

Andrew K. Frey. Christmas 1. Isaiah 45:20-25.
December 27, 2020. St. John, Town of Center, WI.

²⁰Gather! Come! Draw near together, you survivors from the nations. They have no knowledge—those who are lifting up their idols of wood and praying to a god that cannot save. ²¹Make an announcement and come close. Let them consult together. Who made this known ahead of time? From time past who announced it? Was it not I, the LORD? There is no god except me, a righteous God and Savior. There is no one except me. ²²Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, because I am God, and there is no other. ²³I have sworn by myself. From my mouth a righteous word has gone out, and it will not return unfulfilled. Indeed, to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance. ²⁴“Only in the LORD,” they will say of me, “Only in the LORD is there true righteousness and strength.” To him they will come and be ashamed—all those who are angry at him. ²⁵In the LORD, all the descendants of Israel will be justified. They will be praised by him. (EHV)

Theme: Salvation is Found in the Lord Alone

Here we are, only a few days after Christmas; and many people have all but forgotten about Christ. Work starts again tomorrow for many people; many relatives have gone back home (if they came at all this year), others are looking ahead to New Year’s Eve already. Jesus had his day in the sun, people celebrated his birthday, but now they have moved on to whatever is next in their lives. Some may not think much about Christ or make him a part of their lives until Easter—and some not till next Christmas Eve. And it’s not just 2020 (or the fact that we are worshiping in the basement today), it happens every year—worship attendance rises in the weeks before Christmas, but one of the least attended services of the year is today, the Sunday after Christmas.

Why is that? Well, for some, Christmas is nothing more than a secular celebration and they completely ignore the miracle of the incarnation—God becoming man. Others may even love the Christmas narrative of a baby boy being born in poor and lowly circumstances. But Jesus, for them, ever remains a baby—they don’t see him as the Savior because that means that they are sinners. And if Christmas is emptied of its importance, then so is Christ; and Christ, then is pushed aside until it’s convenient for them. Jesus once said in Matthew 15, while quoting Isaiah 29, **These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain.** Worshiping the Lord without faith is of no value to anyone, the Lord sees through the façade. The Lord doesn’t want the mere outward action of worship; he wants our hearts! Others certainly believe in Christ; they treasure the gospel and know how important Jesus’ coming is for our salvation. But they fall into thinking that they need to take a little break from Church, after all with all the extra services the past month, and everything going on around Christmas, they could use a little break and sleep in a little bit!

But you’re here! You haven’t forgotten about Christ. It’s the Sunday after Christmas and you are one of the select few who made it a priority to be here today, or to worship with us online! Good! Maybe you should feel good about yourself, puff out your chest a little bit, and look down upon others because they aren’t as good as you!

Of course, I’m being sarcastic. You’re not innocent; none of us are! How often don’t we forget about God? How often doesn’t Christ get pushed off to the side in our lives? Maybe you stepped up your devotional life this past month leading up to Christmas, but you had to work hard to carve out and extra 5-10 minutes in your day to do so. It’ll be good to get that time back you figure, so you cut back. Maybe you won’t spend as much time in prayer, certainly you have

an extra hour or so now that midweek Advent services are over. You certainly aren't going to forget about Christ completely—but he isn't necessarily primary in your life as he was just a few days ago.

So we all, to one extent or another turn away from Christ or forget about him just days after Christmas. For different reasons of course, some never know Jesus as God and Savior—and Christmas has been stripped from all its significance, and so is Christ. And for us Christians, it's so easy to let the things of this world distract us from Christ and the worship of him, that we forget about him in one way or another. Perhaps you can boil the reason down to this: we either reject Jesus as God and Savior, or don't value this important truth enough.

In the verses leading up to our text Isaiah is looking into the future and foretells how the Persian King Cyrus would allow a remnant of the people to return back to the Promised Land. This would prove that the Lord is faithful to his word and keeps his promises. Isaiah then urges people from all over the world to see the Lord as the one true God, since only the true God can keep all of his promises.

In our text for today, Isaiah reminds all people that salvation is for all who turn to Christ in faith—Jews and Gentiles alike. He says in verse 22, **Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.** The Lord wants people from all over the world to come to him and hear his Word as he says in verse 20, **Gather! Come! Draw near together.** The Lord wants nothing more than for us—the whole world—to be saved. He doesn't necessarily want us to merely worship him at Christmastime, he wants our hearts; more than anything else he wants us to believe in him and be saved. So he urges us, pleads us with to turn to him in faith so he can save us. Since we can't save ourselves, and are, in fact, on our way to eternal damnation without him, and the Lord doesn't desire that anyone perish for eternity, in love he pleads us to turn to him for salvation. And in these last days and in the days after Christmas, when more and more people are forgetting the Lord and turning away from him, the Lord urges us to remain him and to encourage others to do the same! As we read in our second lesson, **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.**

The Lord gives one main reason as to why we should turn to him, **because I am God, and there is no other.** This section of Isaiah wasn't just for the Jewish people, but for people of all nations. Like the Jews there were people of other countries who were forced into exile in Babylon. These nations all worshiped false gods. Some of them had multiple gods, others worshiped the sun or other aspects of nature. Some would take a piece of wood, whittle some sort of figure into it and then worship it and offer sacrifices to it as if it were real! About them Isaiah writes, **They have no knowledge—those who are lifting up their idols of wood and praying to a god that cannot save.** Since the Lord wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, he calls on all people to listen to him as the only true God and the only true God who can save.

And that is his point in verse 21, **There is no god except me, a righteous God and Savior. There is no one except me.** There is only one God and there is only one Savior. They are one and the same. Jesus is God and Jesus is our Savior. We have seen that again and again this Christmas season—all six of our lessons just a few days ago on Christmas morning made this point! For example, we see it in Jesus' name; Jesus means the Lord's saves and another name is Immanuel, which means God with us. There is no god besides the Lord and there is salvation outside of Christ. Peter famously makes the same point about Jesus in Acts 4, **There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.**

This message of salvation is found in God's inspired word alone. God's holy inspired Word comes out from his mouth and makes believers of all nations. As we read in verse 23, **From my mouth a righteous word has gone out, and it will not return unfulfilled.** It is this gospel that has been shared with us and it is this gospel that has brought us to faith so that we would be holy or righteous in God's sight. By faith that we receive the perfect life that Christ has one for us and gives to us, so we are righteous and holy in his sight. So God's righteous word makes us righteous. In verse 24 Isaiah makes the point again, **"Only in the Lord," they will say of me, "Only in the Lord is there true righteousness and strength."**

Not only does the word make us righteous, but it is also through the Word that we are justified. Justification is God's declaration of us guilty sinners being not guilty. We are justified not because of we who are or what we've done; we are justified purely by a gift of God's grace. He has declared the entire world not guilty by the work of Christ; and it is through faith that we believe and are justified! He says in verse 25, **In the LORD, all the descendants of Israel will be justified. They will be praised by him.** This refers to us—we may not be physical descendants of Israel, but through faith in Christ we are part of spiritual Israel, who are declared not guilty through faith in him!

Not only is the Lord the Lord of salvation and righteousness, by whose word we are justified, but in him is strength. This can refer to many things—but I mostly think of physical blessings. Not only does he provide for all our spiritual needs, but he also promises to be with us, to guard and protect us, to provide for us—to give us our daily bread! The Lord above loves us so much that truly provides for all our needs—both physical and spiritual!

So many people turn away from the Lord, especially in the days after Christmas. Today the Lord reminds us of who he is. He isn't just the baby born in Bethlehem to a poor virgin and placed in a manger. He is true God from eternity who came down from heaven and took on human flesh. He is a jealous God and a just God. But he is God of love and forgiveness. He alone is true God and he alone is our Savior. He is the one whose word brings us to faith, by which we are declared righteous or holy in his sight. By the work that he would do on the cross and by his resurrection we are declared not guilty! On top of all these spiritual gifts are the physical gifts he provides for us. Grace upon grace is given to us by our God and Savior Jesus.

So many people turn away from him because they do not know him or they don't care. So the Lord urges us to turn to him, remain his Word and be saved! The more we understand the truths laid out for us by Isaiah, the more we comprehend who Jesus is, what he has done for us, the more we want to turn to him in every aspect of our lives.

One more note: we are reminded that the word of the Lord does not return to him empty. We know that it accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. Let us then continue to let the Word come from our lips, to continue to share the gospel message with others. Yes, the day of Christmas is gone, but Christ is still our God and Savior; and at a time when so many people are turning away from the Lord, this important truth needs to be shared, so the Holy Spirit can work faith in their hearts and they then see Jesus as God and Savior. Amen.

"Now to the eternal King, Jesus Christ, to the immortal, invisible, only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."