

## GOD'S INVITATION - ISAIAH 45:22

### LIFE VERSE OF C.H. SPURGEON

It was the first Sunday of the New Year and the weather couldn't have been worse. Snow, snow and more snow. It had snowed steadily all night long. There were already a couple of feet covering the roads and footpaths. The fields were sheets of blinding whiteness. And the flakes were continuing to fall as if they never meant to stop.

The caretaker crossed the yard to that church on Artillery Street to open the door and light the wood stove. He smiled to himself wondering if anyone was going to brave the elements to come to church that morning.

A half an hour later, he saw 2 men bravely trudging up the steps to the chapel. They entered the narthex and shook all of the snow off of their bodies laughing to each other. What a morning to celebrate the first Sunday in 1850.

By 11:00, there were about a dozen worshipers who had gathered. They looked at each other in that sanctuary that would normally house about 300 and shook their heads. Their preacher wasn't even there. He obviously hadn't been able to navigate the impassable roads. There was only one face

that wasn't familiar to everyone - a young man who was about 15 years of age. What should they do? Should they try to have any service at all? They didn't have any musicians, they didn't have their pastor, should they just call it a snowed out day and go back home?

One of the first men who had arrived was an elder in the church. A tailor by trade, he had faithfully served the Lord for many years as a layman. He rose and said that they might as well have an abbreviated service together. After all, they had all braved the elements - they might as well sing a hymn, pray and read a passage of Scripture. So the dozen or so worshipers began their short worship service of about 10-15 minutes.

Little did they know when they began the service that the young 15 year old in the back had been wrestling with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in his life for a couple of years. He had finally become so uncomfortable that he had made a New Year's resolution to attend church every Sunday in that year. Wouldn't you know that January 6th would bring this incredible snow storm? But he had waded out through the drifts in faithfulness to the promise that he had made to God.

When the dozen had finished singing an acopella hymn and praying, the

elder who was leading turned to Isaiah 45:22 - he read, *“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”*

He then gave his testimony as to how God had saved him and what the Lord meant to him in his life.

If you journey today to that church that is still standing on Artillery Street, you will find a marble plaque on the wall near the pew where that 15 year old young man sat on that Jan. 6, 1850 Sunday morning. For that young man was wonderfully converted that morning. A few years later God would call him into the gospel ministry. Today, he is called *The Prince of Preachers*. And that verse which that tailor used that morning from Isaiah 45:22 became the life verse of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Turn and read to Isaiah 45:22 with me.

*“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.*

Isaiah is the first of the books that we call the Major Prophets. We call Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel major prophets because they are much larger books than the 12 Minor Prophets. Of all of the prophets, Isaiah is perhaps the most beautiful in its style. Listen to what J. Sidlow Baxter has to

say in his introduction to Isaiah: “What Beethoven is in the realm of music, what Shakespeare is in the realm of literature, what Spurgeon was among the Victorian preachers, that is Isaiah among the prophets. As a writer he transcends all his prophet compeers; and it is fitting that matchless contribution from his pen should stand as leader to the 17 prophetic books. All who have any sense of literary appreciation must be impressed by the combined excellences of Isaiah’s style – its grandeur and dignity, its energy and liveliness, its profusion of imagery, its vividness of description, its forceful play on words, its dramatic and rhetorical touches, and last, but not least, its wonderful variety.”

Isaiah seems to have been of a very high social status and well-educated. He was personally familiar with Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was the historiographer of the Judaen court during Jotham’s reign and wrote accounts of the reigns of Uzziah and Hezekiah. It was obvious that Isaiah was a man who felt comfortable in the courts of the kings.

But the times when Isaiah prophesied were not easy times in Israel’s history. He began his prophetic ministry near the end of Uzziah’s reign and spoke for God for some 60 years. Jewish tradition says that Isaiah lived into

the reign of Manasseh, under whom he suffered a horrible martyrdom for resisting and speaking out against that wicked king's actions. Tradition says that Mannaseh had Isaiah placed in the hollowed trunk of a tree and then sawed in two. It is thought that Hebrews 11:37 alludes to Isaiah's martyrdom.

HEB 11:32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- <sup>38</sup> the world was not worthy of them.

It has often been observed that the book of Isaiah is a miniature Bible in his presentation. Just as the Bible has 66 books, so Isaiah has 66 chapters. As the Bible is divided into the Old Testament of 39 books and the New Testament of 27 books, Isaiah has a natural division of the first 39 chapters and the last 27 chapters. As the Old Testament focuses on God's law and the inability of His people to keep it, so the first 39 chapters of Isaiah focus on the judgments of God upon his people for their inability to keep his commandments. And as the New Testament focuses on God's love and redemptive program being completed in Christ Jesus, so the last 27 chapters of Isaiah focus on God's grace and comfort for His people and his coming salvation.

Now this verse that was Spurgeon's favorite is found in the latter part of Isaiah that is focusing on the redemption and salvation that God offers to his people.

*"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.*

In this brief verse, the prophet Isaiah speaks against 2 commonly held assumptions in the world around him. These 2 have been assumed by people

of all ages - they are basic tenants in the worldly philosophy that is authored and promoted by the evil one. The majority assumed them to be true when Spurgeon lived in 19th century England. Most Americans assume them to be true today. But they are false assumptions which hinder people from finding the narrow path that leads to eternal life. I would direct your attention to these 2 false assumptions and Isaiah's statements of God's truth about them this evening.

1. Assumption #1 is that people are basically good - they just need some minor corrections in life.

Now we all want to think the best of ourselves and of each other - and there's certainly nothing wrong with that to a degree. Most people in society try to be kind and good to one another. Certainly, all of us who have come to church this morning want to help others - and that's noble and beneficial to society. A person who totally sells himself to be wicked and do evil to others is a detriment to any society and usually ends up behind bars somewhere. So I think that most of us would agree that most in our community like to think of themselves as good people who try to help out others and value acts of generosity and kindness.

A poll published in U.S.A. Today some time ago (June, 1997) illustrates this common belief. The pollster found that 66% of Americans believed that there is a literal heaven, and 87% of Americans believe that they are going to heaven after they die. Now discounting the inconsistency of at least 21% of our countrymen thinking that they are going to a place that they don't believe exists, this poll illustrates the fact that most people in our country feel that they are a pretty good person. Almost 9 out of 10 feel that they believe that they will go to heaven after they die.

Now we need to be careful that we don't evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to others around us - especially those who we feel are inferior morally to us. How easy it is for us to congratulate ourselves on the fact that we are hardworking citizens, we are law abiding citizens, therefore, we must be pretty good people - not perfect, but on a scale of 1 to 10, we are probably 7 or 8's.

We need to be reminded that the standard of entrance into heaven is not American society, but it is rather God's perfect character. And when God looks down upon us through his holy and righteous eyes, he doesn't basically good, kind, caring people, but he rather sees people who fall woefully short

of his standards of righteousness and moral perfection.

I remember the nursery rhyme *Little Jack Horner* which many of us learned as children. It went something like this - pardon me if I don't get it word perfect, it's been a long time.

*Little Jack Horner, sat in his corner, eating his Christmas pie.*

*He stuck in his thumb, and pulled out a plum, and said "what a good boy am I".*

Now this scene has always amazed me, even as a child. For here is a young lad who ruins a perfectly good pie by sticking his thumb right into the middle of it, and he comes to the amazing conclusion that he is a very good boy. Another casual observer to this scene could come to the conclusion that he is a pie-ruiner - but not Jack Horner. He comes to the conclusion that he is a very good boy.

As I have grown in my knowledge of God's word and life around me, I have come to see many parallels between Jack Horner and the world in which we live.

\*God created us in a perfect environment. God made Adam and Eve and put them in the beautiful Garden of Eden.

\*But just look around at what the human race has done to this once perfect world because of sin and rebellion against God. We have polluted the environment; there are streets that cannot be traveled down safely day or night; the history of mankind is littered with war after war; yet, we have the tendency to look at one another and say, *We are basically pretty good people - what good boys we are.*

Isaiah the prophet gives us the assessment from God's point of view. *Turn to me and be saved.* He does not say, adjust your course a little bit, or make some slight modifications. He rather says, *Turn.* Even though the Hebrew word that is used here is found some 2100 times in the O.T. with some variations of meaning, its root meaning is to completely turn around.

\*this same word is found in Genesis 18:22 to describe the 2 angels as they turned from Abraham to make their journey to Sodom. These angels completely changed their course. They turned around and headed down the road to the city of Sodom.

\*the indication is clear. This word indicates an about face; it is heading in a different direction; it is choosing a completely opposite path in life.

\*Now there is another interesting sidelight in connection with this

Hebrew word. The root of this term is the same root that is used for the word *face* in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew word *face* was often used to represent one's presence and character.

\*Isaiah's message is direct and to the point. We can only be saved as we realize that we are headed in the wrong direction. As long as we compare ourselves to others in our sinful society, we will just travel along with them on the broad road that leads to destruction. It is only as we see the face of God himself, as we become aware of his holy and righteous character, as we compare ourselves with His standards of perfection and see how far we fall short, that we repent of our sinful ways, that we turn and follow Him.

\*Happily, God is willing and able to come to our aid and enable us to journey down our new path in life. It is his power that allows us to choose a new path; it is his forgiveness that cleanses us from our imperfections; it is his grace which enables us to follow Him. But if we are to ever be saved, we must turn first. *Turn to me and be saved*, the prophet writes.

2. Assumption #2 is that everybody has their own concepts and beliefs about God and they are all valid. What is most important is for a person to really be sincere in their beliefs. What a person actually believes is not as

important as how strong his faith is - this is the commonly held view by most around us today.

\*Now we must never forget the religious world that Isaiah faced. Every single nation in Isaiah's day accepted and worshipped many gods except for the nation of Israel - and most of Israel's history is characterized by its acceptance and worship of the gods of its surrounding nations. Most people in Isaiah's day would not defend the view that there is one true God. They felt that this exclusivism was very narrow and bigoted. Rather, the commonly accepted view was that there were many gods. These gods controlled the various functions of nature.

\*Baal was the god of the storm - he controlled the cycle of rainfall which was so important in their agricultural society.

\*Ashtoreth was the mother-goddess. She was the goddess of love and fertility - another important function in an agricultural society where prosperity was related to the reproduction of animals.

\*Chemosh was the god of war. He was the god who would help armies to win battles.

\*Dagon was the god of grain. He was the god who would help the grain

to grow and provide a rich and bountiful harvest.

\*Isis and Mot were the gods of life and death. They were the gods who controlled the length and quality of a person's life.

\*Re was the sun god and Nanna was the moon god. They controlled the cycle of days and weeks and months and years - critically important especially in a world where time was measured by a lunar calendar.

\*Now even though Baal and Ashtoreth were primarily Phoenician and Canaanite gods, and Chemosh was primarily a Moabite god, and Dagon primarily a Philistine god, and Osiris and Re primarily Egyptian gods, and Nanna primarily a Mesopotamian god - these gods were all worshipped by people of all lands, especially by the higher cultural classes who were culturally sensitive and well-educated. And when any of these countries rose to a position of prominence in the Middle East, as would happen in regular cycles, their gods also would become more dominant over the others. But nobody in these Middle Eastern countries would deny the validity of any of these gods - for there was a common assumption that there were many gods who were in charge of different universal functions and they all had to be recognized and honored.

\*Even after the Philistines had captured the ark that they considered to be the god of the Israelites, they were careful to pay homage to it and sacrifice to it before returning it back to the Israelites. They reflected the commonly held religious views of their day.

\*Now many Christians have been encouraged by recent trends in our own country. Whereas there was a time when I was growing up when it was considered to be primitive or unscientific to believe in anything that was supernatural, our culture has changed a great deal in the past decade or so. Now most Americans openly acknowledge their belief in God; a majority will admit that they believe in an afterlife; there are even T.V. shows that feature angels and other supernatural beings. And this is encouraging to those of us who have always acknowledged the reality of a supernatural world.

\*But at the same time as this awareness of the supernatural is growing, there is another disturbing trend that is also growing at an alarming rate. The concept of any absolute truth has been hammered at for so long that the spirit of toleration has almost become the universal deity. Toleration has become god. And the one sin that cannot be accepted by the god Toleration, the one

unpardonable and unforgivable sin, is the claim that there is one God or one way to heaven or one truth that everyone must believe. Christians are tolerated along with everyone else as long as they don't claim to have any exclusive truth. As long as they are content to be one of the spokes of the wheel along with all of the other major world religions who also claim a path to heaven, there is no problem. But when some of the claims of God and Christ are proclaimed, and when some of the restrictive lifestyles of the Bible are preached, sparks begin to fly. And it is amazing how much venom and hatred there can be coming from a world whose god is toleration.

Now what is amazing in its inconsistency is the fact that we would never tolerate this kind of attitude in any other important area of life. When we are feeling ill and make an appointment with our family physician, we would never tolerate a doctor who would just prescribe any old medicine for us. Can you imagine someone going to a doctor with a specific set of symptoms and the doctor telling them, *Well, it doesn't matter what medicine you take. I'll just give you a blank prescription form here. You fill it in and take it to the Pharmacist. I'm sure you'll get better. Just really believe hard that the medicine that you are taking will cure you.* Can you imagine a doctor like

that staying in practice for long?

But that is exactly the prevailing world's philosophy towards a much more serious problem that we all have. The sin that we have to deal with in our lives is far worse than any physical ailment that we might have. It is a cancer that is spread throughout our entire being. To say that any old cure will do - just meditate for a while every day, or just hang these crystals from the mirror in your car, or just follow the 5 pillars religiously - it doesn't matter what you do as long as you sincerely believe it will help - is simply spiritual malpractice.

\*As believers, we must recognize the fact that God never presented himself or his word to be one option among many. The prophet, Isaiah, quoted God as saying, *for I am God, and there is no other.*

\*God's Son, the Messiah, said of himself as recorded in John 14:6: *I am the way, the truth and the life, no one is able to come to the father, except through me.*

\*The Apostle Peter said as the early church was being formed, *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12.*

\*If there is one message that is proclaimed consistently throughout the Bible, it is the message that there is only One true and living God, there is one heaven where He dwells, and there is one way to get there - and that is His way. God has provided for our salvation through his one and only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who enters heaven gates is going to walk in with the garment of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. That's the only way to get into heaven. There is no other way.

\*So we must turn from our sins, trust in the one true and living God, for there is just one God - there is no other. That is the message of the prophet Isaiah given here in this passage.

\*Now there is an implication that is also brought out in our text which we do not have time to develop - but we will just mention it in closing. The middle phrase of our verse speaks about the ends of the earth.

*"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.*

\*Now we need to realize a truth that is most important as Christians. I realize that I have basically been speaking against 2 assumptions that are commonly held by most people in our country today. And, undoubtedly,

there are some of you seated here this evening who have not agreed with me.

\*But I just want to give you a few thoughts to think about in closing. Isn't it logical that there could only be one God who would be infinite in power in the universe. How could there possibly be 2 infinite beings? What would happen if they both wanted to sit in the same chair? Omnipotence, being all powerful, by its very definition demands a unity. There can be only one truly infinite being. And if there is one true and living God who created all of the universe, wouldn't it be right that everyone across the face of this earth acknowledge and worship this God? And if there is just one true and living God who created all things and is all powerful, wouldn't He be the one who set forth the pathway to eternal life?

\*Now each of us has a choice. We can accept the assumptions that we hear all of the time around us - the same assumptions that were prevalent in Isaiah's day nearly 3,000 years ago, the same assumptions that were taught in Spurgeon's time a hundred years ago. We can convince ourselves that we are basically alright spiritually and try our best to be good enough to get to heaven. We can convince ourselves that there are many gods, many

pathways to heaven and just choose the one that appeals most to us. But we had better realize that if what Isaiah wrote is true, and if what Jesus said was true and if what Peter preached was true, we are not going to make it to heaven - we are taking the wrong spiritual medicine - we are just deceiving ourselves.

\*God said through his prophet Isaiah, "*Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.* If we listen to these words of God, we will realize that our spiritual condition is more desperate than we realize. We must turn from our sin and accept God's gracious help. Jesus Christ died for our sins. Paul told that jailer in Philippi, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.* And then as we are truly born again into God's family, and as we grow in our knowledge and love for God, we will be committed to spreading the good news of the gospel throughout the world, so that the name of the only true and living God might be lifted up and worshiped to the ends of the earth.