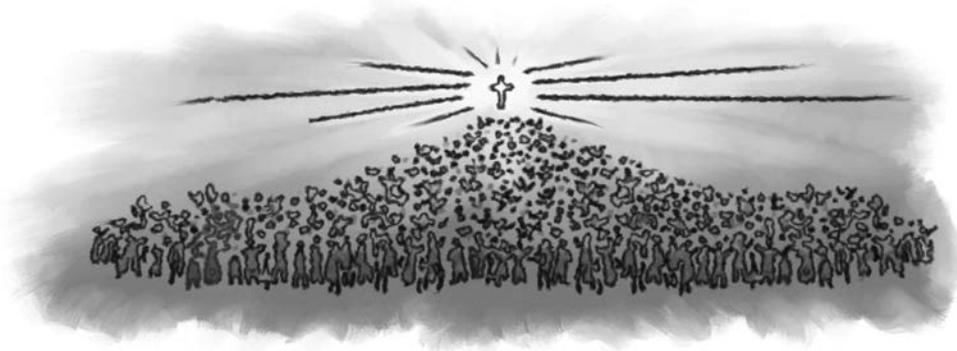


The One Person We Need Most



SABBATH—MARCH 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 59; Isaiah 59:15–21; Isaiah 60:1, 2; Isaiah 61; Isaiah 61:2.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Nations will come to your light. And kings will see the shining-greatness [glory] of the Lord on you’ ” (Isaiah 60:3, NLV).



“The mercy of Jesus is our only hope.”

“**WE MUST LEARN** in the school of Jesus. God wants to bless us when we accept His special agreement. But He cannot give those blessings to us if we do not accept what Jesus did for us on the cross. Often, we try to get these blessings on our own. We think we can do something to earn the favor of God or make ourselves worthy of His blessing. But this idea is wrong. We must look away from ourselves to Jesus. We must believe He is a living Savior. We must not think that our own good behavior will save us. The mercy of Jesus is our only hope. The Lord gives us this promise: ‘Let those [people] who are evil stop doing evil things. And let them quit thinking evil thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD. The LORD will show them his tender love. Let them turn to our God. He is always ready to forgive’ (Isaiah 55:7, NIV). We must believe the promise of God. We must not think that feeling is faith. We must trust God fully. We must depend on Jesus and what He did to save us. He is our Savior. Then God will give us all the help we need.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 36, adapted.

This week we will study the writings of Isaiah to learn more about this important Bible truth.

THE EVIL THAT SIN CAUSES (Isaiah 59)

In Isaiah 58:3, NIV, the people ask God: “ ‘We have gone without food,’ they say. ‘Why haven’t you noticed [paid attention to] it? We have made ourselves suffer. Why haven’t you paid any attention to us?’ ”

The people think that the Lord does not answer them when they ask Him to save them. But in Isaiah 59:1, Isaiah answers that God can save them, and He hears them too.

Read Isaiah 59:2. What does this verse show that the people are doing to cause God to turn away from their prayers?

God chooses not to “pay attention” to His people. Why? Because “your sins have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:2, NIV). This verse shows us how sin hurts our friendship with God. Isaiah spends the rest of chapter 59 talking about this topic. Human history shows us that Isaiah is correct. Sin can destroy our connection with the Lord. It can cause us to lose our everlasting life. Sin does not turn God away from us. Sin turns us away from God.

Read Genesis 3:8. How does this example of sin show us the important Bible rule we just talked about?

Sin is turning away from God. The bad things that happen because of sin cause us to turn away from God even more. Sin separates us from God. Is it because God does not try to bring us back to Himself? No. The whole Bible shows us how God keeps trying to bring us back to Himself. The reason sin separates us is because sin causes us to turn away from God and His saving love. That is why it is so important that we do not put up with any sin in our lives.

In what ways have you seen in your own life that sin separates you from God? What is the only thing that can be done to solve the problem of separation?



**“ ‘Your sins have separated you from your God’ ”
(Isaiah 59:2, NIV).**

WHO IS FORGIVEN? (Isaiah 59:15–21)

In His work as Judge, God looks at our behavior as proof of the faith in our hearts.

Isaiah 59 shows us a picture of the sin problem. The Bible also shows us hope.

How many of us have sinned? The Bible tells us the answer. Everyone. That is why we need God to save us and forgive us (Jeremiah 31:34). Paul agrees. Everyone has sinned (Romans 3:9–20, 23). So, how can God say we are innocent, as if we never sinned? God can save us when we accept by faith the death of Jesus for us.

Read Romans 3:21–24. What do these verses tell us about how God saves us? What hope should this Bible truth give us during this time when God judges His people?

What is the most important question that God will ask in His work as Judge? Is it, Who has sinned? That is not a question that needs to be asked. As we saw, everyone has sinned. The important question is: Who is forgiven? God is fair when He makes free from guilt “any person who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26, ICB). God will look at our faith when He decides who is saved. He will ask, Have you accepted the forgiveness of Jesus?

True, God judges us by our behavior and our actions. But our behavior and good actions do not save us. If so, then we are no longer saved by faith (Romans 4:14). Our works show if we have been saved (James 2:18).

Our works cannot save us. Not now and not in the time when God does His work as Judge. Why? For the answer, read Romans 3:20, 23.

It is too late for our good behavior or obedience to the law to save us. The law shows us our sin. That is its job. Faith works by love (Galatians 5:6). The Spirit of God pours the love of God in the human heart (Romans 5:5). This love shows that a person has living faith in Jesus (read also James 2:26).

Our works show our saving faith. We show that we are saved when we obey the law of God. In His work as Judge, God looks at our behavior as proof of the faith in our hearts. God looks only at the works we do after we give our lives to Jesus. All the sins we did before Jesus saves us are forgiven and covered with His blood (read Romans 6).

A MESSAGE FOR EVERYONE ON EARTH (Isaiah 60:1, 2)

What is Isaiah 60:1, 2 talking about? What important rule do you see here that also is seen in the whole Bible? What hope does this rule offer us?

In Isaiah 60:1, 2, we see a picture of what God will do for His people after they are free from Babylon. This plan includes a Savior, who will free people from sin.

In Isaiah 60:3, who has the “light” that kings and people groups come to?

In the Hebrew language, this light shows us that the person who has the light is a woman. The woman also is shown by the city Zion. We read about this city in Isaiah 59:20. So, the people on the earth will come to Zion. They are covered in darkness. They will go to Zion because of the light shining there. This light is a word picture for the glory of God (Isaiah 60:2). This glory is seen in Jesus. Zion is another name for Jerusalem. Isaiah writes the name Jerusalem in Isaiah 60:1. When Isaiah talks about the city, he really means the people of God.

Isaiah 60 talks more about the ideas we read about in the beginning of the chapter in Isaiah 60:1–3. The people on the earth go to Jerusalem because of the light. The light is a word picture for the glory of God. This glory comes to the city when Jesus comes as a human to this earth.

How does this message about the future help us remember the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2, 3? How are both sets of verses saying the same thing?

God chose Abraham and his future children to bless everyone on this earth (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18; Genesis 22:18). So, the special agreement between God and Abraham also was for all humans too.

Isaiah wanted to bring his people back to the first plan that God had for them when He chose them as His people. God chose them to show everyone on earth His love (read also Isaiah 56:3–8).

God chose Israel to be His people in Bible times. He chose Seventh-day Adventists to be His end-time church. What is His plan for the church? And what is His plan for you?



The people on the earth will come to Zion. They will go there because of the light shining in Zion.

THE YEAR WHEN GOD WILL MAKE HIS PEOPLE FREE (Isaiah 61:2)

Who is talking in Isaiah 61:2?

God chose the person who is talking. God poured His Spirit on Him too. That shows us that this person is the Savior. He is the One God chose to save people from sin. What is the job of the Savior? Isaiah tells us: “The Spirit of the LORD and King is on me. The LORD has anointed [chosen] me to announce good news to poor people. He has sent me to comfort those [people] whose hearts have been broken. He has sent me to announce freedom for those who have been captured. He wants me to set [make] prisoners free from their dark cells [prisons]” (Isaiah 61:1, NlrV). Is this someone we already know from our study of Isaiah? Compare Isaiah 42:1–7, which talks about the Servant of God.

Isaiah 61:2, ERV, announces that “the time has come for the LORD to show his kindness [loving-favor]” to His people. The Chosen One makes Israel free and, at that time, announces a special year will happen. During this special year, God will show His people His favor. Compare Leviticus 25:10, ERV: “ ‘You will make the 50th year a special year. You will announce freedom for everyone living in your country. This will be called “Jubilee.” Each of you will go back to your own property. And each of you will go back to your own family.’ ” This verse shows us what happens in the Year of Jubilee. This was good news for people who were forced to sell their family land or become servants (Leviticus 25:25–55). Now these people can get their land back and their freedom.

This special year in Isaiah 61:2 (NlrV, EXB, CEB, NLV) is a Jubilee year. But it also is much more than that. This special year is the time when the Chosen One, the King, will announce Himself. He will show who He is by making His people free and giving them a new start. In Bible times, new kings often announced that people who owed money did not need to pay it back. The work of the Chosen One does more than make people free from slavery or give them back their lands. He also comforts the suffering. He heals broken hearts. He gives them new lives (Isaiah 61:1–11). He announces the special year of loving-favor from God. He also announces that God will punish evil people (Isaiah 61:2).

What work did Jesus do that we should be doing now?



“ ‘He [the Lord] has sent me [Jesus] to announce freedom for those who have been captured’ ”
(Isaiah 61:1, NlrV).

GOD WILL PUNISH PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO DO EVIL (Isaiah 61:2)

In Isaiah 61, the Savior shares the good news about many good things He will do. So, why does He promise that God will punish people who love to do evil? Is this good news too? If yes, why? When will this promise happen?

When Jesus was in Nazareth, He read Isaiah 61. He read the first part of Isaiah 61:2—God “has sent me to announce that the time has come for the LORD to show his kindness [loving-favor]” (Isaiah 61:2, ERV; read also Luke 4:19). Then Jesus stopped reading and said, “While you heard me reading these words just now, they were coming true!” (Luke 4:21, ERV). Jesus chose not to read the next words in the same verse: “our God will also punish evil people” (Isaiah 61:2, ERV). Jesus came to make humans free from Satan. Jesus was just starting to do this work. So, the time when God also will punish evil people had not come. In Matthew 24 (compare Mark 13, Luke 21), Jesus told His followers that God will punish sinners in the future.

In Isaiah 61, the day that God will punish evil people is the same as “the Lord’s overwhelming [scary] and terrible [awful] day of judging” (Joel 2:31, ICB; Malachi 4:5). This day will be awful and scary for people who refused to accept the forgiveness of God. This day will happen when Jesus comes to make this earth free from sin. Jesus will beat His enemies. He will make His people free (Revelation 19; compare Daniel 2:44, 45). Jesus announced the start of the time for God to show His loving-favor. But the end of that time will happen at the Second Coming.

How can God be loving and at the same time be a God who punishes evil people? Does this make sense? Is His punishment part of His love? If yes, explain.

Jesus told us to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). At the same time, Jesus promises that God will punish people who love to do evil (Matthew 8:12). Paul tells us not to do evil to people who do evil to us (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Paul also says that God “will punish those [people] who don’t know God” (2 Thessalonians 1:8, NIV).

As humans, we are filled with faults. Our wisdom has limits. We are not always fair when we judge and punish other people. God is always fair. Only He can be just and full of mercy when He punishes evil.



Jesus told us to turn the other cheek.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 376–378; also *The Desire of Ages*, pages 236–243.



“Jesus breaks every wall between God and humans.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 237.

“Jesus stands in front of the people as a teacher. He explains the Old Testament messages about Himself. He talks about the Savior as someone who will help the suffering. The Savior will give freedom to slaves. He will heal the sick. He will give sight to the blind. He will show people on earth Bible truth. The way that Jesus talks is wonderful. His words touch the hearts of the people with a power they never felt before. Jesus breaks every wall between God and humans. The people have the same experience as Moses did. As Moses, they see what human eyes cannot see. The Holy Spirit touches their hearts. They answer Jesus with amens and praises to the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 237, adapted.

“The day is coming when God will punish people who love to do evil. This is the day when God will show His deep anger against sin. Who will stand when the Lord comes again? Men have made their hearts hard against the Spirit of God. But on that day, the anger of God will pierce the hearts of humans who refused to accept the truth about Jesus. Soon God will punish sinners. Will the false shepherd protect the sinner in that day? Will God excuse the person who followed after the crowd that disobeyed the law of God? Will it matter if a lot of people like us? Some people do not care about what will happen in the future. But they need to think carefully about the answers to these questions. They need to decide what they believe.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 33, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

① A Seventh-day Adventist preacher talked about the number one problem in his church. Members did not want other people to join them. Why must that change? Our job is to take the Good News about Jesus to as many people as we can. Then they can have a chance to be saved before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). How can we show other people the love, hope, and Good News about Jesus? What can we do to make visitors to our churches feel welcome?

Summary: God brings His people back home. His people turn from the sins that separated them from God. God is with His people. People from other countries come to God and His people. They want to enjoy the loving-favor of God too.

“I WANT TO START A CHURCH!”

Julio Ovalle is excited when he gets home from a meeting for church members in Mexico.

Julio tells his wife, Maria Diaz, about what he learned at the meeting. “Now I want to start a church!” Julio says.

Maria likes the idea. “Let us do it!” she says.

But where do they start? Julio wants to invite people from a new neighborhood. He thinks a good way to start is to teach people important rules of health: air, water, sunshine, and rest. Julio and Maria get support for their idea from church leaders in Northern Mexico. Their church pastor also supports their plans. But some church members are worried. They remember someone tried to start a church in the past. But the church failed.

“This plan will not work,” says one church member to the couple.

“You will not be a success,” says another member.

Julio, Maria, and their two grown daughters put on bright-green shirts. The name of their new health program is written on the shirts: “I Want to Live Healthy.” The family knocks on people’s doors. At each house, they invite people to sign up for health classes and cooking classes.

Julio and his family work hard for four weeks. Finally, a 60-year-old man named Rogelio signs up for Bible studies.

Church members see the family working hard. They learn about Rogelio. Then a few church members put on bright-green shirts, too, and join Julio and his family. They knock on doors. Before long, the group that joins Julio grows to 15 people.

The church members work hard for six months. Soon many people start studying the Bible. So, Julio decides to form a small group to meet on Sabbath afternoons. He announces the plan to his church in February 2017. Julio invites more church members to help him. The church supports the small-group idea. 10 members accept the invitation from Julio to join him. Another church member owns a big hall. He tells Julio that he can hold his Sabbath meetings there for free. 25 people show up to study the Bible at the first meeting.

In the Spring of 2017, the small group becomes a Sabbath School. Then in September 2018, the Sabbath School becomes a church. Today it has more than 35 members. 24 of these people get baptized because of the health classes that Julio and Maria started. The church is named *Puerta del Cielo* in Spanish, which is written as “Door of Heaven.” As many as 50 people come each Sabbath. Soon the church members want to build their own church. “Our goal is to build up the church. We want to save more people for the kingdom of God,” says Julio, age 46.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The family knocks on people’s doors. At each house, they invite people to sign up for health classes and healthy cooking classes.

