

Waiting in Fear

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[0 : 00] Let's turn in prayer to God as we prepare to hear a message drawn from his word. Lord, you know that my own words, my own thoughts are inadequate to express all of the wisdom, all of the truth that your Holy Spirit has given us in your inspired, infallible, inerrant words of scripture.

We thank you for these words. And Lord God, I ask that you would guard my lips from saying anything that is untrue or unhelpful, that you would stir me up to say all that is appropriate to say, all that is helpful, all that is profitable for us to hear.

I ask, Lord, that you give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand what you are saying to us, how it is significant for our lives, for our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, words, actions, habits.

Make us a people who follow your words, not out of a sense of rote duty or drudgery, but out of a sense of desire to honor Jesus Christ as Lord, the one who was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our sins.

I pray, Lord God, that anyone who hears these words and does not know the peace of Jesus Christ, who does not know the rest that comes from knowing that we are reconciled and at peace with you, may turn, find peace with you.

[1 : 42] Know the joy of not only life here and now, but eternal life forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth life where Jesus reigns with us as King and Lord.

We're longing for that and looking for that. Amen. Well, we do live in times of darkness. We do live in anxious times.

And I don't think I need to prove this statement. It is self-evident. You may sense the fears and the anxieties as you watch the evening news.

If you ever go on social media and spend more than 30 seconds on social media, you will see the fears and anxieties on display among friends and neighbors and family.

And for many of us, you may sense the fears and anxieties in your own hearts. And you see it when you go to the grocery store in the eyes of people you see there.

[2 : 45] You hear it in public places, in tense voices, people whose tempers seem to be on a hair trigger. There was a recent study by the Canadian Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that uncovered, as they did surveys at the end of November, that 24% of the Canadians they surveyed had moderate to severe anxiety levels.

This has had a real effect on Canadians' behaviour because the study also concluded that more than a quarter of participants reported binge drinking in the previous week, which was a much higher percentage than earlier this year.

We are waiting in fear. We are trying to cope with our fears. And we are waiting for rescue to come from a year that has been so awful and so difficult for so many of us.

Whether we are waiting for financial help, whether we are waiting for a COVID vaccine, whether we are waiting for a relative to come out of hospital, whether we are waiting for restrictive health orders to end, we are in a place of waiting.

Waiting arouses a multitude of fears, a multitude of anxieties in our heart.

[4 : 07] Because waiting is a time when we are out of control. All of these fears, all of these anxieties, they come from the usual places and these usual places are now amplified.

We are in a pressure cooker that brings out all of these fears. Fears of financial insecurity, fears of disease and poor health, fears of an uncertain future.

These are difficult fears to muddle through. Next week, we're going to look at the hope that God gives. That's next week. We're going to look at the hope that God gives. Even when we're immersed in this toxic smoke of fear and anxiety, we'll turn to a prophecy in Isaiah chapter 9 that speaks of a coming child.

For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. But I want to focus on one particular fear that Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, and the Lord speaking through him. One fear that Isaiah is addressing in his day. And this is a fear that at first is going to sound like it belongs to a certain small percentage of people, but the truth is that we all have a problem with it.

[5 : 35] It's part of a broader sort of fear that is present in every human being throughout history. If we are going to be set free to enjoy the hope that we're going to be talking about next week, if we are going to be set free to hope in the promises of God, we first have to do battle with one of the fears that chokes our breathing, that blurs our vision, that hounds us the most.

And in general terms, this is the fear of man. It's what scripture calls the fear of man. And it plays out in so many ways in our lives. Taken broadly, the fear of man is, it's just this visceral sense, this intuitive sense.

You don't, you know, you just feel it down to your gut that other people are great in power and significance. The fear of man is that visceral sense that other people are great in power and significance.

It's a sense that they pose a threat to my family. They pose a threat to my friends. They pose a threat to my well-being.

They pose a threat to my prosperity, maybe even a threat to my life. It was over 2,700 years ago that Isaiah wrote this prophecy that talks about the fear of man.

[6 : 57] He wrote inspired by the Holy Spirit. And in Isaiah's day, the fear of man was taking one particular form. It had congealed into a form that we can call the fear of conspiracy.

The fear of conspiracy. Conspiracy fear is one particular form of the fear of man.

It's a fear that other people, powerful people, they are working in secret to bring ruin to my life and to the life of the ones I love.

Conspiracy fear imagines a world of whispered conversations. Secret glances and smiles, dark rooms, money-changing hands, authorities stepping over their bounds, people in power looking the other way.

Unless we think that this is something that only a small percentage of the population experiences, the truth is what we're going to find out is that the fear of conspiracy infects all of our lives in one way or another.

[8 : 05] We are all prone to it and we all participate in it. Because we are consumed by the fear of conspiracy not only on a political level, but on a personal level as well in our everyday relationships.

This world of conspiracy, it was the world in the day of King Ahaz 2,700 years ago.

Ahaz was the king of Judah when the words of Isaiah chapter 8 were written. And Ahaz, he is reigning in the capital city of Jerusalem, but his kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, it is about to come under threat because there is an alliance of two powerful kings, two powerful kings to the north of Judah.

And we read about this alliance in Isaiah chapter 7, verses 1 and 2. In the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezan, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it.

But could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, Syria is in league with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

[9 : 34] This military alliance of two northern kings against Judah, this conspiracy, it left Ahaz and it left the people of Judah shaking in their boots.

And to make matters worse, Isaiah reports that these kings are also supporting internal division. They are supporting a coup against Ahaz. Isaiah mentions this part of their conspiracy in chapter 7, verse 6.

Let us go up against Judah and terrify it. And let us conquer it for ourselves and set up the son of Tabeal as king in the midst of it. So Ahaz, in response to this external conspiracy and this internal conspiracy, he responds with a political conspiracy of his own.

Ahaz sends diplomatic envoys to the most powerful, the most nasty empire of the ancient world, the Assyrian Empire.

Ahaz is about to land his people into generations of hurt because of this move. He offers to serve the king of Assyria as his vassal, as his subject.

[10 : 52] And in exchange, Assyria will be giving their protection. And we read in 2 Kings chapter 16, Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Peleser, king of Assyria, saying, I am your servant and your son.

Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel who are attacking me. Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria.

This gesture from Ahaz worked in the short term, but in the long term, it brought the Assyrian Empire down on the neck of Judah. So, there are alliances and there are coups and there are conspiracies emerging left and right.

And you can imagine that on top of these developments, there are all sorts of rumors and fake news that's going around among the people. Because people were the same back then as they are now.

They are in the palace and in the temple and in the marketplace and in the home. They're trading worried tales. They're trading rumors. They're trading reports.

[12 : 18] Passing on information. Information getting scrambled and confused and being misleading. Multitudes of conspiracy theories being banded about about what's going on in the world and what's going on in the palace and what's going on in these northern kingdoms and empires.

This is a people who are waiting in fear. And it's in the middle of all this choking anxiety. It's in the middle of this suffocating fear that the Lord tells Isaiah in chapter 8, verses 11 and 12.

He says, The Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me and warned me not to walk in the way of this people saying, Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy and do not fear what they fear nor be in dread.

The Lord warns Isaiah. He warns those few people, the disciples who are with Isaiah, the few who are remaining faithful to the Lord.

In a time in which, by and large, the people of Judah are not faithful to the Lord, they are not trusting in the Lord, in a time in which they are engaged and consumed by conspiracy fear, the Lord tells Isaiah, Don't be caught up in conspiracy thinking and conspiracy fear.

[13 : 45] Don't go down the rabbit hole of obsessing, of obsessing over secret alliances and coups and rumors and drinking up this news like water.

Don't become like the godless people around you. Now it's interesting that the Lord delivers this command to Isaiah because this is a time when, as we have just seen, there actually really are conspiracies taking place.

There really are secret alliances, money and treasure changing hands, coups and intrigue going on. And yet the Lord still delivers this command, do not engage in conspiracy fear.

The commentator Gary Smith explains the Lord's purpose in saying these words at this time. The exhortation does not deny that there will be some conspiracies.

It merely warns against being paralyzed by fear concerning all the rumors that will arise in the coming days. You know, 99% of the time it's fake news, but on occasion conspiracies really do happen.

[15 : 02] And either way, whether it's fake or whether it's real, the Lord warns his people against getting caught up in the fear of man, against getting caught up and choked by conspiracy fear.

So, all of this brings us to conspiracy in our own time. from my personal conversations with friends, from news stories I've read, from comments on social media, you know, I happen to know that we too are immersed in conspiracy fear.

Rumors are flying around about secret political alliances and agendas. Much of this seems to be the usual conspiracies. You know, there's always the usual conspiracies about a flat earth, 9-11, and so on and so forth.

I remember a period of about a month in high school when I was convinced that the moon landing was a hoax. Some of that, some of these conspiracies now surround COVID-19, the disease, its ramifications for us.

Conspiracies are being bandied about south of the border. People are accusing their enemies of mounting a coup, either through election fraud or by falsely accusing the government of election

fraud.

[16:26] On social media, our news feeds are being inundated with articles and poor quality news, most of it incomplete, some of it completely false.

It's hard to tell truth and error apart. We are being blasted with a fire hose of information, probably more than any generation that has lived on the earth, we are being blasted with a fire hose of over-information, a fire hose of conspiracy, a fire hose of anxiety.

So we too are a people waiting in fear. But lest you think, oh, yes, those are all the political and news junkies out there, that's not me.

You know, I don't spend a lot of time worrying about that. But the truth is that every one of us is prone to conspiracy fear on not only a political level but also on a personal level, in the ordinary relationships of our lives.

We fear not only political conspiracies but personal conspiracies. And it's the same dynamic. Have you ever found yourself wondering, what are other people saying about me?

[17:35] What are other people saying to each other about me? Have you ever found yourself imagining conversations between other people about you? Do you ever fear their whispered words of gossip?

Do you ever fear that they are talking about you and snickering with eye rolls of contempt towards you, perhaps disgust with you, perhaps irritation, perhaps mocking laughter in secret?

Do your conspiracy theories about other people go even deeper? Do you find yourself wondering, what is so-and-so thinking of me? Do you ever wonder if that so-and-so, if that spouse or friend or family member, do you ever wonder if they are secretly judging you?

Do you fear that they may hold you in contempt? Do you worry that they may be thinking the worst of you? You know, I'm fairly resistant to other forms of conspiracy thinking.

This one in particular, wondering what other people think about me, that's a lot harder for me to shake. It's hard not to be paranoid about what other people are thinking of you. And even if you're not paranoid about it, this sort of fear, it can really take the form of a low-level anxiety or stress that just permeates your life.

[19:05] And many of you, perhaps you think, oh, I don't struggle with that. A lot of times we're not even consciously aware that we're anxious of these things. You may be anxious and you don't even know it.

It has become the background radiation of your life. You don't even know that there's another way to live. It is your normal. So whether it's political conspiracy, whether it's personal conspiracy, conspiracy fear is alive and well in our time.

You are waiting in fear. You are immersed in fears of conspiracy. You are immersed in fears of conspiracy.

That's a big problem. Now, let's remember what God said in Isaiah chapter 8 verse 12. Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy.

And do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. Now, let's ask, why would God be so concerned that people not get sucked into conspiracy rumors, conspiracy thinking, conspiracy fear?

[20:20] Why would the Lord be so deeply concerned about this? Well, lately I've been, I've had, you know, through the help of friends, through the help of a counselor, lately I've been examining some of this conspiracy fear in my own heart.

And I've learned a disturbing lesson about the dynamics of conspiracy fear in our hearts. And here is the disturbing lesson. You and I actually want conspiracy fear.

You and I actually want conspiracy fear. We seek out conspiracy fear. We embrace it. That may sound counterintuitive.

It feels like it's just something that happens to us. But whether it's political or personal, fear of conspiracy actually does something for us.

You know that? It does something for us. It may seem strange that you and I would want, would actually prefer to be anxious and afraid, but that's a price that we are willing to pay.

[21:24] Because conspiracy thinking, we think it is going to help us in some way. It is going to help us. It is going to give us an advantage in some way. And if that means that the consequences are I am anxious and afraid, that's a price I am willing to pay.

Here is what conspiracy fear does for you. Whether it's political conspiracy, whether it's personal conspiracy. Conspiracy fear fills your life with a problem that you can solve.

It fills your life with a problem that you can solve. Or at least you think you can solve. And in so doing, conspiracy fear distracts you.

It serves a purpose to distract you from a problem that you cannot solve. It distracts you from a problem that you cannot solve. Because as Christians, the problem we cannot solve, the fundamental problem in our life, it is the problem, the deep rooted problem of sin, the problem of our hearts turned away from God, that we have defied and offended a holy God.

We don't want to think about this. We don't want to deal with this. But on a conscious level or on an unconscious level, every human being knows this.

[22 : 38] Many of us have suppressed it deep down, shoved it way down so we're not even consciously aware of it. But we know that we have offended a holy God.

We know that we are not at peace with him. We know that we face his judgment, perhaps in this life, perhaps on the other side of the grave. We know that we have no merit to bring, nothing sufficient, nothing that will be enough to stand in the presence of a holy and righteous and good God.

We have no way to get ourselves out of this mess, nothing to atone for our sins. Now, you who are Christians, you know that we only have one hope.

We only have one Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord. God, it is his righteousness that we count on.

When we stand before God, we do not plead innocent, we plead Christ, we plead his righteousness, we say, look to him, he is the perfect one, I am united with him, I am connected with him, his righteousness is mine, the punishment for my sins was upon him.

Only by believing in Jesus Christ can you be forgiven, only by believing in Jesus Christ can you be reconciled to God, only by believing in him will you find peace with God.

[24 : 11] Jesus is the only one who can save us, he is the only Savior, but, but, and this is true even for Christians, but we really, really want to be the ones who save ourselves.

We really, really, really, I want to be my Savior, I want to stand on my own merits, I want to do it myself. We really, really want our main problem in life to be something that we can solve, and so here's what we do, here's what you do, you, when it comes to conspiracy fear, you immerse yourself in, you obsess over conspiracy, you make that the big problem in your life, you overthink, and you over imagine the plans, and the schemes, and the thoughts, and judgments of other people, and you do this, because the problem of conspiracy fear, it leads you to a delicious solution, a solution that is, feels good, and feels right, and feels very pleasing to ourselves, and the solution that we think will solve this great problem of conspiracy fear, the solution is that secret knowledge will save you, that's the lie that we tell ourselves, secret knowledge, it's going to save you, if you can just peer into the secret inner workings of the conspiracy, if you can know what's really going on behind the curtain, if you can just figure it all out, then you can be saved from this problem, in fact, you can be a hero, you can feel like a hero who has gained mastery over your relationships, or over the world you live in, you have figured it all out, in a personal conspiracy, you know what those other people are really thinking, and saying about you, oh, you know it, you see right through them, in a political conspiracy, you know what's really going on, the secret truth that other people, all those sheep out there, oh, they're just too blind, too uninformed to realize it, and this gives you a feeling of control, you feel that on some small level, you have mastered the situation, it feels good, doesn't it,

I know what it feels like, it feels like you just got a sense of control, you've got to figure it out, in short, the advantage of conspiracy fear is that you get to be your own savior, you get to be your own savior, and if you could take it a step farther, maybe you could just take it to the next level, you could win over, recruit other people to see the conspiracy, too, then maybe you could be their savior, too.

Do you see this dark and twisted heart underneath all of our conspiracy fear? This isn't just a fear that just happens to you, this isn't just a fear in which you are a helpless victim of it, this is a fear that you have chosen, it is a fear you have embraced, and you are accountable for entertaining this fear.

That's why in Isaiah chapter 8 verse 11, the Lord has to warn Isaiah not to walk in the way of this people. Do not let these fears become the attitude and the habit of your life, the way of your life, the way of this people.

[28 : 04] He is warning Isaiah not to obsess over conspiracies, not to crave secret knowledge of what's really going on, because that is the journey, that is the pathway of a people who want to

save themselves.

It is the pathway of a people who have rejected God's Savior, God's Messiah. It is the journey of a people who want to be waiting in fear.

They want to be waiting in fear. It does something for them. And the fear and the anxiety is a price they are willing to pay. It is true what we read in Proverbs 29, verse 25.

The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. For the rest of our time together, we're first going to look at that snare, at the consequences of the fear of man, and in particular, the consequences of conspiracy fear.

Then, we're going to look at the remedy for your fear of conspiracy. We're going to look at the remedy that clears the way for hope.

[29 : 21] First of all, the fear of man lays a snare. What does a snare do? A snare captures you. A snare subjects you to terrible consequences. And you're willing to put yourself in the snare because there's something in that snare, a delicious morsel, that you are going for.

You want to be there. And conspiracy fear does the same thing. It is a snare. Isaiah chapter 8, it shows us that the fear of conspiracy will bring ruin on your life.

The fear of conspiracy will bring ruin on your life. The ruin comes in four ways. We find this four-fold ruin as we work our way through Isaiah chapter 8 verses 14 through 22.

And we're going to work our way through it from verse 14 down to verse 22. The first ruin is that you will become offended by the Lord. That's the first.

You will become offended by the Lord. In Isaiah chapter 8 verses 14 through 15, we read how the people of Israel will respond to the Lord as they wait in a toxic cloud of conspiracy fear.

[30 : 38] He will become, the Lord, will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and many shall stumble on it.

They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken. Now the commentator, Alec Mottier, he explains that the same God who is a blessing to those who trust in him, the same God who is a blessing to those who trust in him, he will not only be a warning, he will in fact be an obstacle to those who turn inward to trust in themselves, who want to be self-reliant, who want to be their own savior.

And Mottier says, 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.

He actually stumbles over the rock that was there to warn him. Those who embrace conspiracy fear as their biggest problem, those who want that to be their biggest problem so they can save themselves, they will be offended.

They will be offended to hear words of warning from the Lord and from anyone who fears the Lord. If you're immersed in conspiracy fear, you are actually, you'll notice that when you're immersed in conspiracy fear, you are not grieving your own sin, are you?

[32 : 12] You're brooding in anger against the perceived sins of other people. You aren't mourning your own blindness and your own unrighteousness.

You're insisting on your own clear-thinking rightness. that stands in such sharp contrast to those poor, blind other people who are wrong.

You don't have your eyes fixed on a crucified savior. You have your eyes fixed on the conspiracy that you are going to unravel. people. And when you have that mindset, know this, that the Lord God is dead set against supporting you.

He is dead set against supporting you on your own self salvation project. And so every time that God's word speaks to you, the scriptures speak to you and remind you of what your real problem is, the real problem of sin in your life, the real problem of the wrath of God and who your real savior is. It's not talking about what you want it to talk about. It feels a little bit less relevant to your life every time you read it and you start to resist God's call to repent a little bit more.

[33 : 37] Your heart gets a little bit harder and harder and harder still. You're not enjoying scripture anymore. You're not enjoying God's word anymore. more. You start becoming offended by the Lord.

Whenever anyone speaks out to warn you about this, you get very irritated and defensive. That's the first way that the fear of conspiracy will bring ruin on your life.

You will become offended by the Lord. The second ruin is that you will turn to more appealing sources of wisdom. You will turn to more appealing sources of wisdom.

Wisdom that seems more appealing than the word of God. In Isaiah's day, the people, they wanted to uncover secret knowledge. They wanted to desperately were trying to forecast the future as they waited in fear.

And so they didn't have statistics, they didn't have political pundits on cable news channels. So, who do they seek out? They sought out mediums to inquire of the spirits and the dead.

[34 : 40] They were trying to acquire secret knowledge from these sources of wisdom. But in verse 19, the Lord warns Isaiah, when they say to you, inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?

Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? Now, certainly today, people still consult these occult sources of wisdom.

This is a thing that goes on. This is not something that is relegated to the distant past. But there is also a danger in seeking wisdom from ordinary sources of knowledge as well.

Perhaps you've become, perhaps your seeking out of wisdom has reached an excessive level.

Perhaps you've become a news junkie sitting in front of a screen for hours a day.

You're consuming news from your favorite websites or TV channels. Or in order to figure out a person, there's this person you know and you're trying to figure out that conspiracy with them and gain keen insight into that person and know what they're going to do, you consume books and articles that are going to tell you exactly what motivates that person, tells you exactly what they're thinking.

[36 : 05] You just found that YouTube video that explains that person to a T. And all of this research, it crowds out what's really important.

It crowds out the Bible. It crowds out the Word of God. And God's words become a footnote to your life. They become a tiny fraction of the information that you are consuming.

Your diet has become horribly unbalanced. You feast on these more appealing sources of wisdom.

This wisdom that promises to save you from the conspiracies that you fear.

And you neglect to feast on God's Word as you wait in fear. The fear of conspiracy will bring ruin on your life. You will first become offended by the Lord.

You will second turn to more appealing sources of wisdom. And then the third ruin is this. You will be consumed with distress and anger.

[37 : 16] You will be consumed with distress and anger. This is what the Lord told Isaiah would happen to his countrymen. verse 21.

They will pass through the land greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God and turn their faces upward.

Could there ever be a sadder fate than the one who is caught in this snare, who is caught in the fear of man? Is there ever a more pitiable outcome than the one who is lost in a maze of conspiracy fear?

Isaiah foretold a time when the people of Judah would travel through the land. We're not sure whether he means traveling through the land into exile, whether traveling through the land because they can't find food anywhere and they're desperately foraging, but regardless they are in misery, they are in distress.

And as for today, even if you are well fed, even if you're not going into exile, the effect of all this fear is that it will bring ruin on you and on your relationships.

[38 : 41] I promise you that. It will bring ruin on you and on your relationships. Your days will be passed in obsession and suspicion, absorbed in anxious thought. love. And the people who love you, they will be watching you and grieved as they watch you become a different person, as they see the light go out of your eyes, as you keep turning all your conversations towards speculating and grumbling against the people that you fear.

They are watching you slowly shrivel and die. And before long, your fear turns into anger. So often, anger is the other side of the coin from fear.

Like the people of Judah, whose fears turn into anger, who become enraged and speak contemptuously against their king and their God. So you will become consumed with anger.

If you have immersed yourself in fears of political conspiracy, you will burn with anger or be eaten away with bitterness and hatred against government leaders, against faceless multinational corporations, against powerful, wealthy individuals.

If you have immersed yourselves in fears of personal conspiracy, what this is going to look like is you are going to be brooding over the evil thoughts that you imagine that other people are holding against you.

[40 : 11] In your heart, you will descend into bitterness, even hatred toward your friend or your neighbor, toward your brother or your sister.

The fear of conspiracy will bring ruin on your life. The third way of ruin is that you will be consumed with distress and anger. And the fourth and final way of ruin is this.

You will be thrust into despair. You will be thrust into despair. This is the final state of the people of Judah in verse 22.

They will look to the earth, but behold distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and they will be thrust into thick darkness.

Because what happened is that you thought that unraveling the conspiracy would save you. You thought that figuring out what other people are doing or thinking. It would just give you this sense of control in a confusing world of broken relationships.

[41 : 20] But you will find out that it does nothing of the sort. Your fears are not brought under control. Instead, your fears multiply. Your imagination runs wilder still.

You see conspiracies more and more and more ever expanding and growing. more and more and more people do you become embittered and alienated towards.

And you will feel more powerless than you ever did before. And then the final state is one of paralysis, apathy, depression, and despair.

When you look at the world around you, when you look at the state of your life, you find distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And this anguish, it is from the hand of the Lord.

This anguish is from the hand of the Lord. What he has done is he has given you over to the consequences of your sin. He is the one who has thrust you into thick darkness.

[42 : 26] And you know what? Maybe he has done this in order to save you. Maybe he has handed you over in order to save you. Maybe he has done this because your fear of conspiracy will bring ruin on your life and he wants you to see the ruin and turn and repent.

You cannot save yourself from this fear of man. You must turn from these anxious thoughts to the Lord God, the only one who can save you.

Because what we find in Isaiah chapter 8 is that God alone has the remedy for your fear of conspiracy.

God alone has the remedy for your fear of conspiracy. Our ruin comes in four ways and God's remedy here comes in three ways.

There is a fourfold ruin and a threefold remedy. And we find the three ways of this remedy. As we start in verse 20 and then work our way backwards.

[43 : 34] Backwards to the center of this passage. In verse 20 we find the first remedy that God has given you. He has given you his sufficient word.

He has given you his sufficient word. Here's what the Lord urges Isaiah in verse 20. To the teaching and to the testimony.

If they will not speak according to this word. It is because they have no dawn. The Lord is saying that in confusing times. In times when we're not sure what's going on in the world.

When we're not sure what other people are thinking about us. When we're not sure what they're saying about us. When we don't understand what's happening in the government. When we don't understand what's happening.

We must run to the teaching and to the testimony. We must run to the scriptures. To the words that the Holy Spirit has given us. Because this is where we find the truth and the life that we need.

[44 : 39] This is where we find exactly what we need to know in this situation. This is where we find something reliable and faithful. Something you can count on to help you navigate these turbulent times.

The Lord tells Isaiah here that those who rely on other sources of wisdom have no dawn. They exist in a perpetual night time.

They will remain in thick darkness without hope that they will someday be able to see. Conspiracy fear leaves you in spiritual blindness.

And the worst thing about spiritual blindness is that you think you can see clearly. But you are in fact do not see at all. And because you don't know that you're blind.

You have no hope of gaining the light of dawn. And so. We must open God's word. We must open our hearts to listen to his spirit speak to us through the words of scripture.

[45 : 40] We must trust that in God's word he has revealed truth and light so that we will be able to see clearly. If only we will entrust ourselves to him.

So the Lord establishes that the scriptures they are the one place of confidence in which we can set our hope. And Isaiah affirms this truth in verses 16 and 17 when he says bind up the testimony seal the teaching among my disciples.

I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob and I will hope in him. So rather than running hither and thither and reading and researching and obsessing to figure out what's going on behind the conspiracy curtain.

Isaiah doubles down on the words of scripture. The testimony and the teaching. Rather than overthinking and obsessing and researching his fears Isaiah says I will wait for the Lord and I will hope in him.

The Lord may be turning in judgment against his rebellious people around him but Isaiah is not going to rebel. Isaiah is going to stand firm.

[47 : 04] Isaiah is no longer going to be waiting in fear but he is waiting in hope. I will hope in him. And so today will you stand firm on God's word?

And I don't just mean intellectual assent. I don't just mean saying oh yes I believe God's word is inspired and errant and infallible etc etc etc. I mean do you spend more time reading the Bible or more time consuming news stories and articles?

Do you spend more time pondering and mulling over what God says about you in scripture? Or do you spend more time indulging worries about what other people are thinking and saying about you? Do you really love God's word? Is that where your mind goes when it has a moment to run free? Do you believe that God's word really is sufficient?

That when you read God's word and especially when you open God's word and look at the person of Jesus Christ and who he is and how lovely he is and wonderful and great and good he is.

[48 : 20] Do you believe that this is sufficient to keep you grounded and stable and sane in turbulent times when it seems like every day you hear of somebody else who is losing their grounding their stability their sanity?

Wait for the Lord. Hope in him. He has given you his sufficient word. There's a second remedy that God has given you.

He's given you a sufficient word and the second remedy is he has given you his fearsome presence. He has given you his fearsome presence.

Amid a people who are immersed in conspiracy fear. God speaks in verse 13 and here's what God tells Isaiah.

The Lord of hosts him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear and let him be your dread. God. This may not sound to you like a good thing.

[49 : 31] But it is the best thing. If you are caught in the snare of the fear of man, if you are neck deep in conspiracy fear, this is the only thing that is going to get you out. You must fight fear with fear.

You must pit the fear of the Lord against the fear of man. When people seem great in power and significance, you must bring to mind, open the words of scripture and look and see and remember, remember, remember that it is the Lord who is great in power and significance and gravity.

Only a God who is holy, only a God who is judge. This is the only God who will seem great to you. Otherwise, he will seem like an irrelevant deity that you can slip into your pocket, don't pull out and whisper a prayer to you when you feel bad and then put back in there.

But he won't be able to save you, he won't be able to help you and he will not deliver you from any of your fears. This is why Jesus told us in Luke chapter 12 verses 4 and 5.

This is what Jesus says about fear of man versus fear of the Lord. I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do.

[50 : 52] But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

When Jesus said these things, perhaps he had in mind Isaiah 8 verse 13. Let him be your fear and let him be your dread.

We need a God who is holy, a God who judges, a God who is willing to cast into hell and has authority to do that. If you know deep down in your gut that this is who the Lord is, that he is great in power and significance, then all other fears, they will find their proper place.

If the sun with its great gravity is in the center of our solar system, everything else falls into proper place and so it is with the Lord. The other fears will no longer control you.

They will find their right place. And so you can remember the words of Psalm 118 verse 6. The Lord is on my side. I will not fear.

[52 : 11] What can man do to me? Wait for the Lord and fear him. The second remedy is he's given you his fearsome presence. And then God has given you the third and final remedy.

He has given you his reassuring promise. He has given you his reassuring promise. His promise is this. He is greater than the ones you fear.

His wisdom will outlast and outwit any conspiracy. He is greater than multinational corporations. He is greater than government agencies.

He is greater than demonic authorities. He is greater than the local rumor mill. He is greater than social media gossip groups. He is greater than the spouse or that parent or neighbor who fills you with anxiety.

In Isaiah 8 verse 10, Isaiah speaks this promise. This promise that stands against all conspiracy. This promise that reassures those who wait for the Lord.

[53 : 16] Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak a word, but it will not stand for God is with us. All conspiracies will be shattered.

That phrase, God is with us. It's a translation into English. The Hebrew word is Emmanuel. Emmanuel.

God is with us. That is the promise of Christmas. And so in verse 11, Isaiah can say that the Lord's strong hand is upon him.

God has given his reassuring, strengthening, stabilizing, confidence giving promise. God is saying, do not be afraid.

Gently saying, don't be afraid. And then he is adding, I am with you. I'm with you. Emmanuel, God with us.

[54 : 21] That is the reassuring promise. That is the message of Christmas. God will bring light and truth to a world that is saturated with fear.

God will disperse the gloomy clouds of night. Next week, we will turn to face this light in Isaiah chapter 9 to see how God will deliver all those who are waiting in fear.

We will read, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

Our God and our Father, we are looking forward to next week to turn from these heavy, this heavy talk of our fears, to turn towards the bright hope that is breaking into our world.

Not only a kingdom, but even better, a good king. We long for that. O come, O come, Emmanuel.

[55 : 36] O come, O come, God with us. That is our prayer, Lord. For today, I pray that if there, perhaps this is a time when some of those listening have been immersed in political conspiracy fear, and I pray that this may be something that causes them to halt, to consider, to ponder their ways, to think, what has this done for me?

To see the evidence that this has begun to bring ruin into their lives, to turn back and repent, and open up the teaching and the testimony.

For some who have dwelt for a long time in fears of personal conspiracy, and perhaps never thought of it as a conspiracy fear, and perhaps never realized that they have actively sought this out, and embraced it, and pursued it.

O Lord, may they stop, take stock, and consider. May they listen to your reasoning and to your invitation to turn from this huge problem, this distraction, this fear of man, to instead fear the Lord, to see that their relationship with you, their reconciliation with you, the chance for forgiveness and peace with you is so much greater, and brings so much more peace, and is the true deepest problem in our lives.

May they instead turn and find joy, and peace, and freedom in embracing new life with you. Lord, deliver us from all our fears.

[57 : 23] Do not fear. Do not fear. Do not fear. I am with you. Do not fear. I am with you. We need to hear these words of assurance from a God who is not only great, but a God who is good, and a God who is with us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.