

# THE SCROLLS

All is Well | Isaiah 59:1-21

## Life Lesson

Christmas reminds us that we live between Christ's first coming, where He bridged the gap our sin created, and His second coming, where He will restore all things. Isaiah 59 shows our helplessness in the face of sin, but also God's loving initiative. God did not wait for us to fix ourselves; He came to us. Because Christ has come and will come again, we can live with honesty about our sin and unshakeable hope for salvation and peace.

## Examine Scripture

*Indeed, the Lord's arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear. 2 But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen. 3 For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers, with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongues mutter injustice. 4 No one makes claims justly; no one pleads honestly. They trust in empty and worthless words; they conceive trouble and give birth to iniquity. 5 They hatch viper's eggs and weave spider's webs. Whoever eats their eggs will die; crack one open, and a viper is hatched. 6 Their webs cannot become clothing, and they cannot cover themselves with their works. Their works are sinful works, and violent acts are in their hands. 7 Their feet run after evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are sinful thoughts; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths. 8 They have not known the path of peace, and*

## Falling to Peaces

Over the next few weeks, we will celebrate Christmas. It is a time to celebrate Christ's first advent, His Incarnation (John 1:14), and to prepare for His second advent, His Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Essentially, Christmas reminds us that we are living between Christ's two advents. It's not just about looking back or forward; it's about what we should do in the meantime. As we begin the Christmas season, we must understand the necessity of Christ's first advent, His Incarnation. As Pastor Jeff reminded us a few weeks ago: "You will never know Jesus Christ as a reality in your life until you know Him as a necessity."

Isaiah 59 gives one of the most explicit statements on human sinfulness and depravity. It outlines the rebellious actions and attitudes of the people of Israel and the result of their sinfulness: separation from God. The gulf between God and His people is ever-widening because of sin. However, amid this incredible darkness, there is a light. In fact, Isaiah has already prophesied of this light: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness . . . For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:1-6). So, what is the answer to this awful sinfulness and the separation it has caused? Jesus! Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us to bridge the chasm between us and God. Beautifully, this prophecy shows the answer to the sinfulness on display in our text: Jesus' Incarnation (for a child will be born for us) and Jesus' crucifixion (a son will be given to us). So, in our text, the ugliness of sin is on full display, but so is the beauty of salvation.

## V. 1

Before the ugliness and devastation of sin are laid bare, Isaiah reminds us that nothing, especially not sin, is greater than God. What encouragement! Even in the midst of our sin, even with an ever-widening chasm between us and God, He is not too weak to save! In his commentary, Matthew Henry writes, "In this chapter we have sin

*there is no justice in their ways. They have made their roads crooked; no one who walks on them will know peace. 9 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night. 10 We grope along a wall like the blind; we grope like those without eyes. We stumble at noon as though it were twilight; we are like the dead among those who are healthy. 11 We all growl like bears and moan like doves. We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. 12 For our transgressions have multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: 13 transgression and deception against the Lord, turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering lying words from the heart. 14 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far off. For truth has stumbled in the public square, and honesty cannot enter. 15 Truth is missing, and whoever turns from evil is plundered. The Lord saw that there was no justice, and he was offended. 16 He saw that there was no man—he was amazed that there was no one interceding; so his own arm brought salvation, and his own righteousness supported him. 17 He put on righteousness as body armor, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and he wrapped himself in seal as in a cloak. 18 So he will repay according to their deeds: fury to his enemies, retribution to his foes, and he will repay the coasts and islands. 19 They will fear the name of the Lord in the west and his glory in the east; for he will come like a rushing stream driven by the wind of the Lord. 20 “The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those in Jacob who turn from transgression.” This is the Lord’s declaration. 21 “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of your children’s children, from now on and forever,” says the Lord.*

• Underline “not too weak” and “not too deaf” in (v. 1).

• In (v.2), circle “iniquities” and draw a line to “separating” and circle “sins” and draw a line to “hidden.”

• Underline “no man” and “no one” in (v. 16).

• Bracket “covenant” in (v. 21).

appearing exceedingly sinful, and grace appearing exceedingly gracious . . . Neither length of time nor strength of enemies, no, nor weakness of instruments, can shorten or straiten the power of God.”

As we read this text and our sinful hearts are exposed, we must remember this powerful truth: God is not too weak to save, nor too deaf to hear. In other words, there is hope and there can be peace! This is what Advent is all about: hope and peace. God does not leave us in the mire and depth of our sin. He provides us salvation through Jesus!

## V. 2

Before outlining their sins and trespasses, Isaiah reveals the result of their sin: separation from God. It is interesting that Isaiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would show the result of sin before describing the sin itself. It seems that Isaiah is demonstrating that the extent or type of sin is inconsequential; any sin causes separation from God. It does not matter how “big” or “small” the sin may seem in our eyes; any sin causes separation from God and causes death (Rom. 6:23). James echoes this in (James 2:10): “For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all.” So, the result of sin is damning; it brings forth death and separation. It is a dire situation.

Throughout this text, there are shifts from second-person plural (you and your in vs. 2-3) to third-person plural (them and their in vs. 4-8) and then to first-person plural (we and our in vs. 9-15). It is easy to point out the faults in others, but as you grow in Christ and begin to understand holiness, you no longer see sin in others without first recognizing it in yourself. You cannot fully experience God's grace until you accept responsibility for your sin and separation from Him. But here's the challenge: if we are entirely responsible for that separation, then we can't do anything on our own to close the gap. The same hands that grasp sin cannot build a bridge. That's why we need a Redeemer, Mediator, and Savior; and that is Jesus! That is our hope! That is the purpose of His Incarnation. That is what we celebrate at Christmas!

## Vs. 3-7

In these verses, Isaiah provides a detailed list of Israel's sins. As he describes their faults, Isaiah demonstrates that sin has tainted every aspect of life. Their sins involve not only social injustice but also total depravity. The people of Israel have lost their way; their ungodly desires “give birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death” (James 1:15). Consider the extent of their sin as it affects every part of them: “hands are defiled with blood and your fingers, with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongues mutter injustice . . . Their works are sinful works, and violent acts are in their hands. Their feet run after evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are sinful

## Personal Notes

thoughts” (vs. 3-7). From head to toe, the people are completely sinful. They produce “viper eggs” and “spider webs.” In other words, what they produce, their works, are not only useless but actually dangerous. It is an ominous picture that Isaiah has painted.

Such a description of sin should serve as enough warning for us to resist temptation and pursue personal holiness. In Romans 3, Paul even uses these verses to say, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). So, before we judge Israel too quickly, we must remember the tendency of our own hearts toward sin. Without Christ, we are left to our own sinful desires. If left unchecked, our hearts will guide us toward sin and ultimately cause separation from God.

### V. 8

A common theme in Isaiah is the path of God or the road of righteousness. Notice the contrast given in this verse. The people do not know the “path” of peace. There is no justice or righteousness in their “ways.” Even their roads are “crooked,” leading to a life of no peace. Look back to (v. 7): “ruin and wretchedness are in their paths.” So, because of their sin, no matter which way they go, the people are walking a path of no peace. There is no peace with others, with themselves, and no peace with God. Israel has lost its way.

Therefore, there is a great need for someone to show the way, to lead them, and us, to the path of peace. Isaiah even prophesies of the One who says, “I will lead the blind by a way they did not know; I will guide them on paths they have not known. I will turn darkness to light in front of them and rough places into level ground. This is what I will do for them, and I will not abandon them” (Is. 42:16). In an expression of inexhaustible grace and mercy, Jesus became flesh, not only to show us the way, but also to declare Himself as “the Way” (John 14:6).

### Vs. 9-14

In these verses, we see the transition to first-person plural demonstrating Isaiah’s confession that he, too, is guilty of sin. It recalls his response to seeing God in His glory in Isaiah 6: “Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Armies” (Is. 6:5). Isaiah confesses their dire situation because of their sin. It is perhaps best summarized in (vs. 9 and 11): “We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night . . . We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.” There is no justice, no righteousness, no truth, no salvation, no peace, and no hope.

## Personal Reflection

1. How does the truth that “nothing is greater than God, not even my sin” influence the way I handle my own struggles, failures, or feelings of unworthiness?
2. How do I personally experience or recognize the separation that sin causes between me and God, and how does this awareness increase my need for Christ?
3. Which areas of my life show signs of “crooked paths,” and how is Jesus calling me to walk in His way of peace, righteousness, and truth this Christmas season?
4. When I reflect on Isaiah’s shift from “their sins” to “our sins,” how willing am I to honestly confess my own sins instead of focusing on others’ faults?
5. How does the promise that “the Redeemer will come” inspire hope, and how am I preparing my heart to both celebrate Christ’s first coming and look forward to His return?

## Commentaries

*Expositor's Bible Commentary*  
(Abridged Edition): Old Testament  
edited by Kenneth Barker

*NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*  
by John Oswalt

## Mt. Zion's Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to  
**MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY**  
disciples of Jesus Christ.*

### Vs. 15-21

“The Lord saw that there was no justice, and he was offended” (v. 15). The Lord was offended. This might not seem like a hopeful moment, but God was upset because of the lack of justice and peace. When He looked, no one was stepping in to help. The people were living in the darkness of their sin, and no one was shining light. They were so wrapped up in their sin that they became slaves to it, and there was no hope of freedom. No one among them was willing or worthy to intercede for them.

So, what was God’s response? If sinful hands cannot build a bridge to cross the chaos of separation, if man could not provide salvation, then God would do it Himself: “so his own arm brought salvation” (v. 16). We see such a scene in (Rev. 5:1-7): “Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals. I also saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look in it. I wept and wept because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or even to look in it. Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders . . . He went and took the scroll out of the right hand of the one seated on the throne.” Only Jesus is worthy to take the scroll of redemption history and salvation for those who cannot save themselves.

Our Savior, though He enters the world meekly and humbly, born in a stable, is clothed in power and glory. In (v. 17), we see the inspiration of the armor of God that Paul describes in Ephesians 6. It demonstrates the power of the Savior and Redeemer. If there is any doubt, look at how people will respond to His power and glory in (vs. 18-19). If the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use Isaiah 59 to describe the armor of God available to us, then what do we have to fear? We can adorn ourselves with the power and authority of Christ: “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:10-11).

Lastly, Isaiah 59 ends with a promise. The Lord declares and covenants: “The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (v. 20). If they will repent and turn from their sinful ways, they will receive salvation.

This is the message of Christmas. Hope has come. Salvation has come. Light has come. Peace has come. Jesus has come and will come again!