

A Redeemer will come to Zion –

to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, declares the LORD.

There you have the five characters in our story!

We have often seen that there is a masculine singular character –  
who is now identified as the Redeemer.

There is a feminine singular – Zion – the city of God.

There is the masculine plural – those who turn from transgression.

And there is Jacob – (Israel, my servant) – the servant of the LORD who fell short.

And – of course – there is the LORD.

Isaiah 59:20 captures the whole of Isaiah’s message in one verse.

Because Isaiah 59:20 is a declaration from the LORD.

This is *God’s promise*.

Isaiah is speaking comfort to the people of God in the midst of their afflictions.

And his comfort is *not* that you are going to live a comfortable and happy life!

His comfort is that *he* is going to do something about your sin – *and* your misery.

A *Redeemer* will come to Zion.

A redeemer is one who pays the debt for another.

But in the OT, this has a far more profound meaning.

The redeemer was one who bought back his relative’s property –  
or married his relative’s widow –  
in order to maintain the name of the dead.

And by now, as we’ve gone through Isaiah’s prophecy for several months,  
it should be clear that Israel is dead.

And God promises that he will send a Redeemer –  
one who will restore the land – and the Seed –  
one who will bring life to the dead.

Isaiah 56-59 is structured around the theme of the eschatological Sabbath,  
and how our Sabbath-keeping provides a foretaste of that heavenly rest.

It consists of eight words from God.

Six in chapters 56-57 that explain the problem of Israel’s Sabbath-breaking,  
and the seventh in chapter 58 that promises God’s blessing.

And we’ve been seeing the importance of the pronouns in Isaiah!

You (plural) are fasting – but selfishly, with no thought for giving rest to others.

And so God says that if you (singular) call the Sabbath a delight –  
then God will make you ride on the heights of the earth.

Now the eighth word explains that there is no man who can do this.  
Only God can bring that eschatological blessing  
through the Redeemer that will come to Zion.

Isaiah structures this entire chapter through the use of pronouns.

(In Hebrew this is accomplished by switching verb endings)

There are five different movements in this eighth word from the LORD.

First, the prophet speaks to accuse “you” (plural) of your sin (59:1-3),  
speaking directly to the people of Israel.

Second, Isaiah convicts “them” of sin, turning to the third person (59:4-8)

Third, Isaiah uses the first person plural,  
identifying himself with the people of God,  
confessing “our” sin (9-13).

Fourth, Isaiah speaks of what God will do, using the third person singular:  
“he” will bring salvation in the person of the Redeemer. (15-20).

And finally, God himself speaks in the first person singular,  
declaring that “I” will do it. (21)

### **1. The Accusation of “Your” Sin (1-3)**

*Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,  
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;*

<sup>2</sup>*but your iniquities have made a separation  
between you and your God,  
and your sins have hidden his face from you  
so that he does not hear.*

<sup>3</sup>*For your hands are defiled with blood  
and your fingers with iniquity;  
your lips have spoken lies;  
your tongue mutters wickedness.*

As we saw last time,  
the people have fasted, and sought God’s face,  
but their sins separate them from God, so that he does not hear.

Our passage begins and ends here.

Our iniquities have separated us from God (v2).

A Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who *turn* from transgression (v20).

If you don't repent of your sin –  
if you don't turn away from it –  
then it is still there!

And that is why God does not hear Israel's prayers.

God is *able* to hear them just fine.

But he *does not* hear them because they refuse to repent and obey him.

What are their sins?

“Your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity;  
your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness.”

There are two problems:

a lack of justice  
and a lack of truth

Indeed, these two problems are intimately bound up together,  
because truth is not being proclaimed in the courts.

There is a legal problem in Israel,  
and it is not merely one of corrupt judges.

The corruption reaches to every part of Israel.

## 2. The Evidence of “Their” Sin (4-8)

<sup>4</sup>*No one enters suit justly;  
no one goes to law honestly;  
they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies,  
they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity.*

As Isaiah looks at the courts of Israel,  
he focuses not on the judges, but on the people.  
Everyone seeks his own, regardless of justice.

They rely on “empty pleas.”

We've encountered this word empty before: it is “tohu”  
just like the world in Genesis 1:2 was tohu vbohu (empty and barren)  
so also their voice is empty—their pleas carry no weight,  
because they are devoid of truth and of justice.

They speak lies.

(Note the word “lies” in verse 4 is different from verse three—  
broader sense of unreliability/disregard for truth)

They don't care about justice –  
so long as they get what they want!

This is not just true of Israel way back when –  
this is the way that legal systems generally work!  
After all, who passes the laws?

It's usually the wealthy and privileged.  
And their laws are usually designed to maintain their wealth and privilege.

Verses 5-6 then compare this utter disregard for truth to snakes and spiders.

<sup>5</sup> *They hatch adders' eggs;  
they weave the spider's web;  
he who eats their eggs dies,  
and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Their webs will not serve as clothing;  
men will not cover themselves with what they make.  
Their works are works of iniquity,  
and deeds of violence are in their hands.*

They are weaving spiders' webs--  
attempting to ensnare the innocent in their schemes  
They hatch adders' eggs--poisonous snakes that bring suffering and death.  
But their webs cannot cover their evil deeds.  
They are naked before the eye of the LORD--  
and he declares their works "works of iniquity"

<sup>7</sup> *Their feet run to evil,  
and they are swift to shed innocent blood;  
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;  
desolation and destruction are in their highways.*

Even after the Exile, Israel still has not learned.  
They will return to the ways of their fathers.  
Israel still will not enter God's rest.

<sup>8</sup> *The way of peace they do not know,  
and there is no justice in their paths;  
they have made their roads crooked;  
no one who treads on them knows peace.*

Paul speaks of this in Romans 3:15-17 (quoting verse 7)  
as he convicts all humanity – Jew and Gentile alike – of their sin.

Now, you might think that Isaiah would say something like,  
"but for those who are faithful – for the righteous remnant..."

But Isaiah was the teacher of Paul –  
and Isaiah recognized 700 years before the apostle –  
that this is not *their* problem.

This is *our problem*.

The injustice of our communities is not the fault of *those people*.  
The unrighteousness of our workplaces and our towns and cities  
is *our fault*.

Isaiah recognizes that although he is not personally guilty of the sins of verses 4-8,  
he is a part of this community.

It is not as though some of Israel has been faithful, and the rest has failed.

Sin and corruption has affected everyone.

And Isaiah includes himself in this condition.

### **3. The Confession of “Our” Sin (v9-13)**

<sup>9</sup> *Therefore justice is far from us,  
and righteousness does not overtake us;  
we hope for light, and behold, darkness,  
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.*

Everyone wants light.

Everyone wants brightness and cheer!

But behold, darkness.

We walk in gloom.

<sup>10</sup> *We grope for the wall like the blind;  
we grope like those who have no eyes;  
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,  
among those in full vigor we are like dead men.*

This is the common lot of humanity!

We are dead in our trespasses and sins.

We were supposed to live as God’s covenant people,  
but instead

<sup>11</sup> *We all growl like bears;  
we moan and moan like doves;  
we hope for justice, but there is none;  
for salvation, but it is far from us.*

Why?

Why is justice nowhere to be found?

Why is salvation far away?

*<sup>12</sup> For our transgressions are multiplied before you,  
and our sins testify against us;  
for our transgressions are with us,  
and we know our iniquities:*

Israel's sin is twofold – a lack of justice and a lack of truth:  
and verse 13 shows us both:

*<sup>13</sup> transgressing, and denying the LORD,  
and turning back from following our God,  
speaking oppression and revolt,  
conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.*

Our problem is both vertical and horizontal.

We deny the LORD – we turn back from following our God –  
and we speak oppression and revolt –  
we conceive and utter from the heart lying words.

Oppression is when we use our strength to push down others.  
Revolt is normally used of our rebellion against God.

The two invariably go together!

Think about it.

I am a husband – a father – a teacher – a pastor – a professor – and more...

It is really easy for me to use my position – any of those positions –  
to benefit myself.

As long as I am in submission to God,  
humbling myself to seek first the Kingdom of Christ –  
then I can use my authority properly  
to serve Christ – and my neighbor.

But watch what happens when I revolt against God!  
Because as soon as I am out of tune with God,  
what takes his place?  
Whether it is myself, or something else –  
the result is invariably the same:  
now I will to use other people (and I'll try to use God)  
in the service of something that is not God!

And the result is that everything else gets out of tune as well!  
When you are in revolt against God, you cannot help but oppress others!

And so Isaiah summarizes this twofold problem in verses 14-15 (read).

#### **4. The Solution: Only “He” Can Save (v14-20)**

<sup>14</sup> *Justice is turned back,  
and righteousness stands far away;  
for truth has stumbled in the public squares,  
and uprightness cannot enter.*

<sup>15</sup> *Truth is lacking,  
and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.*

The problem with Israel is that they lack justice and truth.  
this has stated in verse 3, and again in verse 8 and verse 13.

But it would be misleading to say that these are two problems.  
It is a twofold problem.

Truth is not just an abstract concept.  
Truth is about how you are related to the one who is Truth.

Justice cannot exist without truth.  
Truth cannot stand without justice.

There is no finer statement of the problem than when the judge looked at the accused  
and asked, “What is truth?”

For Pilate, “truth” had become whatever judgment would save his skin.  
Truth stumbled in the public squares – and when uprightness entered,  
they screamed, “Away with him! Crucify him!”

The reason why justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off,  
is because truth has stumbled in the public squares.  
If Israel is not true to their God,  
then there is no righteousness.

Verses 15b-20 then use the third person singular, moving from confession of sin,  
to confession of faith:  
(Read verses 15b-16)

*The LORD saw it, and it displeased him<sup>[a]</sup>  
that there was no justice.  
<sup>16</sup> He saw that there was no man,  
and wondered that there was no one to intercede;  
then his own arm brought him salvation,  
and his righteousness upheld him.*

Righteousness and justice are closely bound together  
with steadfast love and faithfulness (or truth).

As Psalm 89:14 declares, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;  
steadfast love and faithfulness (or truth) go before you.”

Psalm 85:10-11 adds, “Steadfast love and faithfulness (truth) will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Faithfulness (truth) will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.”

When will these things be?

When God restores his people and brings salvation to those who fear him!

Isaiah, drawing on the connection between tsedek and emet (righteousness and truth/faithfulness)  
in the Psalms, now declares the coming of that eschatological salvation.

(Read 17-20).

*<sup>17</sup> He put on righteousness as a breastplate,  
and a helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,  
and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.*

*<sup>18</sup> According to their deeds, so will he repay,  
wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies;  
to the coastlands he will render repayment.*

*<sup>19</sup> So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west,  
and his glory from the rising of the sun;  
for he will come like a rushing stream,<sup>[b]</sup>  
which the wind of the LORD drives.*

*<sup>20</sup> “And a Redeemer will come to Zion,  
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.*

This passage is one of the most emphatic statements of the deity of Christ.

Isaiah makes it clear at the beginning of the passage that no man can bring justice.

No man can bring salvation.

Only God’s own arm can bring salvation.

The glory of the Redeemer is none other than the glory of Yahweh (verse 19).

And yet verse 21 shows that the Redeemer is plainly also a man (as we will see).

Paul cites Isaiah 59 three times.

Verse 7 is quoted in Paul’s litany in Romans 3, regarding those who do evil.

What Isaiah spoke of regarding Israel,

Paul applies to all peoples.

This is appropriate.

After all, Isaiah has been saying over and over again



that Israel is no better than the nations.  
Israel was supposed to be the “man” who would intercede for the nations.  
But Israel has failed.  
Israel is just like the nations—they are swift to shed innocent blood.

Paul then cites verse 20 in Romans 11:26-27.

*<sup>25</sup> Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,  
“The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;  
<sup>27</sup> “and this will be my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins.”*

Paul says that Israel’s disobedience  
is the occasion for the salvation of the Gentiles (verse 30-31).  
And yet through the coming of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ,  
mercy has come to the Jews as well.

*<sup>30</sup> For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. <sup>32</sup> For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

God’s purpose in all of this –  
God’s purpose in all the stuff that goes on in your life! –  
is to bring all things together in Jesus Christ.  
You’re not going to figure it all out.  
That’s not your job!

Rather, you are called to *know him!*  
You are called into fellowship with him!

The most interesting use of Isaiah 59 is in Ephesians 6,  
the passage following the one we looked at this morning.  
Paul uses the language of verse 17 to describe the armor of God.  
“Take up the whole armor of God,  
that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,  
and having done all, to stand firm.  
Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth,  
and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
and as shoes for your feet,  
having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith,  
with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;  
and take the helmet of salvation,  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

At least two of these pieces of armor,  
the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation,  
come from Isaiah 59.  
But in Isaiah 59, this armor is the armor of God,  
when his own arm brings salvation.

What is Paul saying?  
When Paul calls it “the armor of God,”  
he is not merely saying that it is the armor that God provides.  
It is the armor that God himself wore,  
when he came in Jesus the Messiah.  
In Isaiah 59 this is armor that only God can wear.  
Isaiah has systematically excluded the whole human race.  
Israel is certainly not worthy of the breastplate of righteousness.  
“We hope for justice, but there is none.”  
No helmet of salvation crowns the people of God:  
“We hope for salvation, but it is far from us.”

No, the armor of God cannot adorn the fallen sons of Israel.  
Only God can save.  
Then how can Paul command you to put this armor on?  
Because our Lord Jesus Christ has united you to himself.  
You can only put this armor on, by putting on Christ.  
But as you are united to him, this armor becomes yours as well.  
Jesus became all that we are by nature,  
so that we might become all that he is by grace.  
The Redeemer has come to Zion,  
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression.

## 5. Because This Is “My” Covenant (v21)

“I” promise that I will do it.  
Isaiah turns to the first person singular,  
as God declares his covenant:

*<sup>21</sup> “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”*

And yes, this is addressed to you singular.  
My covenant with “them” (plural)  
is that the Spirit that is upon “you” (masculine singular)  
will remain upon them (your offspring).

God is the one who must come and save his people,  
the Redeemer must be a divine person,  
and when this Redeemer comes to Zion,  
then the Spirit of God will be poured out upon his offspring.  
The importance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular (you) in 59:21  
is amplified when you look at the “you” in chapter 60.

The “you” in chapter 60 will be a 2<sup>nd</sup> person *feminine* singular.  
And the feminine singular throughout Isaiah is regularly Zion.  
The singular Redeemer, the divine person who brings salvation to Zion,  
this one shall be the one who brings the words of God and the Spirit of God  
to his offspring.

Because Jesus has brought righteousness,  
therefore he has also brought truth.

If verses 15-20 emphasize the righteousness of God in redemption,  
verse 21 emphasizes the life of truth that flows from that.

The words of God will remain in the mouth of the Redeemer,  
and of his offspring,  
and of his children’s offspring.

And this covenant will endure from this time forth and forevermore.  
All that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
will be fulfilled in this Redeemer.

God will be our God and the God of our children,  
because he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God promises that his words will remain in our mouths,  
and in the mouths of our children.

As Paul says, “take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly  
as you sing to one another psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Brothers and sisters,  
the day has finally come, when the word of God does not merely  
bounce off the hardened ears of a wicked people.  
God has created a people with hearts of flesh,

those who now have eyes to see what God is doing,  
and ears to hear what God is saying!  
And he has given to you his Word and Spirit so that you might live as his people.  
Do not neglect this gift,  
but devote yourselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,  
to the breaking of bread and to prayers.  
As God's elect, holy and beloved,  
put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.  
Put on the armor of God—and be who you are in Christ!