

20 "Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. **21** Declare what is to be, present it-- let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. **22** "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. **23** By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. **24** They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.' " All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. **25** But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.

Isaiah talks about a precious gift. **[Hold in hands a gift box.]**

Vs.22 tells us who the gift is intended for. Can you read what the tag says? To: All people.

"All you ends of the earth" – that means, for Isaiah, for the people of Isaiah's day, for me, for you, for the people of our day, and for the generations after us. So we would do well to check it out!

Who is the gift from? From: God.

Who is this God? Is it a generic God, which we hear so often mentioned on TV shows? In movies? Is it a "make your own" God? Is it a God that is a conglomeration many ideas from many sources?

Vs.21 says – **"There is no God apart from me, the Lord."** Vs.22 – **"I am God, and there is no other."**

If this seems obvious and we need not spend much of our precious time thinking about it, consider the assaults aimed at this divine truth.

I've seen the New Age book lying on the coffee shop table, which makes the appeal: there is "a god or goddess inside each of us just waiting to be discovered." Let me put some flesh on that for you. Susan and I once met a flute-playing young man named Timothy. It was a rather unique setting. We were on a short hike leading up to an arch near Moab, UT. He told us how he had taken the middle name Adonai. Adonai is one of the Hebrew names for God – it means: "the Lord."

Even more common, at least in our culture, popular opinion these days promotes the concept that you can make God out to be whoever you want him to be. Many people end up with their own "personal" god whom they have fashioned, not the only true God who has fashioned us all. I came across an example of this. About a week ago... a mother wrote about what this Christmas season has been like for her and her daughter. This was the first year their family set up a nativity in their home, and read from a book of advent stories each morning. She explains:

This is [my daughters] sixth Christmas. ... Our Divali lights (used in Hinduism) and Christmas candles are one and the same. ... We pray to God at night but haven't fully fleshed out His character or discussed how He is different from Ganesh (Hindu god) and Lakshmi (Hindu goddess) and now, baby Jesus. ... So we've been living in a world where God is everywhere and Ganesh rests above our door and Buddha sits outside it. ... I've started to love this wild faith we're creating. Don't tell 10-year-old me, who knew only Sunday mornings bowing to Jesus on a cross, but I love weaving the vibrant fabric of dozens of deities into the cloth of my own faith. I think it's coming along quite nicely. As for what it will mean for [my daughter], well... that one is up to her. <http://www.raising-humans.com/>

I hope you see: we've got some dangerous terrain to navigate. Assaults on God's 1st commandment surround us. They circulate on the shelves at Barnes & Noble; they get streamed into our homes on TV and the Internet; they get embedded in popular movies via religious references.

And so what we're spending time on today is a vital issue. If we don't speak clearly to one another, in order to clear-the-air for each other of the propaganda that's being pushed, who will? If we don't take time to discuss and clarify for our children the false notions they are going to hear and see from the world, who will speak up to our children about the truth? And what about a voice to champion the Truth to the world – who will it be? We're in the place that we are ... we have the knowledge that we have by God's grace.

Here is a powerful truth. God gives evidence, here, that there is no other God besides him. What does he enter into the record? 100% accuracy of telling the future. "Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord?" (vs.21) Oh, others can guess at the future and get it right sometimes. If they speak in very general terms, they might have a relatively high percentage of predictions fulfilled. The Lord God is different. Take a look at His record, and take a look at the detail with which he sees into the future:

- At this time in the world's history, when Isaiah wrote, God was foretelling the rise of King Cyrus of Persia. He names him, even though Cyrus was approximately 100 to 150 years in the future.
- Before that, the Lord foretold how the remaining portion of Israel would be carried into captivity under King Nebechednezzar of Babylon. That Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, and subsequent captivity of Judah's people, was also foretold by God long before it happened.
- Prior to that, God had fulfilled his promises to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants; he had fulfilled his promise to make Abraham's descendents numerous.
- And the single greatest event of history foretold by God is the birth, work and death of Jesus, foretold in such detail that the type of birth, place of birth, flight to Egypt, place of growing up, type of miracles, circumstances of his betrayal, type of death and reality of his resurrection were all foretold.

The Lord God alone foreknew these future events in history. The reality, so evidenced, is: He is God, and there is no other.

So with that firmly in mind: let's return to our gift from Him. Let's open it!

[Open the gift – there are nesting boxes.] The largest box says "Savior-God." Another box inside that presents: "Righteousness." Written on the outside box is: "NEVER LET GO."

The Bible proves the identity of our Savior-God. The gift we've been talking about this Christmas is: He comes in the child born in Bethlehem, the King crucified outside Jerusalem, the conqueror risen on the 3rd day and ascended to his throne in heaven - Jesus Christ.

Why did he have to come? The way the Lord tells that here is: Vs.21 – **“A righteous God and a Savior, there is none but me.”** Vs.22 – **“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.”**

NEVER LET GO of the gift only God can provide. For we don't have the righteousness God requires to enter heaven.

That's brought out here. Whenever we see the commandments come up in God's Word, it would be easy to point every direction but here (self). So we follow a pattern where we each personally look to see where we've gone wrong. Let's do that here.

In vs.20 Isaiah shares how foolish people were – and are – who carry around in their hands idols of wood. In the surrounding chapters he asks: can that intricately carved block of wood hear you? ...answer you? ...move its arms to help you? No.

Bring the application home to people who have “dropped” idols carved out of wood. You don't have Ganesh in your home, do you? But think about this: What's the difference between someone carrying about an idol of wood in one's hand, or carrying about in one's pocket an idol of paper? Money is made of the same stuff, just more thinly sliced. Money itself is not evil. But the love of money is. And what about the issue of trust? Do you ever worry about your financial situation? Do you ever think – or act like – money will solve your problems? Our attitudes can reflect misplaced trust, or a lack of trust in God.

Look at another example. This time the apostle Paul makes the application for us. He uses Isaiah 45:23. Some of the Christians living in Rome had some trouble. What's the connection to Isaiah 45? They were acting like they were God. So the apostle Paul tells them: *“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God’”* (Romans 14:10-11). Pride exerts tremendous pull. I haven't heard any of you taking the middle name “Adonai,” or claiming to be God. But we are tempted to act like we are God. We show the sinful attitudes that infiltrate our hearts when we judge or when we look down on one another. God is judge, not us.

God's Word shows us our sins against Him– starting with the first commandment.

God, in His Word, offers us the only remedy: **“Turn to me and be saved.”** For He alone has righteousness to give. Look at the phrase repeated in vs. 24 and 25: **“In the Lord...”** The gift of righteousness is found **“in the Lord,”** and nowhere else. Jesus, our Lord, gives us his righteousness. And he clears our record of sin. That is told a couple pages earlier. Isaiah records in ch.43, the Lord says: “I, even I, am he who blots out transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (vs.25).

Read Vs.23. “By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked...” God's absolute assurance that all of this is true is: “I swear to you.” That's a solemn oath.

Think of the very practical example of when we take an oath. We reserve swearing for matters of the utmost importance – like when people’s lives depend on your word. This often takes place in a courtroom. You hear echoed: “I swear to tell the truth... so help me God.” Do you hear the concept there? You swear based upon someone greater than yourself.

Our God, the Lord, says: **“By myself I have sworn.”** There is nothing higher for him to swear by than himself. The highest assurance He can offer us is attaching his name to the statement, and saying: “I swear...” Every word of the Bible has God’s stamp of certainty. Here is one place he adds an exclamation mark.

Wrap up: So with that assurance let’s wrap up today by going back to our object lesson. Kids, what do you say when you receive a gift? Thank you! Of course!

*Our section of verses today ends with: **“Exult!”***

We certainly have reason to exult! “Exult” is the Hebrew word: Hallelu. This means to praise or boast about someone, to shine forth or to break out in a cry of joy.

This is certainly the response the Lord deserves from us. Lord, in the New Year lead us to thank you – to exult you again and again for your saving love to us. Lead us to treasure your saving truth, and to have the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. Amen.