

Sermon #56 — Isaiah Series

Title: **“WHAT SHALL ONE THEN ANSWER?”**

Text: Isaiah 14:29-32

Subject: *The Blessedness of God’s Church*

Date: Sunday Evening — July 22, 2018

Readings: *Merle Hart and Mark Henson*

Introduction:

You will find the title of my message in Isaiah 14:32. — **“WHAT SHALL ONE THEN ANSWER?”** My text will be **Isaiah 14:29-32**. This short paragraph is a prophecy of Israel’s victory over the Palestina, the land of the Philistines, Israel’s great and constant, unrelenting, enemy. It is also a prophecy of the great wealth of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. Though Judah was but a very small nation, Judah was God’s nation, God’s chosen, God’s choice people, under God’s constant care. — Let’s read Isaiah 14:29-32 together, and see what God says about his chosen, royal nation, his church.

(Isaiah 14:29-32) Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit *shall be* a fiery flying serpent. (30) And the firstborn of the poor

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shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. (31) Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, *art* dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none *shall be* alone in his appointed times. (32) What shall *one* then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

Isaiah here foretold how that the nations of the world would be astonished at the preservation and prosperity of Zion among such great and numerous enemies. And when they sent messengers to inquire about those things, the answer to be given was, — “The LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.”

Of course, you know that **Zion represents the church of God**. All who are born of God are spiritual Zion. All who trust Christ alone as Lord and Savior are the church of God. And in this world, though despised, persecuted, and abused, the church of God

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attracts the attention of men. **She is like the bush Moses saw...**

- **The bush burned with fire but was not consumed.** — And the church of God has been burned in the fires of bitter persecution since the days of Cain and Abel. Yet, she is not consumed, but only increased.
- **Though insignificant in itself, God was in the bush.** — And though we are weak, insignificant, useless things ourselves, the Lord God is in our midst. — We are the house and temple of God!
- **And God spoke out of that bush.** — Even so, God speaks to men and women today through the instrumentality of his church.

Our text speaks of men from the nations, the world around us, asking questions of God’s church and the answer to be given to those who ask (v. 32).

(Isaiah 14:32) What shall *one* then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath

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founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

Let me bring the text close to home. The men and women of this town, and many around the world, look at this little congregation with astonishment. Some are astonished at our existence. Others are astonished at our ministry. Wherever I go, I have curious people asking questions about us. **We are but an insignificant corner of God’s kingdom. But in God’s good providence we have attracted the attention of the world around us.**

- By the Distinctiveness of our Doctrine (2 Timothy 1:9).
- By the Singular Boldness of our Claims (Philippians 3:3)
- By the Greatness of our Privileges (2 Corinthians 6:17-18; Ephesians 1:3).
- By the Ministry God has Given Us Around the World (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

It is a good thing to have this attention from men. Whether they rejoice with us or oppose us, when men ask questions concerning us, God in his providence

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gives us opportunity to spread his truth in the earth. And we should always be ready to give an answer to those who ask (1 Peter 3:15).

CONFUSION AND CONTEMPT

1st — **Do you sometimes ask yourself why people ask so many questions about God’s church, why the people of this world talk so much about it and study it?** — I do. I am often asked things by people who have absolutely no interest in the things of God.

- What do you believe?
- Why are there so many churches?
- What do you do in your church?
- What makes you think you are right?
- What gives you the right to set in judgment over me?
- What gives you the right to condemn what I do?
- What don’t you...?
- Why do you...?
- What’s the difference between your church and others?

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God’s people have always had to deal with such things. When the Jews triumphed over the Philistines and later were delivered from the Babylonians, their enemies were astonished that such a small, weak nation could survive such great conflicts with far superior enemies. And their curiosity gave God’s people opportunity to glorify him. The same is true of us today.

Some inquire about God’s church with mere contempt. They see nothing great, glorious, or even appealing in the kingdom of God. They look upon us with contempt. Still, they are to be answered. Perhaps if they know more their contempt will evaporate (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

(2 Timothy 2:24-26) And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, (25) In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; (26) And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

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Others inquire about the things of God from nothing but curiosity. Many who come with curiosity are snared by grace. Zacchaeus came to see Jesus, who he was. But when Christ came to him, Zacchaeus went home justified, forgiven, and saved.

Illustration: *The Jogger in New Castle, Australia*

Then there are some who inquire of us because God has awakened in them a true interest in Christ (Song of Solomon 5:9). Like the wise men, they have seen his star and come to worship him, asking, “*Where is he?*”

(Song of Songs 5:1-16) I am come into my garden, my sister, *my* spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

(2) I sleep, but my heart waketh: *it is* the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*, Open to me,

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my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, *and* my locks with the drops of the night. (3) I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?

(4) My beloved put in his hand by the hole *of the door*, and my bowels were moved for him. (5) I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped *with* myrrh, and my fingers *with* sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. (6) I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, *and* was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. (7) The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. (8) I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I *am* sick of love.

(9) What *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, O thou fairest among women? What *is*

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thy beloved more than *another* beloved, that thou dost so charge us? (10) My beloved *is* white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. (11) His head *is as* the most fine gold, his locks *are* bushy, *and* black as a raven. (12) His eyes *are as the eyes* of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, *and* fitly set. (13) His cheeks *are* as a bed of spices, *as* sweet flowers: his lips *like* lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. (14) His hands *are as* gold rings set with the beryl: his belly *is as* bright ivory overlaid *with* sapphires. (15) His legs *are as* pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance *is* as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. (16) His mouth *is* most sweet: yea, he *is* altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Whatever the reason for their questions, it is impossible for people to be indifferent to the church of God. They will make inquiry of God’s saints. And when they do, we should be ready to answer them and give them a reason for our hope in Christ.

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(1 Peter 3:15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

QUESTIONS ASKED

2nd — **What are the questions people ask?** When the messengers of Babylon came to Hezekiah, they came to see everything. Like the Queen of Sheba they asked many questions. Though Hezekiah showed the Babylonian ambassadors too much, you and I can never do so. Let men ask what they will concerning the church of God, we will tell all.

What is the origin of God’s church? — Electing love and sovereign grace (Psalm 78:68-69; Romans 9:11-18).

(Psalm 78:68-69) But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. (69) And he built his sanctuary like high *palaces*, like the earth which he hath established forever.

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(Romans 9:11-18) (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) (12) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. (13) As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (14) What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. (15) For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (17) For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. (18) Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.

What is the history of God’s church? — “Glorious Things” (Psalm 87:1-7).

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(Psalm 87:1-7) His foundation *is* in the holy mountains. (2) The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (3) Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. (4) I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this *man* was born there. (5) And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. (6) The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, *that* this *man* was born there. Selah. (7) As well the singers as the players on instruments *shall be there*: all my springs *are* in thee.

Truly, our history is a history of glorious things God has wrought for us!

- Redemption!
- Providence!
- Grace!
- Preservation!
- Increase!

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Who is the head of God’s church? — Christ alone
(Psalm 99:1-2; Ephesians 1:22).

(Psalm 99:1-2) The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved. (2) The LORD *is* great in Zion; and he *is* high above all the people.

(Ephesians 1:22-23) And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, (23) Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Christ alone is the Head of his church.

- Not the Pope!
- Not the Pastor!
- Not the Deacons!
- Not the Elders!
- Not the People!

He makes the rules. He gives the orders. He supplies the needs.

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What is the charter of God’s church? — Freedom
(John 8:36; Galatians 4:26).

(Galatians 4:26) But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

(John 8:36) If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

- Freedom from Sin.
- Freedom from Satan.
- Free from the Fear of Death!
- Freedom from the World.
- Freedom from the Law.

(Galatians 5:1-4) Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

(2) Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. (3) For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. (4) Christ is become of no effect unto you,

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whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

What is the law of God's church?

- Holiness (Ezekiel 43:10-12) — The Gospel!

(Ezekiel 43:10-12) Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. (11) And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write *it* in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. (12) This *is* the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about *shall be* most holy. Behold, this *is* the law of the house.

- Faith (1 John 3:23).

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- Love (John 13:35; 2 Corinthians 5:14).
- The Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

(2 Timothy 3:16-17) All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

What is the treasure of God’s church? — “The unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).

- His Person.
- His Performance.
- His Position. — “*Joint-Heirs with Christ!*”
- His Promises.
- His Possessions.

What is the security of God’s church? — (Psalm 48:12-14).

(Psalm 48:12-14) Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. (13) Mark ye

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well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell *it* to the generation following. (14) For this God *is* our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide *even* unto death.

- The Purpose of God.
- The Purchase of Christ.
- The Promises of God.
- The Seal of the Spirit.

What is the destiny of God's church? —
(Ephesians 5:25-27).

(Ephesians 5:25-27) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

(Jude 1:24-25) Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless

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before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, (25) To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

The Son of God declares, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

William Carey, that great pioneer missionary, believing those very things, made this a rule of life — “Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God!” God give us grace to follow his example.

REASONS TO ANSWER

3rd — **Why should we answer those who inquire of us?** If you are like I am, you sometimes get tired of answering the questions of men. But when men ask us about the things of God, the Lord has opened a door for us. And we should give answer to those who ask.

- God may silence their objections.
- The Lord may just be pleased to save them.
- It will do us good to tell of God’s work.

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- It will glorify God for us to tell men what he has done, is doing, and shall hereafter do for his church.
- Our answers should always direct men not to us and our work, but to God and his work.

ANSWERS TO GIVE

4th — **What should we answer those who inquire of us?** Isaiah’s purpose here is precisely to show us how to answer inquirers. This is what we have to say to all who ask of us.

Our great God, the Triune Jehovah, is all in all in his church. — “*The LORD hath founded Zion.*” — Whatever we are, whatever we have, whatever we hope to be, “*the LORD hath done it*” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

We are, in ourselves, but a poor and sinful people.

- Our hope is in another — Christ.
- We flee to him for refuge.

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We trust our souls upon the foundation of all the saints of all ages which God himself has laid, and that foundation is Christ (Ephesians 2:13-22).

(Ephesians 2:1-22) And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

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(8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

(11) Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; (12) That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: (13) But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

(14) For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; (15) Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so*

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making peace; (16) And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (17) And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. (18) For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

(19) Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; (20) And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; (21) In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: (22) In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

APPLICATION

- If you are interested in your immortal soul, ask any saved sinner here — We will be happy to tell you what God has done for us.

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- Children of God, look for opportunity to answer the questions of men concerning Christ, his gospel and his kingdom (Song of Solomon 6:1-3).

(Song of Songs 6:1-3) Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? That we may seek him with thee. (2) My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. (3) I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

“Come and see the works of God!” (Psalm 66:5)

- Election
- Redemption
- Regeneration
- Resurrection

Come to Christ and you shall see! God help you to come, for Christ's sake!

(Isaiah 56:1-8) Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation *is*

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near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. (2) Blessed *is* the man *that* doeth this, and the son of man *that* layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. (3) Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I *am* a dry tree. (4) For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose *the things* that please me, and take hold of my covenant; (5) Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. (6) Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, everyone that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; (7) Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *shall be* accepted

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upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. (8) The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather *others* to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.

(Isaiah 33:20) Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle *that* shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken.

Amen.