

Repairer of the Breach to Become Light to the World

Hoshaiah looked out over the ramparts of Lachish, the second most important city in Judah after Jerusalem. And he saw one light shining in the distance. This represented the remaining Judean city, Azekah, that had not yet been destroyed or occupied by the Babylonian forces. And then came a message: *"Let my lord know that we are watching over the beacon of Lachish, according to the signals which my lord gave, for Azekah is not seen."* His scouts had just seen that city of Azekah had fallen. Then, Hoshaiah, the commander of the city, knew that the time was coming when Lachish would soon be surrounded by the Babylonian army. He also knew that 115 years earlier Lachish had been similarly laid siege to by the Assyrian forces led by Sennacherib, the same that had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel and made Galilee a partly Gentile region. In 701 BCE a ramp had been constructed facing Lachish using 3 million stones (19,000 tons), quarried and placed entirely by captured prisoners of war, then covered with soil and paved with wooden planks, upon which the Assyrians rolled up their massive battering ram, to smash the walls. Then, the troops swarmed up through the breach and city was quickly neutralized. It was all done in less than a month. Sennacherib was so pleased with this operation that the siege and its capture were depicted on stone relief on his palace wall in Nineveh (now in the British Museum). But soon after, the Assyrian empire collapsed, and people moved back to repair the breaches in the walls, but the repairs wouldn't last. Azekah (near where David fought Goliath) and Lachish were significant cities serving as strategic military and administrative centers crucial for the defense of Judah. By 587 BCE the Babylonians took control of those cities, and their capture was pivotal leading to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BCE. The Lachish letters, discovered in the ruins of Lachish, provide valuable insights into the events surrounding the fall of these cities and the fate of Judah¹. Well, if Hoshaiah survived, he ended up in Babylon. All that's left of Lachish today now is a tell, a large mound where the city once existed, but that Assyrian-made ramp is still visible after over 2700 years. This was the nadir of Judea, the end of everything. Probably Hoshaiah and many others, knew that the leaders of the country including the king's court and priests had ignored the covenantal agreement with God to protect the people because they made worthless sacrifices and did not care about their welfare, as we heard last Sunday from the prophet Micah. This morning, we heard of the sins that the Lord had recognized amongst their leaders in Isaiah 58; maybe we are guilty of some of these today.²

God exposes the hypocrisy of religious rituals performed without true devotion and obedience. The priests and people outwardly observed religious practices but failed to act with righteousness, justice, and compassion. God made it clear that true fasting is not about outward displays of religiosity, but about living a life that reflects a heart for justice, mercy, and care for the oppressed. ²This Isaiah passage (58:1-9a, 12) could have been written before, during or after the Exile, but from our perspective, it is timeless. Here are some of the verses again.

¹"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

⁶"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; you shall be called, the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Paths in which to Dwell.

As a result of the Babylonian conquest, the Jews lost not only their homes and families, their way of life, but most importantly, their temple and their God. Yahweh was defeated. He couldn't possibly save them now they were in Babylon in Exile. Nebuchadnezzar and his god, Marduk, were now in charge. But the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 47 announced it was Yahweh's way of reminding the people there was a breach in his relationship with them ⁹*I will drive you out of the city and deliver you into the hands of foreigners and inflict punishment on you.* ¹⁰*You will fall by the sword, and I will execute judgment on you at the borders of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*" And then he said he was abandoning Jerusalem and the Temple and going east, for ²³*The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.*" Yet, some during the Exile saw a glimmer of hope. Isaiah (43:5) proclaimed: "*Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.*" God was telling them that he was giving the people a severe punishment to remind them to keep their covenantal promises. East was where Babylon was, so maybe some of the remnant thought Yahweh would be there with them, and they would be able to return to Judea. And over the next few hundred years, their faith was maintained, synagogues were created, and scribes got busy in writing down and consolidated what they brought with them and what they remembered of their old stories of their journey to the land of Caanan, the prophets and the kings, the psalms, which they combined to produce the Hebrew Bible, with Genesis being one of the last books to be written down. It was a work of time and effort, but it resonated with the people both for those returning to Judea and those remaining in Mesopotamia. But they still waited for freedom. They had been occupied by the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, and now the Romans. Where was the promised Messiah that Isaiah had said would come? We fast-forward to the Upper Room. where a group of men and women huddled in fear. They were behind a locked door. At any moment, the ICE agents of the day, the Sanhedrin guard or perhaps the Roman military, would break the door down and haul them away because their leader had been condemned and executed, and they were also guilty of sedition, punishable by crucifixion. They didn't believe what some hallucinating women had said about seeing their Master alive. They were petrified and paralyzed unable to do anything but commiserate among themselves.

What fears paralyze you today, or maybe not you but someone in your family or neighborhood? We live in uncertain times both locally and globally. Voters today say they are not happy with those in charge, expressing themselves with words like disappointment, sadness, hostility, and outrage. There is a long list of concerns that create fear and a lack of trust in our leaders to address many important social issues: racial and gender discrimination, mental and physical disabilities, aging and terminal illnesses, job loss and career uncertainty, habitat loss, desertification of the land, microplastics, adverse climate change, eroding health care and antivaccine policies, AI-generated fake photos and documents, the increasing possibility of WW III, and of course the decline in church attendance. Many do not want to raise children in the world we live in today; do you know those who think this way? I am sure each of you has some experience of these fears and concerns including the looming inevitability of death. But even if you say, generally, I will survive this, many will not. We put up the rampart walls and block any openings, not so much as to let the enemy in, but to keep us from being contaminated from outside things, a plague mentality. We shut our ears to the cries of others. You may say, none of these will affect me, but maybe they will? How do you feel right now about yourself, family, society, and your faith? Is it secure?

And then there he was in the midst of them, showing his wounded hands and his feet. The disciples were startled, but when he said Peace be with you, then they knew that he had come not to reprimand, but to greet, just as we pass the peace together right here in this sanctuary. But the second time of saying Peace be with you, meant more; it was a commissioning to be partners with him, as he breathed the Holy Spirit into them and said, "Go. I will give you all knowledge to do what has to be done in my name, to be

sent to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is here. And so they went, and then they understood what Jesus had said before in all his teachings. That Sermon on the Mount became real to them. When he said. *You are the salt of the earth. You are a city on a hill; you are the light of the world.*”, it wasn’t long before Peter preached to be a light to both Jews and Gentiles. What does that mean for us? How does that translate for us today? Are we in the same position as Hoshaiyah, concerned about invasion of our comfortableness, our status quo? What kind of enemy do we want to keep out and who or what do we want to let in? Is the breach really our separation from God that seems impossible to repair? When Jesus entered that locked room, the break the disciples they had with the Father and Son was now mended; the breach was restored, not just for them but for all of Israel, and for all at the ends of the world. It was the start of New Creation. As God breathed into the first man to give him life, so, he sent the same Spirit breathed into us for an enhanced life, a foretaste of a resurrected body that Jesus had just demonstrated, with unlimited power to create that Kingdom. Are we dreading that the walls of our self-centered life are being breached, so we can see more clearly how broken the world is in our neighborhoods, and further afield? Do we wall ourselves in, and complain, “*Protect me, Lord. Keep me and my family safe.*” We say we just may feel too tired, too old, too incompetent to go on; let me rest. And yet the disciples who wanted to be protected and kept safe, they were given their marching orders from which they never turned back. Yes, we need a secure base to restore and strengthen our faith, but only so we can share it with others.

In your life does the presence of Jesus and his spirit relieve those fears and anxieties allowing you to move forward in your faith and be a beacon in society? How can we be the salt of the earth. What does that mean for us here and now? Yes. A little bit of salt can make a huge difference. Is there something you can do in your neighborhood; take the first step to meet and greet some, share stories with neighbors that may eventually have them see how your faith allows you to rise above today’s problems. Maybe you can sweep their driveway, maybe you can donate some money for a cause, or help a family in an unexpected situation. But a light on the hill or a lighthouse on the coast is something that is seen from far off. So, some things we can do locally, and some are directed to impact a larger population, such as working with others for social justice, reducing gun violence, or minimizing the impact of climate change. – As we heard read by Beth Layhe, “¹⁴*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*” (Matthew 5:14,15).

Jesus talks about a visible light to light up a house or a place where it can shine for many to see. Maybe if he was born in Michigan, Jesus would use lighthouses as examples of light in the world. In this State, you can visit many lighthouses (129 of them). And most of these are on the shore that we can stroll around as tourists and perhaps climb up in them and admire the way that the light system works. Parabolic reflectors and Fresnel lenses concentrate the light into powerful but narrow beams, improving visibility for those on the water, and these can indicate specific safe or hazardous areas³. Red sectors warn of dangerous rocks or shoals. Green sectors mark safe passages. White sectors typically indicate open waters. By combining flashing sequences and color signals, lighthouses provide precise navigational guidance so that mariners can safely interpret their surroundings, even in low visibility conditions. The thing is, lighthouses have no value to you if you are on the shore; you have potentially to be in harm’s way in the open water looking for guidance under threatening or unclear conditions. Whereas most lighthouses in Michigan are on points of land, where I came from in Scotland and around Britain, many lighthouses were built far out in the sea on sunken rocks where the Atlantic Ocean swells would break over them, but how could these be built? It was the father and grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of Treasure Island, who were in the lighthouse-building business⁴. They were commissioned

to find the rocks that were the cause of multiple wrecks. They designed and built over 30 lighthouses around the British Isles. One of last of these was on Dubh Artach, the black rock,⁵ which lies 18 miles west of the Isle of Oronsay. Originally it was considered to be an impossible site for a lighthouse, but the loss of the steamer *Bussorah* with all thirty-three hands on her maiden voyage in 1863, and of an astonishing 24 vessels sunk nearby in the storm of December 30 and 31 of 1865, forced the need to attempt its construction by the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses. The men working in a metal barrack above the reef had first to dig a foundation which was frequently flooded by waves, then granite blocks quarried locally were ferried out and laid higher and higher for the lighthouse to be completed in 1871 towering to 145 feet. It has been able to withstand storm waves reaching 92 feet breaking around the lighthouse and waves pounding the stones with a force of almost 3 tons per square foot. An even-more remote lighthouse, Skerryvore, reaches 156 feet built on a reef that runs for 7 miles mostly underwater. The Islanders had said if God had meant for a lighthouse to be built on the rock, He would have put it there himself, because there was money to be made from the flotsam of wrecks. The lights of these tall lighthouses can be seen 22-25 miles away. I have climbed the hill on Oronsay to see these structures on a clear day and their lights at night. You see, that the taller the lighthouse and the more concentrated the high-powered beams are, the more those on the water can feel secure. Lighthouse height and beam concentration have the greatest impact on reaching furthest out. Sure, we can visit, read, and admire the past work of others to make life a bit safer and faith stronger, but does that stimulate us to take on the role today of being pillars of hope and beacons of life-saving power, granted by the Holy Spirit reaching to others in need, or even in peril? Can we be mediators in mending relationships? Can we ever retire from being active followers of Christ? Can we be menders of torn nets that Pastor Lisa reminded us of last Sunday? *“Then, your light shall break forth like the dawn, you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.* So, like the bright lighthouse beams, let us stand up and focus our faith where the need is greatest. Isaiah 58 begins with a command to *“Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet.”* This is a call to us to proclaim God’s message boldly and without reservation, later reemphasized in the Sermon on the Mount. *“Let your light shine before others, so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* Our faith should not be hidden but demonstrated through our actions.

We started this sermon with lights going out one by one, resulting in total war and destruction, words echoed over 1300 years later by Winston Churchill in 1938 about Europe just before WWII. We ended it with us being bearers of the light to shine wherever and whenever it is needed to restore faith in the goodness of God for all of humankind. Let us remember that to be a bearer of the light in the world, like a lighthouse, we need a strong foundation, a community of faith, that prays, works and learns together. Then we will have the power to shine in a broken world; we will stand together by expressing our faith through love. As Peter Wehner, concludes in The Atlantic last month on his article, “MAGA Jesus Is Not the Real Jesus”, and is printed in the Preparation section of the Order of Service,⁶ “that we will be repairers of the breach, true peacemakers. And that we will ‘shine as stars in the world.’” Let it be so.

¹The Lachish Letters. Free Bible - Lachish Letters (Biblical Archaeology) <https://www.free-bible.com/archaeology/israel/lachish-letters.php>

²More on Isaiah 58 can be read at <https://scripturesavvy.com/isaiah-58/> and https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/isaiah/isaiah-58.cfm

³How Lighthouses Work | Lighthouse NE

⁴The Lighthouse Stevensons, Bella Bathurst, HarperCollins, 1999.

⁵Dubh Artach - Wikipedia

⁶Peter Wehner. MAGA Jesus Is Not the Real Jesus. The Atlantic. January 21, 2025.