

Text: Isaiah 4:1-6

Title: "How the day of God's judgment became the day of His salvation"

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Introduction: We say correctly that hindsight is 20/20. As believers, we look back and find often the gracious care of God's providence through past difficulties that we did not understand at the time. Not long ago, Brother Mark told us about his 20/20 hindsight of the providential care of the Lord. Due to a mistake in the medical care he received, a procedure that should have been done much earlier has been delayed. But looking back, Mark testified that had the procedure been done on time, it would have been damaged by a subsequent accident Mark had at work.

There are many examples of this kind of blessed 20/20 hindsight in the life of a believer. One that I remember happened to Maureen and me when I was in seminary in South Carolina. Our family had the student health insurance provided by the university, and my son Kent needed an operation that the insurance company initially refused to cover. Because we were refused by the insurance company, we had to pay cash upfront for the surgery, but in doing so the cost of the surgery was heavily discounted by the hospital.

After the surgery an administrator at the university contacted the insurance company and argued our case, and in the end the insurance we had did cover the reduced cost of the surgery for my son. Of course, had we not been initially refused, then there would have been no discount, and without the discount, there would not have been complete coverage in the end.

For the believer, the 20/20 hindsight we have of God's gracious providences in our lives through difficult circumstances is often a great blessing.

For Isaiah, the clarity of hindsight is his prophetic foresight. His prophecy sees judgment coming, but in the end that judgment becomes salvation. All of this happens on a certain day that the prophet calls *the day of the Lord* (vv. 4:1, 2). These two references are the seventh and eighth time the book of Isaiah mentions this day. The first seven of these have described this day of the Lord as a day of judgment:

2:11 – “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”

2:12 – “For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.”

2:17 – “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”

2:20 – “In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats.”

3:7 – “In that day shall he [the Israelite with a garment] swear, saying, I will not be an healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people.”

3:18 – “In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their [the proud women of Israel] tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon.”

4:1 – “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.”

And now finally we come to a word of salvation:

4:2 – “In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” This brief chapter 4 tells

us how the day of the Lord's judgment becomes the day of His salvation. Salvation comes in three ways.

I. Salvation comes after the damage of sin (v. 1).

Illustration: The website States101.com reports that on average, there are 101 men for every 100 women in the world. In the Ukraine, however, there are only 86 men for every 100 women. That low ratio of men to women holds even though some 800,000 women have fled Ukraine during their war with Russia.

Application: In the day of the Lord's judgment, the prophet sees a ratio of just over 14 men for every 100 women. Because of the devastation of war, marriage shall be degraded. God's design for marriage is one man married to one woman for life, but here there would be seven women seeking to marry one man. God's design for marriage is that the husband and father of the family work hard to financially support his wife and their children. But here the wives will have to eat bread that they buy for themselves. Taking a husband's name in marriage is still important to them, but the consequences of the sin of the nation has damaged their ability to experience the blessing of God's design for marriage.

Marriage is in trouble in our day as well. Sin has damaged our homes too. Thus far, we have been spared the ravages of war on our homeland, but we have found a way to destroy marriages and their homes without going to war. Though the divorce rate has been declining in recent years, 42% of first marriages still end in divorce. According to a Pew Research poll, 61% of Americans support same-sex marriage. There is no recognition in these numbers of the damage sin does.

But what about our marriages and our homes as believers? Do we understand how our sin can damage them? Our sinful tongues, our sinful desires, our sinful neglects, and our sinful

selfishness all have the potential to destroy our homes. Our salvation comes when we recognize the damage our sin can do.

II. Salvation comes through the Branch of the Lord (vv. 2-4).

Illustration: Easter is around the corner, and some years ago my mom, who lived in South Carolina at the time, received a wonderful surprise Easter gift from a couple in Wisconsin she had never met, named Kathi and Jerry Ragsdale. The Ragsdales had worked to find Mom's address so that they could send her an item they had found at a garage sale. The garage sale was actually an estate sale for a schoolteacher who had passed away. Kathi and Jerry could not remember the name of the schoolteacher or where her home was.

The gift they found there was a Bible that was given to Lila Elizabeth Jesse for Christmas in 1938. The Bible has a certificate of matrimony in it that says the owner's maiden name was Lila Elizabeth Blank. My mom's maiden name is Carolyn Rae Blank. The next couple of pages contain our family tree dating all the way back to a William Blank, who was born in Germany on November 23, 1861. The same page lists both my mom, born on July 15, 1941, and her sister, Barbara Ann Blank, born on May 5, 1944. On the marriages page, a note says that Carolyn Blank married Jack Henry Hobi on December 22, 1962. I was born the following October.

My mom cried when she received the Bible, and she began a nice correspondence with the Ragsdales. It was a nice reminder of how all of us individuals are really branches of a family tree.

Application: That is the metaphor verse 2 uses to tell us through whom this salvation comes. Salvation comes through a branch of a family tree. That family is traceable all the way back to the first mother, Eve, where in Genesis 3:15 she was promised a descendant who would crush the serpent's head.

From Eve, Scripture traces this promised descendant through the lineage of Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Judah, and David. In Jer. 23:5, this promised one is the Branch of David because He comes from David's lineage. Here Isaiah calls Him the Branch of the Lord because He comes from the Lord's lineage. His is both the Son of David and the Son of God. He is both man and God.

Salvation comes in the day that this Branch of the Lord becomes beautiful and glorious (2a). Have you ever had a day in which the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David and the Son of God, became to you beautiful and glorious? If so, that was a day of salvation for you. The Branch would first be a shoot sprouting up (the meaning of the Hebrew word translated *branch*), and then He would become the fruit of the land. The shoot sprouting up likely refers to Jesus's birth and childhood, which are important to Isaiah's prophesy (7:14, 9:6). The fruit from the branch likely refers to Jesus's sinless life and ministry, His atoning death for the sin of sinners, and His glorious resurrection by which He crushed the head of the serpent for good.

He would be the branch and the fruit for those who escaped in Israel (v. 2b). These are the ones who escaped both the unbelief of chapter 3 and the judgment that it caused. They include those Jews who welcomed the first coming of their Messiah in faith, escaping the apostasy of Judaism that had gripped their destroyed nation. They included godly Zechariah and Elizabeth, their son John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna at the temple, eleven of the twelve disciples and the others of the 120 who waited with them for the coming of the Holy Spirit's New Testament revelation of the church. That church would carry this escape from apostate Judaism to the uttermost part of the earth, where you and I sit this morning.

Because of this saving work of the Branch, Jesus Christ, His saved ones are called *holy* (v. 3). We may still find much

unholiness in us, but because Jesus's holiness is imputed to us by faith alone, we are called *holy*. We are called *saints*.

Because of this saving work of Jesus Christ, the pride that turned the beauty of the daughters of Zion into filth is washed away. Their sins, though blood red like crimson, are purged away through the Holy Spirit's conviction (judgment) and illumination (burning) (v. 4).

Have we escaped like the escaped of Israel? Do we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David and the Son of God? Is His death, burial, and resurrection bearing fruit in the land of our lives? Has He called us holy, His saints? Has He changed the pride of our unbelief into sins washed away by faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit touching our hearts? If not, He must. Salvation comes only through this Branch of the Lord.

III. Salvation comes bringing a new creation (vv. 5-6).

Application: You may remember from our earlier reading from the English Standard Version that the word translated *defense* at the end of verse 5 in our King James Version is there translated *canopy*. The Hebrew word always refers to a *marriage canopy*. In Psalm 19:6, the word is translated *chamber*, and the psalmist describes the sun rising in the east "as a bridegroom out of his chamber." In that context, the heavens are declaring the glory of God, and marriage is a metaphor of this glory. The only other usage is in Joel 2:16, which also refers to a groom and his bride.

So just like in Psalm 19 the heavens are a creation that looks like marriage, which declares the glory of God, so in our passage a new creation will come after the Branch does His work, the glory of which causes the prophet to think of the marriage covenant once again. The new creation he describes here is very much like a marriage covenant between God and His people. What new creation did the Branch bring?

Our passage tells us that the new creation is like the pillar of cloud/fire and like the tabernacle of Israel's wilderness wanderings. This cloud and this tabernacle shall be found at the time and place of every true assembly of Mount Zion. *Mount Zion* is a label for the kingdom of God, much like *Washington* can be a symbol for the entirety of the United States.

Illustration: One news article had this title: "A geologist explains what a mineral agreement between Kyiv and Washington should focus on." That news article is not just about the capital of Ukraine and Washington D.C. making a deal. It is about the whole country of Ukraine and the whole country of the United States making a deal. The same literary device (metonymy) is used by Isaiah when he writes *Mount Zion*. *Mount Zion* can refer to God's kingdom in its entirety, as here.

Jesus told Pilate that His Mount Zion kingdom was not yet of this world (John 18:36). Were it of this world, His servants would have taken up arms to fight for Him, but this they were not to do. Jesus's kingdom is not of this world, but some of us in that kingdom are still in this world. This world is where you can find the Mount Zion assemblies of Christ's kingdom on a Sunday morning at true local churches. Everywhere you find one of those, you find something like the cloud by day, the fire by night, and the tabernacle, which was the dwelling place of God during the wanderings of Israel. We too are wanderers in a wilderness in need of this guidance and presence.

The root of the word *assemblies* in verse 5 is the Hebrew word meaning *to call*. It is a word that is very much like our word *churches* in the New Testament, which translates a Greek word whose root means *to call*. Both words refer to *summoned assemblies*. The summons notifies those invited of the time and place to assemble. We are one of those assemblies this morning. Just like Israel wandering in the wilderness had the presence of the Lord in the pillar to guide them, we have the Lord with us wherever we go to guide us. And just like God dwelt in His

house in the tabernacle of the Old Testament, where two or three gather in His local church, He promises to be dwelling in their midst (Matt. 18:20). This is our place of refuge, our covert from storm and from rain, because He is here.

Conclusion: On June 11, 1962, three men escaped Alcatraz prison. Their case files remain open as authorities are not sure what really happened to them, whether they were drowned at sea or made it to freedom.

On the day of the Lord we have read about this morning, a remnant escapes Israel's apostacy and the judgment it deserved. But because of the branch, their case is closed. There is no doubt about what happens to them. The Branch came and bore fruit. Jesus was born, lived a miraculous and sinless life, died for our sins, and rose again for us. Have you escaped Israel's unbelief, their rejection of the Messiah? Has your day of judgment been turned into a day of salvation because of what Jesus did for you? If not, ask Him to do that for you today.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*