

The Holy One of Israel
Isaiah 55:1-13
April 25th, 2021

Isaiah Chapter 59 begins, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save." Orville Gardner saw this in his life first-hand.

He was one of the worst characters who ever lived in New York. A boxer by trade, he was a companion of all sorts of hard people. His reputation was so bad that he was called "Awful Gardner."

He had a little boy, whom he dearly loved. But his son died. A short time after his boy's death, Gardner was in a New York saloon, surrounded by a number of his friends. The night was hot, and he stepped outside to get a little fresh air. As he stood looking up at a star shining down upon him, he said to himself, "I wonder where my little boy is tonight?" Then the thought came to him, "Wherever he is, you'll never see him again unless you change your life."

Touched by the Holy Spirit, Gardner hurried to where his godly mother was. He asked her to pray for him. She did pray for him, and led him to Christ. Gardner went home where he kept a jug of whiskey. He dared not keep it and did not know what to do with it. Finally he took it down to the river, got into a boat and rowed over to an island. He set the liquor on a rock and knelt down, and as he afterwards said, "Fought that jug of whiskey for a long time," and God gave Orville Gardner deliverance.

The subject for today's message comes from our text, **Isaiah Chapter 55**. That subject is salvation; salvation **from** the punishment of our sins, and salvation **to** eternal life with Jesus. Broadly speaking, salvation is to be rescued from a threatening situation. Ultimately, it means to be delivered from the ultimate calamity of God's wrath.

Salvation is easily the most important thing with which fallen human beings can occupy themselves. To miss out on salvation is to be condemned to hell - forever. One author put it this way, "Salvation is moving from living death to deathless life."

Salvation Army officer John Allen once said, 'I deserved to be damned in hell, but God interfered.' I couldn't have said it any better. God the Son, Jesus Christ, came from heaven to earth in order to make us good (acceptable) in what He has accomplished for our salvation.

I was away last Sunday - thanks to Elder Doug Price for filling the pulpit in my absence. We return today to the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. Two Sundays ago, we looked at Isaiah **Chapter 6**, and the holiness of God. We're in the midst of a short sermon series of Old Testament texts that are among my personal favorites. They come from Old Testament books that I haven't, to this point, preached through. We've at least 4 more after today's, at which time, we will commence working through a New Testament book.

Isaiah 55:1-13:

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. **2** Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, and your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David. **4** Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. **5** Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations *who* do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you.”

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. **7** Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. **8** “For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the Lord.

9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. **10** “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

12 “For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands. **13** Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off.”

We'll look to these verses to find answers to 4 questions the text proposes:

1 - Who initiates salvation?

2 - Who is invited to salvation?

3- Who will respond to the invitation?

4 - What is the result of responding to the invitation?

We begin with the question - Who initiates salvation?

This is an easy question to answer - God does! Verse 1 of our text shows He is the one speaking here (and He was the last to speak in the preceding chapter). *What does He say?* “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. **2** Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, and your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

Isaiah isn't the only one who taught that God initiates salvation in the hearts of His elect ones. Consider a few other references:

1 - A reference from this very book - **Isaiah 45:21** - "Tell and bring forth *your* case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? *Who* has told it from that time? *Have* not I, the Lord? And *there is* no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; *there is* none besides Me."

2 - **Psalms 3:8** - "Salvation *belongs* to the Lord. Your blessing *is* upon Your people."

3 - **Jonah 2:9** - "But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the Lord."

When we consider the spiritual condition with which we came into this world, we were without life, spiritually speaking that is. Our souls were condemned for death apart from the spiritual life that only God can give to sinners. Our hearts were hard as rock; our bones were scattered and lifeless. We could function physically, but even then, we could only function according to our sinful nature. We could not please God whatsoever, and what's really scary, we weren't concerned about that!

Since dead people can do nothing, only the power of God could bring life to where there was only death spiritually. So, God initiates salvation in the hearts of those whom God the Father has given to Him, as we read, for instance in **John 17:6 & 8** - "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me."

Since God initiates salvation, we must now consider who is invited to salvation?

Verse 1 says that "everyone" is invited to pursue salvation. Everyone that is, who thirsts and comes to the waters. Salvation is universal in its scope; it is offered to all people. Not in terms of everyone being saved, but in terms of everyone securing salvation who is called to it.

1 - **John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

2 - **Romans 1:16** - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

John Calvin has written, "No man is excluded from calling upon God, the gate of salvation is set open unto all men: neither is there any other thing which keepeth us back from entering in, save only our own unbelief."

Notice the word in verse 1 - "***Come***, everyone who thirsts, ***come*** to the waters..." That word "come" is found 1,826 times in the Bible - 1,252 times in the Old Testament, and 574 in the New Testament. *The book containing the most uses of the word?* Isaiah - with 132 mentions. This **55th chapter of Isaiah** contains four mentions of the word

“come”

Notice the kind of people who are invited to salvation. Verse 7 identifies them as “the **wicked** (who must) forsake his way (give it up), and the **unrighteous man** who must leave his ungodly thoughts. Before we are in Christ, we may have been blessed by God with external physical attraction, but we are ugly in our sinfulness internally.

Earlier, we sang that great hymn, “Come, Ye Sinners.” Note how we are described outside of Christ in the first stanza - “Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched, weak and wounded, sick and sore.” In the second stanza, we are “needy and without money” (the author clearly had **Isaiah Chapter 55** in mind). In the third stanza, we are “weary, heavy laden, bruised and broken by the fall.”

This is profound! It means that you are invited to secure salvation by believing on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It’s not too late for you to receive the saving grace of God if you haven’t yet received it. You don’t have to come down front, or anything like that, but you must receive Christ in order to be saved. *Will you do it today?* Verse 6 teaches us to “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” **2 Corinthians 6:2** instructs that “...today is the day of salvation.”

And, saved friend - brother and sister in Jesus - renew your commitment to Jesus, examining your life to remove any obstacles that are keeping you from growing closer to Him and His people, the Church.

We’ve seen Who initiates salvation and who is invited to salvation. We now see who will respond to the invitation. Hear again what Isaiah says in verses 9-11. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.”

There are two kinds of calls in Scripture - there is the external call where a person is audibly called to turn from their sin unto Jesus for salvation. This they can choose to do or not. The other kind of call is an internal call that accompanies the external call to believe. The internal call is the saving call. It cannot ultimately be rejected. This would explain why people can hear sermon after sermon, or testimony after testimony, and seemingly not live as a Christian. Unless and until the Holy Spirit works in a person’s heart, that person remains unable to respond to any call for salvation,

But, take heart, dear ones, as Jesus puts it in **John 6:37**, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” God’s ways are not ours...thankfully!

What is the result for those who respond to the invitation by coming? Verses 12 and 13 tell us. There is **joy** and **peace** - two commodities - fruit of the Spirit - that every

believer in Jesus Christ has in his/her possession. Because we know that we don't deserve anything good from God, and we know, at least in a small way, the great cost to God for our redemption, we can practice thankfulness. In our redemption from the punishment for our sins, we can remember what God has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us. We often spend so much time thinking about the future that we miss what is happening in this moment. Being thankful can help keep us in the moment and also help us to trust in God for the future.

These last two verses also how even the creation will join us in praising its Creator - "the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands." **Psalm 98:8** includes the rivers clapping *their* hands and the hills being joyful together.

Here's how we can apply this text as a Church. One of the pillars of our church's **mission statement** is that God would make us a **worshipping** Church. That pillar would see us proclaiming the inerrancy (truth) of Scripture from this pulpit on Sundays, in our Sunday School classrooms, and in teaching our children to worship and serve Jesus in our homes. It is also evident in our prayers and fellowship with one another. Ultimately, it would see us unified through a saving relationship with Christ.

I began this message telling you about Orville (Awful) Gardner. God worked mightily in his life, taking him from a nasty boxer to a winsome preacher. God touched many lives through Orville's preaching ministry. One of them was Jerry McAuley.

Jerry was a hard man who ran with a gang in New York which resorted to thievery to support themselves. Jerry was arrested and imprisoned in Sing Sing prison. Inmates were forced to live in unbroken silence in little cells, 3 feet wide, 6 feet high, and 7 feet long. They were wet in the summer; icy in winter. No plumbing, just buckets; cells never disinfected, and filled with rats, lice, and fleas.

One Sunday, Jerry was herded into the chapel. He noticed well-known prize-fighter Orville Gardner on the platform. Gardner told of Jesus finding him. Jerry returned to his cell where he read the Bible day after day. After reading it twice through, Jerry eventually kneeled, describing the occasion with these words - "All at once it seemed something supernatural was in my room. I was afraid to open my eyes; the tears rolled off my face in great drops, and these words came to me, 'My son, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven.'

Jerry was later released from prison where he spent 7 of his first 26 years. He devoted himself to rescuing other wandering souls through his Water Street Mission.