

The Spirit & Word for You

Isaiah 59

Halifax: 16 January 2005

Introduction:

It seems that we keep having reasons for occasional messages and this week is by no means an exception!

- Today we have three special occasions to address!
 1. We have Bob Richmond whom we welcome into church membership today.
 2. We have the son of Kevin and Tracy Bigney, Jesse Duane Thomas Bigney, who is to be baptised today.
 3. We have Mark Blaauw whom we send off today to go and begin study for the gospel ministry at Farel Reformed Theological Seminary in Montreal.

Needless to say, it was a bit of challenge to know which one of these special topics to preach on today until it occurred to me that I might preach on all three!

- This morning I want us to look at a promise addressed to God's people in Isaiah 59 that pertains:
 - to Bob as he enters into communicant church membership,
 - to Jesse (and his parents) as he is baptised in the name of Jesus Christ,
 - and to Mark as he begins his studies for the ministry.

The promise is found in Isaiah 59:20-21:

- Isa 59:20:21: The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the LORD. "As for Me," says the LORD, "this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

In these words we have a glorious summary of God's gracious covenant with His believing church!

- To them He sends the Redeemer, His only begotten Son from heaven...
 - And this Redeemer gives us the most precious of all treasures:
 - He gives us God's Spirit and God's word to dwell in us forever and ever.
 - He actually takes us,
 - ruined sinners that we are,
 - and joins us to our glorious Creator God for all eternity!
 - By Jesus Christ, we are actually brought into eternal union with God Almighty through the Word and Spirit!

- Oh the depth of the riches of the glory of our inheritance!
- How unfathomable is the excellence of this gracious blessing.
- Let us consider it this morning and how it pertains to us as God's people.

I. I want to begin by showing you that this promise is for sinners, by nature separated from God.

A. In verse 20, it says that the Redeemer will come to Zion.

1. "Zion" is another name for the Church—God's covenant people.

a. The Bible frequently tells us that Jesus will come to Zion.

- Psalm 2:6: "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."
- 1 Peter 2:6: Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

b. Now this might cause you to say,

- "Zion is the people who are holy, they are the ones who are called out from the world to belong to God."
- "They are the ones who are righteous..."
- And that is, I suppose, all true enough,
 - but you must not look at it backwards...
 - so that you say, "If someone is holy and righteous, the Redeemer will come to him."
 - Zion is not holy and righteous when the Redeemer comes to her...
 - Zion only becomes holy and righteous after the Redeemer has redeemed her!
 - Jesus does not come to her because she is righteous, but in order that He might make her righteous.
 - If Zion were already righteous, she would not **need** a Redeemer to come to her.

2. The sinful condition of the Church is described for us in Isaiah 59:1-15.

a. The root of the Zion's problem is described in verse 1-3.

1) Isaiah begins by telling you what the problem is not...

- It is not that the Lord's hand is shortened that it cannot save...

- a) A short hand is one that is not able to reach what it wants to reach...
 - It refers to a lack of strength to do what you want to do...
 - But this was not at all the reason that Zion's enemies were ruling over her and bringing her into captivity.
 - God could easily have turned all that around...

- b) Nor was the problem that God's ear was heavy so that He could not hear...
 - He heard His people's moans and groans...
 - He knew that they wanted to be relieved of the yoke of Assyria and Babylon...
 - He was not ignorant that they were being trampled by their adversaries like mire in the streets...
 - He knows that Christians today long to see the church grow and to see Christ reign over all the earth...
 - The problem was not with God's ears...

TRANS> It was neither with a shortened hand or a heavy ear...

- 2) The problem with the church is stated in verse 2:
 - Isa 59:2: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear."
 - Within herself, the church has no righteousness by which God might proceed to save her.
 - When He first called a people out to Himself,
 - He promised to Abraham that He would bless him and his seed and make his name great,
 - and that by him all the families of the earth would be blessed.
 - But now Isaiah shows that there is a problem...
 - The people are unrighteous!
 - And God cannot bless what is unrighteous!
 - It is against His nature to do so...
 - He must curse the unrighteous and visit their sin!
 - Zion is found to have no righteousness of her own!
 - She is fit only for cursing.

3) Verse 3 goes on to summarise her wretched condition:

- Isa 59:3: For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity.
- a) Instead of the love that God calls every human being live in, there was murder...
 - That's what it means when it says,
 - "your hands are defiled with blood."
 - Instead of seeking one another's advantage,
 - they were seeking to take advantage of one another...
 - The people of Zion's attitude was not:
 - "I will give all I can of my life for you..."
 - But rather:
 - "I will take all I can from you."
 - This is the essence of murder.
 - This is the reason their hands are defiled with blood.

TRANS> And in the second half of the verse we learn that:

- b) Instead of speaking the truth, they are found to utter lies...
 - That's what it means when it says:
 - "Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity."
 - We were made to proclaim the glory of our God to one another with words—
 - to speak of the glory of His names, attributes, and works!
 - to tell one another of His greatness.
 - But instead we are found spreading lies about Him!

TRANS> Isaiah goes to great length to explain in detail the wretched condition of Zion from verse 4 to verse 15.

- He shows how wretched they are and how unfit for God's blessing...
- b. How could God keep his promise to bless such murderers and liars?
 - 1) At end of verse 15, we are told what the Lord thought of His people:

- “The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.”
- In all of Zion, there was no righteousness for Him to bless—only murder and lies.
- Verse 16 goes on to say that this caused Him to marvel!
 - He was amazed that in all of the people He had called out to Himself for blessing there was no one that could intercede!
 - “He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor...”
 - Not one righteous person that could bring any good thing for Him to bless—
 - Every where He looked, there was only reason to curse!
 - Such is the corruption of the Church—how much more the world!

2) But God had promised that He **would** bless His Church...

a) How could He?

- Since there was nothing in the church worthy of blessing...
 - God Himself determined that He would bring His own righteousness to the church!

b) Verse 16 goes on to say:

- Isa 59:16b: Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him.
 - As no redeemer was to be found in Zion,
 - God Himself would come to Zion...
 - As no man was able to intercede,
 - God Himself would intercede on the basis of His own righteousness!
 - His own righteousness would sustain Him in blessing His people.
 - He Himself would become the foundation of their blessing.

c) Verse 17-19 describe how the Redeemer is fully equipped with righteousness and zeal to come and save us...

- He is seen fully armed with both strength and zeal to redeem!
 - And then verse 20 promises that He **will** come to Zion!

- We who live in these days know what the LORD has now done to bring righteousness to the church!
- He has come in the person of His Son and clothed Himself with human flesh!
 - He has taken His place as the Head of the Church and gone out ahead of us as our representative to intercede for us!
 - And in His own person, He has taken the curse of God for the whole body.
 - All of God's wrath against our iniquities has fallen on Him and we are set free!
- And now God has every reason to bless us,
 - not because of our own righteousness,
 - but because of the righteousness that Jesus, the Redeemer, has brought to us!
- Blessed be His glorious name!

B. Now I think it ought to be a great encouragement to all of us in the church that it is not the righteous, but sinners that God promises to bless in Isaiah 59:20-21.

1. Bob, would you want to join this church—full of sinners—if God's blessing depended on your own righteousness?
 - a. You enter this congregation confessing that you are “a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His love and mercy.”
 - In saying that, you confess with all the other members that in yourself, God has no reason at all to bless you, but every reason to curse you.
 - b. I don't think anyone could honestly make a confession like that unless you realise that Jesus came to redeem sinners.
 - But I say, when you realise that Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, you can say, “Here I am, a sinner!”
 - I come to you Jesus because you came for sinners and I am a sinner!
2. And then there is little Jesse Bigney...
 - a. The Bible teaches that Zion's children are also sinners.
 - 1) The Bible says nothing about an age of accountability when a child becomes guilty...
 - It teaches us to confess: “In sin did my mother conceive me...”

- And it says that we come from our mother's womb speaking lies.
 - We are sinners in our very nature—that is why we all sin.
 - Sin is not something that comes from the outside, but it flows out from our wicked hearts.
 - We are all sinners from the core of our being...
- 2) You see, the human race is fallen.
- Parents are a corrupt tree,
 - and a corrupt tree can only bring forth corrupt fruit.
 - Adam and Eve were ashamed of the reproductive organs as soon as they had sinned because now they could only bring forth corruption.
 - All they could ever produce were children that were murders and liars.
 - Some people deny that children are sinners,
 - But this is based on sentiment rather than scripture...
 - Tell me something, does God judge the righteous along with the unrighteous?
 - Absolutely not—He declares that that would be unjust...
 - Now let me ask you another question...
 - Do babies ever suffer?
 - Do they ever have pain?
 - Do they ever die?
 - Of course they do...
 - and the reason they do is because they are all sinners, just like their parents.
 - I don't mean that the ones that suffer the worst are worse sinners, but the fact that they all suffer and some even die shows that as a class they are guilty.
 - They would never suffer if they were not sinners.
- 3) Kevin and Tracy,
- This is why when we baptise Jesse we will ask you to acknowledge that he is a sinner by affirming the following:
 - “Do you acknowledge that your child is a sinner in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit?”

- Baptism is an outward symbol of the inward cleansing our children need because they are sinners.
- b. Surely you would not want to make this confession if it were not true that Jesus came to redeem sinners.
- 1) He came to save children as well as adults!
 - That is why he tells the disciples to not forbid the little children to come to Him for His blessing...
 - He is minded to bless them, for of such is the kingdom of God!
 - Jesus speaks in particular about children whose parents are members of His kingdom.
 - Paul teaches in 1 Cor 7 that the children of believers are holy.
 - 2) In the Old Testament, God commanded that the sign of circumcision be given to infants of believers because the promise of cleansing applies to them and because they need to be cleansed just as much as their parents do.
 - Circumcision was a sign of the cleansing that comes by faith in the Redeemer who was coming...
 - and now that He has come, baptism takes the place of circumcision.
 - In it, God teaches us and our children to look to Christ alone for our cleansing...
 - He does not teach us to suppose they need no cleansing because they are children...
 - or to suppose that they are excluded from Jesus' cleansing because they are children.
3. And Mark, what an encouragement to you as one going into the ministry to know that Jesus came for sinners...
- a. I can't imagine why anyone would want to go into ministry who thought God's blessing was for the righteous!
 - Can you imagine?
 - What would you preach?
 - You would either have to deny that we are all sinners,
 - or all you could preach was that everyone will go to Hell and that there is no hope!
 - b. But God has given you good news to preach to sinners.

- 1) Some people will hate you for preaching this message because they will be trying to avoid the truth that they are sinners...
 - They will be listening to the flattery of false religion and of the world, telling them that they are really good deep down...
 - But you must tell them that they are all liars and murderers deep down
- 2) But then tell them the good news that Jesus came to redeem liars and murderers!
 - He came because we were incapable of producing any righteousness for ourselves...
 - He did not suffer on the cross because we were good, but because we are desperate sinners.

TRANS> And so you see that God's promise of redemption is not to righteous, but to sinners. This is good news!

II. But I want you to notice that not everyone in Zion receives the Redeemer's blessing...

- **The promise is only for those turn from transgression!**
- Look at the second part of verse 20 where this is stated:
 - Let me read the whole verse...
 - Isa 59:20: "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob."

A. Bob, this is necessary for you and every other member of the church of Jesus Christ!

- You must turn from your transgression if you are to have this redeemer.
1. It is all true that Jesus came to redeem sinners, but He only redeems those sinners that turn from their transgression...
 - a. You have to break your alliance with sin if you wish to be joined to Christ.
 - 1) This does not mean you must become sinless before you can come to Jesus—
 - It would be ridiculous to have a Saviour who came to save you from sin if you must first save yourself.
 - No, that is not it at all...
 - 2) Breaking your alliance with sin means that you turn against your sin and come to Jesus to go to war against it...
 - You come to Him looking to Him to cleanse you from your sin.

- Just as it would be ridiculous to have a Saviour who came to save you that requires you to save yourself before you can come to Him...
- Would it not also be ridiculous to come to a Saviour who came to save you from your sin if you want to keep your sin!
 - That would be like the fool who takes his car to the car wash and does not want it to be made clean!
 - Why would you come to Jesus if you want to keep your sin?

b. But to be quite honest, I can answer that question.

1) I have met many sinners who come to Jesus that do not want to be cleansed from their sins...

- They come to Him, not to be cleansed from sin, but only to be delivered from their sorrows and miseries!
- That is exactly the way Israel was when Isaiah wrote these words...
 - Verse 9-11 show clearly that they were earnestly looking for God to save them!
 - Listen to what they say:
 - Isaiah 59:9-11: Therefore justice is far from us, Nor does righteousness overtake us; We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, *but* we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, And we grope as if *we had* no eyes; We stumble at noonday as at twilight; *We are* as dead *men* in desolate places. We all growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves; We look for justice, but *there is* none; For salvation, *but* it is far from us.

2) The problem was not that they did not want salvation from God...

- The problem was that they did not want the salvation that God gives!
- They saw the oppression of their enemies and the troubles of life and they complained and groaned and cried out to God for deliverance.
- The justice they sought was for God to deal with the ungodly nations that had come against them.
 - Just as when Jesus came, the Jews were glad to be saved from sickness and infirmity and poverty and would have been glad to be set free from the Roman dominion...
 - But they did not care much about being delivered from the dominion of sin.

2. But you see, the Redeemer comes first and foremost to deliver us from sin!

- That is why He comes only to those in the church who “turn from transgression in Jacob.”

- We must join Him in His saving purpose.
- a. That is why we ask every member to confess that you trust in Jesus alone as the Saviour of sinners “as He is offered in the gospel.”
 - If you do not look to Him to save you from your sin, then you are not trusting in Him as He is offered in the gospel...
 - He is offered to those who “turn from transgression.”
- b. But understand that this does not mean a true believer has no sins that he cherishes...
 - Sadly, we do have those that we are fond of...
 - But turning from them means that you cry out to Jesus to deliver you from them and do not live in them.
 - This is that tension that Paul speaks about in Romans 7 when He says that good that he wants to do, he does not do...
 - The point is that overall he wants to do good, but he finds that he is still weak and so looks to Christ to deliver him from this body of death.

TRANS> Church members, if you want the redeemer you must turn from your transgression...

- You must align yourself no longer with Satan, but with Jesus and His saving purpose.
 - Satan’s purpose is to rebel, Jesus’ purpose is to deliver us from our rebellion.
- B. Kevin and Tracy, this also pertains to you as the covenant parents of Jesse...
 - and to you as the parents of Nathaniel and Erin...
 - And to all the other parents who themselves have turned from your transgressions.
- 1. You must turn against sin in your children just as you have turned against it in yourself.
 - a. Whenever you see it rear up in them, you are to use the chastisement that God has appointed for you to use...
 - Pr 23:13-14 says:
 - Do not withhold correction from a child, For *if* you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell.
 - This is not to be your chastisement, but God’s chastisement, administered by you as parents.
 - b. Some parents claim, in the name of love, to with hold chastisement from their children, but this is very foolish!

- If you are not against sin in your child, you are against your child!
 - Pr 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.
2. But chastisement is not “the Lord’s chastisement” unless you also teach your children to look to Jesus to be cleansed from their sin!
- a. Bringing sin to Jesus is the only way to be cleansed from it,
 - If you delight in the cleansing from sin that Jesus gives,
 - you will want to bring your children to this cleansing also...
 - When they are too young to speak for themselves, you will pray for their forgiveness...
 - And as soon as they can speak, you will lead them to pray for their own forgiveness and cleansing...
 - You will teach them the vocabulary of prayer the same way you teach them other things...
 - By leading them in it as the seeds of their understanding develop.
 - b. Some parents act very silly about these things...
 - as if children must learn about praying for forgiveness and cleansing when they can fully understand it...
 - I wonder why these same parents don’t wait to talk to their children until they know their children can understand them!
 - Everyone knows that children learn to speak by having their parents speak to them before they know how to speak!
 - It is the same with teaching them to come to Jesus for cleansing from sin.
 - When they are young, it is up to you to bring them to Jesus for His blessing...
 - And as they get older, it is for them to continue to come to Him for His blessing.
 - But if you are not leading them to turn from transgression from the beginning,
 - what hope is there that they will **continue** to turn from it when they are older?
 - You have not given them anything to continue in!
 - It is impossible to continue in something that was never started.
- C. And Mark, this also applies to you as one who wishes to minister to God’s people.

1. The right kind of ministry is a ministry that is against sin.
 - a. It is a ministry that labours to turn God's people from their transgressions.
 - b. It is a ministry that recognises that Jesus came to deliver His people from their sins.
2. But let me warn you, there will always be pressure on you to shift your focus from this!
 - a. There is a new gospel out there that is spreading all over the world, and of course, it is really not another gospel because there is only one gospel.
 - But this new gospel has nothing to do with turning from transgression!
 - In this new gospel, a person comes to Jesus for other reasons than to be saved from sin...
 - They are taught to experience Jesus' nearness and to feel his love,
 - they are taught to ask him to come into their heart...
 - But they are not taught to repent and trust in Him for the forgiveness of sin.
 - He is there as a friend and a guide and a comforter...
 - He is there to lift you up when you are down...
 - or to encourage you when life is hard...
 - But He is not there to save you from your sin.
 - b. The problem is that this new gospel is very popular in our society, and the real gospel is not as popular...
 - And there are people out there who write books and who lead seminars about church growth...
 - And these people will teach you that if you want your church to really grow, then give people this new gospel.
 - Don't do anything that would make them feel uncomfortable so they will want to stay.
 - If you turn to this new gospel, you will do what you can to drive the Redeemer away from those who hear you!
 - Be sure that you are not in the business of flattering sinners...
 - But rather of calling them to repentance.
 - If you are not turned against sin yourself, you will not be able to lead others to turn against sin either.

But now I have a question for you all.

- I have shown you that Christ came to redeem sinners...
- And I have shown you that He came to redeem sinners that turn from their transgression...
 - But how can we ever expect to find anyone who would truly turn from their transgression to come to Jesus?
- Remember,
 - the problem with God's people was that God had promised to bless us,
 - but there was no righteousness in us for God to bless.
 - God keeps His promise to bless Abraham and all other believers by sending Christ to make us righteous...
- But what if there was nobody was willing to turn from his transgressions and come to Jesus for salvation?
 - I know that sounds crazy—a person would have to be out of His mind to refuse to come to Jesus for so great a salvation...
 - But the truth is that sin has put us out of our mind...
 - It has separated us from God and from what is important to Him.
 - The truth is that there is not one person who would ever turn from His transgression and come to Jesus...
 - There is not one who does good,
 - There is not one who seeks after God.
 - So why do we have communicant members who claim to have come to Jesus for salvation from sin?
 - And why do we have parents who claim that they are looking to Jesus to cleanse their children from their sin?
 - And why do we have preachers who claim that they want to preach the gospel and call men and women to turn from their sin to Jesus Christ?
 - If we are all too sinful to turn from our sin, what's the point?

III. The point is that God sees to it there will be a people that will turn to Him.

1. God does more than send Jesus to pay for our sins and bring us righteousness.
 - a. He also gives us His word and Spirit to remain with us forever!
 - This is what God promises to do in verse 21!

- "As for Me," says the LORD, "this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."
- b. This is God's promise to His people that He will do more than redeem them...
- He will also do in them what is necessary to cause them to turn to Christ and remain with Christ.
 - It would do no good for Him to send Christ to redeem us if no one wanted to be redeemed...
 - So God sees to it that there will always be a people who will turn from their transgressions to be redeemed by Jesus Christ!
2. You see, the Spirit and the Word work together to bring us to Christ and to keep us joined to Him.
- a. God's word is His promise of salvation in Christ, the promise of the forgiveness of sin and of everlasting blessing through Him...
- And God's Spirit is the one who raises us from spiritual death to see:
 - that we are wretched sinners who need to be redeemed...
 - And that Christ is a wonderful Saviour to whom we have every reason to come that we may be redeemed.
 - The Spirit and Word are what work in us to cause us to come to Christ to be cleansed from our sin.
 - The Spirit makes us alive to all that God has said so that we joyfully respond to Him.
 - He makes us want to be cleansed.
 - He makes us see what would have been obvious if we were not blinded by sin.
 - This is why believers find it hard to understand why anyone would not want to come to Jesus...
 - The lights have been turned on for them and they realise how foolish it is to reject so great a salvation!
- b. And God promises that the Spirit and the Word will remain with us forever...
- 1) The Spirit and the Word will keep us from ever turning away from Jesus once we have come to Him...
- There may be times of strong temptation that come...

- But the seed of faith cannot die because the Spirit of God had planted it in us and we cannot totally nor finally turn away.
 - True faith will always overcome in the end.
- 2) And I say, this is the hope you have—you who have turned from transgression...
- a) Bob, and all you communicant members, this is your hope!
- Have you come to Jesus to be cleansed from your transgression?
 - God's word and God's Spirit will remain in your heart and in your mouth.
 - You will continue believe on Jesus and to confess Him.
 - God will keep you in the gospel.
- b) Kevin and Tracy, and all you parents of covenant children, this is your hope for your children...
- Have you brought them to Jesus to be cleansed from their transgressions?
 - God promises that His word and Spirit will not depart from your mouth nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants.
 - It is true that God sometimes chastens us by cutting off our children from His covenant,
 - but this promise is to the church in general.
 - In other words, it is the promise that there God will always maintain a remnant of His people for the sake of the fathers.
 - But the promise is also to covenant parents who are faithful to keep God's covenant and to believe His promise concerning their children...
 - When God cuts off our children, he does not do so apart from their parent's covenantal slackness concerning them.
 - Abraham was chastened concerning Ishmael whom he conceived by his wife's maid...
 - Isaac was chastened concerning Esau whom he taught to crave an independent blessing from God apart from Jacob through whom the blessing was promised.
 - David was chastened for his adultery and murder, and for his indulgence of his sons by their rebellion.

- You are called, therefore, to look to God in faith to give you His word and Spirit that you might keep God's covenant...
 - and to work in your children that they might keep His covenant.
 - You must seek him for both yourself and for them.
- c) And finally to Mark, this promise of the word and Spirit is your only hope in the ministry...
 - Your preaching will be utterly fruitless unless God blesses it by His word and Spirit.
 - There would be no reason for you to preach if God did not promise to give His word and Spirit to the church,
 - because nobody would believe.
 - All would despise the gospel and there would be no point...
 - And not only that, but apart from God's preserving His word and Spirit in the church,
 - you yourself would pervert the gospel and begin to preach falsehood.
 - If you would be faithful to continue in the faithful ministry of the gospel, you must look to God to give you His Word and Spirit.
 - He is the One who keeps us in His truth.

Conclusion

And so my people, you see what God has done for us in the Church!

- We have no righteousness of our own...
 - But God Himself sends righteousness to us in Christ...
 - And bestows that righteousness on all of you who turn from your transgressions to Him.
- And now your hope is that you and your children will continue in Christ because God has promised that His Word and Spirit will remain with you forever.
 - You would never have come to Christ if God had not given you His Word and Spirit.
 - And now that He has, He promises that they will not depart from you.
 - What reason you have to give thanks!
 - What reason you have to hope!

