

God's Love for Those Never Saved

Isaiah 63:7–9; Isaiah 64:5-7; Isaiah 65:1–7; Romans 2:4; 1 Timothy 4:10

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Yesterday we ended by looking at the Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10. But that's not the only Scripture that speaks of God's love for those who turn away from Him. In Isaiah 63:7–9 the prophet describes God's demeanor toward the nation of Israel:

"I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has granted them according to His compassion, and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, 'Surely, they are My people, Sons who will not deal falsely.' So He became their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His mercy He redeemed them; and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old."

Someone might say, Yes, but that talks about God's redemptive love for His elect alone. No, this speaks of a love that spread over the entire nation of Israel. God "became their Savior" in the sense that He redeemed the entire nation from Egypt. He suffered when they suffered. He sustained them "all the days of old." This speaks not of an eternal salvation, but of a temporal relationship with an earthly nation. How do we know? Look at verse 10: "But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore, He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them."

That is an amazing statement! Here we see God defined as the Savior, the lover, the redeemer of a people who make themselves His enemies. They rebel against Him. They grieve His Holy Spirit. They choose a life of sin.

Now notice verse 17: "Why, O Lord, dost Thou cause us to stray from Thy ways, and harden our heart from fearing Thee?" That speaks of God's judicial hardening of the disobedient nation. He actually hardened the hearts of those whom He loved and redeemed out of Egypt.

Isaiah 64:5 includes these shocking words: "Thou wast angry, for we sinned, we continued in them a long time; and shall we be saved?"

How can God be Savior to those who will not be saved? Yet these are clearly unconverted people. Look at verses 6–7, which begins with a familiar passage:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. And there is no one who calls on Thy name, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee; for Thou hast hidden Thy face from us, and hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities.

These are clearly unconverted, unbelieving people. In what sense can God call Himself their Savior?

Here is the sense of it: God revealed Himself as Savior. He manifested His love to the nation. “In all their affliction He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). He poured out His goodness, and lovingkindness and mercy on the nation. And that divine forbearance and longsuffering should have moved them to repentance (Romans 2:4). But instead they responded with unbelief, and their hearts were hardened.

Isaiah 65 takes it still further:

I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, “Here am I, here am I,” To a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts. (Isaiah 65:1–2)

In other words, God turned away from these rebellious people, consigned them to their own idolatry, and chose a people for Himself from among other nations.

Isaiah reveals the shocking blasphemy of those from whom God has turned away. They considered themselves holier than God (Isaiah 65:5); they continually provoked Him to His face (Isaiah 65:3), defiling themselves (Isaiah 65:4) and scorning God for idols (Isaiah 65:7). God judged them with the utmost severity, because their hostility to Him was great, and their rejection of Him was final.

Yet these were people on whom God had showered love and goodness! He even called Himself their Savior.

In a similar sense Jesus is called “Savior of the world” (John. 4:42; 1 John. 4:14). Paul wrote, “We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Timothy 4:10). The point is not that He actually saves the whole world (for that would be universalism, and Scripture clearly teaches that not all will be saved). The point is that He is the only Savior to whom anyone in the world can turn for forgiveness and eternal life—and therefore, all are urged to embrace Him as Savior. Jesus Christ is proffered to the world as Savior. In setting forth His own Son as Savior of the world, God displays the same kind of love to the whole world that was manifest in the Old Testament to the rebellious Israelites. It is a sincere, tender-hearted, compassionate love that offers mercy and forgiveness.

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