

Text: [Isaiah 30:19-22](#)

Date: May 2, 2021

Title: “Start Driving”

Theme: Listening for God’s guidance often requires us first to begin moving in a direction.

1

It may come as a tremendous surprise to you, but there are a number of things I’m quite particular about. Ok, if you know me maybe not surprising. Especially not surprising is how particular I am about my technology. One example is the app I use for directions when I’m driving. Are you fanatical about this too?

Me, I am a Google maps guy, always and forever. But there are some things I do NOT want. I don’t want it talking to me, for example. That drives me crazy. I can’t take it.

I’ve tried Apple Maps, but with that somehow the distance to the next turn always seems misleading. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve gone past the street I wanted as a result. So that’s a no for me.

I kind of like Waze, but it’s just too much information. I mean, people reporting police here, stopped cars there, cows on the road or what not somewhere else. It’s a lot. And I always feel kinda guilty for not contributing to the community and reporting these things. But then again, how are you supposed to do that and drive? I just can’t.

Can you tell I get easily frustrated by stuff?

And you know, one of the things about ALL of these apps that is frustrating is that they can’t help you when you’re stopped. You know what I mean? Like, say you’re in a parking lot and the orientation of the map isn’t exactly clear. That little arrow representing your car isn’t pointed in the right direction. In that case, there’s really no way to know which way to go – at least not until you start driving. Which, if you’re like me, usually results in you starting off in the wrong direction and then having to turn around. But you’ve always got to get started first. Otherwise, it doesn’t work.

2

I think that's the main point I want to make today. Sometimes, before we can receive the direction we need, we've first got to get going.

As the US begins to move out of the pandemic toward something more familiar, all of us are wondering what normal will look like now. I know businesses are trying to wrestle with what the past year has done to their model. And so is the church. We've got a lot to figure out in terms of how we move to a hybrid approach that takes on-line as seriously as we've always taken in-person.

And I could focus on that in the message today, but you know what? I also want us to think about this in terms of our own personal lives. We're looking for clarity. That's the point of this series.

I don't know about you, but I honestly feel like the past year has been so overwhelming and confusing that I'm just now getting to a place where I can look past the next week or two and think more hopefully and concretely about a future. And I'm sure I'm not the only one who is trying to figure out what the past year has taught me about myself, about my faith, and about how I want to manage my life at work and at home going forward.

Of course, going forward is a process. And one of the things I've been learning, is that no matter how much we want certainty, how much we desire a complete map of our lives and each turn along the way, it's just not possible.

I wonder if this isn't part of the design. If we could see each step, would we start the journey at all? But then again, without that roadmap, many of us are very hesitant to do anything. We're hesitant to set out at all.

3

We talked last week about this idea of clarity versus certainty. And today's scripture references that notion again.

I know this reading from Isaiah might seem kind of obscure. Trust me, even for preachers a lot of Isaiah is tough to wrap your head around, because

you have to know a lot about the historical situation to understand it. And the history around of the book of Isaiah is complicated.

This particular passage is part of a section where the prophet takes aim at Hezekiah, the king who ruled in Jerusalem at the turn of the eighth to seventh century BC. At the time, the Assyrian Empire was the dominant player in the Middle East. And though Hezekiah is portrayed in most of the Bible as a righteous ruler, in Isaiah chapter 30, he's criticized for pursuing an alliance with Egypt as a means to protect the kingdom.

The prophet was critical for a few reasons. First, at this point in history, Egypt was far past its prime, way too weak to be of any real help. But more importantly, God had given this commandment in the book of Deuteronomy: "The king must not return the people to Egypt... because the LORD told you, 'you will never go back by that road again.'" (Deuteronomy 17:6) God knows people: sometimes we'll try and return to what was, no matter how bad it was, just because we can't yet see what will be. But this wasn't an option for Israel. Those who had escaped slavery in Egypt once, were never to bind themselves to that place again.

What Isaiah advocates instead is a radical trust in the LORD. This doesn't sound like a great move from a strategic perspective. After all, when you are up against a bully, even a weak ally seems better than no ally at all. And an ally you can't see seems like a poor bet when what you really need is an real live army – God's angel armies don't quite seem to cut it.

4

Hezekiah and the people around him were like many of us. We tend to gravitate toward the certain, sure, known thing every time, even if in reality the certain thing isn't all that great. The certain thing might be the stability of a situation as we know it, even if it's not working really well for us, because we just don't know what else to do. The passage we read talks about the "bread of distress and the water of oppression." Sometimes that menu sounds better to us than no food at all. Inertia is a powerful force in the world. We often stand still because we don't have the map to get us from where we are to where we want to go.

Now sometimes, the problem is that we are all too ready to go because we think we've got the map. Sometimes we perceive that there's certainty in an

outside source that can provide the resources we need – like Hezekiah making a treaty with Egypt. A plan like that is a kind of map we draw ourselves. But it's often a dicey proposition, because you know as well as I do that at times, the people, institutions or opportunities we put our trust in don't turn out to be all that trustworthy. They let us down.

Isaiah talks about that too. In this passage, he criticizes the people's "gods" of silver and makes fun of the fancy robes of their pagan priests. He says essentially, "maybe one of these days you'll get wise and realize those things can't help you. Maybe one of these days you'll realize they're nothing more than rags fit to be thrown out." In their quest for certainty, people were more than ready to turn to the false hope of idols, because at least they were real and they were tangible.

5

But that's not where hope lies for followers of our God. It's not in the false certainty that we believe will come from external things: the opportunities that we think we can create for ourselves, the roadmaps we try and draw for our own lives. Does my life in my mid-forties look anything like I thought it would in my early twenties? Of course it doesn't.

Our hope is also not in the pseudo-comfort of sitting still. I say pseudo-comfort, because we know that sometimes we'll accept a whole lot that tastes like the "bread of distress and the water of oppression" just because it's all we know. And we're afraid of doing something else. It's also not in endlessly making plans, drawing and redrawing the map, dreaming of something different for ourselves but afraid to set out on the journey because we don't know exactly which way to go.

Remember, friends: the GPS can't recalibrate until you start moving.

And that's exactly what I hear God saying today: sometimes, if you want clarity in your direction, you first need to get moving. "If you stray to the right or the left, you will hear a word that comes from behind you: 'This is the way, walk in it.'"

The word – the direction - doesn't come first. The motion comes first. Then, if you stray to the right or left, you'll hear. But there is an action, a first step out that we need to initiate. No one else can do this. Our endless inertia,

our comfort with what is or what was, our efforts to construct the perfect map before doing anything – none of it is what God desires for us or requires of us. Instead, often what's required is the courage to put something in motion, then listen for the voice of God telling us whether we're on the right track.

Here's the challenge. I've already told you, I don't like listening to the GPS voice. But the bad news for me is that listening is exactly what's required. Because we don't get to see the full picture. We don't get that kind of certainty. Isaiah says that the voice is BEHIND us, not in front of us. The map gets drawn AS we're driving the road, not before. And that's uncomfortable for us. We want to be the mapmaker. But that's not our job. Our job is to learn to trust the mapmaker. If you've tried finding clarity while sitting still, maybe you need to do something different. What if you just start driving, and keep listening for what's next?

Amen.

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