & 4...
 - and this is very important—because God does not give signs apart from giving an explanation of them...
 - And in this case, the explanation is rather surprising!

1. It would have not been all that surprising to learn that Isaiah was mimicking persons who were taken captive by the Assyrians...
 - That is what had just occurred.
 - No one was terribly surprised that Assyria had taken Ashdod, for Samaria and Damascus had already been taken...
 - but the LORD declares that Isaiah is mimicking Egyptians and Cushites who would be taken away as prisoners by Assyria!
 - Listen to what He says:
 - Isa 20:3-4: And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.
 - It was one thing to understand that Egypt might not keep its promises to assist, but it was quite another to think that Egyptians and Cushites should be dragged off as prisoners!
 - There was a sort of expectation that Egypt would always be there as a kind of counter-force against Assyria—
2. Who would have ever thought the Africans would be thus subdued?
 - a. This humiliation of Africa was something that happened ten years after the fall of Ashdod...
 - Ashdod fell in 711 BC,
 - and Egypt was defeated at the battle of El Tekeh in 701 BC,
 - just before Sennacherib came against Jerusalem and was defeated!
 - What a hard think it must have been for these proud Africans to be paraded along as naked prisoners, stripped of all their glory
 - The greater the height to which one is raised—the greater the fall!
 - b. It is often easy for us to see the folly of those who resort to something that is **really** temporary for security...
 - You know, the person who is relying on gambling, or the one who feels rich because he just got a new credit card, or the one who turns to drugs or alcohol or to a one night stand...
 - It's fairly easy for us to see that such measures are headed for trouble...
 - but Isaiah was not talking about Ashdod—he was talking about Egypt and Cush!

- He was talking about the failure of something that seemed like it was solid and lasting!
 - This is not the failure of a bad investment—this is the collapse of the whole economy!
 - This is not the subduing of Mexico, this is subduing of the United States.
- c. O brothers and sisters!
- You must see just how temporary all these things are that we trust in in the light of eternity!
 - What is that solid portfolio worth to you in a million years when you are spending eternity in heaven or hell?
 - What is that Egypt that you are trusting in that seems so strong and so secure to you in this world in the ages of eternity?
 - What security do you really have if you have never humbled yourself and turned to the LORD for His salvation?
 - What are you holding on to for your security and what is it going to amount to if you are not holding on the Christ?

TRANS> The LORD not only tells us that Egypt will fail those who trust in her...

III. The LORD also tells us what the outcome will be for those who trust in Egypt.

A. He tells us that they will be ashamed and afraid who have trusted in Egypt!

- Look at verse 5:
 - Isa 20:5: And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.
- 1. There is nothing quite so frightening as to see the very thing that you are trusting in fail—
 - to have entrusted yourself to a plane and to see that it is starting to fail...
 - All of the sudden your realise that you have no place to go, nothing to hang on to—
 - You must go down with the thing you have joined yourself to—it is too late to find another refuge.
 - You can't get on another plane—you are going to go down.
 - Verse 6 brings this out quite strongly when it says:

- Isaiah 20:6: And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?
 - This is the response of everyone in the region of Palestine...
 - The translations vary here—some have,
 - “the inhabitant of this territory,”
 - others “the inhabitant of this isle” or “of the coastland”
 - But the reference is to whole of the land of Palestine on the Mediterranean Sea.
 - This whole region that was relying on Egypt to resist Assyria will realise that they have no protection from Egypt.
 - How ashamed you are when you realise that you have been trusting in worthless things!
 - When you had comforted yourself with another loan to make everything feel okay and then the bills come due and you are over your head!
 - Then you are ashamed that you should have ever sought refuge in that credit card.
 - Now, everything is lost!
2. And of course my brothers and sisters, I am talking about a lot more than planes or credit cards and even Egyptians!
- These are illustrations...
 - I am talking about finding security in **anything** outside of Jesus Christ, God’s only provision for our salvation!
 - And if you are not trusting Him and serving him, you are relying on something frivolous.
 - There is no way around it...
 - You are talking comfort in things like planes and credit cards and Egypt.
 - Isaiah has told us before that those who have avoided His call to salvation will be utterly terrified in the day of Judgement such that they will want the rocks and the mountains to fall on them!
 - Psalm 73 says that the wicked will be utterly consumed with terrors...
 - What a terrible thing that—“to be utterly consumed with terrors!”
 - Solomon tells us what regrets the fool will have in that day...
 - He will say:

- Prov 5:12-13: "How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!
- Prov 6:15 says: "his calamity shall come suddenly; Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy."
- And how much worse are the warnings of the New Testament...
 - In 2 Thessalonians 1:7, we are told that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
 - 2 Thess 1:8-9: "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe.
 - All this for not obeying the gospel—for ignoring their need to come to Jesus Christ and taking refuge in frivolous things.
 - Jesus Himself tells us that He will speak the dreadful words to them—the most dreadful that they will ever hear when they come to them from His own glorious person:
 - Matthew 25:41: 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:
 - That is what **He** will say, and then it will be too late—forever.

B. God in His mercy tells us in advance what the day of judgement will look like for those who have found refuge outside of Jesus Christ.

1. He tells us because we are so foolish and silly that we would go on trusting in whatever we have found for security...
 - Even after we have believed, we foolishly turn to frivolous things like Egypt and forget that Jesus Christ is our only refuge.
 - We too, who know the Lord, have to have stiff warnings!
 - a. It is for this reason that Jesus pleads with His disciples in the sermon on the Mount,
 - Matthew 6:19-21: Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
 - Christian, why should you live as if the things of this present world are going to last forever!
 - No, your life is about the kingdom of God and about service to Him.

- b. And the Apostle Paul reasons with us in our folly:
 - Colossians 3:1-7: If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

- 2. These sorts of words of warning are effectual for the elect...
 - In other words, we receive them and we act on them!
 - They come to us in the power of the Holy Spirit and they turn us.
 - God used these actions and words of Isaiah to keep Israel from trusting in Egypt.
 - They were tempted to do so, but they heard the warnings and they responded to them with obedient faith.
 - And then, instead of being distressed and ashamed when Assyria came, they were comforted and able to glory in God's deliverance.
 - The Lord is so gracious to give us these words before it is too late for us to turn!

- C. Oh how important it is for all of you to hear!
 1. You must choose you this day whom you will serve!
 - Don't keep going back to your frivolous things!
 - Don't keep feeding at the Devil's table,
 - every bite you take destroys your soul—your love for Christ—the trust you might have had in Him.
 - Hunger and thirst for Him and His righteousness and you will be satisfied!
 - Feast at the devil's table and you will die!
 - I don't care how enticing or how secure the things of the Devil may appear to be to you now...
 - they will end in terror and disappointment!
 - Don't destroy your soul when there is a Saviour for you to turn to!

 2. What use is the thing you are trusting in going to be to you in a thousand years? in a million years? in a billion years?
 - a. I don't mean to say that is wrong for you try to make sound investments or to lock your doors at night or a thousand other such things...

- In fact, you ought to do these things...
 - You are not to be frivolous with your life or with all that God has given you...
 - but what I keep saying to you is that it is very wrong for you to find security in any of these things if you have not made peace with God.
 - That kind of security is a very frivolous and damnable security that will sink you to the lowest Hell...
 - I hate to see a man with a good job and good family and with good health who has no interest in the Saviour—
 - He is the man most to be pitted because he has not yet discovered how slender his security is!
 - He does not know the danger he is in.
 - He is much to be pitied!
 - It is not that he has these blessings that is the problem, but that he thinks all is well because he has them—
 - He is trusting in them when he desperately needs the Lord.
- b. So the question is, what is the foundation of your security?
- Is it Egypt?
 - Will everything be lost for you if Egypt fails?
 - Are you filled with terror at the thought of losing your retirement account? or losing your job? or losing your health?
 - And what are the choices you make?
 - At who's table are your feasting?
 - Is it the table of the Lord?
 - Are you laying up treasures in heaven, or is all your treasure invested in this world?
 - Where is your heart?
 - Where is your greatest concern?
 - Where is your attention?
- c. Oh how we need Jesus!
- There is so much evil that remains in us...
 - But He came to deliver us!
 - Whosoever believes in Him will not be disappointed!