

Isaiah's Song of Salvation

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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It seems almost impossible that the year 2009 is now history. In fact, as I just completed the former sentence on my computer, I looked to the top of the page and realized that I had put "January 2, 2009." Where did the last year go? Another year has slipped into eternity. Our designation of the ending and beginning of the solar year is rather arbitrary; if you lived in the time of Moses, the year would have started in March or April. Even so, as we have now put new calendars on our walls, it is appropriate to give solemn reflection to the beginning of 2010. The questions we should be asking ourselves are; Are we closer to the Lord now than a year ago? Has there been any progress in our Christian walk in the past year? Are we different than we were twelve months ago? Has our love for Him and our service to others increased?

One thing is for sure; We are now closer to the coming of the Lord than we were last January. There was a date in history when God spoke this world into existence. There was a date in history when God washed the world from its pollution by a flood. There was a date in history when Jesus died on a cross to save us from sin. There will be a date in history when He comes again and we are one year closer to that date than when 2009 began. I pray that His coming will be soon!

Our study today comes from a wonderful chapter in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet in Old Testament times whose ministry encompassed the years 750 to 690 B. C. His messages were directed to both the northern kingdom of Israel, which fell to the Assyrians in 722 B. C., and to the southern kingdom of Judah, which would fall to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. His messages contain warnings of reproof for their sins and invitations to accept God's mercy and salvation.

Israel had fallen dramatically from the ideal to which God had called her. Glorious light had fallen on her path; light which, if it had been followed, would have resulted in Israel becoming the most blessed nation in the world and an example of righteousness which could have won converts from among the Gentiles. Sadly, for the most part, this light was rejected and despised. Israel became like the pagan nations around them; no, she became worse. Light that is rejected becomes darker than the darkness of ignorance. It becomes the blackness of rebellion.

Nevertheless, God loved them and sent messenger after messenger to deliver His appeals of love and promises of restoration. Isaiah was only one of a succession of godly prophets who faithfully bore God's pleas to return to Him. Had they repented of their sins, had they put away their idols and sincerely given their hearts to Him, He would have worked a miracle in their lives and in their nation; it would have become the wonder of the world. All the promises made to them would have been fulfilled, had they listened and obeyed.

These warnings, appeals and promises were recorded and preserved for our benefit. Though some 27 centuries have passed since Isaiah penned them, they have relevance to you and to me today. God hasn't changed. His plan is still in operation. His hand still guides the affairs of this planet. His messages of hope and salvation given through his messenger Isaiah apply with even greater force to us today, who live on the very precipice of eternity. The prophecy of Isaiah given to Israel of the past, if heeded, would have saved them from the swords of Assyria and Babylon. The prophecy of Isaiah given to the Israel of today, if heeded, will save them in the great "day of the Lord," even the coming of Jesus Christ back to this world in glory. Let's look at what Isaiah said. By the way, the roots of two great Christian hymns are found in this passage. Do you know which ones they are?

"In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: 'We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength.'" Isaiah 26:1-4.

"That day" as it first applied to Isaiah's time, refers to the protection God would have provided His people against the attack of their enemies. Had they repented and obeyed Him, the assaults of the Assyrians and Babylonians would have been repulsed. Because they refused to submit, because they pushed God away, His protective hand was removed and they suffered the consequences. In the Old Testament, God is said to "do" that which He "allows." He is, after all, the Omnipotent King. Eventually the soldiers of Sargon and Nebuchadnezzar waged war against the cities of Israel and Judah. This was called God's "strange act." It was called "the day of the Lord."

But these attacks by Assyria and Babylon, devastating though they were, serve as examples and lesson books for the great Event which now approaches, the Great

Day of the Lord. This is the reason why these accounts and warnings have been preserved, for our benefit “upon whom the ends of the world have come.”

Back then, if Israel had surrendered to the Lord, He would have protected them in a mighty way. The song sung by Isaiah could have reverberated throughout the entire kingdom. “We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.” Cities in ancient times constructed walls for their protection. Walls of stone, brick or masonry were erected to withstand the siege of advancing armies. The enemies constructed sophisticated war machines, with battering rams, catapults and protected verandas from which warriors would launch flaming arrows. How long your city could survive depended, in great measure, on the strength of its walls, at least from the human point of view.

Isaiah desired to open the eyes of his fellow citizens to the truth that what they needed most of all was the protection of God. What are city walls against the power of God? Can you tell us, Jericho? Can you inform us, Babylon? More than anything else Judah needed the surrounding safeguard of the Lord. If they had His covering, nothing else would matter. They could have withstood the mightiest armies of earth. In fact, Assyria did aspire to attack Jerusalem. In boastful and blasphemous language Rabshakeh, the king’s spokesman, expressed the design of his monarch to take Jerusalem down. However, at that time, Judah still retained the protective presence of Yahweh and one angel struck the forces of Assyria destroying 185,000 of her troops. The remainder retreated and the planned attack was abandoned.

That same protection was available a century and a half later when Babylon launched her attacks against the city, but in the meantime, like sleeping Samson, they knew not that their power was gone and that God had abandoned them to the hands of their enemies.

This song will be sung. It will be sung by those who experience the salvation God has in store for those who love and serve Him at the end of time. God’s people will be in deep distress at the hands of those who despise His law. Those who dare to obey God at any cost; those who faithfully keep His Sabbath as a sign of their loyalty to Him will be the object of hatred as time closes. The fires of persecution will be rekindled. The hymn of Martin Luther will have incredible significance to those who live under these circumstances. “Let goods and kindred go; this mortal life also. The body they may kill. God’s truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever.”

The hymn of Isaiah 26, the “song of salvation” will have deep significance to those warriors of the Lord who live at that time. “In *that day* this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.’” Listen, friends! Every type of protection that we can obtain, whether it is by insurance or savings plan, what seems to be a healthy IRA portfolio, will eventually fail. Man attempts to erect impregnable “walls” of human devising, but they will all fail. What we need is the protection of the Lord! What we need are the walls of salvation and the bulwarks of His grace! Nothing can take the place of His guardianship! Nothing can be exchanged for His covering hand in that day!

The illustration Jesus gave of the protection of a mother hen for her chicks will have wonderful meaning for His faithful then. Every word of Psalm 91 will have living application for those who live for Jesus at the time of His coming. This chapter of Isaiah closes with the admonition, “Come My people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the LORD comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.” Isaiah 26:20, 21. “Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’s anger.” Zephaniah 2:3.

Isaiah makes it very plain who are the recipients of God’s favor. “*Open the gates*, that the *righteous nation which keeps the truth* may enter in.” There can be little question that this passage formed the backdrop for one of Revelation’s most precious promises. “Blessed are *those who do His commandments*, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may *enter through the gates* into the city.” Revelation 22:14. We realize that some new Bibles read differently in that text (“wash their robes” instead of “do His commandments”), but we favor the translation given in the King James, New King James and other such Bibles, “Blessed are those who do His commandments.”

There is no question but that the obedience of faith is the characteristic of the redeemed. This is the message of the entire Bible. It was disloyalty to God that sent Lucifer from heaven. It was disloyalty to God that sent Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. This is the most basic concept given in Scripture. True love for God will always manifest itself in the obedience of faith. This obedience does not provide the merit for salvation; that is a gift of God. But having respect to the great Gift God has provided; appreciating the great atonement represented by Christ’s precious blood will result in faithful obedience. How could it be otherwise? Those

who “enter in” are described as “the righteous nation.” What is righteousness, but “right doing.” How could it be that “the righteous nation” would be composed of those who willingly and knowingly trample on God’s holy law? Impossible!

This righteousness is imputed to the sinner’s account so that his *record* is set right, and it is imparted to his heart through the Spirit so that his *life* is set right. The sinner’s record is put right *in heaven* by God’s grace, and his or her life is put right *on earth* by His grace. The result is a changed life, one that complies, through God’s strength, with the holy precepts of His law. This is God’s work, not ours, but we must give our consent. In one of the clearest statements of righteousness by faith Isaiah later testifies, “LORD, You will establish peace for us, for *You have also done all our works in us.*” Isaiah 26:12. This is not legalism; neither is it self-righteousness. It is not man saving himself by his own works.

Paul echoed the same thought when he wrote, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is *God Who works in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12, 13.

Obedience to God through faith is the qualification of the redeemed. Who would suggest that it is anything different than that? Will God take to heaven those who rebel against His government? Never! Will an “unrighteous nation” be admitted through the gates into His city? Never! Will those who despise and trample on His law be welcomed into His kingdom? Not possible! Disobedience and rebellion began the sin problem and God cannot afford, for the safety and serenity of the universe, to perpetuate the sin problem by bringing into His kingdom those who are unwilling to obey Him in every detail.

The “righteous nation” is described as that which “keeps the truth.” Pilate asked Jesus as He stood before him at trial, “What is truth.” Jesus is the Truth. He said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” John 14:6. He is described as the “faithful and true Witness.” Revelation 3:14. How often His remarks were prefaced by the phrase, “Truly, truly I say to you.” He is the Truth, and there is no deception in Him. He “cannot lie.”

There is something which is so closely identified with God that it shares many of the same characteristics given in Scripture. That is His holy law. It is a description of what God is. Notice these comparisons: God is eternal; His law is eternal. God is holy; His law is holy. God is love; His law is love. God is truth; His law is truth. Notice how the Bible equates God’s law with truth. “Your righteousness is an

everlasting righteousness, and *Your law is truth.*” Psalm 119:142. “You are near, O LORD, and all Your *commandments are truth.*” Psalm 119:151.

When the Bible refers to the “righteousness nation which keeps the truth,” there can be no doubt but that it is referring to those who have surrendered their wills and lives to God and have made a commitment to obey all His commandments. These will be the ones to whom the gates are opened and enter in. These will be the ones who “have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city.” How Satan has deluded the world to think that God’s free grace gives one the right to disobey Him! Satan well knows that disobedience cost him his heritage; disobedience cost Adam and Eve their estate and will cost anyone the right to eat the life-perpetuating fruit of the tree of life. Determine now that you will obey all His commandments at any price! Why not? He made you and He saved you. How can you not fall at His feet in love and appreciation?

Isaiah continues, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD is everlasting strength.” One of the greatest benefits of God’s Good News is the promise of peace in our hearts. Not the peace that the world gives, which is temporary and unfulfilling; “My peace,” said Jesus. The peace of which Paul spoke when he wrote, “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7. Peace that prevails over circumstances. Peace that lives despite trials and hardships. In Christ that peace conquered the Roman whip, spikes and cross. Peace that endures even to death. That’s the peace in which God wants to bathe our hearts and souls.

Peace despite a failing economy; peace despite failing health; peace despite failing relationships; peace despite the absence of any earthly support. His peace. Perfect peace. In the Hebrew language, it actually reads, “peace, peace.” Because the word is doubled, obviously for emphasis, the translators expressed it as “perfect peace.”

Perhaps this repetition of the word was in the mind of the songwriter Warren D. Cornell, pastor in the Methodist Episcopal faith, who wrote this hymn at a Methodist camp meeting in 1889,

“Far away in the depths of my spirit tonight

Rolls a melody sweeter than psalm

In celestial-like strains it unceasingly falls

O'er my soul like an infinite calm

Peace! Peace! Wonderful peace

Coming down from the Father above

Sweep over my spirit forever I pray

In fathomless billows of love.”

The peace that Jesus gives us pervades every part of our lives. There are some practical suggestions on how we can live in peace. We can avoid raising our voices, especially while at home. We should never raise our voices in anger. This destroys the spirit of peace immediately. Even if you're not speaking in anger, rather than shout from one room to another, take the time to go to where the person is to whom you want to speak. This will facilitate the presence of peace in your home.

Add a few more minutes in your calculation of how long it takes to drive, and you will find your journey more peaceful than if you are rushed and every stoplight increases your blood pressure. Jesus wants us to live in peace. Most of all, begin each day committing your life to Him and accepting again His gift of salvation. Bask in the warmth of His love and know that His forgiveness has covered your sins. Know that His plan for your life is best, and even if you can't see around the bends in the road of life, He is in control and will even turn the trials to be blessings. He is on the throne of the universe and He is on the throne of your heart. There is nothing you will face today for which He hasn't made provision.

You can be God's "bubble child," protected by His peace against the disease of anxiety. You are a citizen of heaven; you are a follower of the One Who said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Should it be that today your life close in death, He is there and has a plan. The glorious promise given later in this same chapter will be fulfilled; "Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Isaiah 26:19. Shouldn't we have peace in our hearts knowing all this!

But it's not just "knowing" all this; it's having our minds "stayed" on Him. The promise is not given to the one whose mind is focused on this world and its aims. The promise of peace is not offered to the one whose attention is on the fleeting pleasures of this life. "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

Isaiah 48:22. The mind of the wicked is not “stayed” on Him; the Bible says, “The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.” Psalm 10:4. This peace is given to the one whose mind is “stayed” on Him. This means that throughout the day, through all the day, our minds are fixed on Him. We are constantly drawing from the well of salvation, constantly breathing the air of heaven, constantly thinking about God’s plan at work in our lives. Our minds are “stayed” on Him. Meaningless distractions are set aside. The empty noise of the world is shut out and we are able, even in this dreary wilderness, to walk with God.

“Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength.” The unique name of God, Yahweh, is used in this passage. At times other people were given names, such as *elohim*, (“powerful ones”) referring to earthly judges, or *adonai* (lord or husband), but never was any other, whether human being or false god, given the name Yahweh. In the Scriptures, we know when this is the name used in the original when it appears in all capital letters, LORD or GOD. On occasion it was abbreviated to “Yah,” as in this text. This name Yahweh was reserved for the Lord alone. There is none like Him! There is no god like our God! In Him we can safely trust.

In Him is “everlasting strength.” In the original that phrase is “the Rock of Ages.” “In Him is the Rock of Ages.” What a beautiful picture is that! We can’t help but wonder if this passage might have been in the mind of Augustus Toplady, who, when caught in a sudden storm, took refuge within a rock and scribbled the words on a card which became the Christian standard,

“Rock of ages, cleft for me

Let me hide myself in Thee.”

We close the books on 2009, pleading with God to forgive our sins and cleanse our hearts. We ask that our minds will, in 2010 be “stayed on Him” and we will enjoy that “perfect peace” which passes understanding. We ask that He will work within us and lead us in the paths of righteousness and obedience; that we will “keep the truth” and someday soon the gates will open and we will be given entrance therein.