

Matt Kruse
NBC – AM Service
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“To The Scriptures!”
Series: *The Church, The Home, & The School*

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 8, Isaiah chapter 8.

We are starting this morning a short series on Christian Education. As elders we have found it helpful to take a couple of weeks between our longer series on books of the Bible to address a current area of concern from the Scriptures. So, over the last few years we have looked at death, dying, & eternity, the topic of Marriage, the marks of a Biblical Church, and sacrifice that is worth making. With each of these topics we have sought to hear from the Lord by looking to specific passages which deal with those issues. And that is what we will do over the next couple of weeks as we consider this topic of Christian education.

I have had the great privilege of being raised and discipled in formal Christian education from Kindergarten through the fulfillment of my Master’s degree. For 21 consecutive school years I had the distinct joy of sitting under some of the choicest servants of our Lord as they taught me everything from addition and multiplication to the core elements of God’s universe to the most important principles of studying the Bible. My wife has also been blessed by being the product of Christian schooling from her 1st Grade year all the way through her college degree. And when we were looking for a place to land and serve we were blessed beyond measure to land in a church which valued the Christian school ministry and had one that our children could attend. I have told you before and will say it many more times – the impact of NBCS upon our children constantly astounds me – we are so grateful as parents for the role it plays in helping us to disciple our children in the ways of our Savior.

I say all of that to let you know that I have deep affection for and strong commitment to the Christian School ministry in general, and to NBCS in particular. Christian education has been a major part of my life, and God has used that experience and those teachers to shape me in so many ways, and to shape my family in so many ways. So, there is my bias laid out there on the table for you right at the get go. Along with that let me say that I love being a part of a church family that views the choice about a child’s education as a matter of Christian liberty. As a body we have refused to say more than God’s Word does about this, and even though we have a Christian school as part of our ministry, we have fought hard to not become a church family which only accepts and welcomes those who send their kids to Christian school. We recognize that each model of formal education – the public school, the Christian school, and the home school – each have their strengths and weaknesses, and we try to be a church family which supports parents in whatever choice they make. This is good and right, and I praise God for it. It

gives me great joy to hear homeschool families rejoice in a church where a Christian school ministry is important, but where they also feel loved, accepted, and supported in their schooling choice. But, this does not mean that we cannot speak about the Christian School ministry for the fear of hurting anyone's feelings about the matter. We are a church that has a Christian school ministry, and for over 4 decades we have energetically and sacrificially supported its ministry. So, it is right and good for us to talk about it a bit.

Before we jump into Isaiah 8 I want to lay some groundwork as to why we are doing this series at all. I am sure that some of you are already in the checking out stage because you don't have kids, or because you don't have a vested interest in Christian Education. By the way – just out of curiosity I looked through our directory and found that we have about 50 families in our church who have some form of direct connection to Christian education right now. By that, I mean they have some direct connection to a Christian School or to homeschooling. So they either have kids or grandkids in one of those, or they work as a teacher or support staff in a Christian school, or they serve on a school board. If we expanded that to those in our church family who have had some form of Christian education themselves, we would cover almost everyone in our body. So, most of you are currently attending or have attended some form of Christian education for some level of your formal educational training. That is not to in any way make anyone uncomfortable or like they don't belong this morning – I am simply making the point that we as church family have a high level of involvement in Christian Education.

And so, it is right of us to take some time in our main gathering and consider what God's Word says about all of this. It is also right for us to consider this at such a time as this. In so many ways we are uniquely positioned as a church to raise up and train the next generation in a myriad of ways. We have a historic commitment to discipleship, and we have an unyielding trust in the sufficiency of Scripture to perfect and mature men and women and boys and girls in the faith, we are blessed with so many mature adults who can pour their lives into the next generation, and we have an amazingly adequate facility which allows for these times of discipleship to happen. And we have so many among us who are already investing themselves in Christian education – either through the formal setting of the classroom and traditional school, or through schooling in the home.

As we work our way through this short series we will see texts which give us unalterable principles to guide our way in educating our children. These principles will apply to those of you who are home educators and to those who chose to send your children to a Christian school, and to those of you who either work in or chose to send your children to a public school. But as we go, I will be making special application to the ministry of Newton Bible Christian School because this is our ministry as a church, therefore it is crucial for us as a church family to know the purpose and mission of this ministry.

It is also crucial for us to consider this topic at such a time as this because we are at a pivotal moment in the ministry life of our Christian school. Pastor RJ will be leaving us at the end of this school year and our enrollment has dipped to a critically low point. The reality is, beloved, if we continue on the current trajectory we are on as a school in enrollment, then we will not have a school ministry for too much longer. If that is what God has for us then we will accept His

sovereign will, but as the elders and school board look at the principles which guide us and the circumstances which surround us we do not think God is done with this ministry. We have an amazing staff of teachers and office staff, and we are blessed with an engaged, competent, and hardworking school board. The families who are committed to sending their kids to our school next year are deeply committed to NBCS and show their sacrificial support constantly. So many things are going so well, and are positioned for the ministry to thrive. And so, through this series we will seek to lay out the principles and practices that should guide us as a church in general discipleship and in the particular aspect of formal education. We do this to rejoice in the opportunity NBCS has every year to carry out these principles, and we do this to keep freshly before us these core principles and commitments we hold.

When I attended Central Seminary their motto was taken from Isaiah 8:20 – “To the Law and To the Testimony!” Honestly – when I was there it never really made sense to me, or had much impact on me. But now years later, I rejoice in the privilege to go to a school which made this their motto. As we look at Isaiah 8 this morning my goal is to make known to you the rallying cry of all truly Christian education. The rallying cry is simply this – To the Scriptures! Let me show you from Isaiah 8 why this is true. As we look to this text we are not allegorizing what is happening here and making it about us, but we are following the hermeneutic of 1 Corinthians 10 which lets us know that the Old Testament saints’ stories are recorded for us as an example and for our instruction. So, what we see in them, we will see pretty clearly in our generation as well.

Isaiah was a prophet of God to the southern tribes of Israel known collectively as Judah. He lived during the time of Assyrian world dominance and so it was about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. His message from God was given to a people who should have been grateful to the Lord for all of his many blessings and words of revelation, but they weren’t. They had despised God and largely gone their own way. Not quite to the extent that the 10 northern tribes, known as Israel, had done, but they were not far behind. In Isaiah 8 Ahaz is on the throne in Judah and he was a desperately wicked king. He was unfaithful to the Lord and 2 Kings 16 tells us that he even burned his son as an idolatrous offering to a pagan god. This is Isaiah’s audience when he receives these words of prophecy which he is to communicate in chapters 7 and 8. You can imagine the reception that Isaiah received before Ahaz. He was none too interested in hearing – let alone in following the clearly revealed Word of the Lord. And this whole encounter culminates with the motto we must also hear and follow – “to the teaching and to the testimony!”

I. The People of God Are Under Attack – 7:1-2

- a. This call to go to the revealed Word of God is given because the people of God are under attack. Look back at 7:1-2. The king of Israel and the king of Syria – both neighboring nations of Judah – have formed a coalition and have come against Jerusalem and against Ahaz. They have besieged the city, but haven’t yet been able to overthrow Ahaz. And in verse 2 we see the shaking fear of the hearts of Ahaz and the people. They understood that this was serious business. They were in trouble and they needed a way out. This physical skirmish is representative of

the greater battle which has been happening since the days of Adam and Eve in the Garden. God's people are under attack by the arch enemy of God. Satan is looking for every way possible to besiege God's people and destroy God's work. He hates nothing more than the glory of God, and the people of God are the present display of that glory, and so he is seeking constantly to get rid of them.

- b. This wrestling against spiritual forces in high places takes on many forms, but Satan's preferred tactic is deception and delusion of hearts and minds. If he can get God's people to be deluded from the truth then he can win them to his side and cause them to rebel against God. This is why when he first appeared in the Garden he appeared with words of deceptive temptation. In essence, he came as a teacher – an educator. He asked questions and caused them to re-think all that they knew, and then he taught them what he knew about the fruit they were told they couldn't eat – and all of this convinced them to try it out. Satan is an educator – and his wily tactics in the realm of education have not gone away since the Garden. He knows that if he is to get a generation to turn away from God and His truth then he is going to have to teach them counterpoints to the truth. All of this to say – there is a war raging for the hearts and minds of God's people today, just like there has always been. And one of the main theaters for this spiritual battle is in the realm of education.
- c. Everybody realizes the unmatched potential and power someone can have if they can influence the next generation in their early years of development. It is surmised by pollsters that most people's worldview and spiritual bent is fixed by the age of 13, and so to be very specific this morning – there is a strategic battle being waged over the hearts and minds of our children – and this is happening like no place else in the educational systems of America. Publicly funded schools have long been seen as the key element to shaping cultural thought and worldview for the next generation. The 20th Century marked a major shift in the general course of public education. We largely moved from a Biblical framework in the classroom where God's truth was generally taught and appreciated to a humanistic framework where man and his reason became the answer and God's truth was despised and rejected. There were and still are exceptions – including the public school teachers we have in our own congregation this morning – but overall, the system shifted in a major way to a humanistic philosophy. And this was seen as warfare by the way for those who were pushing it. It was not a gentle shove to remove antiquated Christian values, but it was an all-out attack. So, consider this excerpt from an article printed in 1983 in *Humanist* magazine:
 - i. “I am convinced that the battle for human-kind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith . . .
These teachers must embody the same selfless dedication as the most rabid fundamentalist preachers, for they will be ministers of another sort, utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey humanist values in whatever subjects they teach, regardless of the education level – preschool day care or large state university.

The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new – the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of Humanism, resplendent in its promise of a world in which the never-realized Christian ideal of ‘love thy neighbor’ will finally be achieved.” (Quoted in *Spiritual Junk Food*, Mickels & McKeever, 2003, preface)

- d. Beloved – the humanists have declared war on God and on his truth in every generation, and in the last 40 years, they have been able to make amazing headway into the education system of our land. It's interesting isn't it, that our school started in 1973? Right when these humanistic philosophies were being largely evidenced in the public school world, we as a church began our school ministry as a clear advancement on the battlefield for the minds and hearts of our children. This is in line with one of the first acts of government our country ever knew relating to the education of children. In 1647, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed what they called The Old Deluder Satan Act in which they legislated that each town would teach their children to read and write so that they could counter the lies of Satan by knowing the truth of the Scriptures. That is essentially what our spiritual forefathers did in 1973 at Newton Bible Church. They crafted, setup, and advanced an educational system which would pass the standards of education while teaching children to look to the Scriptures for all truth.
- II. **The People of God Are Prone to Look for the Assyrian Option – 2 Kings 16; Isa. 8:5-8**
- a. This matters because the people of God are not just under attack, but the people of God are prone to look for the Assyrian Option. The Assyrian option is the human dependent answer to our immediate problem. So, Ahaz was given the clear revelation from God about the warfare between Judah and the coalition of Syria and Israel. They would not conquer his nation and God would provide signs to validate and verify this prophetic truth. But this wasn't enough for Ahaz. His fear of the present situation was too great to wait for God to act. So, he sent a convoy to Assyria to make a peace deal with Assyria so that they would come and help defeat Israel and Syria. He sent money to the Assyrian king and he sent his vow of loyalty to him, and it worked. The Assyrians accepted Ahaz's offer and they came and dealt swiftly with Israel and Syria. And in the immediate it looked like Ahaz's dependence upon the Assyrians had worked. But as verses 5-8 of chapter 8 make clear – the Assyrians would overthrow Judah's enemies, but their invasion would almost overtake them too. Because they wouldn't trust in the gentle flowing stream of God's clearly revealed prophetic word, they would be overwhelmed and almost drowned by the Assyrian invasion. This will be most clearly seen when Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, is on the throne of Judah and hundreds of thousands of Assyrians come and besiege the city of Jerusalem and write a letter mocking Hezekiah's trust in the Lord his God. Hezekiah remained faithful to the Lord and God intervened and killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night and sent the rest of them running for home.

- b. That incident in Hezekiah's day can be traced back to this event in Isaiah 8 and 2 Kings 16. The leaders of God's people looked to the Assyrian option and while it worked for the time, it yielded long-term devastating results. The same is true in God's people today. So many of the church's leaders are looking for the Assyrian option. So many pastors have turned their attention to the pragmatic message of humanistic ideology and they have abandoned the one and only true Gospel. The people of God in every generation have been prone to look for a way to defeat the enemy which is humanly attainable and humanly achievable – and therefore will ultimately bring praise and honor to humans.
- c. The examples are too numerous to exhaust here, but consider a few – so, we see the proliferation of books out there today in Christian circles which are lauded by so many but which are nothing more than humanistic philosophy re-packaged in spiritually sounding terms. So, one of those is the book *The Shack* which was made into a movie and it presents all three member of the Trinity as being incarnate and as being as mixed up in their identities, roles and character as you can possibly get in your understanding of God – this is an example of looking to the Assyrian option. Or, you have the Bible Answer Man, Hank Hanegraaf, converting to the false gospel of the Greek Orthodox Church which seeks to make salvation dependent upon humanly attainable means based upon church traditions – the Assyrian option. Or, you have the many pastors in our own area who today will stand before their people and will speak some form of encouraging advice which is sourced in man-centered wisdom and methods and they will call it the truth of God – this is God's people looking to the Assyrian option.
- d. Because God's people have always been prone to look for the Assyrian option, we have always needed the prophetic voice of the Isaiah's among us saying – To the Scriptures – they say! And that is in essence what truly Christian education has at its heart. It realizes the tendency of God's people to look to man-dependent and humanly attainable solutions to life's problems – and it counters that with pointing students to the clearly revealed Word of God.

III. The People of God Must Look to the Scriptures – 8:1-4; 11-22

- a. And so, let's look at those words of Isaiah specifically in verses 11-22. Before we read those, let me tell you that God has given a sign to Ahaz and to the people of Judah back in verses 1-4. He had Isaiah right a large sign – like a billboard – with words guaranteeing the fall and defeat of the Israel-Syria coalition. Then God gave Isaiah and his wife a son who was also named with these words and he was to tell the people that before the child could speak intelligibly, God would send the invading armies packing.
- b. But as we have seen, Ahaz, and the people of Judah didn't want to believe God's word from God's prophet and so they turned to the Assyrian option. Into that context we see the words of verses 11-22. Verse 11 says . . .
- c. The people of God desperately need the Word of God in the face of the attack by the enemy of God. We do not need to form coalitions with other humans to have them help us overcome one evil while inviting different evils. No, we need the

clear and unalterable and unchanging Word of the Lord. And this is what God gives to Isaiah and strongly calls Isaiah to in these verses. He puts a strong hand upon Isaiah in verse 11 and he warns him to not walk like the people around him are doing. Beloved – Satan is an educator who presents a false world view to deceive and destroy all of humanity. But God is the only true educator who sees things perfectly and gives us the right view of all things even if it is completely counter cultural to those around us. So many have bemoaned Christian education through the years saying that it takes kids out of the real world and shelters them from seeing what is really true in life. And there is some danger to over-protection as children develop which makes them prone to glamorize the world and all it has to offer when they are given their freedom. But in reality, true truth is found only in God. Reality is defined by Him through revelation. It is not created by human reason and scientific research. This is the crux of the issue of so many things in our day. So many do not believe that God is the Ultimate Reality and that He has made all other reality. Rather, the common thought is that we can make our own reality – that we get to define it as we so chose. So, if you want to be the opposite gender of what you actually are, then go ahead because you define reality by your ability to reason and feel and choose. This and so many other examples of this show the fear of man which is pervasive in our world. We can't tell anyone that their view of reality is wrong.

- d. But God says to his servant – don't fear what they fear. Don't be afraid of them. Verse 12 says that we are not to call conspiracy what they call conspiracy. This is most likely referring to how the people of Judah treated the prophets of God. They called them conspirators and traitors because they told the king not to look for help from other, more powerful countries, but rather to trust in the Lord. In Jeremiah 37, Jeremiah was actually thrown in jail and called a deserter because of this sentiment toward the prophets of God. That is what our world, and even those who call themselves the people of God, do to those who cling to the Word of God in the face of the tidal wave of cultural attack. But we are not to fear them or what they can do to us. Rather, we are to honor the Lord as holy – as different, as supremely true and right and good. He is to be our fear and our dread. We are to bow the knee only to Him and we are to hear and heed what He declares as truth and as reality. And we do this beloved, by clinging to the Scriptures – by turning to the truth of the Word of God in every way and in the face of every assault.
- e. So, in verse 16 Jeremiah is calling for that very thing. Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. In other words – even if everyone else around us is abandoning the clear testimony which God has given – we as His true people are to be clinging to it, binding it up, preserving and protecting it and sealing it as our only hope and our only plan. Then in verse 17 Isaiah says that he will wait for the Lord and he will hope in the Lord. Even in times of great distress where it seems as though God and His work are absent among His people – Isaiah will not abandon the Law and the testimony. Isaiah will not yield to the onslaught of

public opinion. Isaiah will not give up on the Lord who has spoken and who most certainly will act!

- f. Part of the reason he will not give up is because in verse 18 he and his children are signs from the Lord to the rest of the people of Israel. The Lord of Hosts – the covenant making and covenant keeping God of this people has given them Isaiah and his sons as a sign to call them to that which is truly real and right. But in verse 19 we see that the people would rather look to spiritists – necromancers and mediums who consult the dead on the behalf of the living. These are people who have long since abandoned the Word of the Lord and have made a living out of ceremonies and rituals which cry out to the dead as a means of telling the future. You remember the classic illustration of this from Saul's life – the first king of Israel. He had long since stopped listening to the voice of God through Samuel, and so he found himself in need of revelation about going into battle or not. And so he found a medium and asked her to call up Samuel's spirit from the dead so that he could ask him what to do. This is what we as humans are left with when we abandon God and refuse to listen to his clear and always relevant Word about all things. We are left chirping and muttering as we clamor after any voice other than God's voice about a matter. We even find ourselves looking to the voices of the dead rather than listen to the clear voice of the Living God!
- g. And our response to this should be the rallying cry found in verse 20 – To the teaching and to the testimony! Or to simplify it a bit – to the Scriptures! If the world around us will not give heed to God and His clearly revealed truth, then we must be a people who are not swept away in that current, but who stand strong with our feet firmly planted in the Scriptures.
- h. Notice the outcome of those who look to Assyria for human-dependent answers. In verse 14 the Word of the Lord becomes a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to them. They are constantly tripped up by God's clear and authoritative Word as they run headlong toward the world looking for another answer. This leads them in verse 15 to a litany of 5 descriptions of their demise – they stumble, fall, are broken, snared, and are taken. This is added to in verses 20-22 where we are told that if people will not cling to the word of God it is because they have no dawn. Meaning – they have no hope of actually seeing the morning light of a new day and a new hope. They have no true answer for the darkness of their affliction because they have abandoned God and His clear Word. This will lead to further distress and affliction. They will be enraged and they will blame God as they look for answers and hope and find none. In the grips of anguish they will be thrust into further darkness. It's kind of like walking into a pitch black basement room that you have never been in before. In order to navigate your way through you need the light turned on. But instead of feeling along the wall and sticking to where you know the light switch will be, you venture out into the dark room hoping somewhere in the darkness to find the light. You will only find more darkness and despair by looking to the darkness for light. But if you stick to the wall you will find the switch.

- i. Isaiah is committed to the wall. His battle cry is “To the Scriptures!” And beloved – so is ours. Why do we meet every week in multiple formats and at various times? To return to the Lord by running to His Word and letting Him speak His light into our ever darkening world. Why do we bring our children to SS and AWANA and youth group? Because we want them to know what God has said so that they can interpret their world according to how God sees all things – so that they can know what is truly real as determined by God. Why do we have a Christian school ministry? So that we can proclaim the truth of God in every category to the next generation as we equip them to be those who cling to the Scriptures in a world which is running headlong into Hell.

Conclusion: May God find us to be like Isaiah and not like Ahaz. May we never be those who look tirelessly for the Assyrian option, but may we be those who cling steadfastly to the clear and authoritative Word of the Lord! And may our motto always be “To the Scriptures!” Let’s pray.