

“Look unto Me, and be ye Saved”

Rev. G. J. Baan - Isaiah 45:22

Sing: Psalter 84: 1 – 2

Read: Law of God

Sing Psalter 143: 1 - 2

Read: Isaiah 45

Sing: Psalter 255 1 - 4

Sing: Psalter 428: 5, 10

Sing: Psalter 238: 1 - 3

Congregation,

We read the following words in the first general Epistle of Peter, the first chapter, verses 24 and 25,

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

These are very serious words. They speak of the brevity of our life.

The Lord points out in these verses that our life shall not stand forever, that one day (and maybe it will happen very soon and suddenly), there will come a time when our lives will be cut off. We call it the moment of our death.

Peter says, “all flesh,” which means all human beings, “is as grass.” We are all familiar with the qualities of grass. Grass is a tender plant and its flowers are quickly gone.

Then he mentions “all the glory of man,” signifying the best things of man, maybe his power, his gifts, his riches, his talents, and so on. Peter states that it is not more than a flower, a flower that falls off, and withers away. The beauty of a flower can disappear overnight. In the morning it is gone, dry, and dead.

So Peter says, "Your life is like the grass and like the flower of the grass. It falls away." There comes a time for you and for me, young people, boys and girls, that we have to die. All human beings, "all flesh," is as grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of the grass. “The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth

away." What shall happen in that day and in that ultimate time when death comes?

Peter, however, does not only speak about the shortness of life but also of the enduring power of the Word of God. In contrast to the shortness of life stands the everlasting Word of the living God, for he says, "But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever." There shall never be a time that the Word of God will be powerless. The Word of God shall stand forever. It endures eternally. Forever - in the Day of Judgment, but likewise in the day of grace - the Word of God prevails. And so also today, in this worship service, on this Sabbath day, the Word of God is preached just as it has been preached in the past, because the Word of God does not change.

Peter calls the Word of Lord which he preached, the gospel. What is the gospel? In Greek, the word "gospel" literally means "good tidings;" good tidings from God for sinful people. In His mercy and goodness, the Lord calls His servants to preach the gospel. Like fisherman they spread out the nets of the gospel, so that heavenly wonders of grace will follow. And as we listen to the gospel and meditate on the Word of God, the most important question for you and me is this: Did we ever experience in our lives that unforgettable moment that we were caught by the gospel of God, when your or my heart was broken like the hearts of the 3,000 men at the Day of Pentecost were broken? Has the gospel of God been blessed to your heart in such a manner?

Peter says, "This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." And this morning that Word is from Isaiah 45, verse 22, where we read the Word of God as follows, *"Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."*

These words speak about the invitation of the gospel. We will consider together four different thoughts.

1. ***The address of this invitation.*** We consider to whom the Lord is speaking these words, namely, "all the ends of the earth." That is the

address of the invitation of the gospel.

2. ***The origin, or the source of this invitation.*** "For I am God, and there is none else."
3. ***The content of this invitation,*** only three plain words, "Look unto Me."
4. ***The ultimate purpose of this invitation*** "And be ye saved."

"The Invitation of the Gospel": the *address*; the *origin*; the *content*; and the *purpose* of this invitation.

First: The address of this invitation

Congregation, the Prophet Isaiah had to preach the full counsel of God: he preached judgment and gospel, Adam and Christ, sin and the forgiveness of sin, darkness and light. He had to preach the full gospel of God, all the words of God that the Lord had revealed unto him. That is task of all of God's servants.

That is how Isaiah preached to the people of Judah approximately one hundred and fifty years before Judah was conquered and taken captive to Babylon. In the year 722 BC, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel were led captive to Assyria and their capital, Samaria, was destroyed. It was during this time that Isaiah preached the gospel of God in Judah. After 150 years, hence in the year 572 BC, Jerusalem, Judah's capital city, was also destroyed and the remaining tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were deported to Babylon. But by that time Isaiah had already died. He did not live to see the judgment of God upon their sins.

However, in the revelations he received of the Lord, Isaiah saw God's judgments approaching long before they actually happened; and therefore, he preached to the people of Judah and Benjamin about these coming judgments. Judgments, yes, because of their many sins and their staggering guilt. But according to the will of God, Isaiah not only spoke about the judgments of God, but also about the deliverance from their sins. In the twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah 40-66, Isaiah preached about the coming deliverance from judgment. He prophesied that the Lord would deliver His people out of the land of Babylon and

return them to Canaan.

Two hundred years after Isaiah preached this gospel of deliverance to the people of Judah, this wonder of grace was fulfilled in their return from Babylon. But congregation, all these wonders ultimately point to the great deliverance. Christ would come to this sinful earth and be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah, according to the Word of God, foretold this seven hundred years before it actually happened.

So we see that the Lord will never let any of His words fall to the ground but will always fulfill His promises. If He has ever promised you something out of His Word in your heart, there shall come a time when that promise will be fulfilled. Wait upon the Lord; wait patiently at the feet of Jesus.

Congregation, the earthly deliverance, as pictured in the prophecy of Isaiah is an image of the deliverance out of the land of sin. We all need this deliverance, whoever we are: husband or wife, father or mother, boy or girl. You all need it, whether you are an office-bearer or not; whether you are very actively involved in the kingdom of God or not. We all need this wonder of grace. If we do not experience this wonder of grace, this deliverance out of the land of sin, then one day we will perish and perish forever. Then we will go to hell. On the one hand, I hesitate to use that expression, but on the other hand, I must, because all servants of God need to bring this heavenly, divine message.

We can, however, be delivered from our sins and that is just what Isaiah emphasizes in our text. In the first place He speaks to the people of Israel, but not to them only, because in our text we read, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." What does the expression, "the ends of the earth," mean? It does not mean any particular country. No, it means wherever we live on this earth.

The Lord makes clear in this text that wherever we live on this earth, whatever place we come from, all the ends of the earth, we all may hear the gospel of God.

It is very remarkable that Isaiah not only speaks to Israel, but, as it were, to everyone who hears his message. Note that it is not to every *individual* in this

world. God does not speak to every individual. God only speaks to those who have His Word, to those who are able to hear the gospel.

What a great privilege it is, congregation, to have the gospel preached to us and to receive that message every Sunday. What an amazing thing it is that we may read the Word of God, God's message. The wonder of this privilege becomes even greater when we realize that others do not have His Word.

Has God's Word become fruitful in your and my lives? Or has the preaching of the gospel remained fruitless until now? It is the only means of salvation. When God converts a sinner, He either brings the Word to him or her, or, He brings him or her to the Word. There must be a connection between the Word of God and our lives.

Isaiah spoke to people, who in his thoughts, are already in Babylonian captivity. He saw them, as it were, hunched down, crying and praying. Their situation was hopeless. There wasn't any prospect of freedom. They could not hope to be delivered from the land of captivity and be brought back to Israel.

But not only their hope had vanished. Also - and that weighed most heavy on them - God was hidden from them. They could not find the Lord. His countenance was hidden from them. They did not know how to be freed and could not see how the Lord would help. Isaiah foresaw this condition and with that condition in mind he proclaimed to them the Word of God.

So in the first place we see the people of Israel in their hopeless situation in captivity. And our situation is not really any different from theirs. We, being spiritually dead by nature through our sins and iniquities, are alienated from God. Spiritually, we also are in captivity, with the chains of sin tying up our lives. The bondage of unbelief take us prisoners, and leads us into captivity. Maybe you do not know anymore how to be delivered, just like the Israelites which Isaiah had in mind when he uttered these words of prophecy. However, this Word of God is also for you this hour.

Secondly, Isaiah also spoke to the heathen. They too are alienated from God. They have never heard who God is and what He does. Their ungodly lives are full of sin and iniquity. But their situation is not hopeless either: nor is the situation of

any of us a hopeless one. We all - even if you feel that you are a heathen - we all have the possibility of being brought back to the Lord, and the gospel invites us to this eternal salvation and glory: yes, we are invited by God Himself.

There are many promises in Scripture for the heathen. Also heathens will be saved by the irresistible grace of God, no matter how far away they live, even at "the ends of the earth." God is able to reach them by His Word. He sends His preachers to the ends of the earth: also to this congregation to preach His Word and call you by the means of His Word. He, the Almighty One, is able to draw His people to Himself, even though they have to be brought from the ends of the earth.

As we consider the meaning of the words "ends of the earth," I want to emphasize the importance of mission work and evangelism as a practical means to spread the gospel and bring God's holy Word to sinners. Sinners nearby or far away - they all need the Word of God.

And so God brings His Word to sinners or sinners to His Word. This brings us to our second thought:

2. The origin or the source of this invitation

Congregation, we should realize that the Word which we hear preached in church comes from God. Not in the first place from this or that minister, but from God, from the living God. He is the Author of it. The Bible is God's Word.

He was the Author, also in the days of Isaiah when this prophecy came into being. By His Holy Spirit, the Lord granted His servants the wisdom and direction to record the Word of God. Let us realize that this hour, as we open the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God; all the words in it come from God. We have to do with a divine message.

Oh, let us then listen attentively and not reject this Word of God. Let us accept it and receive the Word of God. Be aware that if we reject and despise the preaching, we reject and despise God's Word! Not merely the words of a minister, but more importantly, the Word of the living God. Then we reject His words, His servants, His people, His service, His commandments, indeed, ultimately we reject the Lord God Himself.

Paul says in Hebrews 10:26, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." It is very serious to reject the Word of God. Compare it to a seriously ill person who rejects the last form of treatment offered to him or her. Then the doctor will say, "If you reject this treatment, I cannot help you any more."

And so it is with the Word of God. Receive it, take it, and lay it at your heart and ask the Lord, boys and girls, if His Word that is brought to you from Sunday to Sunday will be blessed to your heart. God alone is the mighty, indeed, the almighty Deliverer. Idols cannot help anyone; and there were many of them in the time of Isaiah, idols in Babylon, idols in Israel. None, however, could deliver.

And we have idols, too, not a graven image, but more concealed. Maybe our houses are our idols, or our cars, our motorcycles, our knowledge, our talents, our electronic devices, our gifts, our money, our families, our husbands or wives, our career, our work, and so on. Idols are the things in which we put our trust, the things that are more important to us than our salvation and our eternal state.

What do idols do? They draw our attention away from eternal matters and give us a misleading and deceiving feeling of happiness. They are like drugs, and intoxicate our feelings.

When someone is admitted to the hospital and is seriously ill, the doctors give drugs in the good sense of the word. For example they can give painkillers, so that we do not have to suffer excruciating pain. These medicines keep us from feeling the full extent of our illness. There are also people who use drugs in the bad sense of the word. These drugs intoxicate their real feelings and for a moment they feel high and happy.

Congregation, this is what you can compare the happiness of this world with. It lasts for a time, maybe even for a long time, but then it is over. Then eternity comes, and then we will realize and feel the dire reality of our awful situation. But then it is too late. But now it is not too late, even though it is very late and you are living on borrowed time. Maybe you are already twenty years old and have never feared the Lord. It is late, very late because twenty years have gone by, and you have never surrendered your heart to the Lord.

And if you are forty years old? It is even much later for you. Why didn't you bow before the Lord? Why didn't you seek the kingdom of God, seeing you are still unconverted? Forty years have passed by; they are gone and will never come back. Are you fifty years old? Sixty years maybe? It is very, very late. Are you eighty years old and still unconverted? Oh, my friend, your condition is extremely serious! Eighty years have passed by and you are in the evening of your life. It is extremely late, but not too late.

We all are still in the time of grace, but ... we will sink into eternal damnation, we will sink into hell if we do not take heed to the word of the living God and keep on serving our idols.

The Lord emphasizes all these things in our text. He says, "I am God and there is none else." That means, besides Me, near Me, under Me, above Me, behind Me, around Me, there is none else who is like Me. The Lord emphatically testifies that there is only one Person, only one place, only one means for salvation.

Maybe the question you struggle with is, "How can I be saved?" Here is the answer; the Lord says, "I am God." Let these words be brought into your hearts. Remember these words tomorrow, boys and girls, youth of the congregation, fathers and mothers. Remember that the Lord says, "I am God." In difficult circumstances, for example, when you are sick, when you are afflicted, when you have problems maybe in your marriage, maybe financially, maybe at your work and when you seek the Lord in your spiritual sorrows, the Lord wants to stress time and time again, "I am God." He alone is able to deliver. One day all our possessions will vanish and our superficial happiness will evaporate, and what then, congregation? Where will we be then? In hell?

Therefore, you need to be rescued from your sins and delivered from your idols. Perhaps you ask, "How can I do this?" Well, my friend, *you* don't have to do this. You cannot do that. You are unable to deliver yourself from the power of sin. All God's children have tried to do that when the Lord came into their lives. The first thing you try to do when the Lord converts you is to mortify sin, stop your evil practices, and uproot all the weeds of sin that grow in your heart. In the beginning it might look promising and you begin to think that it is possible to mortify sin and to live a sinless life according to God's will, but as time goes on

you will experience more and more that you fail miserably in attaining any righteousness with God. You discover that your righteousness has to come from outside of yourself; you learn that you need the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"I am God and there is none else." In these words we especially hear the Lord Jesus Christ speaking. "I am God. I am the only Saviour, and I invite you to the gospel."

That is our third thought:

3. The content of this invitation

"Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

Congregation, what does the Lord really say to us in His invitation? Does He point to all our sins? Does He speak in verse 22 about impending judgment? Or about our unfaithfulness and sinfulness? Or about our unbelief? Does He address your backslidings, child of God? Your repeated lapsing into sin, instead of progressing and growing in grace?

Because we can read in the Word of God that sin and iniquity are also very active in the hearts of God's children, and they perceive that in their own hearts too.

So then, does the Lord condemn in verse 22? Not at all, congregation. Although that is what we deserve: we deserve it because we are sinful, guilty and without hope in our natural unconverted state. Truly, we deserve God's just condemnation.

Yet, we read nothing of that in our text. We only read about an invitation to come to Him. "Look unto Me." Congregation, it is a very brief message: only three words – and only two in the original Hebrew.

Three words in English; two in Hebrew. Oh, we often need many words to discuss our matters, like the Pharisees and scribes. But the Lord only gives us three words, and they are of exceptional importance. Three short words for the most important matter. "Look unto Me." I want very briefly to explain these three

words in considering several aspects of them.

In the first place, when we read here, "Look unto Me," we should interpret that as an equivalent of saying, "Listen to Me." The Lord says, "Do not listen to Satan, or the world, or other people's advice, but to Me. Listen, boys and girls, fathers and mothers, to My Word and to My testimonies. Open your ears for the Word of God."

You know, we do not have any excuse if our ears are deaf and closed. The Lord says, "Open them. Listen to Me." That is very plain. Come to church every Sunday to hear the preaching of the God's Word and listen with willingness of heart, without a critical mindset, waiting upon the Lord. "Listen to Me."

Secondly, the Lord says, "Come to Me. Come to Me every Sunday again. Forsake the world and leave it. Cease from serving your idols. Do not seek and find your life in the pleasures of sin, but come to Me. Come to Me, the Lord Jesus Christ. I am willing and able to save you. I am the fountain of life and salvation. Come to Me with your deadly heart, your sinful heart, your inabilities, your powerlessness, your unwillingness, and with all of your sin. I can, and I want to forgive them all. I can, and I want to make you truly happy. I can, and I will give you eternal glory. Come to Me, all the ends of the earth. Bow before Me. You are deeply guilty. You don't have any rights. I am the just and perfect God and could rightly cast you away. But yet, come to Me."

All those who come to the Lord realize their unworthiness. They surrender to Him and admit their guilt, saying, "O Lord, I deserve to be cast away. I cannot dispute it in any way." But to them the Lord says, "Bow before Me in all your unworthiness and sin. You cannot do anything else. Bow before Me and humble yourself. That is the only way in which I will be honoured and glorified. Come to Me and bow before Me."

Thirdly, in these words "Look unto Me," the Lord means to say, "Speak to Me." But what words shall we utter as we come to Him? Well, confess to Him your sins, make all your iniquities known to Him. "Does He not know them already?" Of course, He knows, but the Lord wants to hear it from the lips of His children as they declare to Him how sinful they find their hearts to be.

We don't have to tell other people how sinful we are. Sometimes there are people who are proud because they were so sinful before the Lord converted them. That's like the Pharisees, and the scribes, and the Sadducees.

The Lord says, "Open your mouth and speak to Me, and confess all your sins and lay them down at My feet. Speak to Me." Have you done this already?

Do you know of those quiet places, those sanctuaries where you spoke to Him? We are gathered here in this sanctuary, but do you have a sanctuary in your heart, a hidden place?

In the fourth place, these words, "Look unto Me," mean, "Trust Me. Trust Me, look unto Me, for I am the God of forgiveness. Look unto Me in My mercy. Behold My power. Behold My love for poor sinners."

Congregation, these words, "Look unto Me," refer especially to the Lord Jesus Christ who is forever at the right hand of God the Father. Look unto Him. Look at the cross on the hill of Golgotha. Are there miserable sinners among us, wretched and poor ones? Oh, I can only give you this advice: Look unto Jesus. Behold His blood. Behold the wounds in His hands and in His feet. Consider all His promises and mark His holy and perfect life. Mark His sacrifice. He earned salvation, a complete salvation.

Isaiah was privileged to comfort the people of God, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1-2). Oh, look unto Jesus. Look at His open wounds. Look at His blood for the forgiveness of all your sins.

"Look unto Me." But what if I cannot look? Then look unto Him with your blind eyes. That's not possible in nature, but here the Lord says it in a spiritual way, "Look unto Me with your heart and you shall be saved. Trust Me; trust Me that all your sins can be forgiven. Trust Me, as you lay yourselves down at My feet; trust me that all your sins are forgiven only in My blood." Trusting is here not a mere conclusion of the mind, but a resting in the word of God's holy grace.

Isn't this the message that Isaiah had to bring to the people in captivity, whatever their life's circumstances were, however great their troubles and gross their sins? "Trust in Me. I can and shall help you through all your difficult

circumstances. Trust in Me alone."

We have seen that "Look unto Me" means "Listen to Me," "Come to Me," "Speak to Me," and "Trust in Me."

The last aspect of this "Look unto Me" contains for God's children the instruction, "Serve Me." "Keep on listening to My Word, to My law, to My statutes, to My commandments and let your heart and life be filled with heavenly joy."

How can we receive that joy? Only by the direction by God's Word. Law and glory. Keeping the Lord's commandments here on earth and the anticipation of the future glory in heaven are the ways to be filled with heavenly joy. And these two, law and glory, are bound together like two folded hands. God's law on earth and glory in heaven. "Serve Me." This then is the content of this invitation "Look unto Me."

Let us first sing from Psalter 428: 5 and 10

Congregation, we already saw the first three points: the address of this invitation, "all the ends of the earth"; secondly, the origin of this invitation, "for I am God and there is none else"; thirdly, the content of this invitation, "Look unto Me" in several different aspects.

Now finally, shortly our fourth point:

4. The ultimate purpose of this invitation

We find this ultimate purpose in the words, "and be ye saved." Why does the Lord, by the mouth of His servant Isaiah, extend this invitation? For what purpose does the Lord Jesus, through the preaching of the gospel, send us this message? Well, congregation, the sole purpose of it is this: He seeks our salvation. Based upon Scripture, I say God seeks our salvation, yours and mine. That is His revealed will, the revealed desire of God.

The secret will of God is not for us to deal with. Of course, it has to be preached. Election is a fountain of life but it is not the only fountain. In all earnestness, if

there was only the fountain of election and not the other fountains, namely, of God's grace in Christ's blood, and the application of the Holy Spirit, we could not be saved. Therefore, when we preach election, it must always be connected with the fountain of Christ's redemptive work on the cross of Golgotha. It also needs to be connected with the truth that we cannot convert ourselves but need the application of the Holy Spirit.

God's servants must preach the full counsel of the Triune God. But you and I, as hearers, as humans, may not handle, may not work with election. The danger is that when we start reasoning with election, we become lazy and passive. We fold our hands, and say, "Oh, well, I will wait for God to convert me."

There are people who, when you speak with them, give the impression that they have saved themselves: saved themselves in their own power and strength, and to their own glory. We are not to be jealous of that.

Conversely, there are people who say, "Well, I will wait until God converts me." No, the Lord has one desire. He seeks our salvation. We can clearly read this in several places in Scripture. God has always one purpose in mind when He sends us the preaching of the gospel, namely, the salvation of His elect. Yes, of His elect. That is right.

May I go one step further? He purposes the salvation of sinners with a broken heart. Of course, we may not divide the hearers of the gospel into three groups, as if there were a third group apart from the converted and unconverted people. Yet I may say that the Lord purposes to save those that that go over the earth with feelings of sorrow about their sins, however unconverted they feel themselves. He purposes to bring the broken-hearted ones to salvation.

I dare to go one step further. With the preaching of the gospel the Lord seeks the salvation of all the hearers. That is God's desire: and even if that does not fit into our logical dogmatic reasoning, we may not skip over this scriptural truth. This happens too often in our days, maybe not openly, but in a concealed way in our minds and hearts. We may not skip over it but rather, we are called to adore the heavenly wisdom of God who, on one hand, has elected His people but, on the other hand, warns and invites us. He says, "*Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*"."

To be saved, that means to be happy, to be filled with heavenly joy. Not with earthly joy, but with a heavenly joy, a happiness that comes from God, a happiness that stems from eternal glory.

How and when can this happiness be experienced? Only when we look unto Christ as our Mediator. When we look unto Him as our Saviour, when one drop of His precious blood may be poured out in our hearts and satisfy our hearts with the forgiveness of all our sins.

Our sins must be forgiven. Your heart and my heart needs to be renewed. Your life and my life must be restored. We must be totally renewed in our hearts and also in our conversation; we need to be turned unto God and be saved. "Be ye saved." That means two things. On one hand, you must strive to be saved in the ways we already mentioned, by fleeing to God, speaking to Him, confessing your sins to Him, looking unto Him. You must strive to enter the narrow gate that leads to life. On the other hand, you must strive to avoid and flee from the broad way that leads to destruction. You must be saved.

How active have you been in seeking your salvation? We have to, as that is one dimension of our salvation; but the Hebrew construct of the words that are used in our text also point to the Lord's work: The Lord must save us and this salvation culminates in the praise of the Father's election. He saves His people through the remission of sin for Christ's sake. He died for them, and He saves them through the undeserved, but essential applying work of the Holy Spirit.

"Be ye saved." In heaven all God's children shall glorify this Triune God. They shall love the Father, their hearts shall be filled with joy and the comfort of the Holy Ghost. They shall receive the fulfillment of all that was promised and shall eternally behold Christ their Saviour. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Take these words with you. Remember them. Do not forget the message which the Lord has brought to you and to me, to your and my heart with these very words, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God," your God, your Jesus, "and there is none else."

Amen.