

**Confrontation with Crisis:**  
**Hitting Rock Bottom**  
**Isaiah 20**

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**Text Introduction:** With the exception of a few Sundays here and there for special emphases, we are going to be in the book of Isaiah from now until the end of the year. We are considering this book from the general theme of “Crisis,” because it is a prophetic message from a time of crisis in Isaiah’s day, focused on the nation of Israel and more precisely, Judah. We are examining the *Confrontation* that comes from Crisis. Eventually, we are going to consider passages of *Comfort* in the midst of our Crisis. We are then going to consider some *Challenges* we face in the midst of crisis. Finally, in the month of December, we will isolate the *Christ* for our Crisis.

Isaiah 1:1 indicates that Isaiah preached these prophetic messages contained in the book during the reigns of Uzziah (also called Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Second Kings 15-20 gives us a reference point for the time of Isaiah’s prophecy. The years covered are 740 B.C. to at least 701 B.C. Some would say that there is evidence that Isaiah’s prophetic ministry lasted until nearly 680 B.C. We must remind ourselves that this time frame puts us in the midst of the divided kingdom (Israel in the North, Judah in the South). In fact, even though Isaiah’s prophecy is focused on Judah in the South, the fall of the Northern kingdom would have happened during his ministry. “Judah faces extinction at the hands of the cruel Assyrians. In this crucial hour of national emergency, God sends Isaiah—a unique man with an unpleasant message. The nation of Judah is rotten to the core and ripe for judgment. Her habitual sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, injustice and corruption have not escaped the notice of her holy God. His righteous wrath will soon fall upon king and commoner alike, that all might learn that the Lord Almighty cannot and will not be mocked.”<sup>1</sup>

Many commentators, on the whole of Isaiah, outline the messages of Isaiah around three major crises that happened during his lifetime. The first crisis is described in chapter 7. We considered that crisis last time. The message Isaiah spoke then is an example of spoken prophecy. God used Isaiah to speak a message to King Ahaz. The message is to depend upon God for victory. Isaiah prophesies that though enemies say they will invade, they will not. They must have faith in God’s message and presence (7:7-10). But, instead, Ahaz formed a treaty with the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser. This is an example of Judah’s continued disobedience to the message of God. Their continued disobedience leads to their ultimate fall.

The subject of our message today is the second crisis, which we read about in Isaiah 20.

**Text:** In the year that the chief commander, sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it—<sup>2</sup> during that time the LORD had spoken through Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, “Go, take off your sackcloth and remove the sandals from your feet,” and he did that, going stripped and barefoot—<sup>3</sup> the LORD said, “As my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot three years as a sign and omen against Egypt and Cush,<sup>4</sup> so the king of Assyria will lead the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old alike, stripped and barefoot, with bared buttocks—to Egypt’s shame.<sup>5</sup> Those who

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<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Walk Bible*, p. 809.

made Cush their hope and Egypt their boast will be dismayed and ashamed. <sup>6</sup> And the inhabitants of this coastland will say on that day, ‘Look, this is what has happened to those we relied on and fled to for help to rescue us from the king of Assyria! Now, how will we escape?’”

**Introduction:** Perhaps you have heard it said, “We are always in a crisis, just coming out of a crisis, or about to be in a crisis.” So life seems to be. And, this tests our faith or confronts our faith. That is why Isaiah is more than just a history lesson for us, but real-life, practical help for us as we deal with our own crises.

Sometimes that confrontation comes in the form of our “hitting rock bottom.”

Well, I don’t mind telling you that I’m doing something today that I didn’t think I would ever do. I probably didn’t exactly know this text existed 30 years ago when I first started preaching. I don’t know when I first really thought about this text more than just a cursory reading of it, but I certainly never imagined preaching from such an odd text.

Here is a strange prophecy indeed. Instead of a spoken prophecy, this chapter reveals an illustrative prophecy. Judah depends upon Egypt. Their trust is in Egypt rather than in God. Ashdod is a Philistine city that has vowed to rise in rebellion against Assyria. Egypt has vowed to support this rebellion. God has Isaiah preach without his robe for three years to indicate that Egypt will be stripped naked. The message is clear—don’t trust in what appears to be mighty Egypt, trust in Almighty God.

We must trust in God above all other things in our lives. We, like Judah, trust in people and things. God desires that we trust in Him. Our refusal to do that is going to eventually lead us to hit rock bottom.

### **A Strange Sermon**

There is no way to deny that this is a strange sermon. But, it is a vivid picture, not a vulgar picture. Think about any picture that you have ever seen of prisoners of war being led off to captivity—stripped, skinny, and shackled—all signaling the hopelessness of their situation. And accompanying the spoken message, God called Isaiah to give them a sermon in sign—stripped of his robe as he spoke the message.

### **A Sign to . . .**

- **Shock**

Shocking messages stay with us. Years ago, at my former church, we had a visited evangelist for a revival. He preached a message about the committed Christian, the carnal Christian, and the non-Christian. As he brought his message to a close, he produced three cards. He took what seemed like forever to explain that during the invitation, he was asking every single person to get out of their seat and come to the front and simply pick up the card that best identified their spiritual condition. He kept saying, “In just a moment, I am going to ask you to come.” Now, I was having all kind of thoughts at that time. He’s not really going to do this. He said “I’m going to count to three and then you are going to come. One, two...” He paused and said, “No, I’m not going to really ask you to do that, because I don’t have to, because in your mind, you have already decided which card you would have had to pick.” You could feel the collective sigh released from the congregation. It was a shocking conclusion to a sermon, and I have never forgotten that sermon.

- **Scare**

The temptation to disobey God ought to scare us.

- **Show Source of Trust**

Just as Isaiah's spoken message forced Judah to face the source of their true trust, this illustrative message does the same.

- **Save**

But, the real point is to save Judah. God will go to any length to save you from the penalty of sin. Doubt that? Just look to the cross!

### **So What?**

- 1. Hitting rock bottom is to be avoided.**

You don't have to hit rock bottom. God doesn't want you to hit rock bottom. You don't want to deal with the consequences of sin. Remember that worn saying: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you far more than you are willing to pay."

- 2. The only way to avoid hitting rock bottom is to trust God.**

- 3. If you find yourself at rock bottom, know that God is there.**

Tony Evans said,

"Sometimes God allows us to hit rock bottom so that we will learn that He is the Rock at the Bottom."

Another way to say that might be, "If you find yourself at rock bottom, look up!"

### **A Little New Testament . . .**

Remember those words, "Now, how will we escape?" Those words show up in the New Testament with one extra phrase. Listen to Hebrews 2:1-3.

For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away. <sup>2</sup>For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, <sup>3</sup>how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:1-3