

Isaiah 45:22-25

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn for a few moments, first to Isaiah 45 in verses 22 and 23, and then we're going to see the two portions in the New Testament where this passage is quoted and where it's applied.

So Isaiah 45 at verse 22, turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked. Before me every knee will bow, by me every tongue will swear.

So as we come to God's word tonight, we are reminded that the people of God then and the people of God now often find themselves in situations that they themselves never would have chosen.

Isaiah is speaking now to an exiled community. They're far from home. They're far from what was familiar. They're in a foreign place where people speak a different language, where they have a different culture.

[1 : 12] And the great news is, is that God has not stopped speaking. God has not stopped in his relationship with them.

They are not where they should be. But that does not present, prevent God from continuing to speak or to, to remind or to rebuke.

And maybe tonight as, as Christians, or if you're not yet a Christian, maybe you would conclude that spiritually you're not where you ought to be. Maybe you've been a Christian for a long time and maybe you feel I should be further along the way.

Or maybe you're finding the going difficult. Maybe you're wandering from the truth. And maybe you feel like you're a stranger in a strange land. But tonight's message is remarkable because we have here in a few words, God unpacking not just what his plan in Jesus is, but God unpacking what his plan for this world and for this universe is that he has yet to complete.

So Isaiah is showing us Jesus when he comes first in his birth, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection.

[2 : 28] But he's also showing us when Jesus comes in his glory. And the first step that we need to do here is to recognize that which is authentic.

To recognize that which is genuine. I think it was two weeks ago now, scholars were called to Butte, the Isle of Butte. The Marquess of Butte has a large library and in that library was a three-volume set of William Shakespeare.

Now, this is not too unusual. I would think that many of us will have Shakespeare's works, the collected works of William Shakespeare. What was remarkable was that the librarian at Mount Stewart House said that actually this is a first folio of Shakespeare.

The first time that all the plays were brought together, originally in one volume, now in three volumes, and they asked scholars to come and check out for themselves. I remember seeing in the interview a scholar from Oxford said, we get this all the time.

And my first reaction was, sure you do. But when I went, and when I opened the book, and I began to turn the pages, the telltale signs were all there.

[3 : 45] The mistakes that characterize the printing mistakes or the spelling mistakes that characterize this as a genuine first folio of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare, the watermark that you can't copy, that the paper itself is the right kind of paper from the right printer. And they authenticated saying that this is one of but a few copies, complete copies of Shakespeare's first folio.

But you have to recognize that which is authentic and recognize that which is genuine. And when we look at Isaiah 45, there's a recurring phrase. In verse 18, we see this at the end of verse 18.

We'll read the whole of verse 18. For this is what the Lord says. He who created the heavens, he is God. He who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it. He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited.

He says, I am the Lord, and there is no other. So before we get to the message, we have to recognize the one who's speaking. We have to identify him.

[4 : 49] And he says that he is the Lord. There is no other but him. There are no other gods. There are no other options. There are no other choices.

Only God created the heavens and the earth. Only God can sustain all things. And only God, as we'll see in a few moments, is able to save. By definition, any other gods, any other messages, are not true, are not genuine.

Are not real. So we need to recognize who it is that is speaking to us. And in fact, God goes a step further when he says in verse 20, he says, gather together and come.

Assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it. Let them take counsel together.

So he's saying, this is who I am. But he says, make your best effort. Gather together. Put your heads together. See if you can come up with a better alternative.

[6 : 00] See if you can do what God can do. Can you predict the future? Can you shape the future? Can you say what will be and make sure that what you say comes to pass?

Can you create what God claims to have created? Can you sustain what God claims to sustain? I mentioned earlier this morning, being from the United States, I often revert to examples.

But one of the American presidents who's not known for being particularly religious or particularly Christian, Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s had a favorite verse.

And he would often quote it. He said his favorite verse was found in Isaiah. This is Isaiah chapter 1. And he says this, come now, verse 18, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Now Johnson only quoted that first part because Johnson was a consummate negotiator. He felt that if you can get people together, they can be reasonable. If you present people with credible alternatives or options that you can get people, even if they disagree, to work together.

[7 : 08] But Johnson didn't quote the verse in full. Because it's come now, let us reason together, verse 18. In chapter 1, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land. But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Let's be reasonable. Let's be rational. Let's use our minds. Let's use our intellectual faculties. Let's consider the case that God is making.

And let's consider whether anyone else can make such a case. But let's also consider the terms and the conditions that God is placing before us. Because he is diagnosing the problem.

And he is also presenting a solution. Now, many people today, and if you go to Amazon or bookstores or any number of sources, there are any number of self-help material.

[8 : 18] Because the problems are obvious. People are not what they want to be. People are not what they like to be. People are not what they hope to be. So when you present them a solution, if they don't eat enough, you can give them a solution that they'll eat more.

If they eat too much, you can help them eat less. If they're not fit, you can help them get fit. Whatever it is, there's any number of books that can help people become better people.

So diagnosing a problem is one thing. But providing a solution is something else entirely. Because the best thing that we can do is we can diagnose external problems.

And we can prescribe external solutions. Whereas God and God alone sees beneath the surface. And he says it's actually what's inside that's the problem.

He said he sees sin and it's so red it's like scarlet. He sees what we are like inside. And he's able to fix us from the inside out.

[9 : 23] But the first step is that we must recognize who he is. Recognize what he has done. Recognize what he says. And recognize then who he is so that we can appreciate what he offers.

Because if he is who he says he is. And we'll see in a moment what he is offering. That it's absolutely essential. That his identity is clear. Because if he is not who he says he is.

Then he can't deliver what he says he's going to deliver. If he's not God who creates all. And sustains all. And through Jesus redeems all. Then he's not able to do what he's promised.

But if he is the real God. The only God. Then what he says will happen. What he promises will be received. So we recognize God.

But we not only recognize who he is. We respond to what he says. Because he says to the people in verse 21.

[10 : 25] Declare what it is to be. Present it. Let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago? Who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I the Lord?

And there is no God apart from me. A righteous God and a savior. There is none but me. Now these are two very distinct images.

That are hard to put together. We can understand a God who is righteous. And we can understand a God who saves. But it's very difficult to understand how God can do both.

Because God who is righteous means that he is a standard. He has a perfect standard. A standard that he requires and demands.

And a standard that he himself or that reflects who he is himself. So this word righteous here means literally completely straight.

[11 : 22] He's not crooked in any way at all. He doesn't lie. There's no lack of integrity. There's no lack of honesty. There's no lack of genuineness. So God is righteous and he demands righteousness.

He demands obedience. He demands that you and I conform to his standard. Now that's a problem. Because we don't.

In the very opening words of Isaiah chapter 1. The problem is there in your heart and in my heart. It's called sin. It's called rebellion. It's called doing things your way.

At your time. For your reasons. With your desires. Whereas God says no. God says we are to place him first. We are to place the neighbor second.

Then we are to place ourselves third. But constantly we put ourselves forward. So then you have this next vision here. Or this next picture.

[12 : 23] A savior. One who saves. One who forgives. One who restores. One who redeems. And you say to yourself. I can understand that. I like that image.

One who reaches out his hand. And rescues somebody who is sinking. One who reaches out his hand. And pulls someone from the sea. Just before they drown. And that's an image that we can identify with.

And that's an image that we can respond to. But how is it possible that God who demands absolute perfection. God who demands it. God who requires it.

God who deserves it. And doesn't get it. How can he be a savior. And still be righteous. Well the key not surprisingly comes not in the Old Testament specifically.

Or most clearly. But if you look at chapter 3 of Romans. And I'll just read two of the verses here. This is Romans chapter 3 at verse 25.

[13 : 27] Not surprisingly the answer again is Jesus. Chapter 3 Romans verse 25. God presented him, Jesus. As a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

He did this to demonstrate his justice. Because in his forbearance. He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his justice.

At the present time. So as to be just. And the one who justifies. Those who have faith in Jesus. That's the same idea that we see in Isaiah 45.

He's just. And he's righteous. But he's more than that. He's able to make the unjust just. He's able to make the unrighteous righteous.

He's able to forgive. And not just forgive. But to transform and to renew. And this is the power of the gospel message. That it meets us in our point of need.

[14 : 32] It meets us exactly where we are. And it leaves us transformed. If we respond. And we'll come to responding in just a moment.

So we recognize Jesus. We recognize God. We recognize his terms and his conditions. That he is both righteous and one who makes righteous. That he is both perfect and pure.

And he's able to save those who are imperfect and impure. And then he gives us the terms and conditions. Verse 22 of Isaiah 45. He says, turn to me and be saved.

All you ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other. Again that refrain. I am God. There is no other. Turn to me and be saved. We respond to God.

According to his terms. And according to his conditions. The word here in verse 22. Turn. When you're translating from one language to another.

[15 : 35] It's very difficult often to capture a one for one translation. Because in one language this word could mean several different things. And it can mean turn.

To turn around. But it can also mean to look. To focus your eyes on something that you previously weren't looking at. You weren't paying attention to something.

Then someone speaks and says look. And then you point your eyes or gaze in one direction. That previously you hadn't been looking at before. So that's the idea here of look.

And this captures the bronze serpent in the Old Testament. Remember in the wilderness journey in Numbers. When the serpent bit the fiery serpents.

The poisonous snakes bit the people. They were complaining against Moses. You remember the story. It's a great Sunday school story. They complained. They said remember how great it was in Egypt.

[16 : 35] We had a wonderful time in Egypt. We had all the food we could eat. We had great living conditions. And now God and Moses have taken us from that place of happiness. And taken us into the desert. Where we're going to die of starvation.

And we're going to die of thirst. Of course they had forgotten. That Egypt was a place of slavery. A place of oppression. And that God had miraculously. And graciously taken them out.

And brought them into. Brought them onto a journey that would lead them to the promised land. And when they were complaining. And when they were moaning.

And they were fault finding. You see not much changes in however many centuries. We still are the same kinds of people. We still complain. We still moan. We still find fault. God sent fiery serpents.

And they bit the people. Some of the people died. People were dying because of these snake bites. And they cry out to Moses. They're sorry now for what they said. They're sorry now for what they did.

[17 : 34] And God said to Moses. Make a serpent of bronze. And stick it on a pole. And whoever looks at the serpent. Will live. That's the idea that's captured here.

Looking. Looking in faith. People are bitten by snakes. People are poisoned. People are dying. People can do nothing. But they're commanded to do something.

They're commanded to look at this serpent. On a pole. And everyone who looks. Lives. Isaiah 45. Look. Turn to me and be saved.

Or look to me and be saved. If you're familiar with the history of God's church. You'll know that certain verses.

Are associated with certain people. So for example. This morning we sang a mighty fortress. Is our God's Psalm 46. Written by Martin Luther. Not surprisingly.

[18 : 30] That was Martin Luther's favorite Psalm. So he wrote this hymn. To capture the theme of Psalm 46. In song. Isaiah 45.22.

Reminds many. Of a man called Charles Spurgeon. He was called the Prince of Preachers. Every Sunday in London. At the end of the 19th century.

6,000 or more people would gather morning. And evening. In the Metropolitan Tabernacle. To hear him preach. But it wasn't always so. You see Martin Luther.

Or I'm sorry. That was the earlier story. Charles Spurgeon. Was a teenager. He wasn't a Christian. He knew the way of salvation. Or he thought he knew the way of salvation.

But he was uncommitted. He was unconverted. And one winter day. Kind of like yesterday. With the snow here. One winter's day. He went to church.

[19 : 29] It was. I think he was 14. Maybe 8 or 15 at the time. So he was a young man. And the church that he wanted to go to. He couldn't reach. Because the snow was so heavy. So he stopped.

It was described as a primitive. Methodist chapel. And he described the event. In these terms. He said. The minister did not come that morning.

He was snowed up I suppose. At last. A very thin looking man. A shoemaker. Or tailor. Something of that sort. Went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text.

For the simple reason. That he had little else to say. The text was. Look unto me. And be ye saved. All the ends of the earth. That's the authorized version. Of Isaiah 45.

22. Look unto me. And be ye saved. All the ends of the earth. When he had managed to spin out. Ten minutes or so. He was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me.

[20 : 25] Under the gallery. Now imagine. Right in the middle. Somebody said. Points out the stranger. The young person. Who's in his midst. And says. Young man.

You look very miserable. Well I did. But I had not been accustomed. To have remarks made from the pulpit. On my personal appearance before. However it was a good blow.

Struck right home. He continued. And you always will be miserable. Miserable in life. Miserable in death. If you don't obey my text. But if you obey now.

This moment. You will be saved. Then lifting up his hands. He shouted. As only a primitive Methodist could do. Young man. Look to Jesus Christ. Look.

Look. Look. You have nothing to do. But look and live. I saw at once. The way of salvation. I had been waiting to do. Fifty things.

[21 : 20] But when I heard that word. Look. What a charming word. It seemed to me. It's not do. Do. Do. It's not stop.

Stop. Stop. It's not try. Try. Try. But if we are responding to God. Who is God. And if we're responding to his word. And his word is true.

Then we do what he tells us to do. And the Bible describes us. Here's the bad news. The Bible describes us as those who are dead. In sins and transgressions.

Dead people are not capable of much activity. The Bible describes us as blind people unable to see. Deaf people unable to hear. Lame people unable to walk.

All the images are not flattering. And yet we are commanded to do the impossible. Deaf people can't hear.

[22 : 19] Blind people can't see. Dead people can't live. And yet the command that we are to respond to is turn to me and be saved. All you ends of the earth.

For I am God and there is no other. So if there is a temptation to say to substitute false gods for the true God. There is equally the temptation to substitute false messages for the true message.

To substitute something else for the good news of Jesus. The world will tell you that you can change yourself.

That you can change your behavior. That you can change your appearance. That you can change your attitude or your emotional life. To some extent that's true. But the message of the world is simply this.

If you try harder, you can do better. Whatever that message is, that is not the message of the Bible. The Bible never commends you to try harder.

[23 : 25] The Bible never commends you to do better. The Bible commands you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And promises that in so doing you'll be saved. The Bible commands you to turn to God and be saved.

The promise and the response are inextricably linked. So we are to look rather than to do. And so often when I speak to people one to one.

So often when you ask people what they thought of what you said. Maybe from the pulpit or in a Bible study or something. Very often the natural response is I'll give that some thought.

Or maybe you're right. Maybe I should read the Bible more. Maybe I should go to the church more often. You know what, I really need to pray more at home.

Or I really need to take God seriously. Now all those things are good. But unfortunately none of those things actually obeys the command that's given here. So if we know who God is, we recognize God.

[24 : 27] We now hear his voice speaking to us. We recognize that he's talking. We recognize that his word is relevant. He now demands us to respond to what he says.

The gospel is often described as an invitation. And it is. But it's more than an invitation. It's a command. We received last week an invitation to a wedding.

And it's a wedding that we're able to go to. It's a wedding we're looking forward to going to. So we have the RSVP. We send the RSVP back saying we're going to be there. And we'd like steak for our meal.

And we'd like sticky toffee pudding for dessert. Whatever we're asked for on the invitation. And we're going to be there. Wedding invitations don't come to us as commands or as summons.

You must be there. You can go. Or if you can't go, you just say, I'm sorry. I can't make it. I'm doing something else that day. Or I'm out of the country. Or whatever it might be. But you see, the gospel message, the word of God, requires a response, demands a response because of the one speaking.

[25 : 34] God himself is speaking. You can ignore anyone you like, but please don't ignore God. Don't ignore the creator of heaven and earth. Don't ignore the maker of the universe.

He says, do something that you are capable of doing. If you were commanded to become better, if you were commanded to be good, if you were commanded to be pure, if you were commanded to abandon sin and to embrace righteousness, you would have to say, God, I hear you saying it, but I can't do it.

We can turn. And we can look. And in so doing, we will be saved. So if we recognize God and if we respond to God's word, we will receive.

It's a simple equation. Respond and receive. Unfortunately, the opposite is true as well. Don't respond and you don't receive.

If you don't obey, if you don't obey God's command, you will not get God's promised salvation. But if you do, you will.

[26 : 44] Turn to me and be saved. This is his promise, that salvation is yours for the asking. It's yours for the receiving. It's a gift. You can't earn it.

You don't deserve it. So for us Christians here tonight, we have every encouragement to go and to tell, to share. If it was down to who we thought would understand, who we felt might respond, who we kind of believed in our minds might be interested, we'd be hard pressed, wouldn't we?

Does she want to? Would he like? The Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says that we can go to anyone and everyone with the message of Jesus. That if they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be saved.

For God so loved, we heard this morning, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

We recognize God. We respond to his word and then we receive his salvation. And this word to be saved or salvation is not just that we are forgiven, though it is.

[28 : 00] It's not just that we're safe, which we are. But this word salvation is a big word that includes all that God has in store for us.

It's not just one thing. Sin is what you think. Sin is what you feel. Sin is what you don't do that you should do.

Sin is what you do that you shouldn't do. Sin is the attitude you have towards people. Sin is the words that you speak. Sin is the thoughts that you entertain. Sin is the promise that all that God wants to give, all that God wants us to enjoy in earth, here, and in heaven.

In John chapter 10, Jesus says that he has come to do two things. He said, first in John 10, 10, the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly or have it more fully. So when we think of what we receive, that we receive forgiveness of sins, but we receive abundant life.

[29 : 19] Becoming a follower of Jesus doesn't mean that your life becomes smaller. It doesn't mean that your joy becomes less. It doesn't mean that this world becomes narrow, but quite the opposite.

The thief, the evil one, promises much but delivers nothing. He promises to the world, but all he wants to do is to steal, kill, and destroy. Whereas Jesus says, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

But not only does Jesus want us to enjoy abundant life. He goes on in verse 28 of John 10 to say this. I give them eternal life.

And no one can snatch them out of my hand. Abundant, complete, full life. And eternal life that never ends. And a security that is based not on ourselves.

So tonight, if you're a Christian, and if you think that the measure of your Christian life and the measure of your hope in Jesus is founded upon the strength of your faith, I've got good news for you.

[30 : 26] It isn't. The measure of your confidence is not based on your commitment to Jesus, but is based on his commitment to you.

Not only has he saved you, but he promises to keep you, to hold you, to protect you, and to preserve you. That he makes this commitment to you.

So tonight you might feel weak. Tonight you might feel discouraged. Tonight you might feel as if the going is tough, the benefits are few, the opponents are many, the challenges are ever present.

And you might be saying to yourself, my grasp on Jesus is weak. That may be very true. The Bible tells us that Jesus' grasp on his people is strong.

He doesn't let you go. He won't let you down. So when we respond to Jesus, when we respond to God's word, when we respond to the gospel, we receive all that he promises to give.

[31 : 28] And one final point. This brings us to verse 23. Is that we realize. We receive what God wishes to give us, but we realize what God has in store.

What still lies ahead. That the story does not end with your faith in Jesus, nor even does the story end with death and going to heaven to be with God in glory.

But we realize that Jesus has work to conclude and to complete. By myself I have sworn. My mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked.

Before me every knee will bow. By me every tongue will swear. There's a day coming when the door of the gospel will shut.

When the day of opportunity will come to an end. And that day will come when Jesus Christ returns from heaven. When Jesus Christ returns.

[32 : 28] And unlike the first coming. When he came in obscurity. When very few people knew. When very few people realized.

You had the wise men, yes. They came from the east. You had the shepherds. Mary, Joseph, they had a clue. But even then, maybe just a limited number of people had a limited number of understanding.

When he comes a second time, there will be no doubt. And the door of opportunity will shut. And every mouth will confess.

And every knee will bow. To him as the conquering Lord. So the opportunity now is to embrace Jesus as Savior. There is a day coming when, like it or not, you will acknowledge him as Lord.

Now, in the New Testament, we read from Philippians chapter 2. And in Philippians chapter 2, we're told that the humiliated Jesus became the exalted Jesus.

[33 : 27] And the Apostle Paul takes the words of Isaiah 45, verse 23, in verse 10 of Philippians 2, and says that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So he removes every ambiguity and says, you read Isaiah 45, verse 23, that's Jesus. And that's the return of Jesus, the end of time. He returns, and everyone recognizes him.

Everyone acknowledges him. Please do not wait until that day when it's too late. And one final verse. It's interesting.

Isaiah 45, 23 appears two places in the New Testament. The second place that it appears is in chapter 14 of Romans.

Romans chapter 14, verse 9. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

[34 : 35] You then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down upon your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written, As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me, every tongue will confess to God.

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. This is what I want you to realize tonight. The gospel message comes to you personally and powerfully.

The gospel message does not ask you to do what you cannot do, but commands you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to turn and to live, to look and to live. But this very verse that reminds us that Jesus Christ is coming back tells us this.

Each one of us will one day give an account. You will give an account to God. I will give an account to God. You will not ask to be given, you will not ask to give an account for me, and I will not be asked to give an account for you.

Each of us will give an account of himself to God. We will all stand before God's judgment seat. So the reality of Jesus' return, the reality of every knee bowing, the reality of every tongue confessing should say, how we live now matters, how we respond to God matters, how we deal with his word matters, because there is a day coming when we will be called to an account.

[36 : 06] So what's tonight's date? The 17th of April, 2016, you heard. You were invited. You were commanded. How did you respond?

What did you do with this message, with this truth? Did you accept or not? Did you believe or not? Did you respond or not?

Did you accept this invitation or did you reject this invitation? This is not my word, but it's God's word, and it's his exhortation. We will all stand before God's judgment seat, and each of us will give an account of himself to God.

The only ones who can give a real and true account to God are those who have turned, those who have been saved, those who have responded, those who have accepted or received the gift that is abundant life and the gift that is eternal life, given at the hands of Jesus to all who would receive and to all who would accept.

So may God prepare us for that day when one day every knee here in this room, in this church, will bow, when every mouth, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that day is coming.

[37 : 22] Let us prepare for that day today before it is too late. May God bless his word to each of our hearts. We're going to sing a few verses from Psalm number 68, which you'll find on page 303.

Psalm 68, the traditional version of the Psalms, verse 18, Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high and in triumph victorious, led captive, captivity.

Verse 19, Blessed be the Lord who is to us of our salvation God, who daily with his benefits, us plenteously doth load. We'll stand to sing verses 18 to 20 of Psalm 68.