

## Characteristics of a Faithful Remnant

Isaiah 8:9-9:7

September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

Big idea: God's remnant people have a distinct confidence in God's presence, hope in hardships, source of authority, and optimism about the future.

Plug for helping college students – note from Jason and Monica Broadway in Washington

Intro

Those who follow Christ often find themselves as strangers within their own lands. Peter spoke to this when he told his readers:

**1 Peter 2:11** Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Rod Dreher has argued for an intentional withdrawal and creation of separate Christian institutions to preserve a remnant of Christianity in the face of increased opposition. An approach he calls the *Benedict Option* after a 6<sup>th</sup> century monk who withdrew from society and gathered others around him. While the posture is overly defensive and pessimistic and is in danger of minimizing outreach and missions, you can see the appeal of the argument and much has been written in Christian circles over the past 10 years of the pros and cons of this approach.

Isaiah found himself describing a remnant of people who remained faithful to the Lord among a larger community that did not even though they identified as Jewish. He describes four characteristics of this faithful remnant. These characteristics describe a faithful remnant today of believers in a dominant culture that is increasingly ambivalent or hostile to the faith.

### 1. They **fear** different things (8:9-12)

- a. The Assyrians were looming over the nations north of Judah, including Syria and Israel. Some of the people were wanting to place their trust in an alliance with those nations to protect them rather than trusting in God to protect them.
  - i. In v. 6 He compares that to rejecting the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, a spring in Jerusalem, for these others kings (Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel). But instead what will happen is the Assyrians will flood over the land like the mighty Euphrates river in Assyria and the waters will sweep away Syria and Israel and come right up to the neck of Judah (v. 8).
- b. Eventually, in the long run, the plans of these foreign nations would be thwarted even if they initially have victory.
  - i. The reason for this confidence is Immanuel, God with us. (v. 10)
- c. It's because of this hope that Isaiah was instructed not to respond in fear like the people around him, the other Israelites who are terrified and wanting to place their trust in the northern kingdom of Israel and Syria.
  - i. Don't say "it's a conspiracy!" to all the things they call a conspiracy.
  - ii. Don't fear what they fear.
- d. It's easy to be fearful in every age and in every nation. Are Christians distinct or do we fear the exact same things at the exact same levels in the exact same ways?
  - i. Chapman University survey in 2018 of the top 10 fears for Americans

1. #1 – corruption of government officials – has stayed consistent at #1 across administration changes
  2. 5 of the top 10 were environmental – fears about pollution of the water and air and climate change
  3. 2 of the top 10 were financial – not having enough money for the future, especially for high medical bills.
- ii. We don't need to spend time questioning whether those are legitimate fears. You could argue that the people in Judah could legitimately fear the Assyrians running over them. We can always find something to fear and it becomes life dominating.
    1. Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all others thoughts are drained. - Arthur Somers Roche
  - iii. What if we said instead, "I don't know how this next election will turn out. . . or this international crisis . . . or this judicial ruling . . . but God is trustworthy and I will trust in Him."
    1. That's where the passage goes next.
2. They respond to **God** in different ways (8:13-15)
    - a. Regard the Lord as holy
      - i. He IS holy – ch 6 proclaimed that loud and clear – we are to REGARD Him as holy.
      - ii. We are to view Him as He really is.
      - iii. Ray Ortlund – Dare to treat God as God. Don't respond to life in a way that makes God look helpless and weak and worthless.
    - b. He shall be your fear and dread
      - i. **Matthew 10:28** "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
    - c. He will either be our sanctuary or a stone that we trip over. (v. 14)
      - i. If we regard Him as holy, we remember Him even when life is scary, life becomes less scary and we experience His peace.
      - ii. When we disregard Him or ignore Him, He isn't going away. We collide with Him and trip over Him.
      - iii. Motyer - It is as if a rock were put across a road to block the traveler from danger but, in carelessness or scorn, he refuses the warning and stumbles to his death. ... the same God in his unchanging nature is both sanctuary and snare; it depends on how people respond to his holiness.
      - iv. **Matthew 21:44** "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."
  3. They have a different source of **authority** (8:16-20)
    - a. This remnant people holds to God's Word and preserves it for a later generation (vv. 16-17)
    - b. In contrast to the other people who are consulting mediums and spiritists
      - i. The equivalents of going to horoscopes, astrologers, palm readers, psychics, or those who claim to speak with the dead – these are not for God's people to listen to.

- c. "Should not a people consult their God?" Isaiah asks in v. 19.
  - i. That tells us this isn't an indictment on the pagan nations around Judah, this is an indictment of those who claim to follow the God of Israel and yet when life gets hard they aren't going to Him they are going to someone who claims to talk to dead people.
  - ii. It describes them as whispering and muttering, because there was a belief in the ancient near east that the dead spoke in quiet, birdlike little mutterings.
    - 1. Isaiah's response thunders...
- d. "To the law and to the testimony!"
  - i. That's what the remnant people listen to, that's where they go for their authoritative explanation of life.
  - ii. God's instructions about life aren't hidden and mysterious. They don't require secret knowledge of how to read tea leaves or consult with the dead. Open it and read – its accessible to all!
- e. This is one of the 5 foundational beliefs of the Protestant reformation – Sola Scriptura
  - i. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.
  - ii. Scripture alone is the highest and final authority.
    - 1. Not a decree from the church, another book, or the emperor or king.
      - a. If you say, "well, yeah, that's obvious" – that's because you're a product of the Reformation and you don't realize it!
  - iii. The kings of Israel were supposed to write their own copy of God's word
    - 1. **Deuteronomy 17:18-19** "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes
    - 2. Write down his own copy of the law of God. May refer to the book of Deuteronomy or a portion of it or the Bible to this point. This was not to be merely set on a shelf but it was to be read all the days of his life.
    - 3. Why this command? He was to know that there was an authority over Him. The authority belongs to God. God has authority because He is the creator and owner of everything. And God communicates to us through the Bible.
  - iv. Joshua is to meditate on God's law day and night, carefully doing everything commanded in it. (Joshua 1:7-8). Likewise Psalm 1:2 says the righteous man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.
    - 1. This is the expectation throughout scripture and the high view held by God's people.
  - v. That began to change in the period before the reformation. It wasn't exactly that the church had a low view of scripture. But they viewed it as something that couldn't be handled by common people. They would distort it. It needed to be interpreted by the church leadership. It was believed that the common people were incapable of accurately understanding it so it was kept out of their hands and kept out of their languages. It was only available in Latin, a language not spoken by any of the common people any more, only the educated church elites.

1. For the reformers, the goal was not to get the Bible in the hands of the king, but into the hands of the commoner.
  - vi. In about 1380 John Wycliffe in England began to see the problems with this. He was serving in Oxford at a prestigious post at the university when he began to teach the Bible, not the pope, was the supreme source of spiritual authority (Reeves). He was effectively exiled to a small English village where he continued to write. He translated the Bible in English so the people could read it. The language was choppy, it was translated from Latin rather than going back to the original Hebrew and Greek, and it needed to be hand copied but it was something. He died a few years after completing his translation. After his death he was condemned as a heretic for these actions and his bones were dug up and burned. But the Bible remained and groups began to gather and read the Bible (really scraps of the Bible because paper was still expensive and the printing press was still not in use).
  - vii. 140 years later in the 1520's Martin Luther used part of his time in hiding to translate the Greek New Testament into German. His translation became so prolifically read it transformed the German language.
  - viii. At about the same time as Luther, William Tyndale produced a much improved copy of the New Testament in English. Where Wycliffe's copy relied on the Latin version, Tyndale went back to the Greek and produced a much more readable and accurate translation. By now the printing press had taken off so it could be printed rather than hand copied and mass distributed.
    1. Tyndale famously said to one scholar who disagreed with him, "I will cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of Scripture than you!"
  - ix. The renewed emphasis on the clarity of the gospel all rest upon this reality – the Word is the authority and people could read it for themselves.
    1. Once the scripture was in the hands of the people in a language they could understand, the reformation could not be stamped out.
  - x. Ulrich Zwingli discovered this truth in Switzerland as a contemporary of Luther. Already a priest, he had never read the Bible himself. But he found a copy of it in Greek and devoured it. He ended up memorizing the entire New Testament in Greek (think about that, Awana kids!). Zwingli became convinced that the people needed to hear the Word of God simply explained to them. He believed he could preach the Word to all because it could be understood by all, allowed him to proceed with patience in transforming the church. He could teach methodically, clearly through scripture and then people would see the need for change rather than for it to be imposed from above.
  - xi. This is our heritage. It's why I'm encouraging you over these three months to read Isaiah yourself.
    1. You don't need me as your mediator. You can hear from God directly in the pages of His Word.
4. Their hope is in the **Messiah** (8:21-9:7)
    - a. Verses 21-22 return to the description of the way in which they stumble over Him.
      - i. They misunderstand and misinterpret their situation and so they become bitter rather than repentant when God allows the people to be taken into exile.

1. They curse their king and their God, even though they have been stiff arming God the whole time, doing the opposite of this remnant people.
- ii. Sounds like CS Lewis describing his perspective before coming to Christ.
  1. CS Lewis - I was at that time living like many atheists; in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing.
  2. Julie Exline, a psychologist at Case Western Reserve University and the lead author of 2011 study on people who report they are angry at God. She was surprised at the counterintuitive finds: Those who reported no belief in God reported more grudges toward Him than believers.
  3. Emotional atheism – pain and suffering lead often lead people away from God because they feel like He has let them down or not held up His end of the bargain – so they are both angry at Him and convinced He doesn't exist, yet their very anger points to His existence. You can't be angry at a unicorn – they don't exist.
  4. Joe Carter - I'm beginning to suspect that emotional atheism is far more common than many Christians realize. We need a new apologetic approach that takes into account that the ordinary pain and sufferings of life leads more people away from God than a library full of anti-theist books. Focusing solely on the [intellectual arguments] may blind us to the anger and suffering that is adding new nonbelievers to their ranks
  5. That's why a book like *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* is so important. It helps us see that our lament, our complaints, can drive us to God instead of away from God.
- b. That leads us to the best known portion of this passage, immortalized in Handel's Messiah in which at Christmas we sing about the wonderful! Counselor! Mighty God, Everlasting Father!
  - i. Notice the contrast that has preceded it. This beautiful description of the Messiah doesn't materialize out of thin air. The context is of a remnant people who are trusting in God and waiting for His Messiah, while their countrymen are distressed, gloomy, raging at God, consulting with mediums and spiritists.
- c. Life seemed dark, but they look ahead to the Messiah.
- d. The Messiah will be the great ***light*** to those in ***darkness***. (9:1-2)
  - i. He would shine a light on a dark land – applied in Mathew 4 to Jesus as He began His ministry in the northern territories that were first carried away into exile.
- e. The Messiah will be the great ***liberator*** to those who are ***oppressed***. (9:3-5)
  - i. Many live today in places where they are oppressed by their own government or an outside force.
  - ii. As we mentioned, that was the case for the Israelites with the invading Assyrians when Isaiah prophesied. That was also the case for the Israelites 700 years later when Jesus was born.
    1. Jesus didn't immediately free them from political oppression.
- iii. Consider the promises in these verses
  1. V. 3 – God will multiply the nation, just as He promised to Abraham that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky
  2. V. 3 – He will increase their gladness
    - a. The gladness will be like the farmer with harvest or the soldier after war

3. V. 4-5 – For (notice the connection) – this explains the gladness
    - a. They will be delivered from their oppressors – the yoke will be taken off, the boot used for war and the cloak rolled in blood will be burned because they aren't needed for war anymore – using vivid word pictures
  - iv. Jesus said he came in fulfillment of these promises in Isaiah.
    1. Certainly people are still oppressed and experiencing injustice today around the world. One day Jesus will roll all of that back and bring perfect justice.
    2. But He does now offer freedom from sin
  - f. The Messiah will be the great Lord who rules with wisdom and righteousness. (9:6-7)
    - i. The expectation continues to building in these verses through the use of “for”
    - ii. Isaiah said the child will be born “to us.”
    - iii. The government will rest on His shoulders
    - iv. Four names or titles given for this Son
      1. Wonderful counselor – speaks to his wisdom. Unlike the foolish King Ahaz leading the nation to ruin, this Son would be wise.
      2. Mighty God – Used in Isaiah 10 very clearly of the Lord, the God of Israel
        - a. **Isaiah 10:20-21** Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.
      3. Eternal Father – may wonder if this refers to the Son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> member of the Trinity, why is He called “father” here?
        - a. Father is used in this context of a benevolent protector king. The emphasis is on His care for His people and His eternity, not His relationship within the Trinity.
    - v. Prince of Peace – He is the ruler that will bring peace
      1. Don't sanitize it and make it merely a spiritual peace, although that is true.
      2. **Romans 5:1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
      3. There is real, tangible hope to people displaced by war that one day Jesus, the prince of peace, will bring peace.
      4. There will be no end to the increase of His government or peace.
5. How can we live as a faithful remnant?
- a. It seems likely that Christians will be increasingly marginalized
    - i. Duke University this week prohibited Young Life, a Christian group, from becoming an official campus organization because their policy prohibited someone who practiced a homosexual lifestyle from serving in leadership, in keeping with Biblical principles.
    - ii. A similar thing happened 2 years ago at the University of Iowa but then a federal judge ruled the university was in the wrong to do so.

- iii. The trend is concerning but we don't want to be overly pessimistic about how things will play out in the years to come.
- b. But these four characteristics of a faithful remnant can shape our response with way:
  - i. Don't live by fear
  - ii. Regard God as holy
  - iii. Live by His Word as your authority
  - iv. Place your hope in the Messiah



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- c. The Messiah will be the great Lord who rules with **wisdom** and **righteousness**. (9:6-7)

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