

# THE LIFTING OF SMOKE

## ISAIAH 9

Text: Isaiah 9:18

### **Isaiah 9:18**

<sup>18</sup>For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up *like* the lifting up of smoke.

Introduction:

How many of you have ever been near a fire that was raging uncontrollably? This is a scary sight.

I have read stories of fire fighters who have fought forest fires out west and in America's northwest. Sometimes those fire fighters lost their lives in such blazes. Fire is a frightening thing.

In the Bible, we find wickedness compared to a fire. We understand the analogy. Isaiah used such a comparison.

Notice again verses 18-20:

### **Isaiah 9:18-20**

<sup>18</sup>For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up *like* the lifting up of smoke. <sup>19</sup>Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall

be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother. <sup>20</sup> And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm:

Today we see wickedness burning like a flame in our nation today.

Notice with me as we consider and make comparison to what Isaiah saw in his day the corruption and degradation of the Israelite people. He had seen the jaws of sinful pride sink her teeth into this great people.

As he witnessed her downfall he described what he saw as burning like a fire.

I believe that the same fires which destroyed Israel may well be smoldering in our nation today.

## **1. THE PEOPLE WERE FILLED WITH PRIDE (VS. 9-10)**

### **Isaiah 9:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> And all the people shall know, *even* Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, <sup>10</sup> The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change *them into* cedars.

God was sending judgment on the Israelite people. They made two mistakes. First, they ignored the cause of the calamities. Second, they arrogantly boasted that

they would rebuild. It is as if they thought they did not need God.

Remember:

**Proverbs 16:18**

<sup>18</sup> Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

**1 Peter 5:5**

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

**Proverbs 29:23**

<sup>23</sup> A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.

As I look at America I see an extremely proud people. We are proud of being Americans but we are also arrogant toward other people in our world. In addition, we are blind when bad things happen to us. We wander along showing little concern for the tragedies that strike us.

Illustration:

Listen to what Abraham Lincoln said of us almost 150 years ago. "We've grown in numbers and wealth and power as no other nation has grown...We've vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our own hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with

unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient..., too proud to pray to the God that made us.”

## **2. THEY WERE INTERNALLY PERPLEXED (VS. 16, 19)**

### **Isaiah 9:16**

<sup>16</sup> For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err; and *they that are* led of them *are* destroyed.

### **Isaiah 9:19**

<sup>19</sup> Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother.

There was poor leadership from their national leaders, confusion and anarchy among the people.

This is the 51<sup>st</sup> state in America – the state of “Confusion.”

Note:

There are those who demand that government get out of our personal lives — except for pregnant woman.

Supporters of the health insurance industry scream at us, “You don't want a government bureaucrat coming between you and your doctor.” But they ignore the fact that companies in that business maintain huge staffs

whose primary purpose is to cut or deny claims for procedures recommended by your doctor, or to terminate coverage they consider to be an impediment to company profits.

Retirees join in on the clamor against “socialized medicine” — unless it happens to go by the name of Medicare.

Congressmen rail against government waste, but are unwilling to trim their own nonessential spending, or cut any of their lavish benefits. They have the best universal health care available, but stand in the way of anything like that for the rest of us.

The complaint by the 99 percent about the excessive accumulation of wealth by the top 1 percent has been labeled class warfare. But doesn't the overwhelming political power of that 1 percent, which has enabled them to divert an unconscionable preponderance of the nation's wealth into their hands, constitute a class warfare that has divided our society into the very small “have” and the very large “have-not” classes?

Most political leaders today base most all that they do on polls, and not principles.

We are living in a day like the days of Isaiah – Days of Perplexity.

### 3. THEY IGNORED THE WARNING PRECURSORS

When conditions are ripe for a forest fire, our forestry officials will issue warnings concerning the danger. They will discourage people from burning trash, building camp fires or the like. When people neglect those warnings and build fires they are flirting with danger. Look at verse 13.

#### **Isaiah 9:13**

<sup>13</sup> For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts.

We too have got to the place where we do not heed the warnings of God's judgment.

If God is consistent, in his dealings with America, the way he has always been consistent throughout history, he will warn us of approaching judgment. In speaking of the end of the age the Lord spoke of the warning signs we should notice.

#### **Matthew 24:37-44**

<sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. <sup>38</sup> For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, <sup>39</sup> And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. <sup>40</sup> Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. <sup>42</sup> Watch

therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. <sup>44</sup> Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

When the flood came, men were found "eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage," absorbed in their worldly pursuits, and utterly regardless of Noah's repeated warnings. They saw no likelihood of a flood. They would not believe there was any danger. But at last the flood came suddenly and "took them all away." All that were not with Noah in the ark were drowned. They were all swept away to their last account, unpardoned, unconverted, and unprepared to meet God. And our Lord says, "so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Illustration:

This happened in Nazi Germany. People tried to warn them what was happening. A man named Martin Niemoller tried to warn the people. He saw the warning signs on the horizon. Listen to what he said:

First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me.

## **4. THERE WAS A WICKED PROGRESSION (VS. 18)**

### **Isaiah 9:18**

<sup>18</sup> For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up *like* the lifting up of smoke.

Illustration:

When I served as a youth director and had camp we would have on Friday evening a campfire service.

To get the campfire started I would use dried grass, twigs, or paper for kindling.

Once those things begin to burn, I then add sticks and progressively move to larger items and eventually logs were placed on the fire.

Illustration:

Dr. Carle Zimmerman sociologist and historian who studied the deterioration and ultimate disintegration of



various cultures wrote in his book “Family and Civilization” which was written in 1947.

He found that in each society the disintegration of the culture was preceded by the disintegration of the family. He discovered 11 common elements that were always present. Let me mention a few of those eleven common elements:

- Marriage lost its sacredness; it was frequently broken by divorce.
- Traditional meaning of the marriage ceremony was lost. Alternate forms and definitions of marriage arose, and traditional marriage vows were replaced by individual marriage contracts.
- Instead of supporting each other in complementary and cooperating roles, men and women compete; the two genders seek to dominate each other. Instead of seeking opportunity and justice, the genders radicalize, focus on secondary issues, and destabilizing society, and ultimately hurt people by placing politically-defined demands upon them and setting ideological standards for success. Instead working for fairness, radicalized genders attempt to manipulate public opinion on a variety of issues, and direct the lives of people.

- Feminist movements appeared, and women lost interest in child bearing and mothering, preferring to pursue power and influence.
- Public disrespect for parents and authority in general increased.
- Juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, and rebellion accelerated
- People with traditional marriages refused to accept family responsibilities.
- Desire for and acceptance of adultery grew.
- Increased tolerance for sexual perversions of all kinds, particularly homosexuality, with a resultant increase in sex-related crimes

This list sounds and looks an awful lot like the day in which we are living.

Close:

What can we do?

1. We can pray and ask God to send revival.

Illustration:

In January 1996 Rev. Joe Wright prayed a prayer in the Kansas Senate that should stir us. It should stir us to pray. This prayer inflamed many liberals but it was the truth.

Listen to his prayer:

“Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask Your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance.

We know Your Word says, ‘Woe to those who call evil good’, but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.

We confess that,

We have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it Pluralism;

We have worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism;

We have endorsed perversion and called it alternative lifestyle;

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery;

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare;

We have killed our unborn and called it choice;

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable;

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem;

We have abused power and called it politics;

We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition;

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression;

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh, God and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free.

Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent; to direct us to the center of Your will and to openly ask these things in the name of your Son, the living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

## 2. We can get involved

A man by the name of Richard Hogue in the book "America Return to God" said:

“If our country survives---and I realize that’s a big IF---it will be because there is an awakening in the lives of committed Christians across our nation who finally begin to realize that it is not only their opportunity but also their absolute responsibility to be intricately involved in the political process of our country and to use that involvement to turn this nation once again to the Lord.

For much too long we have allowed our government to grow farther and farther away from the direction that God has always demanded our nation take. At the same time we have yielded the control of our country to a godless, secular, humanistic philosophy that has absolutely sapped the strength and spiritual vitality America has always had. Never before, in the history of Christendom, have so many believers been willing to forfeit their liberty and freedom without even putting up a struggle.”

May we today heed the warning signs on the horizon and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways.