

Isaiah 7:10-16 NIV

"The Lord's greatest gifts"

"Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,
¹¹ 'Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.' ¹² But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.' ¹³ Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, ¹⁶ for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste."

This time of year many of us think of taking new directions in life.

- **Walk the high road.**
- **Give up stuff that makes us feel guilty.**
- **Quit bad habits.**
- **Make peace with our families.**

Some make resolutions.

- Others take private vows.
- A few would like to change, but feel hopeless because of past failures.



Most of us would like to change some things.

One big obstacle prevents us.

What stands in the way?

We haven't decided on a destination.

We haven't decided where we want to go or what we want to do.

Some say, "How can you make plans when you don't know what life will bring?"

"To prophesy is difficult, especially concerning the future," said Alvin Toffler

Fogginess of the future isn't our major obstacle.

"What stands in the way?" you ask.

Here's the greatest hitch:

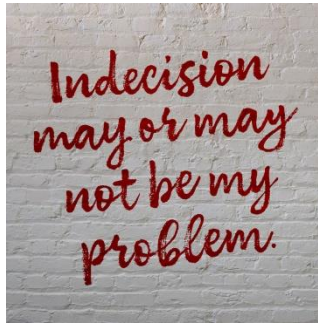
We haven't fully decided to walk in the Lord's way or to depend on his gifts

We want to do what we enjoy, and we never fully commit to God.

A man who lived in Northampton, England, would attend the Anglican Church one Sunday and the Methodist Church the next. The people of the Anglican Church invited him to join their church. The Methodist people invited him to become a member of theirs. He could never make up his mind. When he died, his wife wanted his body buried in the Anglican churchyard.

Church officials didn't think this was quite right.

If you visit this churchyard today, you will find his body buried so that half of it is inside the fence and half outside.¹



Above all other things, are you certain you want to live to please God?

Have you fully decided to walk in the Lord's way?

That's why in our Isaiah text, King Ahaz didn't want to put God to the test.

He didn't want to serve God.

The young king wanted to do as he saw fit.

In the face of Ahaz's rejection of God, Isaiah told him about God's plans.

Was King Ahaz right or was Isaiah?

The *Old Testament* book *2 Kings*, chapter 16, tells many disgusting facts about King Ahaz.

His refusal to follow God led him to disastrous choices for his son and others.

Today, not many Christians could tell you one fact about King Ahaz.

Yet think of the thousands of times this Christmas season folks hear Isaiah's great news that a virgin conceived and gave birth to child who brought God to us and with us.

Following God in Christ helps us make better choices for us and our loved ones.

Still, many people delay making that decision. The fact is we can't stay on the fence.

There's no such thing as having one part with God and the other part with the world.

Note Peter's description:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."²

¹S. Lawrence Johnson, *The Pig's Brother and Other Children's Sermons*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1970

²² (1 Pet 2:9,10 NIV)

Peter described what happens when we fully answer God’s call:

We go from:

Darkness to light.

We’re either **in darkness** or light.

Notice that there’s **no gray area -no twilight zone.**

We’re either fully with God or against Him.

Once not a people—now the people of God.

Once no mercy—now received mercy.

From being lost to being saved.

Do you know your condition?

Every day you are alive, Jesus confronts you with the decision to follow his way.

It's never too late to make a new beginning.

At end of Interstate-10 in Santa Monica, a sign warned: “Last

Santa Monica Exit”

If you don’t take that exit, you’ll drive along the Pacific Ocean for several miles—and might get lost.



Jesus calls at life’s interchanges.

He’s ready to meet our deepest needs.

How do we take advantage of his offer?

First, we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Every adult faces the choice:

Do you want to go from darkness to light?

- From no mercy to receiving mercy,

Accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus stated the matter starkly:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction..."

If you haven’t yet accepted Jesus as your savior and Lord, I pray you’ll do so soon.

William Barclay once said there are three things which cannot come back: the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity.

As he came to the end of his distinguished ministry in London, the great British preacher Leslie Weatherhead said: "I am to be asked shortly on a radio program to answer the question, 'What have you learned from life?'"

“Well, I have learned a lot of things from life, but from my own failures, from the confidences of innumerable men and women, from the rough and tumble of forty-five years in the Christian ministry, and from my observations as a student of personal, national and international affairs, I will tell you the outstanding thing I have learned. It is this: Life will only work out one way, and that is God's way. He made it like that. Every other way has across it a barricade bearing a notice which says, '**No thoroughfare this way.**' If you surmount the barrier, there is a precipice. Men will not learn the truth of half a dozen words: '**OUTSIDE GOD THERE IS ONLY DEATH.**' After all, Jesus did say, '**I am the Way.**'”

When we’re born of the water and the Spirit—born again into Christ—he requires us to walk with him.

Many churches never expect that of you.

They take for granted that you’ve accepted Jesus at some point in your life.

You show up services.

Bring your tithes and offerings and that’s it.

Imagine talking to a baby in the womb.

The baby says, “I’m not sure I’m ready for birth. What do I have to do out there?”

“Aw, nothing much really.

Just show up now and then.

Cry occasionally to let people know you exist.

Being born is the important thing.”

Here’s what saved people do, said Peter”:

“... Declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Have you recently praised God for giving you life in Christ?

Have you declared “the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”?

Isaiah urged his fellow citizens to “tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us . . .” (Isaiah 63:7 NIV).

Isaiah’s contemporaries wanted to do things their way.



They saw no need to put God first and praise Him.

They lost their country to foreign enemies.

**Our country isn't headed in a godly direction.
Not many nations survive longer than a few centuries.**

People forget God.

**Leaders become corrupt, folks get greedy,
and lawlessness occurs.**

The one born of a virgin did not come to save a nation.

**He came to save individuals of every tribe,
language, and background.**

We accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

**We live as Jesus did and we tell other people
about God's goodness.**

**We sing "the praises of him who called us out of
darkness into his wonderful light"?**

- **It's OK to brag about our grandkids.**
- **Praise our school ball teams.**
- **Talk about Hawkeyes and Cyclones.**
- **Praise our pickups and vehicles.**
- **But primarily and most of all we praise and honor God.**

He gave us life.

- **He makes the other joys of life possible.**

- **If we enjoy eternity, it'll be because of God's Christ, born of a virgin, died on the cross, but became powerfully alive forever three days later.**
- **He rules for eternity.**
- **He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

Work on praising God this week.

**Thank him in front
of your friends.**

**Honor Him
wherever you are.**



**Praise God for his goodness and mercy.
Thank Him for giving you life in Christ.
Make Jesus your Lord.**

**The greatest gift in life is
Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior.**

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