

Isaiah 45:22

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 December 2013

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] So, how many of you have read the white paper on independence? It's just 700 pages, so man up and get a move on, and make your way, trudge your way through said paper.

Now, its publication, as would be expected, provoked a variety of responses. And I've got to tell you my favorite response by a country mile. I've already mentioned it in the newsletter, if you've already had a peek at the newsletter, but I make no apology for repeating it. On the day that the white paper was published or presented, BBC Scotland, as you would imagine, were going around the country seeking to get a response from people, ordinary people, to what was being proposed. And there was a reporter on Lewis, and she was asking one or two people. I didn't see this myself. It was reported to me, so I can't vouch for the absolute accuracy of every detail, but the gist of it is, I'm sure, accurate. So, there was a crofter who was asked about what he thought on the matter, but the manner in which the question was posed was along the lines of, what would most benefit Lewis? The context, obviously, of this constitutional debate, what would most benefit

Lewis? And his reply was something along these lines. Now, that's a good question. What would most benefit Lewis is if more and more people turned to the Lord? I didn't even attempt a Lewis accent.

You'll be glad of that. But I thought that was just a brilliant answer that this fellow gave to the reporter. What would most benefit Lewis? What would most benefit Aberdeen? What would most benefit Scotland if more and more people turned to the Lord? Let's just imagine that for a moment. Let's just imagine the movers and shakers within the political establishment. Alex Salmon, Nicholas Sturgeon. Wouldn't it be great if they turned to the Lord? Joanne Lamond, Ruth Davidson, even Patrick Harvey. I'm biting my tongue because if I don't, I'll say something uncharitable. But in terms of him turning to the Lord, well, I would add my hallelujah were that to happen. What would most benefit Scotland is if more and more people turned to the Lord. So, Mr. Crofter, he's probably an uncle of somebody here this morning. I don't know. But whoever you are, I salute you. And of course, we do smile as we hear of that incident. And I'm sure many of us will nod in silent agreement. But the answer that this man gave did get me thinking. What does it actually mean, what he said? What would benefit Scotland, what would benefit Lewis, what would benefit anywhere is if more and more people turn to the

Lord? And very particularly, this aspect of it, to turn to the Lord. What does that actually mean? I wonder how many of BBC Scotland, I don't know if it was listeners or viewers, but I don't know how many of them would have had much of a notion of what turning to the Lord means or involves.

[3 : 4 1] What about you? What does it mean to turn to the Lord? I want to spend a little time this morning considering this question, and we'll do so with the help of a verse that we've read where the language of turning to God is employed by God. And I refer to verse 22 of Isaiah chapter 45, Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

And it is this verse that we want to think about this morning. This evening we hope to continue and think about the following verses that are also filled with much to occupy our attention and indeed amazement. But this morning, this verse, Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other. This verse answers a number of important questions regarding this matter of what turning involves. Not only the verse itself, but the verses that precede it and that follow it, and we might make some reference to those verses also. And the questions that are answered by this verse are many, and we'll think about a few of them. First of all, this verse gives us an answer to the question, what does it mean to turn? What does it mean to turn to God?

But this verse also answers the question, what is the necessary consequence of turning? What happens when a person turns to God? The verse also addresses the question of who should turn to God, or answers the question, who does God turn to? That matter is also dealt with by this verse. But then also, the verse gives us reasons why we can be confident of the promised outcome if we do turn. That is a concern that some might have. How can I be sure that what is said will happen will actually happen if I do turn to turn to God? But we need to begin by considering what that actually looks like. What does it mean to turn to God?

Turn to me and be saved. That is what we are commended to do. That is what we're commanded to do. Well, what does that involve? The verb that is translated there in verse 22 of Isaiah chapter 45, turn is a Hebrew verb that incorporates the word face. And it paints the picture of somebody turning their face from looking one direction to looking in a new direction. I think that's helpful to bear in mind because it reminds us that it's not just about direction of travel, but it's about who we are looking to.

Or if we were to stretch a little the possible meaning of the word, who we're trusting in. Who do you look to? We do use that language, don't we, sometimes in certain circumstances of trusting. Who are you looking to?

[7 : 18] Who are you trusting in? Well, this is the idea of the word that is used. To turn to God is to turn not only from going in a particular direction, but from looking in a particular way and looking in a new way.

Looking away from God to another, whoever that might be, to looking to God and trusting in Him. And what the verb certainly implies and requires is one action that can be considered from two perspectives.

What or who are we to turn from? What or who are we to turn to? Turning necessarily has those two aspects. We turn from and we turn to.

Let's just think about that for a moment. First of all, what are we to turn from? Now, the verse itself, verse 22 alone, doesn't give us the answer to that question. We're simply told, turn to me and be saved. Turn to me. No reference to what we are to turn from.

But while the verse itself doesn't give us that detail, it doesn't take a lot of searching to find an answer to the question in the passage and in the immediately preceding verses.

[8 : 44] In verse 20, for example, we read, 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.

These fugitives from the nations. It's a very suggestive phrase, a rather intriguing phrase. And it would appear, and it seems reasonable to conclude, that the fugitives from the nations are those men and women from other nations who have become dissatisfied with the gods that they have inherited or have served and are being drawn to the God of Israel.

And they are being addressed, not the only ones being addressed, but they are being addressed in these words of God, turn to me and be saved. And in the description of these fugitives from the nations, we're given an insight into what it was they were turning from.

And what was it that they were turning from? Well, they were turning from idolatry. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.

There in verse 20. Idolatry, that in these brief words, is described rather ruthlessly as both ignorant and useless.

[10:10] The word ignorant is explicitly used. It's there. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood. Even the picture is almost comical. That here we have these gods that need to be carried.

Well, what power can they have if their worshippers need to carry them? They can't walk for themselves. They need to be carried. And so, the prophet almost mockingly identifies how ignorant it is to look to, to trust in such gods, such idols.

It's ignorant. It's ignorant. Idolatry is ignorant. But it's also useless. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Of course, the two go together.

But that aspect is also highlighted. They can't save. They're useless. They serve no purpose. And so, those who are commanded and invited to turn to God are to turn from idols.

The fugitives from the nations are those who, thank God, have discovered that the idols that they were looking to are impotent. They cannot save.

[11:26] They do not satisfy. They fail to deliver. Now, we can think about this and say, well, that makes sense. And we certainly wouldn't be so ignorant.

We wouldn't be so foolish to carry idols of wood. And yet, as I hope we know, other gods or idols can come in all shapes and sizes.

An idol is anything that takes the central place in our lives that corresponds to God. That could be ourselves. You could be your own idol.

You might be a worshiper of self, of your own status, of your own power, of your own autonomy, your own power to decide for yourself and not have anybody tell you what to do, of your own pleasure, of your own comfort, of your own sin.

The list of idols is a very long one. Idolatry is alive and kicking in 21st century Aberdeen. Indeed, idolatry is alive and kicking wherever there are human hearts.

[12:38] Hearts that are in the memorable, and because it's memorable, oft-repeated language of the reformer John Calvin, he describes idols, or hearts rather, sorry, as idol factories.

So, what are we to turn from? We are to turn from idols. But what or who are we to turn to? Well, there the answer is very clearly before us in our verse, Turn to me.

Turn to me. And who is the me there in the verse? Well, again, the answer to that is so evident. The verse goes on, Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

We are to turn to God. Not to a religion recommended by God or even a church instituted by God, but to God Himself. We are to turn to God.

God, this morning, says to us, Turn to me. Turn to me. Turn to me. Not just do what I tell you, or live in the manner that I think is better. No.

[13:51] Turn to me. Turn to me. We are to turn to God. We are to look to God. Our face is to turn, to look in His direction, to look to Him, to trust in Him.

We are to put our trust in God. And who is this God that we are to put our trust in? Well, the immediately preceding verse provides us with a description that God Himself gives of Himself.

And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior. There is none but me. This is the God, the God of Israel, the God who reveals Himself in Scripture, the God who is righteous and a Savior.

This is the God we are to turn to. But we might ask, and the question could be asked very legitimately for somebody who is seriously concerned to take on board what is being said and what they find in this verse, the question might be asked, Well, how can I see His face that I might look to Him?

How can I find Him that I might turn to Him? Where can I find this God? And here we listen to the words of Paul as he writes to the Christians in Corinth, in 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 6.

[15 : 21] Listen to what Paul says. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

What Paul is saying is that if we are to find this God, if we want to know this God, if we want to see this God, we will see Him in the face of Christ.

Or remember the words of Jesus to Philip, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

So, we turn from idols to God, to Jesus. A parallel or synonymous verb, to turn, often found in the Bible to describe essentially the same movement, is the verb to repent.

Jesus really is talking about the same demand that is placed upon us, turning from our sin, turning from self to the appointed Savior, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 35] Now, we'll come back to this God and how He describes Himself in a moment, this God that we are to turn to. But let's move on to the second question that is answered by this verse.

Not only does it help us understand what is involved in turning, but it also identifies for us the consequence of turning.

What happens when you turn to God? Well, what does the verse say? Turn to me and be saved. And the language that the prophet uses conveys the idea of something, a consequence, that is absolutely certain.

Turn to me and necessarily the consequence of that will be that you will surely be saved. Turn to me and be saved.

There is no other possible outcome. In the history of humanity, there has never been a man or a woman who has turned to God, who has turned from idols to the living and true God, who has turned from self to the Savior, Jesus, and who has discovered another outcome.

[17 : 49] This is the only possible outcome. The only and necessary consequence of heartfelt turning, of heartfelt repentance, is our salvation.

Turn to me and be saved. But what does it mean to be saved? The word is very rich in its meaning and especially in the manner in which it is used in the Bible, but it certainly means, among other things, to be liberated.

And as with turning, there is a from and a to aspect, liberated from slavery to sin and self, and liberated to or for freedom in God.

The breadth and the depth of the concept and reality of salvation in the Bible can only be adequately, though not fully, appreciated in the light of an understanding of the identity and saving work of the Savior.

God describes Himself, as we've seen in this passage, as the Savior. And in the light of God's fuller revelation in the New Testament, we discover that God's Son, Jesus, is our appointed Savior.

[19 : 07] And it is as we discover and appreciate who Jesus is and the work that He has done, His saving work, the work of Jesus, the work of Yeshua, the work of the Savior, and the work of the Savior.

It is then that we better appreciate what it is to be saved, what is this necessary consequence of turning to God, of repenting and turning to Him.

The saving work of Jesus secures for those who turn to Him forgiveness of sins, freedom from condemnation, friendship with God, full or eternal life.

And we could go on. This is the necessary and happy consequence of turning. But let's move on to another question that we indicated at the beginning we would think about.

Who does God command to turn? Who does God command to turn? And there I'm just taking as a given, though it's worth stressing, that the language of verse 22 is indeed the language of command.

[20 : 19] Turn to me and be saved. This is not a helpful suggestion that God is making. It's very helpful, but it's not a suggestion. It is a command that God directs.

Turn to me and be saved. But our question that we want to think about now is, who is He directing this command to? Well, again, the answer is there before us. It's so clear and explicit.

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth. All you ends of the earth. Now, this is vivid language. It's poetic language.

But though poetic, it loses none of its clarity. Indeed, maybe it has greater clarity, given its poetic appeal. The language is all-encompassing in scope.

And yet, at the same time, wonderfully, intimately personal in its application. None are excluded from the call or the command of God to turn to Him.

[21 : 18] The command is directed to all without exception. Every nation, every people, every language, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, each and every one of us here this morning, none are excluded.

If you inhabit somewhere under the umbrella of this expression, the ends of the earth, then the command is directed to you.

Some might say Aberdeen is the ends of the earth, rather uncharitably. But regardless, the command is directed to you. It's all-encompassing.

It's global in scope. And yet it is, as I mentioned just in the passing a moment ago, it is also intimately personal. Because it is people who turn.

We can speak of. We can legitimately speak of and indeed have a great desire that our nation would turn to God. And that's legitimate language.

[22 : 23] But it's also true that it is necessary within that big picture for people, individuals, men and women, boys and girls, to personally turn to God.

Individuals with names and personalities and foibles and issues. It is people who are called, who are commanded to turn. You are commanded to turn.

And I am commanded to turn. Turn to me and be saved. How can you be sure of the promised outcome?

We've identified what the outcome is. You'll be saved. But how can you be sure that that will actually happen if you do turn? On what grounds can you be sure?

Well, again, God gives you the grounds upon which you can be confident that the promised outcome will indeed be delivered. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.

[23 : 26] And then we read, For I am God. For I am God. God stakes His own reputation. God stakes His own integrity on the promise that He makes.

He offers as His cast iron guarantee that this will happen, His own person, His own nature. For I am God.

And what do we know of the nature of the God who makes the promise? Well, in this very passage in the previous verse that we've just noticed, we have described for us in a measure something of His nature, a righteous God, a trustworthy God, a God of integrity, and a Savior.

His saving work is an expression of His saving nature. It is in His very nature to save.

He is a righteous God. He is a saving God. It is this God who stakes His own reputation, His own name, as the guarantee that the outcome that He promises will come true.

[24 : 46] Turn to me and you will be saved. For I am God. How can you be sure that if you turn from your idols, from your God, from yourself, to God in the person of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, how can you be sure that if you turn in repentance and faith to Jesus, that you will be saved?

You don't need to take my word for it. That would be shaky ground. But you can take God's word for it. Turn to me and be saved. For I am God.

In any case, if you have as yet not turned to God, you don't need to speculate or imagine what the outcome might be.

Turn to Him this morning and discover for yourself that it is indeed true what He tells us and what we find in this verse that we're considering.

I want to close with a final question that some might pose. Whenever we face big decisions, this is a question, and often it's a sensible question, that we pose.

[26 : 03] Do I have any other options? Do I have any other options? As I say, that's a reasonable question, often when faced with big decisions.

And in the matter of your eternal salvation, do you have any other options? What does the verse say? What does God say?

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other. And there is no other.

In this matter, a matter of greater moment and of greater weight and of greater significance than any decision you could possibly make, in this matter, there are no other options.

You have no other options. If you're looking for a Savior, there is but one option. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, He is the only Savior who can save you.

[27 : 08] He is the only one you can turn to and be saved. There is no other. So will you turn?

I think it's worth stressing, though maybe the stress in what we've said today might appear to be directed particularly to those who as yet have not ever turned to God that you might be saved.

The call to turn to Him is one that is directed to all of us, for we are to turn permanently and perseveringly and day by day we are to turn to Him.

We are so prone to look elsewhere and to cast our gaze in other directions, and so to all of us comes this command, turn to me.

and be saved. Will you turn? I'm a child of the Thatcher generation, an accident of my birth, and the one phrase that best captures the character of the recently departed Margaret Thatcher is what she said in a speech to a party conference in 1980.

[28 : 17] Some of you will already know where I'm going with this. The lady's not returning. Well, in the serious matter of sinners in need of a Savior, there can be no more foolish and tragic boast.

This sinner is not for turning. So, what about you? Will you turn? What would most benefit? Lewis or Aberdeen or Scotland?

Not a yes or a no vote in September. Whatever your views of the matter are. Rather, more and more people turning to the Lord.

Will you be one of them? I would urge you to turn. Turn to Jesus. Look to Him. Trust in Him. And be saved.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that as we pray, we pray to the God who is the righteous God, the God who is our Savior, the God who declares and we recognize to be true, the only living and true God that is none but You.

[29 : 30] And we thank You for Your interest in us. We thank You for this gracious command. You command us, but You command us born of Your love, for us, that we would turn to You and be saved.

And we pray that by Your Spirit You would indeed enable us to turn from any and all others, any idols or gods that fascinate us or capture our devotion, and that we would turn to You and put our trust in You, turn in repentance and faith as we see and discover in Jesus, the Savior who is able to save, and indeed the only Savior who is able to save.

And we pray these things in His name. Amen. Amen. We can close our service this morning singing from Psalm 22 on page 27.

You can sing Psalms on page 27, and we'll sing from verse 27 through to the end of the psalm. We'll sing these verses to the tune, Warrington, The whole earth will remember Him and turn towards the Lord their God.

All peoples will bow down to Him, the nations of the world abroad. And singing on through to the end of the psalm, we'll stand to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 58] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

The kingdom to the Lord belongs, and show her patience he is here.

Let reach above the earth with peace, and worship with and offering.

All those whose destiny is just, will hauntly heal before his throne.

[32 : 35] They cannot give themselves a lie, nor live in heaven, nor live alone.

O sanity will serve the Lord, and generations still to come.

Will tell the people, yet and more, the righteous earth that he has done.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.