

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 33:1-24

Topic

The LORD tells His people that they possess in Him incredible spiritual treasure

Title

“To What Do I Owe The Treasure?”

In the 1960s, protest songs were plentiful

🎵 The Plastic Ono Band charted with *All We are Saying is Give Peace a Chance*.

🎵 Barry McGuire - *Eve of Destruction*.

🎵 Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young - *Ohio* (as in “four [shot] dead in Ohio” at the Kent State protest).

People are always surprised to learn that *Last Train to Clarksville* is a protest song. Micky Dolenz, the last surviving *Monkee*, explained, “It’s an anti-war song. It’s about a guy going to Clarksville, Tennessee, which is an army base if I’m not mistaken. He’s obviously been drafted and he says to his girlfriend, ‘I don’t know if I’m ever coming home.’ ”

Then there was 1969s *One Tin Soldier*. It describes a fictional mountain kingdom who possess a great treasure. The residents of the valley become envious of this treasure, and intend to claim it for themselves, suspecting it may be gold. The kingdom offers to share it. The people of the valley proceed to invade the kingdom and kill everyone in order to seize the treasure.

*Now they stood beside the treasure
On the mountain, dark and red
Turned the stone and looked beneath it
"Peace on Earth" was all it said*

We see something like this in verse six, where we read, "the Fear of the Lord is His treasure."

The Assyrian army besieged God's people. They hoped to enrich themselves with Temple treasures, slaves, and other spoils.

Surveying these verses we see that the LORD's concept of treasure is very different from the world's. He treasures things like "salvation," "justice," "righteousness," "wisdom," "knowledge," and forgiveness. In the end, God Himself is the treasure.

The LORD's treasure isn't buried, or hidden. It isn't guarded by booby traps. There are no riddles to solve. Only one thing, one simple thing, one obvious thing, is necessary: **The fear of the LORD.**

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Fear Of The Lord Is Nothing For You To Be Afraid Of**, and **#2 Fearfulness Of The Lord Is Something For You To Be Appreciative Of.**

#1 - Fear Of The Lord Is Nothing For You To Be Afraid Of (v1-13)

What is the fear of the Lord?

Definitions and descriptions abound. Philosophically, I've settled on something A.W. Tozer wrote: *"The greatness of God rouses fear within us, but His goodness encourages us not to be afraid of Him. To fear and not be afraid - that is the paradox of faith."*

I'm in good company in saying that the fear of the Lord is nothing to be afraid of.

Isa 33:1 Woe to you who plunder, though you *have not been* plundered; And you who deal treacherously, though they have not dealt treacherously with you! When you cease plundering, You will be plundered; When you make an end of dealing treacherously, They will deal treacherously with you.

The treacherous plunderer was the nation of Assyria. God used them to discipline His people. Internal treachery and the rise of Babylon as the next world power would end their domination.

Isa 33:2 O LORD, be gracious to us; We have waited for You. Be their arm every morning, Our salvation also in the time of trouble.

Each morning brought renewed peril to the besieged Jews. I'm glad that God's mercies in my life are "new every morning." Last night the Lord remained awake while I slept. I woke up to the day He has made. I need to depend upon His "arm," His strength, since I have none of my own.

"O LORD, be gracious to us" is the prayer of the Jews inside the walls of Jerusalem. The rest of the verse is a prayer of Isaiah's for the people.

The Jews had been brought low and were finally looking up to the LORD for His help.

Isa 33:3 At the noise of the tumult the people shall flee; When You lift Yourself up, the nations shall be scattered;

The LORD is depicted as coming and scattering the nations, plural. We are thus looking to the far future, to the Time of Jacob's Trouble, commonly called the Great Tribulation.

Isa 33:4 And Your plunder shall be gathered *Like* the gathering of the caterpillar; As the running to and fro of locusts, He shall run upon them.

One morning, 185,000 Assyrians would not awaken. In the night the Angel of the Lord would kill them. Their defeat and despoiling would be like when locusts or caterpillars destroy entire crops, leaving nothing.

Isa 33:5 The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.

He reigns! This is the Millennial Kingdom that follows the Great Tribulation. It lasts millie-annum, one-thousand years. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem.

Isa 33:6 Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, *And* the strength of salvation; The fear of the LORD *is* His treasure.

Isaiah frequently gives us glimpses of the thousand year Kingdom. "Wisdom," "knowledge," and "salvation" will be enforced to stabilize the earth.

We need still to convert the *philosophical* into the *practical*. *How should we then live?* in "the fear of the Lord?"

You have new life in Jesus. You are a new creation. If you are in Christ, *He is in you*. You are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. He was gifted to the Church Age believers on the Day of Pentecost described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts. The apostle Paul explained it to the church in Colossae, saying, "For ages and ages this message was kept secret from everyone, but now it has been explained to God's people. And the mystery is that **Christ lives in you**, and He is your hope of sharing in God's glory" (1:26-27 CEV).

Sam Storms wrote, "God doesn't simply give us His Spirit, He gives the Spirit *into* us. Not just *to* us, but by an act of what can only be called intimate impartation His Spirit resides within to encourage, energize, and enable. The Spirit isn't just here, **He's inside.**"

What does this have to do with fear? *Plenty!*

I've heard, and probably said myself, things like, "If Jesus were to come right now, would you want to be caught watching this movie, or going to this party, or doing something that would make you ashamed? But that supposes that Jesus is not always with you. He is, and by apprehending that He is, I will walk with Him obediently, joyfully, fearing to in any way offend Him; desiring rather to please Him.

The fear of the Lord is the apprehension that Jesus is with me at all times.

Isa 33:7 Surely their valiant ones shall cry outside, The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly.

Isa 33:8 The highways lie waste, The traveling man ceases. He has broken the covenant, He has despised the cities, He regards no man.

Isa 33:9 The earth mourns *and* languishes, Lebanon is shamed *and* shriveled; Sharon is like a wilderness, And Bashan and Carmel shake off *their* fruits.'

That doesn't sound very 'millennial,' does it? It is not uncommon for God's prophets to make abrupt changes of subject. Here Isaiah comes back from the far future to discuss what had led up to the Assyrian's being camped around Jerusalem.

Elsewhere we learn that the Jews had sent a peace envoy to the Assyrians. The Assyrians had no intention of honoring any such agreements.

Isa 33:10 "Now I will rise," says the LORD; "Now I will be exalted, Now I will lift Myself up.

"Now," "now," "now." Lots of movies have that tense scene where the hero waits... And waits... And waits until the last second. Then there was Groot in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 1*. In the prison, Rocket was telling the heroes his plan. One thing he needed was a quarnox battery; but he warned, "You definitely want to get that last." Groot was in the background of the scene, getting the battery first.

We're like Groot when it comes to God's timing. We want to skip ahead to the end. The LORD's plan & its timing are always perfect.

Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. It looked as though they would destroy Judah. But at that moment, the LORD addressed them. He would "rise" against them, be "exalted" in victory. The Assyrians had forgotten the LORD was using them. They went too far. He would eliminate their threat and "lift Himself up" to deal directly with Judah.

Isa 33:11 You shall conceive chaff, You shall bring forth stubble; Your breath, as fire, shall devour you.

Isa 33:12 And the people shall be *like* the burnings of lime; *Like* thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire.

The Assyrians are compared to extremely flammable "chaff," "stubble," and "thorns." Their malice and arrogance was like fire coming from their mouths. We call people hot heads. They were fire breathers. Sure, it was the Angel of the Lord who killed 185,000 of them in one night. Prior to that, however, their spokesman had mocked God's people. (If you are a *Lord of the Rings Fan*, think the Mouthpiece of Sauron). Their arrogance brought defeat upon themselves.

Isa 33:13 Hear, you *who are* afar off, what I have done; And you *who are* near, acknowledge My might."

Whether it's the past siege of Assyria, or the future Time of Jacob's Trouble, the LORD will put down Israel's enemies.

The fear of the Lord isn't just one thing, with one definition. One thing it is, and that is the constant apprehension that He is dwelling in you and, thereby, Jesus is always with you.

#2 - Fearfulness Of The Lord Is Something For You To Be Appreciative Of (v14-24)

"Fearfulness" is prominent in the remaining verses. The word so translated means to *shudder* (tremble). It is only used four times in the Bible (including this usage). Another is Daniel 10:11. An angel comes to Daniel and we read, "While he was speaking this word to me, I stood **trembling**."

More than a few Bible characters trembled in the presence of the Lord or of one of His messenger angels. The apostle John famously fell down seeking to worship an angel.

Fearfulness is simultaneously seeing God's holiness and my sinfulness. Not only at the moment of salvation. It ought to continue and deepen over the course of your Christian walk.

The apostle Paul's soliloquy in Romans 7 is classic: *"For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but I cannot carry it out. For I don't do the good I want to do, but instead do the evil that I don't want to do"* (7:18-19 ISV).

Fearfulness is necessary & good.

It brings you to apprehend, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24-25).

Sinful as you are, the Lord does not condemn you. He has given you His Spirit so you can conquer sin, conquer your flesh.

Isa 33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

The Jews saw what the Angel of the LORD did to the Assyrian army and, in that moment, understood that they were "hypocrites" who deserved greater judgment

seeing as they were the people of God. As A.W. Tozer noted, just as they saw the *greatness* of God, they saw the *goodness* of God in verse fifteen:

Isa 33:15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:

There are in verse fifteen at least five results of fearfulness. I suggest you number them, then meditate on each one of them. Ask the Lord, for example, "Have I shut my eyes from seeing evil?" It's between you and Jesus.

Isa 33:16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense *will be* the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water *will be* sure.

Another version of the Bible translates this, "he will dwell on the heights; his refuge will be the rocky fortresses, his food provided, his water assured" (HCSB). Many premillennial commentators think Isaiah was prophesying of the Jews in the Holy Land after the antichrist defiles their Temple. Jesus tells them to get out of Dodge (Matthew 24). Further, it is believed that this godly remnant will find refuge in the ancient rock-hewn cliff city of Petra. The remnant will survive there, protected by God, for three and a half years.

Isa 33:17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.

"The Jewish people who survive the Tribulation will see their King, and they will see their land as it stretches far into the distance. For the first time, Israel will receive all of the land that was promised to the patriarchs" (Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum).

Isa 33:18 Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the [siege] towers?" These are officers in Assyria:

- "Scribe," i.e., Secretary of State.
- "He who weighs," i.e., paymaster.
- "He who counts the siege towers," i.e., those who did recon on the enemy's defenses.

The "terror" of such enemies will be no more

Isa 33:19 You will not see a fierce people, A people of obscure speech, beyond perception, Of a stammering tongue *that you* cannot understand.

To be taken captive by those whose language they could not comprehend was an indictment that they had refused to listen to the LORD.

Isa 33:20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, A tabernacle *that* will not be taken down; Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, Nor will any of its cords be broken.

The nation of Israel, in the future Millennium, will finally takes its rightful place as the chief among the nations. Tenderly, lovingly, joyfully, the Jewish people will be "home."

Isa 33:21 But there the majestic LORD *will be* for us A place of broad rivers *and* streams, In which no galley with oars will sail, Nor majestic ships pass by

Rivers enriched the life of such great cities as Nineveh and Babylon. They also gave access to their enemies. Babylon, you will remember, was conquered when the Medo-Persians stopped the flow of the river, and entered under the wall.

Jerusalem under the LORD's rule will have all the glory of such cities (and far more!) but none of their vulnerability.

Isa 33:22 (For the LORD *is* our Judge, The LORD *is* our Lawgiver, The LORD *is* our King; He will save us);

The Jews rarely acknowledged God in these roles. The obvious example is in God's role as King. At one point in their history, they demanded a king over them (First Samuel 8). It grieved the LORD, but He gave them what they wanted. Bad idea from the jump.

Captain Kirk has to be in the top ten, maybe top five, maybe #1, of human heroes. He once said of us, "*We prefer to help ourselves. We make mistakes, but we're human - and maybe that's the word that best explains us.*"

We like to celebrate the indomitable human spirit, that cannot be broken but clings to freedom at great cost. Disembowel me and I will cry out, "Freedom!"

We celebrate it, that is, until we accuse God of inactivity. "Where is the promise of His coming?" Well, we can't have it both ways. We can't demand our freedom from God

to sin **and** demand He put an end to sin. God's plan to redeem us is on track and will succeed. It's taking longer than we like is our fault. In fact, the apostle Peter says we can "hasten it," speed it up, by obeying God (Second Peter 3:12).

Isa 33:23 Your tackle is loosed, They could not strengthen their mast, They could not spread the sail. Then the prey of great plunder is divided; The lame take the prey.

Assyria's defeat will be like a shipwreck, after which the many spoils on the ship will be divided among the Israelites. There will be so much plunder that plenty will be left by the time even "lame" people hobble out there to the field of slaughter. (The Hebrew word is *lamo*, as in, "You're a lamo!"). (Not really!).

Isa 33:24 And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick"; The people who dwell in it *will be forgiven their iniquity.*

One of the commentaries expanded on this:

The ministry of the King as a healer will be seen throughout the age, so that sickness and even death, except as a penal measure in dealing with overt sin, will be removed. Accompanying this ministry will be the healing of all deformity at the inception of the Millennium.¹

Phillip Yancey wrote, *"The proof of spiritual maturity is not how pure you are but awareness of your impurity. That very awareness opens the door to grace."*

The awareness he is talking about is what we saw earlier in the apostle Paul. He was still a "wretched man," but one upon whom there is no condemnation from the Lord.

A danger of fearfulness is that you remain wretched. Don't. Instead, learn this from Martin Luther:

When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares we deserve death and Hell, we ought to speak thus: "I admit that I deserve death and Hell.

What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where He is, there I shall be also."

¹Isa. 33:24; Jer. 30:17; Ezek. 34:16; Isa. 29:17-19; 35:3-6; 61:1-2; Jer. 31:8; Mic. 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:19

We should never think lightly of sin; or sin so that grace will abound. But we must be certain we leave the door of grace unlocked and wide open.