

THE MEANS AND PURPOSE OF OUR SALVATION

48 Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who have been named Israel and come from the lineage of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of Jehovah and invoke the God of Israel—but not in truth or righteousness—²(they call themselves [citizens] of the holy city and depend upon the God of Israel, Jehovah of hosts is his name): ³I foretold the former things long ago; indeed, I announced them with my mouth and made them known. [Then] suddenly I acted and brought them to fulfillment. ⁴[I did so] because I know that you are obstinate and the sinews of your neck are made of iron and your forehead is like bronze. ⁵That is why I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you, so that you could not say, My idol has done these things; my carved image and my molten image have ordained them. ⁶You have heard [about these things]; take note, [you have heard] all this; will you not acknowledge this? From now on I will show you new things, hidden things that you did not know. ⁷They are newly created and did not exist in the past; you have not heard of them before today, so that you cannot say, Yes, I knew about them. ⁸Indeed, you had not [previously] heard [about these things]; indeed, you did not [previously] know [about them]; indeed, I did not open your ear long ago [and tell you about these things. I did not do so] because I knew that you are very treacherous; from the time of your birth you were called a rebel.

⁹For my [own] name's sake I will defer my anger, and for [the sake of] my praise I refrain [from expressing my wrath] against you, so that I do not cut you off. ¹⁰Look! I have refined you, but [you have not proven yourself] to be like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹For my own sake, for my own sake, I will do it—[I will restrain my anger,] for how can I allow my name to be profaned? I will not give my glory to anyone else! ¹²Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, the one whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am also the last. ¹³My [own] hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens. When I summon [the starry host], they all stand up together. ¹⁴Come together, all of you, and listen. Which of [the idols] has foretold these things? The one whom Jehovah loves will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Chaldeans. ¹⁵I, I have spoken. Indeed, I have called him. I have brought him, and he will succeed in his mission.

¹⁶Come near to me and listen to this: From the beginning [of these events] I have spoken [about them publicly], not secretly; from the time that they occurred, I was there. Now the Lord Jehovah has sent me with his Spirit. ¹⁷This is what Jehovah, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says, I am Jehovah your God, who instructs you for your benefit, who leads you in the way you should go. ¹⁸If only you had paid attention to my commandments, your peace would have been like a river and your righteousness [would have been] like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹Furthermore, your descendants would have been like the sand, and your children like its [countless] grains; his name will never be cut off from my presence nor destroyed. ²⁰Come out of Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans! Announce this with shouts of joy, proclaim it, declare it to the ends of the earth, say, Jehovah has redeemed his servant Jacob! ²¹They did not suffer thirst when he led them through the deserts; he caused water to flow out of the rock for them—he split the rock and the waters gushed out. ²²[But] there is no peace for the wicked, declares Jehovah. (Isa. 48:1-22)

Introduction

In the passage of Scripture presently before us, the LORD announces His intention to redeem Israel out of their bondage and bring them back to the Promised Land of Canaan. But before He does so, the LORD wants His people to come to grips with two fundamental truths: 1) their redemption is due to His grace and mercy, it is not due to their merit; and 2) their redemption is for His glory and service, in which alone they will find true blessing.

Like the Old Testament people of Israel, we, too, are prone to lose sight of the divine cause of our salvation (the grace of God), as well as the divine purpose of that salvation (service to God as obedient sons for His glory), with the result being a self-glorifying and self-gratifying existence. The incarnation is perversely seen as the evidence that God is honored to become one with us. The crucifixion is perversely seen as the evidence that God stands ready to serve us at any cost.

This passage serves to confront us with those same fundamental truths with which the LORD confronted Israel: 1) our redemption is due to His divine grace and mercy, it is not due to our own merit; and 2) our redemption is for His service and glory, in which alone we will find true blessing.

I. We Have Been Saved by the LORD's Grace (Isa. 48:1-11)

In verses 1-2 the LORD confronts Israel with the fact that they have not been true to their high spiritual calling. They have been named "*Israel*"—they are identified with the Old Testament patriarch as his descendants and they are numbered among that body of people who are designated as God's own possession. They have "*come from the lineage of Judah*"—they are of the nation of Judah, that part of Israel that was preserved from the Assyrian onslaught that swept away the ten northern tribes—thus they might view themselves as special objects of God's favor, uniquely and divinely protected and preserved. They "*take oaths in the name of Jehovah and invoke the God of Israel*"—they acknowledge that the LORD is God, and they confess Him to be their God; and they engage in public acts of worship addressed to Him. They "*call themselves [citizens] of the holy city and depend upon the God of Israel*"—they view themselves as members of the kingdom of God—the kingdom characterized by holiness—and they presume that the LORD will take care of them and identify them as His own cherished possession. "*But not in truth or righteousness*"—their state of heart and mind does not conform to God's standard, it does not conform to the name they bear, it does not conform to the religion they profess and the identify they assume to possess.

In verses 3-8 the LORD declares that these people have been obstinate and stiff-necked—they have been stubbornly resistant to God. The LORD reminds these people of His former words of prophecy (vs. 3): long ago He foretold what He would do, and then suddenly He fulfilled His word. He explains that He

announced His works far in advance because of the obstinacy and stubbornness of the people—He describes them as having necks like iron sinews and foreheads of bronze (vs. 4.) Had the LORD not sent His prophets to foretell what He was about to do, when His work was actually performed these people would have attributed it to their idols rather than acknowledging it to be an act of the LORD their God (vs. 5.)

Now the LORD declares that He is going to show these people new things: things that have been hidden, unknown, newly created, unheard of before (vs. 6b-7a.) The LORD has determined to make these new things known to the people at this present time rather than revealing them in the past so that they cannot say, *"Yes, I knew about them"* (vs. 7b.) If the LORD had foretold these things in advance, when the events actually came to pass the people would have been unaffected and unimpressed. Rather than stand in awe at the work of God, they would have congratulated themselves on their ability to know these acts long before they occurred, willfully failing to remember that it was the LORD who foretold what He was going to do.

The LORD declares, *"I knew that you are very treacherous"* (vs. 8b.) There is within the human heart a terrible prejudice against God: a sinful lust to deny Him and His work in spite of the evidence, a sinful tendency to be completely biased against God. The Apostle Paul addresses this in Romans 1:18, *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."*

In verse 10 the LORD informs Israel that when they were subjected to testing they did not come forth like pure silver. The LORD subjected His people to the refining process, as one would test precious metals. He subjected them to *"the furnace of affliction."* That is to say, He subjected them to various trials and testings to see how they would react—Would they give their allegiance to Him and remain faithful to their God and to His commandments? The outcome of this process of testing has regretfully demonstrated that they are *"not like silver."* They are not the spiritual equivalent of precious metal; rather, they show themselves to be spiritual dross with many impure alloys.

Against this background of holy accusation supported by the hard evidence of spiritual apostasy, is seen the wonder of the LORD's testimony in verses 9 and 11.

"For my own name's sake I will defer my anger, and for the sake of my praise I refrain [from expressing my wrath] against you, so that I do not cut you off" (vs. 9.) Sinful lives, characterized by superficiality of worship, stubbornness of heart, and absence of obedience, provoke the LORD to righteous anger—an anger that would move the LORD to cut His people off from the covenant and consign us to the judgment of everlasting punishment. But in His mercy He defers that holy anger (literally, He *"makes his anger long,"* He restrains Himself from inflicting the sentence of everlasting judgment)—and this He does for His own Name's sake.

That is to say, in faithfulness to His promise that Abraham shall have a nation of descendants, as recorded in Genesis 15:5, *"And [Jehovah] brought him out [to the open field] and said, 'Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"* Much more so, in faithfulness to Christ, so that He shall, indeed, have spiritual fruit for His labor: *"And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me'"* (Heb. 2:13b.) The writer of Hebrews applies the words of Isaiah 8:18 to Christ and His spiritual children—all those who receive Him as their Savior. The LORD is enabled to defer His anger and show mercy to His people because His justice has been executed upon the Person of the Messiah, as will be revealed in Isaiah 53,

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5-6)

In Romans 3:25-26, the Apostle Paul further elaborates upon the redemptive work of Jesus the messiah, *"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement ... ²⁶He did it to demonstrate his justice ... so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus."*

In Isaiah 48:11 the LORD goes on to declare, *"For my own sake, for my own sake, I will do it—[I will restrain my anger,] for how can I allow my name to be profaned? I will not give my glory to anyone else!"* If the LORD were not to save His people He would be seen as being powerless to save and accused of being unfaithful to His covenantal promises. Moses presents this argument unto the LORD as the reason for Him to save His rebellious people at the time they made the golden calf:

"I have seen these people," Jehovah said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." ¹¹But Moses sought the favor of Jehovah his God. "O Jehovah," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" ¹⁴Then Jehovah relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (Ex. 32:9-14)

If the LORD had not delivered His people from their captivity, the devil—the god of this world—would have deprived the LORD of the glory of gaining the ultimate

victory, victory over sin and its eternal consequences—the victory of redeeming His sinful hell-deserving people.

Let us recognize that we have been saved by the LORD's grace—and not because of any merit found in us. Remember the teaching of the Apostle Paul, *"when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly ...⁸ ... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:6,8.) As the hymn writer, Horatius Bonar, expresses it:

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified.
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.

II. We Have Been Saved for the LORD's Glory (Isa. 48:17-22)

The LORD who identifies Himself as our *"Redeemer;"* at the same time informs us that He is *"the Holy One of Israel"* (vs. 17a.) He then goes on to declare, *"I am Jehovah your God"*—He is the God to whom we belong and with whom we have been brought into covenant; note 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *"You do not belong to yourself;²⁰ you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body."* As our God He teaches us and leads us in the way we should go (vs. 17c.) The Psalmist presents the same theme when he declares, *"The LORD is my shepherd ...³ He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake"* (Psl. 23:1a, 3.) As Isaiah 48:17 goes on to indicate, the LORD our God leads us in the way of righteousness for His name's sake and for our profit. When He first established the covenant nation of Israel, the LORD expressed His desire that His people would be devoted to Him so that they might perpetually experience His covenantal blessing: *"Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"* (Deut. 5:29.)

Now the LORD expresses remorse that His people have failed to walk in His ways, *"If only you had paid attention to my commandments!"* (vs. 18a.) If they had done so, they would have experienced the blessings He here enumerates. *"Your peace would have been like a river"*—the blessing of peace with God is compared to the idyllic scene of a peacefully meandering river. *"Your righteousness [would have been] like the waves of the sea"*—the life of the individual and the people of God collectively would overflow with the fruit of righteousness just as the waves cover the sea. *"Your descendants would have been like the sand, and your children like its [countless] grains; his name would never be cut off from my presence nor destroyed"*—obedience would bring the fulfillment of the covenantal promise of an abundance of offspring altogether enjoying the blessing of dwelling in the presence of the LORD forever.

Whereas Old Testament Israel failed to heed the LORD's admonition and purpose for their lives as expressed in verse 18a, the passage indicates that the divine purpose shall yet be fulfilled through the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that the LORD calls upon His people to come forth from Babylon (vs. 20) indicates that, although they had been given over to judgment because of their failure to heed their LORD's admonition, there is a call for repentance, and the promise of restoration—and the assurance that the LORD shall yet accomplish His divine purpose in those whom He has redeemed for Himself:

... I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit in you and cause you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezek. 36:24-28)

The use of the singular pronoun in verse 19b ("**his name**") as well as the future tense ("**his name will never be cut off from my presence**") reminds us that there is only One who was truly obedient to the LORD—the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Redeemer—and it is by faith in Him that we enter into His righteous life and God's purpose with regard to us is realized. Note 2 Corinthians 5:21, "**Him [Christ] who knew no sin he [God the Father] made to be sin on our behalf; so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.**"

The passage abruptly closes with a startling and sober reminder that if there is no righteousness there can be no peace—either in this world or in the world to come: "*[But] there is no peace for the wicked, declares Jehovah*" (vs. 22.) The kingdom of God is populated not by those who merely come to Jesus; but by those who, having come to Jesus, become like Jesus, note Titus 2:14, "*our Savior Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.*"

Let us recognize that we have been saved for the LORD's glory—the glory of having His righteous character reproduced in us and radiate from us for all of eternity. In Romans 8:29-30, the Apostle Paul expresses the purpose of God's saving work and lists the various aspects of that work in the past tense in order to emphasize the certainty that that work will, indeed, be finally realized in the lives of the LORD's redeemed to the glory of His Name:

... those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)

Conclusion

Like the Old Testament people of Israel, we, too, are prone to lose sight of the divine cause of our salvation, as well as the divine purpose of that salvation. When that is allowed to happen the result is a self-glorifying and self-gratifying existence.

But here in Isaiah 48 we are confronted with and reminded of both the means of our salvation (namely, the grace and mercy of the LORD our God) as well as the purpose of that salvation (namely, the glory of the LORD in having His righteous character reproduced in His redeemed people). In one of many New Testament passages these great truths are stated as follows:

*It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹it is not of works, therefore no one can boast.
¹⁰We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)*