

TURN AND BE SAVED

22 “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. 24 They will say of me, ‘In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.’” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. 25 But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the LORD and will make their boast in him.

There are different ways of saying “turn” in the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments. Some of those are calls to turn away from something—such as turning away from sin or temptation; turning in repentance. Here at the end of Isaiah 45, God is giving his people an invitation. This is not a command to turn away from something, but the hand of our Saving God inviting us to turn to him and be saved.

If we were to read backward toward the beginning of the chapter, we would find the Lord comforting his people Israel, his chosen nation. But here the language changes. The Lord invites, but he does not just invite his chosen people Israel. He invites anyone and everyone who will listen to turn to him in faith and be saved.

In fact, God calls out to “all you ends of the earth.” In Isaiah’s time, a lot of the Old World had been discovered. Most of northern Africa and its western islands were known. The middle east was of course completely inhabited and explored. The Mediterranean was known to sailors. Europe was known in some capacity—Jonah had tried to reach Tarshish, a place on the Atlantic coast of Spain. The Scythians were a feared people from the steppes of Russia. And there may even be a hint in Isaiah 49 that a distant eastern land known as Sinim or China had come to be known by Isaiah’s time.^a

But the gospel of forgiveness does not only need to go to the physical ends of the earth. God uses you and me to carry the gospel to people nearby who might think they know all about religion or Christians, but they just don’t know what their Savior has done for them.

So as God invites us to worship him, he takes us back to the basis of our faith in the revealed word of God, the Bible. You see, without the Bible, man would have some vague idea of God as

^a Isaiah 49:12, where the NIV has “some from the region of Aswan” following the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the accepted Hebrew text has “Sinim.”

creator and as the one who hates sin, but without the Bible, man cannot know who God is or what God has done for us. And here God walks us through the very basic teaching of who he is through a review of the first three commandments. First: “I am God, and there is no other.” Second, “By myself, I have sworn.” Third: “Before me, every knee will bow.” He refers to them in order, and then reverses the order by going back to the second: “By me, every tongue will swear,” and the first, “In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.” God is demonstrating that his love for us motivates our love for him and our desire to know him better. And the more we dig into the word of God to get to know him better, the more we love him and will want to serve and obey him.

But we need to take care. Apart from God, man is totally lost, lost, lost. Man cannot save himself. But the opinion in us is that somehow we’re “not so bad.” I must be pretty good, the sinner thinks. I must do something that God likes. This notion thinks that either people are basically good, or at least, I am basically good, and that I am saved at least partly because of my goodness – that notion is deadly.

But what does the Bible say about this? Paul says: “**This sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.**” (Romans 8:7). Another way of putting that is: “It is impossible for the sinful man to do anything that pleases God.” This is exactly what God said as Noah and his family walked away from the ark to begin life on land once again: “**Every inclination of man’s heart is evil**” (Gen 8:21).

So, here you and I founder, like passengers thrown from a sinking ship, with no rescue in sight, no land or rock to swim to, as our limbs grow tired, and we know that we cannot save ourselves.

This is where God says: “**Turn to me and be saved!**”

From nowhere on earth, nowhere we were looking, God appeared. I didn’t see heaven open and the lightning bolt of eternity showing the arrival of the Savior! Why didn’t people see him coming? They weren’t looking for him, even though God had told us all along where he would come from. He was born into the world, like a regular baby boy. He was born into the family of the prophecy, descended from Abraham through David and his sons, born of a virgin girl in Bethlehem. A prophet who called to the world, “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest!**” (Matthew 11:28).

There he is, the Savior, to scoop us out of our hopeless state, the Rescuer, the only one to help when we were helpless. God prophesied to Isaiah: “**In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength,**” and who is it who delivers us? The Lord alone, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

How does he save us? Through his outside work, the alien work, of the gospel. This is the work we call “Conversion,” being turned to God.

If you were to read a book, a good book on a subject like gardening or using a new bread maker, you could, just by being informed by the book, become learned and proficient enough to do this new activity. But that’s not how conversion works. The message of the gospel, aimed directly at the will of man, takes hold of what was dead and makes it alive in Christ. Like a lifeless winter field, the gospel comes and gives what nothing else could: the forgiveness of our sins. This creates faith in us, and we learn to love the words **“In the Lord alone is deliverance.”** Like Mark 16:16, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,” this teaches us the formula of eternity: Only faith saves. Only unbelief condemns.

And by faith we recognize our Savior. Along with the Palm Sunday crowd we want to cheer him and yell at the top of our lungs: There goes my Savior, my God, my Lord, my King! Hosanna! Hallelujah! Gloria in excelsis Deo! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

What wouldn’t any one of us do to have seen that moment and walked cheering and waving our palm branches as Jesus entered Jerusalem’s gates as the true King of kings and Lord of Lords. But while you and I can’t go back in time to see it, we don’t need to, to believe it.

Think of your conversion this way: God went up to you and me, the Unwilling, and by his gentle mercy persuaded us to trust in him, revealing to us how lost we were and how beautiful a thing it is to be saved by Jesus, and in doing so God made those who were unwilling into willing followers, and now he dwells in us, in our spirits and in our flesh, encouraging and guiding us.

Thank God for crushing our old opinions about saving ourselves, for forgiving even that hideous mistake of a sin, and for showing us the truth: We are saved through Christ alone.

In addition to the Palm branches we have used today in memory of that first Palm Sunday, we have shown you this picture on the screen of daisies turned up toward the sun. This is the invitation God gives to us in his saving Word: Turn to me and be saved, every one of you.

By faith, all of us who put our trust in Jesus are the true descendants of Israel whom Isaiah says “will find deliverance in the Lord” in verse 25. That’s you. Eternal life is not some mystery somebody else knew about, leaving you in the dark. It’s been handed to you by your loving and gracious God who said: **“Turn to me and be saved.”** Amen.