

The Great Invitation **Isaiah 59: 1 – 21**

Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we ask that you would now bless the reading of your word to us. I ask you would help me as I preach. I ask that you would help us all as we hear. May we be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 59, starting our reading at verse 1:

“¹ Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; ² but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. ³ For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness. ⁴ No one enters suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity. ⁵ They hatch adders' eggs; they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched. ⁶ Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. ⁷ Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. ⁸ The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.

“⁹ Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. ¹⁰ We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men. ¹¹ We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. ¹² For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: ¹³ transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

“¹⁴ Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. ¹⁵ Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

“The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. ¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. ¹⁸ According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. ¹⁹ So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.

“²⁰ ‘And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,’ declares the LORD. ²¹ ‘And as for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from this time forth and forevermore.’” Amen. May God bless His word to us.

Isaiah 59, not surprisingly—once again, I state the obvious—Isaiah 59 comes in context immediately after Isaiah 58, which comes immediately after Isaiah 57. It’s not, therefore, surprising that the subject matter is very similar.

The complaint from Isaiah 58 was that God was not hearing the prayer of His people. And God’s reply was, “It’s because you’re hypocrites. Oh yeah, you go through the routine of fasting, and you make sure that everybody knows you’re supposedly humbling yourself, and you’ve got sackcloth and ashes.”

But God’s answer to the people in Isaiah 58 was, “I know that your heart is not in it. And the way that I know your heart is not in it is that the way that you live in this world does not give me any glory. You don’t love your neighbor as you love yourself. You don’t obey my law. You are an oppressor. You are actually as wicked as the people that you are praying to me to take vengeance upon for their wickedness. You are equally as wicked as the people that you think I should be judging. Why should I accept such prayers?”

That was Isaiah 58 in a nutshell. The promise in Isaiah 58 was that should they truly repent, should they truly worship God from their heart, their prayers would be heard, and they would be restored. They would see the blessings of God poured out upon them once more.

Isaiah 59 starts also speaking of the fact that the people have complained that God is not hearing their prayers. Isaiah 59, just reading verse 1: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear”—in spite of the sins of the people, in spite of our sins, in spite of the sins of the nation to which Isaiah was preaching.

And at times, in Isaiah’s life as a prophet, I can tell you, the nation of Judah, that southern kingdom of Judah, was at the lowest of low points. There was a son of David upon the throne at times in Isaiah’s life who was sacrificing his children to Moloch, who had taken the copy of an altar from a foreign nation, from Syria, and he had set that altar up in the very sanctuary where he could now offer offerings to his false gods. In other words, the king was apostate and the people had followed the king.

Isaiah had prophesied—and God had sent many other prophets—that this rebellion against God can only bring destruction. When you read the accusations of a prophet against his people, try to always bear in mind the book of Deuteronomy, that second statement of the law, which is the summary of old covenant law with relation to the people of Israel. Usually when you look into the nitty-gritty of the accusation of the prophet, you will find that he is applying something that was stated in Deuteronomy to the people of his day, saying, “Moses spoke of this. This is what’s happening. This is why it’s happening. You’ve only got to be familiar with your Scriptures, my people, and you would understand the times in which you live.”

Isaiah's promise to the people is that in spite of their sins, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or His ear dull that it cannot hear. Don't imagine that God is not God over all. Don't imagine that salvation is to be found in any of the gods in the nations that surround us. Typical attitudes of the day were that whichever foreign nation had the victory on a day, that nation's gods were stronger than those of the nation that was defeated.

Judah at this time is back-pedaling, rolling backwards. God is preparing to bring judgment upon Jerusalem, that His people would be carried off into captivity to Babylon as He had promised in the book of Deuteronomy. They were back-pedaling. And those who were not true worshipers of the living God were basically thinking along the same lines as the apostate kings, and along the same lines as the world around them—"If we're being defeated in battle, our God is not more powerful than the gods of those who defeat us." And Isaiah says, "No. The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or His ear dull that it cannot hear."

Now we can look in a narrow way at what Isaiah's saying, okay? And it's not incorrect to look at it that way. Isaiah is saying to the very people who are in front of him—just as you're here in front of me today, he was also, preaching to a people—and he was saying to them, "If we repent, if there is a true repentance before God, these disasters need not fall upon us." He could say to those people of his day, "There is salvation for us." And for those people, salvation was what? It was the ongoing security and prosperity of Jerusalem.

But as I've already pointed out to you, our passage before us this morning has been used in the New Testament. There are actually three clear citations of it in the New Testament. We looked in our New Testament reading at Romans chapter 3, where the Apostle Paul cites a couple of verses out of Isaiah 59 in his summary statement concerning the sinfulness of humanity. It's also quoted in Romans chapter 11, where the Apostle Paul is there speaking about the fact that God has worked redemption for all the world, saving all of humanity through His Son Jesus Christ.

And don't forget, and I'm sure most of you are aware of Ephesians chapter 6, where we're told to put on the whole armor of God. Well, in Isaiah 59, we're told that it's the Savior Himself who puts on the armor of God. It's the Savior Himself who comes to redeem a people. So what we're actually being told is that by the power of Holy Spirit in Ephesians chapter 6, just to sum it up, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, live as Christ lived. Obey God, and God will use you, and God will work salvation through His obedient church."

Though Isaiah speaks to a people immediately in front of him, in his time, the apostles take these Scriptures and they preach them to the whole world. Paul wrote to the Romans. Now there were probably Jews amongst that Roman congregation, but there were certainly also Gentiles. If you look at the list of the names at the end of the letter, the people to whom he sends his greetings, there are Jewish names, there are Greek names, or Roman names. Paul is preaching to the whole world, and he's using Isaiah 59 in some places as a text to preach to the whole world.

So we take this message and we preach it today in a church, now, to the whole world. Why? The message is universal. The message is universal. When we go back to Isaiah's day, the law was preached from the temple, and the people were to give glory to God in Jerusalem, at the temple of God. But what does Jesus tell us in John chapter 2? He tells us that His body is the temple, His body is the dwelling place of God. And He tells us, for example in Matthew chapter 28, that He now rules all things. "All authority has been given into my hand."

So in a manner of speaking, you worship the Lord where you are. You don't have to go to Jerusalem, you don't have to go to the temple. But the same law is preached, the same sins of humanity are preached. God's moral law is God's eternal moral law. It's based on God's own righteousness. You don't get to call yourself a godly person, and at the same time be an adulterer, a murderer, a liar, a slanderer, a jealous and covetous person, a person who has other gods, a person who takes the Lord's name in vain, a person who does not honor the day of worship. You don't get to break His law and still call yourself one of God's people.

And so the promise of salvation that we find in Isaiah is also our promise of salvation. Isaiah does tell the people—and we've already looked at the four Servant's Songs, as they're called—he does tell the people a deliverer is coming; a Redeemer is coming; salvation is coming.

But when you look carefully at what he says to the people, he's honestly preaching to them more than just, "God will defend Jerusalem if we repent." He's preaching that ultimately the whole world will come to give glory to God, that salvation will go out to all the nations, that all of mankind will be called upon to repent of their sins. So Isaiah says to the people, "God can still save. His ear is not dull, it's not fat, it's not heavy. His ear hears our prayers."

Then we go into what I believe is the first part of this text that we should look at, in verses 1 to 8, and I've called it "The Diagnosis," or "The Accusation." Here's the diagnosis, here's the problem, here's God's insight. What's the problem, God? "Okay," says God, "here's the problem:"

Verse 2: "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. ³For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness. ⁴No one enters suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity. ⁵They hatch adders' eggs; they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched. ⁶Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. ⁷Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. ⁸The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace."

Okay, what are we to see here? Notice first of all, God is speaking through Isaiah. It's all third person plural pronouns. Every "you" is a "you-all," "alla youse," and it's as though Isaiah is looking at a people and describing them. He's obviously inspired by the Spirit of God. He's speaking the very words of God. This is God's accusation against humanity. It's God's accusation against the nation of Judah at that time.

But as I've already explained, when Paul uses his citation of this passage in Romans chapter 3, the accusation is being brought against all of humanity. He's speaking to a group of people, and he's saying, "You all—all of you. You're wicked. You're sinners." Looking at verse 8, it says, "The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths."

Turn back to Isaiah 57, and look at the last two verses of Isaiah 57—verses 20 and 21: “²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. ²¹ There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” God is now saying that His people, His people Judah, His people who are ruled over by a son of David, who have the Levitical priesthood, who have the scrolls of the Scripture in the temple, His people do not know the way of peace. They do not have justice in their paths. They have made their roads crooked. No one who treads on them knows peace. That’s what God’s saying about His very own people.

I can’t help but notice that God speaks of their works. Looking at verses 5 and 6, they hatch adders’ eggs, they weave a spider’s web, their eggs are poisonous. Their very schemes are poisonous. If you crush one of their eggs, a snake comes from it. Look at verse 6: “Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity.”

When Adam and Eve first sinned, what did they try to do? They wanted to cover themselves. They tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. They knew that they were naked. Well now, God describes this people in Jerusalem, this people in the nation of Judah, and He says they’re trying to cover themselves in their own works. “Their webs will not serve as clothing.” They can’t cover themselves in their own righteousness.

We can’t cover ourselves, my friends. We just cannot cover ourselves by our own works. To cover Adam and Eve, what had to happen? Well, God took the skin of an animal. We’re not told exactly what kind of animal, but I think we all assume that it would have been a sheep-like kind of animal. God took the skin of an animal. You don’t get the skin off an animal without killing the animal. God slaughtered a beast. Its blood was shed. The skin of that beast was then used as a covering.

There’s a message there. There’s a gospel message in that. Life from God comes, first of all, from God. Who covered them? They didn’t cover themselves, God covered them. Their sin demanded bloodshed. Now Scripture tells us that the payment for their sin was not actually the shedding of the animal’s blood. It was symbolic. It was teaching them that the way of salvation comes through imputation. You sinned. Something that did not sin, something innocent, will die as a result of your sins, and God in His mercy will cover you. God will accept that offering of life. When the blood is shed, the life is poured out.

You know, I know that in my preaching I often speak to you of the blood of Christ. Well, I’m not speaking to you about something magic. I’m not speaking to you about flicking something magic on you so that you’ll be magically cleansed. When the Bible speaks of the blood of Jesus and the blood of the Lamb, it’s speaking of the fact that His very life was poured out and spilled for us. Always remember that in its Scriptural context. They can’t cover themselves. All of humanity throughout all of human history has been seeking to cover itself.

If ever in the Scripture you find anyone described as having been naked, that nakedness is considered to be a shameful state. A person ought not to be naked, ought not to be only partially covered, but should be covered. Think for example of the story of Joseph. His father covered him with a coat of many colors. His brothers, being jealous, took away his covering and sold him naked, and then Pharaoh clothed him. The Pharaoh covered him once again. He lost his covering in the house of Potiphar when his wife attempted to seduce him. He ran away.

Think of those ideas as we read here that men are trying to cover themselves with their works, and their works are like a spider's web. I mean, imagine trying to make clothing out of the silk of a spider. It's just not up to the task. It won't do the job. Men seeking to do their own good works always end up pursuing sin. Looking at verse 7, "Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways." Men seeking to justify themselves through good works always end up sinning against the very God before whom they are claiming to be righteous.

The Pharisee and the antinomian actually walk hand-in-hand, because they both make the same mistake. What's the mistake? They assume that God doesn't hate sin. The Pharisee assumes that sin is nothing more or less than a scorecard, and if I'm minus ten on the sin's column, well, as long as I do plus eleven in the positive's column, I'm safe. The antinomian assumes that God doesn't really care about sin. As long as I say I believe in Jesus, I can do as I please. Neither of them is understanding God's holiness, God's righteousness, God's demand for perfection.

God's demand upon Adam and Eve was a demand of perfection—perfect obedience. The promise was, obviously, that perfect obedience would bring life. In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul talks about the fact that all fall short. Well, the first one, or the first ones that fell short were Adam and Eve. They fell short. God had a plan.

Now, you know, every time I say that, I feel like I've just got to explain it a little bit. God had a plan from the beginning of time, and that plan was that He would create the earth, that He would create mankind on it. God wasn't surprised when they fell. But from our human perspective, we are to understand that God had given Adam and Eve a command that brought life, that if they did not fall short, they would have gone on to eternal life in the very presence of God. But they fell. And ever since, man has sought to clothe himself in his own works.

Okay, let's have a look at our second part, verses 9 through to halfway through verse 15. I've called this part, "Submission and Confession." The first thing I want you to notice is that the pronouns change. In the first section, Isaiah, speaking as God, speaks as the prosecuting lawyer. "You people," "You all," "You all are wicked," "You all are sinners." Well now, looking from verses 9 through to halfway through verse 15, Isaiah speaks as one of the people who are accused. "We all; every we; every us; we hope for light; us—we all." Isaiah now identifies himself as one of those people whom he has accused.

Never forget, in Isaiah chapter 6, when Isaiah was confronted with the glorious vision of YAHWEH, high and lifted up, he said, "Woe is me, for I am a sinful man, dwelling in the midst of a sinful people." He confessed his guilt. Though Isaiah speaks as the mouthpiece of God, and though he brings against the people the accusations of God that "you are lawbreakers," he doesn't count himself as one who is righteous by his own works. He counts himself as one of the sinners to whom God speaks.

⁹Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. ¹⁰We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men. ¹¹We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us."

Looking there at verse 11, it speaks of growling like bears and moaning like doves. The words are interesting. The word there that's been translated in my Bible as "growl" tends to suggest there's some kind of guttural anger, to be bitter about something. And the word "moan" simply just suggests misery, outright utter misery. They're both bitter and their miserable. That's what sin is doing to them.

I'm also made to think of the book of Ezekiel. Just turn to Ezekiel chapter 9. Ezekiel chapter 9 is the scene where God is bringing judgment on Jerusalem and upon the house of God, and he has the angels with him, who are being sent out to kill all who are wicked. We'll start reading Ezekiel chapter 9 at verse 1:

"¹ Then he cried in my ears," that's God crying and Ezekiel hearing the crying of God, "Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, 'Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.' ² And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

"³ Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. ⁴ And the LORD said to him, 'Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.' ⁵ And to the others he said in my hearing, 'Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. ⁶ Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.'"

Notice that those who have been accounted as faithful are those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it, those who are convicted of the sinfulness and the wickedness of the day, those who are heartbroken.

Now turn back to Isaiah chapter 59. "We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves." That moaning, it's the same moaning, the same word—we moan, we moan. "We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions," verse 12, "are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities."

Remember I quoted to you Psalm 103—"God will separate us from our sins as far as the east is from the west"? Isaiah's lamentation at this moment is, "We haven't been separated from our sins. Our transgressions are with us:"—he's now deep in the conviction of sins—"¹³ transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words." He makes no claim to righteousness. He makes no claim to being different from the people whom he brings accusation against.

I'm reminded of the prophet Daniel in Daniel chapter 9, when he realizes the time had come for the people to be called back to Israel from Babylonian captivity. Daniel starts to pray, and how does he pray? He confesses the sins, "We and our fathers have sinned against you our God."

Now this is Daniel, the biblical hero. This is Daniel who was thrown into the lions' den because he would not sin against God. If anyone could be counted righteous in his own right, you might think, Let's have a look at Daniel. Nothing negative is said about Daniel anywhere in the book of Daniel. But Daniel counts himself as one of the people. He doesn't claim any righteousness of his own. "We have sinned against you, our God. We have sinned against you, our God."

I address this to those of you who have been blessed by growing up in a home under the word of God and the admonition of God. You've grown up hearing the gospel. And God, through that gracious placement of you in that place, God put you there. God restrained you from sins, many sins. I'm sure I've done things that people here have never done. I wasn't raised in a God-fearing household.

But here's the thing, it doesn't actually make you righteous. It means that God's demand for perfection upon you is actually reasonable. What complaint have you got? When God says to you, I'm looking at you, and I'm looking for a life of perfect obedience, can you say, Yes? And the answer will be, No, you can't. You may not have committed the sins that I've committed, but you've still sinned, all right? You've still sinned. Whatever little thing it is that you feel you've done, that's it. That's all it requires. That in itself draws down the death penalty of God.

So my friends, don't sit there thinking, "I don't identify with this. This has nothing to do with me. I've never lived that kind of life." My friends, God's judging the issue of the heart, the matter of the heart, the things that come from our heart. God judges truly, God judges deeply, and so you're guilty. Praise God that you've been restrained from so many of the sins of the world. You are blessed. You are certainly blessed in that. But don't imagine that you've gotten that advantage in life through anything other than the gift and the grace of God. He's given it to you. Make the most of it. That's what you should be thinking as you hear these things.

"Transgressing and denying the Lord," looking at Isaiah 59:13, "and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words." Once again, Scripture leads you to Scripture. Think about what Jesus said about the heart: "From the issues of the heart," from the heart comes forth lying, murder, wickedness, adultery. The heart is desperately wicked. These things come from our heart. Truth is lacking.

Now looking at verses 14 and 15: "¹⁴Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. ¹⁵Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey." Once again, my friends, how easily do these words apply to the world in which we live this day? It is becoming harder to live godly lives in the sight of the world. The world is becoming less and less likely to tolerate righteous living.

The world demands that our children are schooled, and they want them schooled in the doctrines of the world. They want them schooled in the religions of the world. Any school that's taking government money is now required to teach that boys can be girls, and girls can be boys, and there's nothing unnatural in any sexual desire that any person may have. That wickedness is now being instituted into our very society. And to be one who departs from evil is to be one who is likely to come under the attack of the world. You're likely to come under oppression. That's the way it is. This is the age in which we're called to live. We live faithfully. That's what God requires of us.

Looking at the second half of verse 15: “The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.” The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him. You must wonder there: If God is displeased, what is to happen? If God is displeased, what is to happen? You see, the note of Isaiah’s preaching is about to change. But I just want us to stop and imagine, “The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.”

Where would you imagine this is going from here, if we hadn’t already pre-read the whole passage, and it just stopped there? “The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.” What should happen? What could justly and fairly happen? What could righteously happen? The Lord looked upon His people who had His word, and saw that there was no justice, and He was displeased. What should happen? Judgment. Judgment. God should bring justice.

God should bring justice against these sinful people. God should bring justice throughout the earth. We all long for it. I long for it, we all long for it. But we better remember something— We don’t want justice in a personal sense. I don’t want justice in a personal sense, I want mercy. Judgment is good. When God judges, that’s good. And mercy is good. And when God is merciful, that’s good. I’ll tell you what I want from God. I want mercy.

But God looked upon these people, and it displeased Him. And you might think that here Isaiah is going to bring the hell-fire and the brimstone—terror, death destruction, disaster. It’s coming! The judgment of God is at hand. It’s coming! But we’re told something about God, for example in Ezekiel chapter 18, verses 30 to 32. God tells us that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He doesn’t enjoy the death of the wicked. It gives Him no joy. He gets no joy from that. The problem here is that God is displeased.

Thinking back to Isaiah 53—just turn back there, Isaiah 53, verses 10 to 11. Now my translation reads, “¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand,” there in Isaiah 53:10. A reasonable translation of that would be, “It was God’s good pleasure to crush Him.” God was pleased to crush Him. Who was to be crushed there? The servant, the suffering servant, the servant who was to be high and lifted up.

God’s not pleased with the death of the wicked. God judges. God causes the penalty for sin to be death. God definitely punishes the wicked, but that doesn’t please Him. But what does please Him? What does please Him? Salvation. The offering that His servant makes. It was God’s good pleasure to crush Him. It was the will of the Lord that He be crushed.

Turn back to Isaiah 59, and let’s read on. Verse 16. Now we come, as I’ve said, to Salvation. This is salvation. This is redemption. “¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.”

Let me just read to you Isaiah 53, verse 1: “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” Isaiah 59:16: “He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.”

Who are we speaking of here? We're speaking of the servant, the same one that Isaiah has already preached to us about; the same one who's coming to work salvation; the same one who's coming to bring those new covenant blessings to the people of God. It's not the Fifth Servant's Song. No one calls it that. But it's the same subject matter. It's the same issue, it's the same solution.

Verse 17: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. ¹⁸ According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. ¹⁹ So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives."

Now we should just have a look at a translation issue there in verse 19. I think some of you will have a Bible that says, "The enemy will raise up like a flood." Our translators are trying to help us, and they're not sure which way to go. I can tell you that all of the solid faithful commentators are kind of split down the middle. It's either saying that the enemies rise up like a flood, or it's saying that the one who works salvation comes in like a flood. It's saying one or the other, and I'm not a Hebrew scholar. I can't get to the very depths of that, but I can tell you that those who are scholars debate the point. It's one or the other.

"They shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. ²⁰ And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD." A Redeemer will come.

Now Isaiah speaks in verse 18 of the fact that those who are sinners will be repaid according to their deeds. Well that's the natural result of salvation. Salvation and judgment always go hand-in-hand with God. When Jesus saves one and not another, the judgment of God is involved. One is being left in their sins, and one is being forgiven their sins and brought into the kingdom of God. We can't divide those things as though one has nothing to do with the other. All of humanity is under judgment. Those whom the servant does not save remain under judgment.

Don't forget, when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., that was the judgment of God. Jesus spoke of that in the Olivet Discourse. He spoke of the fact that the temple would be destroyed, stone upon stone. No stone will rest upon another. It will be destroyed. The judgment of God comes hand-in-hand with the salvation of God. But Isaiah is pointing us to the salvation of God—the Redeemer. "A Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the Lord."

Looking at verse 21, "And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the LORD, "from this time forth and forevermore."

Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 to 34, is Jeremiah's specific and detailed prediction of the coming of the new covenant. Just turn quickly to Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 31: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the

house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Looking at verse 33: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD.” Turn back now to Isaiah 59, verse 21. God speaking: “²¹ ‘And as for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from this time forth and forevermore.’”

This Redeemer who comes, bringing both salvation and the judgment of God, is a Redeemer who is going to inaugurate, or set in place, God’s new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31—that covenant of salvation, that covenant where your sins are not counted against you anymore, where your heart has been changed. In Jeremiah 31, verses 31 to 34, remember we’re told that the law will cease to be an external thing, outside of you, telling you what you should do. The law is written on your heart. God’s law becomes within you, an internal thing, guiding the very choices and every step that we take in our life. We’re granted life.

Paul speaks in Second Corinthians of the fact that people have hearts of stone. He speaks of that heart of stone being basically the ministry of death—the law—speaking of the fact that people, upon breaking the law, come under God’s judgment, which is death. And then he speaks of the fact that their hearts are changed, that they’re touched by the finger of the living God. Their hearts are transformed. The law is placed within them, and they cease from their sins, and they, through repentance and faith, commence a life of obedience. “My words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,’ says the LORD.” Your seed, your children’s seed.

This once again recalls the promises that had originally been made to Abraham—“In your seed, all the nations of the world will be blessed.” It recalls the promise made all the way back in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve heard God speaking of His judgment upon the serpent, God said what? “The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.” He will bruise the serpent’s head.

The Apostle Paul, for example in Galatians, tells us that we who share the faith of Abraham are the offspring of Abraham, the children of Abraham. And Paul tells us that the seed of Abraham ultimately points to whom? The Lord Jesus Christ. He’s the seed of Abraham, He’s the one that brings redemption, He’s the seed of the woman.

Galatians is wonderful, because it tells us that He was born of a woman born under the law. What did Paul want us to do when he spoke of that? He wanted us to think back to Galatians—the seed of the woman, the one who crushes the serpent’s head, this idea that your offspring will have the word of God put them.

Who are our offspring? Well, this is a debate that Baptists will have with Presbyterians—Reformed Baptists with Presbyterians and with the Dutch Reformed, for example. They'll say the offspring are our babies. They'll say that's obvious from the text, isn't it? And so they'll baptize their infants.

And we'll say, No, the offspring, the ones who are truly the seed, are the one who have the faith of Abraham; that the seed of Abraham are those who are born by the same Holy Spirit who gave life to Abraham. And so we don't baptize our babies. We seek and search, and hope and pray, and raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and we hope and pray that they will be baptized upon confession of faith.

The seed of Abraham is all who believe, all who share in the faith of Abraham. I mean, Paul spells that out in the New Testament. Not all who are born of Abraham are the children of Abraham, or the sons of Abraham. But the ones who are born of God are counted as the children of Abraham. So Isaiah's saying here that our offspring, in spiritual terms, are those who hear our gospel—those who hear our gospel and are given the gift of life and faith by God. And they respond with faith and repentance.

Earlier on in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah speaks of “here I am, and the children God has given me.” And if we read that in its context, we see that Isaiah's not necessarily speaking of the babies that his wife had had; he's speaking of those who receive his teaching, those who are listening to the things that he had to say. His children were those who were receiving the things that God had given him to say. He was preaching to a faithless nation, but within that faithless nation was a faithful remnant. And he was preaching to them.

The promise of God is that this new covenant blessing will not depart from the preaching of the gospel. All who hear the word and respond in faith will receive the Spirit of God and will go on themselves to be preachers of that gospel. “The word of God shall not depart from their mouth from this time forth, and evermore.”

So there we have it—Accusation, Confession, Salvation. All are sinners, all have fallen short of the glory of God. We are sinners. The only thing that sets us apart from the world is the grace of God. And there's salvation to be found in none other than the Redeemer whom God has sent forth, Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, the servant who died for our sins. By His righteousness, He made many to be accounted righteous.

We're amongst that number, my friends. We don't deserve to be amongst that number, but God has put us in that number. God has made us His own. He loves us. He has blessed us. It pleases God to work salvation. He gets no joy in judgment, though He must judge. A holy and righteous God must judge. He must condemn sin. He must send unrepentant sinners to the place of judgment. He must. But this brings Him no pleasure. But He's pleased to save us. He's not a reluctant Savior.

You know, there are some people who sort of preach the death of Jesus as though in dying, Jesus was struggling to draw down the favor of God, that God was reluctant to save anyone, and Jesus was trying to prove to God the Father that mankind was worth saving. That's nonsense. God gave His only begotten Son. Jesus died according to the will of the Father.

It's God who sent salvation into the earth. It's Jesus the Son of God who worked salvation in the earth. It's the Holy Spirit of God, who is Himself God, who applies salvation in the earth. God is not a reluctant Savior, He rejoices in saving. He rejoices in His goodness to mankind. God rejoices—it pleases Him to show His mercy. It pleases Him. He rejoices in His goodness to His people.

My friends, I simply point out one more time—Isaiah preaches to the people in front of him, but he preaches to the whole world, throughout all time. You can't just sort of say, Well this really doesn't apply to me. Yes, it does. Yes, it does. It applies to all of us. God is our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, and Jesus is the only Redeemer that can redeem us from the penalty of sin. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we thank you once more for the good things that you speak to us from the holy Scriptures. We thank you that you have given us a sure word, a reliable word. We thank you that you have revealed to us that your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is man's only Savior and our only hope. We give you the praise and the glory in His name. Amen.