

GOD'S THOUGHTS AND GOD'S WAYS  
Isa. 55:1-9

Intro: Anyone who is a Christian knows that verses 8 and 9 are true. The examples seem to be abounding everywhere in proof.

There are actually two truths in these two verses. The first, that there is a contrast between the thoughts and ways of God when compared with the ways and thoughts of men. Almost everyone who believes in God will accept this. But not everyone is prepared to accept the second truth--that God's thoughts and ways are "higher," that is, superior in every way to the thoughts and ways of man.

And yet there is no question about either of these. God's ways are different, but God's ways are also better--immeasurably better--"as the heavens are higher than the earth."

There are many ways we could approach this subject tonight, but I would like to look at these two verses as Isaiah is presenting them. You will notice that the verses begin with "for," indicating that we have an explanation here. Isaiah is seeking to prove what he has written in the preceding verses, and here we have the explanation.

What would you say is the theme of the first seven verses?

It seems to be forgiveness (v. 7), satisfaction (v. 2), and the prospect that "your soul shall live" (v. 3). All of this seems to add up to the grand theme which runs through the prophecy of Isaiah: SALVATION. Isaiah seems to be pointing the way to the people of Judah and he is seeking to show them that salvation itself will manifest the difference between the thoughts and ways of men when compared with the thoughts and ways of God.

If you could have planned the way of salvation for God, what would you have done? When man is left to himself to try to discover the divine way of salvation, he is usually just as wrong as he can be unless he knows something about the Word of God. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

How does Isaiah present salvation to show how different it is from the thoughts and ways of men?

## I. SALVATION IS PERSONAL (Isa. 55:1a).

You will often hear people say something like this: Why did God not provide for the salvation of all men instead of leaving it up to men to seek Him? (We are looking at salvation from the human side tonight.)

We like to group people together and do the same thing for everyone--oftentimes when they do not want what we are trying to do.

God delights in the love of His creatures. He does not want anyone in heaven who does not want to be there. He wants our love to be turned toward Him because we really love Him--not because we are included in some mass movement that will take us all to heaven.

The key word is "thirsteth." There has to be an individual recognition of need, a dissatisfaction with all that this world has to offer, a realization that there is a God, and that He alone can satisfy the deep longings which we feel in our hearts.

Note the individual emphasis in such verses as John 3:16; Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Cf. John 1:12.

Salvation is a personal matter. We come to the Lord in the same way, but we must come one by one.

## II. SALVATION IS FREE (Isa. 55:1b).

The average American is suspicious of anything that is free. We feel that it cannot be worth very much. And we will spend millions every year on pleasure, on things which we feel will bring us satisfaction, but we always find that the search is a fruitless one.

Read v. 2.

Man, if left to himself, would never devise a salvation that is free. You can see this if you will look at the religions of the world, or at our many strictly American cults you will find invariably that there is something for man to do, and sometimes this involves the actual spending of money.

Think how revolutionary among the religions of men is the idea expressed in Rom. 6:23b!

"Give" is one of the distinctive words of the Gospel. If salvation were on any other basis, someone would be excluded. Salvation is not cheap; it was purchased at the infinite price of the death of God's only begotten Son. But what He provided is offered to us free. There are no conditions attached. No time payments. No fine print. Salvation is offered tonight as a gift from God to anyone and everyone who will receive it.

III. SALVATION IS ETERNAL (Isa. 55:3), "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

Cf. John 3:16. If you can get salvation and then lose it, it is not eternal as far as you are concerned.

Some feel that this is a dangerous doctrine. Some will even use stronger words in denouncing it. Why? Because they feel that if you give men any security at all, they will not do what God wants them to do. We do not trust each other to do the right thing.

Well, let me say right here that God does not trust us to keep ourselves either. Those who approach salvation from this point of view are not in line with God's thoughts and ways. HE IS THE SAVIOUR! We trust the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and then He keeps us. Remember that grand benediction in Jude 24, 25! And think also of Peter's opening to his first epistle in 1 Pet. 1:3-5.

No! We would make salvation conditional. But salvation is according to God's thoughts, and He has made it eternal.

IV. SALVATION IS MERCIFUL (Isa. 55:6, 7).

In Luke 18 we have the account of a parable which our Lord told on one occasion. It concerned a publican and a Pharisee. Both of them had gone up to the temple to pray, but what a difference there was in their prayers. The Pharisee clearly revealed in his prayer that he knew nothing about the thoughts and ways of God concerning salvation. (Read Luke 18:11, 12.) But listen to the prayer of

the publican: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

There was only one hope for him, just as there is only one hope for any man, or woman, or child. It is the mercy of God.

Tit. 3:5 confirms this. "Not by works of righteousness . . ."

You and I would make it on the basis of merit. We would make men atone for their own sins in order to get right with God. We would feel that mercy was making it too easy, but there is no other way that God could possibly deal with us.

There is one other word.

V. SALVATION MEANS ABSOLUTE FORGIVENESS (Isa. 55:7b).  
What words are these: "He will abundantly pardon."

Man would say, We had better wait to see what a man has done before we offer him forgiveness. Or, if he ever commits the same sins again, then we will open the whole case and deal with him for every sin.

Again, remember, our forgiveness was purchased by the blood of Christ. God does not overlook or excuse sin. BUT WHEN HE FORGIVES THE SINNER HE FORGIVES FOR EVER. Listen to Heb. 10:17. "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

In the passage which Dr. Mitchell used last Sunday night we read about "a woman . . . which was a sinner" (Luke 7:37). The Pharisees would have nothing to do with her, and they felt that if the Lord were really a prophet He would get rid of her too. How amazed they were when He said, "Her sins, which were many, are forgiven" (Luke 7:47).

No man would do that--but God would!

Concl: Are you not thankful that God does not deal with us the way we would deal with each other? The greatest tragedy is this, however, that regardless of what men may require in money, in time, in repentance, in rituals, or in any other thing, MEN ARE NOT THE ONES WHO WILL DECIDE ABOUT HOW WE CAN GET RIGHT WITH GOD AND EVENTUALLY GET TO HEAVEN. God alone has that right, and we need to know His thoughts and His ways--different, but higher AND RIGHT!