

Isaiah 59 April 28

Isaiah 59:1-21 (NKJV)

1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.

2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.

3 For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity.

4 No one calls for justice, Nor does *any* plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

5 They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; He who eats of their eggs dies, And *from* that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

6 Their webs will not become garments, Nor will they cover themselves with their works; Their works *are* works of iniquity, And the act of violence *is* in their hands.

7 Their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction *are* in their paths.

8 The way of peace they have not known, And *there is* no justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

9 Therefore justice is far from us, Nor does righteousness overtake us; We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, *but* we walk in blackness!

10 We grope for the wall like the blind, And we grope as if *we had* no eyes; We stumble at noonday as at twilight; *We are* as dead *men* in desolate places.

11 We all growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves; We look 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 *as for* our iniquities, we know them:

13 In transgressing and lying against the LORD, And departing from our God, Speaking oppression and revolt, Conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

14 Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter.

15 So truth fails, And he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then 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 intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

17 For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak.

18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly He will repay, Fury to His adversaries, Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay.

19 So shall they fear The name of the LORD from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.

20 "The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the LORD.

21 "As for Me," says the LORD, "*this is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

What is wrong with our God?

Immediately all of us who have any kind of theological background say- of course there is nothing wrong with our God. And we can spout a bunch of the attributes of God. We can make logical mincemeat of anyone who says there is something wrong with our God. Isn't that true?

That is our theory. And it is a good theory based on fact.

But what do we **really believe**? And that does not come out on our written exams. It comes out in our **day to day**.

For instance the day I prepared this I found out I had a credit card charge that I did not authorize. Now, how I **respond to that** tells more about what I really believe about God than anything I write or preach does.

In our lives we will experience all kinds of difficult things. And if we are to believe good theology those things are placed in our lives for a good purpose, even though often they are **not good things**. Now think about this. Which statement do our **normal responses** back?

There is nothing wrong with God. He is perfectly wise in allowing this in my life. I trust Him and will learn to think right about it, no matter how hard that might be at this moment. I will even thank Him in the midst of this. All is not lost. There is still a God in heaven. OR

There is something wrong with God. He should know that I cannot deal with this event. He should have withheld this thing from me. If He really loved me He would deal with me differently. I cannot thank Him in the midst of this. It is too hard. It is too unpleasant. I cannot trust a God that would allow such things in my life.

So how does our **practical theology** really work out? What do we really believe about God? What do those people who most closely watch us responding to life's hardships see about us? What have we taught **them** about God?

Look at verse 1 of our text.

1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.

Do you see what this is saying? There is nothing wrong with God.

His hand is not shortened. I immediately thought of something that happened while I was at Wrightsville beach. I was trying to plug the CPAP machine in through the headboard of the bed. But it was arranged in such a way that I could either see the receptacle or I could reach it with my hand, but I could not to both. So I kept going back and forth until I finally got it plugged in.

God never faces such difficulties. He is perfectly capable to provide what we need all the time. His hand can always reach the problem. His ears are never faulty. He doesn't even need us to whisper. He knows our thoughts.

The problems in our lives are never because there is **something wrong with God**. And if God has allowed the problems, we can rest in the knowledge that they are going to serve some good purpose somehow.

Now in this instance these people are crying out for God's salvation. They are crying out for the removal of danger or oppression. They are crying out for some hard thing to be removed. And why is it not being removed? Well in this case, God is responding to stubbornly rebellious people. And He starts out with the fact that the problem is **not on His end**.

2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

Now this passage is going to be talking about some very hard hearted people. They may be committing sins that we would not even be tempted to commit. And it would be easy to think we can brush over this because we would never be like this. But as always, we have the seeds of these things in us. We have our flesh which is the muscle memory of the old us, the us before Christ made us new. And it is always waging a war, wanting to do what it wants to do. So before we give ourselves a free ride, we want to at least consider the principles here.

Now in verse 2 Isaiah is saying that the reason that God will not remove the bad things from his audience's lives, the reason that God will not do what they want Him to do, is not because He is **unable**. It is because He is **unwilling**. And He is not unwilling because there is something wrong with **Him**. He is unwilling because there is something wrong with **them**.

And the something wrong is known iniquity and sin. Iniquity refers to twisting or perverting something deliberately. It carries with it guilt from conscious wrong doing.

Sin is generally a trespass against what God has said. He says do A. We do B. The words used here are interesting. Where it says "**separated**" it is the same word that referred to the expanse that **separated** the waters underneath and the waters above in Genesis 1:6. This may have come immediately to mind to this Jewish audience.

And then He says that it is **your sins** that have hidden God's face from you. What is the biggest problem in your relationship with God? Is it that He is hard to reach? Is it that He is not clear enough? Is it that He does not give us enough information? Is it that He does not make what He wants obvious enough? No. **We** may evaluate it that way. But the biggest deterrent to our closeness to God is **us**, and more specifically **our sin**.

When we choose darkness, we don't want light. We don't want the truth exposed because it means **we will have to change**. Sometimes we simply don't want to change. Sometimes we fear that **we cannot** change. But none of those reasons hold any weight. If you want to lose closeness to God, it is simple. Sin. If you want to be closer to God it is simple. Bow to His Lordship. The question really comes down to one thing at that point. What do you really want most?

Now Isaiah starts getting specific about the sins.

³ For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity.

⁴ No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

Maybe we are not guilty of murder. Maybe we are not guilty of bloodshed. But all of us are guilty of lies and perversity. Maybe we have not reached the extreme these people have. They no longer want justice or truth. They are more concerned about having their own way, whatever that might happen to be.

But we know what these sins are like. And without a doubt, those sins are what comes out of us when we stop doing battle with our sin. It is what comes out of us when we fail to put on the armor of God. It is what comes out of us

when we start trusting our perceptions and our assumptions and we think that **how we feel** tells us anything about the real world. I think that maybe our greatest failures happen not when we simply say, I don't care what God says, I will do what I want. I think that maybe they come when I think **I know what God wants because I feel a certain way**. Because then we can do all manner of obnoxious and offensive and irresponsible things and feel self righteous about doing them. It turns offensive things into righteous things in our mind. And we will never question them because we have removed them from the scrutiny of the word. We make fun of Debbie Boone's line in a song in the 80's, how can it be wrong if it feels so right. But if we are not very very careful, we say the same things with our lives. **Sin happens easiest when we trust our perceptions for final guidance.**

God's Word is the standard. It doesn't matter who we are. It doesn't matter what we know. It doesn't matter what our predispositions or our temptations. What God says is true is true. Everyone else, including ourselves are liars. And we will say that over and over again. But it is so hard to really mean it. It is so hard to look at the word and say, you know what? I don't know anything about anything. Only God does. That is humility. That is truly bowing. And it is terribly rare.

That is why this verse says **They trust in empty words and speak lies**. It does not matter at the end of the day what **we say** is true. It only matters what **we trust** is true. And how do we know which is which? By what we do. By how we respond. By what we defend.

And if what **we trust** is not true, eventually **what we say** will not be true. We will **think** it to be true. We will go to great lengths to get people **to believe** what we say. But it will not be provable from what God says. It will be a "yes, but" to what God has said.

⁵ They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; He who eats of their eggs dies, And from that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

⁶ Their webs will not become garments, Nor will they cover themselves with their works; Their works are works of iniquity, And the act of violence is in their hands.

The point of this passage is how futile sinful strategies are. At the end of the day they produce nothing of value. They will rob us of that which **matters most** in life. Are you tempted to look at pornography? Are you tempted to spout hateful or disrespectful things to your spouse? Are you tempted to lie about how you are spending your time? Are you tempted to do whatever you must to get your own way? We are all tempted in different ways all the time.

But what the sins all have in common are **they hatch out bad vermin**. And they never hatch out useful food or clothing.

And the worst things are those sins we choose that we hope will clothe us in something that will impress God. But it is completely unproductive in doing so. All of our righteousness really is like useless detestable wheel grease filled rags.

7 Their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction *are* in their paths. 8 The way of peace they have not known, And *there is no* justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

This passage is loosely quoted in

Romans 3:15-17 (YLT)

15 Swift *are* their feet to shed blood.

16 Ruin and misery *are* in their ways.

17 And a way of peace they did not know.

In Romans it is talking about how both Jews and Greeks are all under the reign and domain of sin. Vs 9

Paul goes on

Romans 3:10-12 (NKJV)

10 As it is written: "*There is none righteous, no, not one;*

11 *There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.*

12 *They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.*"

Then our text from today is added under that context. It is obviously in the context of the unregenerate person, the person who does not have a saving relationship with Christ. So we know that we are safe to apply this passage to the unbelieving heart. And at the same time we see principles about sin that we can apply to ourselves.

So we see in verse 7 of our text what the state of those without a relationship with Christ is. Maybe they do not go to this extreme. But it is only a matter of style, not substance.

We see people who are quick to run to that which gives them what they want. Again we could go through all the lists of sins in the New Testament and we would probably still miss some that people are capable of. We see that they make haste, they run, to shed innocent blood. We tend to think of this only being the most hardened of sinners, but the abortion statistics would reveal that it is far more mainstream than we would like to think. It is amazing how capable human beings are of murder if they don't have to see the crime take

place. In fact it is amazing how capable we are of most any sin if our circumstances suddenly changed. When we say, "I would never do this or that", we probably don't know ourselves well enough. We simply have not imagined all the situations we could have been in.

But what do these people who pursue their own plans lack? Peace. They don't have any peace.

The way of peace they have not known

Whoever takes that way shall not know peace

Peace with God only comes from receiving from God and walking in the only way we can have peace. It is in the life of Christ. This has been another theme of Isaiah. We have seen idolatry, fear, trust and peace over and over again. Do you have peace with God? Can you face unsettling circumstances and maintain the confidence that comes from understanding that all is right between you and your Savior.

Can you say like the song writer

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.
3. My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
4. For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.
5. But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!
6. And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

⁹ Therefore justice is far from us, Nor does righteousness overtake us; We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, *but* we walk in blackness!

¹⁰ We grope for the wall like the blind, And we grope as if *we had* no eyes; We stumble at noonday as at twilight; *We are* as dead men in desolate places.

¹¹ We all growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves; We look 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 *as for* our iniquities, we know them:

What we see here is the bleak end of humanism. Left to ourselves and our own efforts we end up without justice, without righteousness, without light, without direction, without clarity, without vision, without comfort, without salvation. In summary we are allowed those things that **take up our time**, but we are deprived of those things **our souls need most**.

I read We all growl like bears and moan sadly like doves and I think about what I see on Fox News. This is life on planet earth apart from God. But this should not be what comes out of the lives of believers. We have justice and righteousness and light and direction and clarity and vision and comfort and salvation. We may lack some of the things we would prefer to **bide our time**, but we have those things that **our souls need most**.

And what is the difference?

Verse 12. Those trusting in themselves and their own wisdom have their transgressions always with them. We who trust God have our transgressions removed from us, at least the curse of them, the penalty of them, the condemnation of them. Praise God for His indescribable gift.

¹³ In transgressing and lying against the LORD, And departing from our God, Speaking oppression and revolt, Conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

¹⁴ Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter.

Isaiah is continuing with his confession of the sins of Judah. He is speaking as if he is them.

Here is the heart of all of us before God gets hold of us. This is truly what we can expect of unregenerate humanity. And there is nothing good here. Many people are aghast when they look back at Hitler Germany and ask how this ever could have happened. When, really, the bigger question is why does it

not happen more often? What is **in the man** and what **comes out of the man** apart from a saving relationship with Christ is **never good at its core**. It may have some very positive effects about it. It may look nice and feel nice. There may be kindness and politeness and respect. It is amazing actually how positive the attributes can be. But behind it all is always something despicable. And at the very heart of it is a lack of belief in the most core of truths.

Look at the relationship here. Justice is turned back. Righteousness stands far off. Why? How can these most crucial of things for human civilization to be kept at bay. What is the core problem?

For truth is fallen in the street.

Truth is trampled underfoot in the normal comings and goings of people. That is the sense of this. That which should be **the most valuable** is being treated of **not being worthy** of picking up out of the dirt. It is completely devalued. That is the world we live in. You and I know a thousand truths for which we will be demeaned for saying. These truths are not welcome in our world. They go against the party line, the “politically correct speak” that seems to run our world. But they are true, none the less. And at the **heart of it** what do we have?

Jesus said I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. There is the truth of all truths that needs to be known and seen and recognized. And what if it isn't?

Hebrews 10:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

It is a very dangerous thing for **us** or **anyone else** to trample this truth in the street. We cannot and we must not trample the Son of God underfoot. That is the crime of all crimes.

¹⁵ So truth fails, And he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey.

Then 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 intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

Look at this. The one who chooses to repent, the one who departs from evil, the one who sees this truth in the street and picks it up and polishes it off and lives by it... he becomes the one singled out for derision. He makes himself a

target. Jesus said as much. People by nature love darkness over light. And if we embrace the light, we are destined to bear a degree of distain. Then we read here that the Lord saw that no one was standing in the gap, that no one would tell this truth, that no one would stand up for what was true. No one would speak for God. So He speaks for Himself. He Himself puts on the armor of God like we are told to put on in Ephesians 6.

17 For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak.

18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly He will repay, Fury to His adversaries, Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay.

What we see here is the downside of being an enemy of God. God is never at the mercy of human beings. God is never dependent upon that which humans may or may not do. When He wants something done, it gets done. Whether that is **salvation** or **damnation**, whether it is **reward** or **penalty**, it will happen. And no man will stop it. Here we see His fury. But fortunately that is not the only side to God. Look at the result He is shooting for.

19 So shall they fear The name of the LORD from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.

This is God's end game... a people who live in the proper reverential fear that humans should have toward God. This show of mercy and love is what God is like. And even His fierce anger will be used in a way to draw His people to Himself. And where are they from? **Everywhere** across the globe. And what about their enemies? Well, when they come rushing up the gully like a flood, God has simply to put up His standard and His people are protected. It isn't like a big battle ensues and we are unsure of the outcome.

20 "The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the LORD.

Paul used this verse again in Romans.

Romans 11:25-27 (NKJV)

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "*The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;*

27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

Here we see Paul applies this to the last days when God will bring Israel back to Himself. God's endgame always involves mercy and salvation to His elect. How you describe elect might be different, but what happens to them is undebatable. God will save His people. That is what God is about. And notice how He describes His people. **"Those who turn from transgression."** Don't ever believe those who describe a salvation that has no effect on how one lives. There is nothing in the pages of scripture like this. God's salvation affects how we see God. And when we truly are regenerate, we will turn from sin. We won't do it perfectly, but it will be observable in the life of a Christian. If a person does not show signs of turning **from sin**, you can be sure they have not turned **to God**.

²¹ **"As for Me," says the LORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."**

And here God gives a covenant. And the covenant is essentially that God's Spirit will ensure that God's word will never depart from God's people. If you read about what God has done to keep His word accessible to humans, you will see that He has carried out His promise to us. His Word has been passed on. Here we read the very words of the prophet Isaiah and even **they** were passed on to us. This is no small thing. We are spoiled beyond belief. We have the Word of God at our disposal all day long. We take it for granted. And we forget just how valuable it is. We forget all the people who died so we could have it.

But here it is. We can freely read it and study it.

God has given us this truth that others might trample in the street. But He has **preserved it** because He knows that **apart from it** we cannot live. We must hide His word in our heart so we may not sin. We must allow that truth in the inmost places. We must believe His work and obey it if we love Jesus. We have it. He has preserved it. Because His people need it. We cannot trust any other competing voices. Even if the voices are **us** telling ourselves **something different**.

So what is wrong with our God? **Nothing**. Absolutely nothing. And what is wrong with us? **Too much to tell**. And where does the answer lie? In the truth that is easily trampled in the streets and in our minds. The truth that sits on our shelves and end tables and night stands. Will we really believe what it tells us about ourselves? Will we believe what it tells us about God?