

Isaiah 59 The Great Intervention

Parents, do your kids ever get into an argument or fight and the only way to resolve the matter is for you to intervene, to get involved yourself? Well, today, we see the intervention of God to solve a problem so deep that only He can solve. I get the theme of the sermon from v. 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.”** From here through 63:3 the emphasis for Isaiah is God’s anointed conqueror, whom we know as the Lord Jesus. As we look back upon his person and his work, we see this truth in fulness. This is the great mystery of the Gospel, through which lens we preach the Book of Isaiah. This morning, I want to preach this gospel, breaking the sermon into 4 parts as we begin with the fall of man and work our way all the way to worldwide salvation: 1) Accusation; 2) Confession; 3) Intervention; and 4) Result. We need this text as we are reminded of who we are, what we must do, what God has done to bring salvation to us and the world.

1. Accusation. In vv. 1-8 we see God’s accusation and verdict upon sinful mankind. These verses really go with cp. 58. In these words Isaiah continues God’s accusation against Israel. If you remember, they were described as **“seeking God,” “delighting to know his ways,” and “seeking righteousness judgments”** (58:2). They were also fasting and keeping the Sabbath. But God did not answer them. And it wasn’t that God could not hear or could not save them. What was the problem? It was their sin. Look at 59:1-2: **“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 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.”** This is God’s righteous accusation against Israel of Isaiah’s day. Look at vv. 3-4: **“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.”** What a picture? When a mother gives birth, there is a beautiful baby. But, not so with sin. Because of the depravity of man, our hearts give birth to sin. This is the experience of every son of Adam in this world. **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23).

In vv. 5-6b Isaiah continues with more pictures. **“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. Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make.”** Here we see the hatching of venomous snake eggs. I remember living in Kenya and Kevin calling me over to the house to show me a bunch of cobra eggs in his window. What do you think we did with them? We destroyed them. Why? Because they are harmful. In the same kind of way, sin is harmful to us and to others. Think of all the ways sin hurts us and our families. In the home: Lazy parents, not teaching their children to fear God. Anger in the home. Disobedient children. The use of pornography. At work: poor work ethic, lying to the boss or the teacher. Not reporting all your income to the IRS or cheating on your taxes. In politics: Greed and thirst for power, deceit, the seeking of self. And these are sins we can see. What about the sins of omission? Oh, how sin harms us and the world!

Isaiah’s next picture is the spider web. How many times have you walked through the woods and run into one? The spider spends great effort spinning the web, but in a moment the next morning

it is gone. It is useless. It is the same with our sins. Not only do they harm us and others, they do not help us. Remember the context, they were keeping the sabbath and fasting, doing lots of religious works; yet these works did not help them in their relationship to God. Such are our works of righteousness in the sight of God.

Let me continue through v. 8 starting in 6b: **“Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. 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. 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.”** This is our world. This is our problem. And God’s accusation is right. These words from Isaiah were on the heart of Paul when he wrote to the Romans. **“As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known”** Knowing this to be true, what do we do? Where do we start as we think about the great chasm between us and our maker?

2. Confession. We must begin with confession and repentance. Starting in v. 9, we see a change from 3rd person to 1st person. In other words, Isaiah puts himself right in the middle of sinful Israel and he begins to confess their sins together. Look at vv. 9-15a: **“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. 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. 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. For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.”**

We’ve heard it said, *“Confession is good for the soul.”* Well, this is certainly true, more than the world knows. And the confession of sins is very prominent in the OT and NT. In Nehemiah 9 after they had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem after Babylonian captivity, Ezra gathers the people and they read from Law (5 Books of Moses) half a day. And then later that month they gathered again, read from the Law again. Then, they confessed their sins for more than a quarter of the day (Neh. 9). Now, some people confess after they’ve been caught for a sin. I used to do all kinds of things to my sister (as she sometimes reminds me). And do you think I was going to confess? No. But, when she told on me and Dad confronted, what do you think I did? I made a confession. Well, this isn’t the kind of confession God requires. So, let’s examine this passage and highlight some elements of a good confession, the kind of confession God desires.

One of the first things I see is that a good confession recognizes God as the Lord. Idolatry always looks to self or something or someone other than God as the Lord. But Isaiah knew they had

denied the Lord and turned back from following him (vv. 12-13). Back in Nehemiah, this is the first thing I noticed in their confession. They said, **“You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens . . . and you preserve them . . . and you chose Abram . . . and made a covenant with him . . . And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous”** (Neh. 9:6-8). Beloved, the first element of a good confession is one that says, *“God is the Lord!”* Also, we confess that our sin is not merely a bad choice, a bad decision, or a mistake. It is an offense against the Lord God!

Another element of a good confession is that we are SORRY for our sins. In this text, Isaiah (and those of faith) groan like doves and growl like a bear because of our sins. Christians mourn over their sins. And not just people. Paul says, **“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”** (Rom. 8:22:23). This is so much more than merely feeling sorry that you got caught. It goes deep within our hearts. A good confession sees sin as a heart problem that permeates the entire being. And when we look at our sins and the sins of those around us, we agree with God’s accusation.

A good confession reflects a desire for righteousness and justice in the world. Vv. 14-15: **“Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking.”**

Another interesting truth from this passage is that a good confession recognizes the grace of God even for a heart to confess. Isaiah says, “We are blind.” Verse 9b: **“we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, we walk in gloom.”** And in v. 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.”** This means that only God can give us light and hope and vigor. Repentance and a good confession is always a gift from God. This is why we take no glory in our salvation. You might say, *“I confess with my mouth”* which is true. But, if it originated with you, then you have something to boast in.

Finally, a good confession knows that sin is against God, the Lord. And ONLY God can make things right, which brings us to truth #3.

3. Intervention. Here we see God’s intervention. Brothers and sisters, if salvation comes to any of us, it will not be the result of our works or our ways that we try to get to God. As we’ve seen, our works are useless. We hope for light, but only darkness and gloom come our way. We stumble along the paths we make. And our vigor is like that of a dead man. I know I read this verse two weeks ago, but I want to mention it again. In Rev. 5 John has a vision and he says, **“And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it . . .”** Beloved, when you look at your sin before a holy God, what can you do? As we’ve seen, your sins harm yourself and everyone around you. And your righteous acts are called **“polluted garments”** (Is. 64:6). This is all of us! You may as well go out to the woods and try and use a spider’s web as a hammock. I think of the wall of water that came into that Japanese town after the earthquake and swallowed up the people and the cars and the

buildings like as easy as it is discard an ant crawling on my arm. This was Israel's case with their fasting and keeping of sabbath and keeping of the law in their own efforts. This is your case and mine. Look at 57:12-13: **"I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you. When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you!"**

Brothers and sisters, this is the plight of sinful mankind. When Adam sinned, He tried to cover himself with leaves. But, God . . . made a covering for him and his wife. Noah lay drunk in his tent after being rescued from the flood. And after this we see one of the greatest prophecies of promise found in the Bible. And we read also that Noah found grace (favor) in the eyes of the Lord. Abraham lied over and over in his life as he tried to preserve his lineage (as though God could not). Yet, He also found favor in God's eyes. And Jesus said of him that he **"rejoiced to see his day"** (John 8:56). Job, the most righteous man of his day, said of himself: **"How can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times"** (9:2-3). In another place, as he considers who he is a sinner, says, **"Thought I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser"** (9:15). Do you see his confession? He agrees with his accuser. And by faith he also says, **"Though he slays me I will hope in him"** (13:15). And **"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth."** And **"yet in my flesh I shall see God."** (19:25-26). I could mention Moses or David or Solomon or one of the prophets, or any man or woman of faith in the OT. ALL of them understood this truth: **"There is none righteous, no not one."** And as Christians, we understand this truth!

Now look back at 59:15b ff. **"The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. V. 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."** Now back to Rev. 5:5. In his vision John began to weep and then we read: **"One of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."**

Now look with me to Eph. 2. Starting in v. 1: **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God . . . being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . ."**

Brothers and sisters, a good confession is a result of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. In spite of our sin and our standing before God, He: **"shows his love toward us in while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8). This is the Gospel! (God saw there was NO ONE! And He intervened. Rom. 3:21-26: **"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by**

his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

This is the great intervention! And what is the result?

4. Result. The result is worldwide salvation for those who repent and judgment for those who do not. Let me read vv. 17-20 in closing: **"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. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. 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. "And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD."**

Brothers and sisters, God is bringing the history of sin on the earth to a close one day through the person and work of Christ. And He will reign, and we will reign with him! But it only happens because He does what we cannot do with the most beautiful intervention.