

Isaiah **Waging Love**

Lesson #11 for March 13, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 55; 58.

1. Isaiah 55 and 58 are great chapters in the Old Testament because they discuss what God actually wants of His people.

Isaiah 55:1-3: ¹ The LORD says,

“Come, everyone who is thirsty—
here is water!

Come, you that have no money—
buy corn and eat!

Come! Buy wine and milk—
it will cost you nothing!

²Why spend money on what does not satisfy?

Why spend your wages and still be hungry?

Listen to me and do what I say,
and you will enjoy the best food of all.

³“Listen now, my people, and
come to me; come to me, and you will have life!

I will make a lasting covenant with you

and give you the blessings I promised to David.”—American Bible Society.

(1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Isaiah 55:1–3). New York: American Bible Society.

2. In a society where almost everything depends on having money to buy things, what is God trying to tell us by saying that we can “buy” without any money? God wants to offer us something whose value is beyond the wildest imagination of any human, and He offers it free! But, there is still a transaction. Something of worth is transferred. God offers forgiveness free; however, it cost Them an enormous price: The life and death of the Son.
3. Similar passages in the New Testament in 1 Peter 1:18-19 and Ephesians 2:8-9 make it clear that God’s free gift is worth far more than silver or gold or anything else in this world.
4. Isaiah helps us to recognize that there was not a separate “old-covenant” salvation by works which was then superseded by the “new-covenant” salvation by grace/faith. There is only one way to salvation. From ancient times, there are myth stories told about people like Gilgamesh and others who did heroic exploits, vainly seeking eternal life. In modern times, some groups promote the idea of reincarnation; but, it is also fruitless.

Salvation is free in that there’s nothing we can do to earn it. Our works can never be good enough to save us. Yet, at the same time, it can cost us everything. What does that mean? (See, for instance, *Matt. 10:39, Luke 9:23, Luke 14:26, Phil. 3:8.*)—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, March 7.[§]

Matthew 10:39: [Jesus said:] “Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

5. Didn’t the Christian martyrs down through the ages pay a big price for their Christianity? While salvation is free, living a Christian life may cost you everything!

Luke 9:23: And he [Jesus] said to them all, “Anyone who wants to come with me must forget self, take up their cross every day, and follow me.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

6. What did the disciples think when Jesus mentioned *the cross*? They thought they would

be leaders. At that point, they had no idea what was coming! Did it cost the disciples/apostles anything to carry on the work that Jesus left them? Almost all of them died martyrs' deaths!

Luke 14:26: [Jesus said:] "Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well."—*Good News Bible*.*†

7. What would you say to someone who came to you with that proposal? What was Jesus actually trying to say to us in this verse? It certainly does not mean that we should stop loving our family members! But, our commitment to God and His cause must take priority over every other commitment. Even if everyone around us rejects the truth, we must stand firmly in its favor. However, having said that, even dying a martyr's death is a small price to pay for eternal life with God in the earth made new.

Philippians 3:8: Not only those things; I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it all as mere refuse, so that I may gain Christ....—*Good News Bible*.*

8. Review Isaiah 55:6-13. After the Babylonian captivity, were they happy to go "home"?
9. What is God implying by saying that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts? Surely, none of us would suggest that we are in some way on an equal plain with God. After all, He spoke the entire universe into existence. As we study things more carefully, we discover that even some of the simplest things—even the "simplest forms" of life—are complicated far beyond our ability to grasp. [See James Tour on www.youtube.com for more.]

10. But, this infinitely great and wonderful God who has all those powers chose to live with us.

Isaiah 57:15: "I am the high and holy God, who lives for ever. I live in a high and holy place, but I also live with people who are humble and repentant, so that I can restore their confidence and hope."—*Good News Bible*.*

11. He will live with us *if* we are humble. But, God does not intend to save us *in* our sins or *with* our sins; He intends to save us *from* our sins. And so, He challenges us to leave our wicked ways.

Isaiah 55:6-9: ⁶Turn to the LORD and pray to him,
now that he is near.

⁷Let the wicked leave their way of life

and **change their way of thinking**. [Compare Philippians 2:5-11.]

Let them turn to the LORD, our God;

he is merciful and quick to forgive.—*Good News Bible*.*†

12. Can we possibly comprehend the love that God has shown to the human race? And what He has done? And what He will do in the future on our behalf? But, there is more!

The theme of redemption is one that angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now? ...

The subject is inexhaustible. The study of the incarnation of Christ, His atoning sacrifice, and mediatorial work will employ the mind of the diligent student as long as time shall last; and looking to heaven with its unnumbered years, he will exclaim, "Great is the mystery of godliness."—Ellen G. White,

*My Life Today** 360.3-4.† Compare *Maranatha* 365.3-4.

But, we must never forget that the great controversy did not start here on planet earth. It is true that we got caught up in it very early in human existence; but, **the truth about God had to be demonstrated before the entire universe before the great controversy could be won. And God chose to win that battle here on this earth.**

The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. **Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth.** Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes....**

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of **the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God.** In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. **In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, “I have manifested thy name.” “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”** When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* January 20, 1890, par. 6,9.†

13. We like to focus on what God has done for us. While it is true that what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have done for us is of immeasurable value, the angels in heaven and the entire rest of the universe needed to see what Jesus demonstrated.

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. **The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God’s government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped.... **Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ’s life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* July 12, 1899, par. 2-3.† Compare *LHU* 257.2-3.

Christ died for sinless angels too.

That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more**

secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven.... The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* December 30, 1889, par. 4; *SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 5, 1132.8-9.† [Notice especially *eternal safeguard*.]‡ Compare TA 205.2-3; *Our High Calling* 45.4; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7a, 476.3.

14. Do we really want to be a part of God’s marvelous plan? Are we willing to give up all the hurtful things that damage us and make it hard for us to accept God’s plan for us? God has done everything possible to save us. What are we willing to do for Him?

Isaiah 58:1-8: ¹ The LORD says, “Shout as loud as you can! Tell my people Israel about their sins! ²They worship me every day, claiming that they are eager to know my ways and obey my laws. They say they want me to give them just laws and that they take pleasure in worshipping me.”

³ The people ask, “Why should we **fast** if the LORD never notices?

Why should we **go without food** if he pays no attention?”

The LORD says to them, “The truth is that at the same time as you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. ⁴Your fasting makes you violent, and you quarrel and fight. Do you think this kind of fasting will make me listen to your prayers? ⁵When you fast, you make yourselves suffer; you bow your heads low like a blade of grass, and spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. Is that what you call fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that?

⁶ **“The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. ⁷Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.**

⁸ “Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun, and your wounds will be quickly healed. I will always be with you to save you; my presence will protect you on every side.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

15. What is this *fast* referred to in Isaiah 58:3? A careful search through the Scriptures demonstrates that there is only one fast commanded by God in all of Scripture. See Leviticus 16:29,31; Leviticus 23:27-32.

This must be the fast of the Day of Atonement, the only fast commanded by God (*Lev. 16:29, 31; Lev. 23:27-32*). This is confirmed in Isaiah 58:3 by the parallel expression “humble ourselves” (*NRSV*), which follows the terminology of Leviticus. Humbling or afflicting oneself referred to various forms of self-denial, including fasting (*compare Ps. 35:13; Dan. 10:2, 3, 12*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, March 9. §

Leviticus 16:29,31: ²⁹ The following regulations are to be observed for all time to come. On the tenth day of the seventh month the Israelites and the foreigners living among them must **fast** and must not do any work.... ³¹That day is to be a very holy day, one on which they fast and do no work at all. These regulations are to be observed for all time to come.—*Good News Bible*.*†

Comment regarding **Leviticus 16:29: A statute for ever. The Day of Atonement was the only fast day of the year, and was called “the fast” (Acts 27:9). Other fasts added later were not required or approved by God (Isa. 58:3–7; Zech. 7:3–10). In the time of Christ there were 29 fasts in addition to 2 weekly fast days.**

Afflict your souls. This was more than fasting. It included soul searching, a review of one’s progress in holy living, a seeking of God, confession of sin, making amends for neglected duties, squaring accounts with God and men, thus redeeming the time.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,* vol. 1, 778–779. Review and Herald Publishing Association.†

16. When we recognize that Isaiah was talking about the Day of Atonement, we see why he said, “Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (Isaiah 58:1, *NRSV**) This *trumpet* refers to the *shofar* or ram’s horn trumpet blown on the first day of the seventh month, calling the people to the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement.
17. On one very special year—the 50th year—a second *shofar* announcement was made on the 10th day of the seventh month, recognizing that that entire year was set aside.
Leviticus 23:23-24: ^{23–24} On the first day of the seventh month observe a special day of rest, and come together for worship when the trumpets sound.—*Good News Bible*.*
- Leviticus 25:9-10:** ⁹Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, send someone to blow a trumpet throughout the whole land. ¹⁰**In this way you shall set the fiftieth year apart and proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land.** During this year all property that has been sold shall be restored to the original owner or his descendants, and anyone who has been sold as a slave shall return to his family.—*Good News Bible*.*†
18. While there was only one fast commanded by God in all of the Bible, there were multiple other fasts practiced by the children of Israel at different times. So, what was the fast described in Isaiah 58:3-7? What is it that God wanted in place of their “fast”? Justice!
19. What kind of injustices might we be guilty of in our day? Is God calling for us to correct our injustices today? A careful look at Isaiah 58 seems to suggest that the people were expecting the Lord to congratulate them for their “piety.” Of course, that was a complete contradiction to what they were supposed to be doing on the Day of Atonement. They were supposed to humble themselves to practice self-denial, expressing their gratitude and loyalty to Him for the forgiveness that He had given them for the sins committed during the entire previous year. On the Day of Atonement, there was that extensive ceremony for removing sins from the tabernacle and separating them from God’s people forever.
20. Do we recognize similar problems in our day? Are we able to distinguish between merely being religious and being a true follower of Christ? Are we willing to forsake all of our injustices? Or, do we believe that merely following religious rituals will bring us salvation?
21. Review Isaiah 58:1-12. Apparently, Isaiah was making a point on the very day when the Day of Atonement was supposed to be celebrated. This is implied by his saying: “Shout as loud as you can! Tell my people Israel about their sins!” (Isaiah 58:1, *GNB**) That was the message that announced the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement.
22. **Once again, Isaiah talked about what really matters in the life of God’s followers. Is it a religious ritual? Or, does it mean completely changing the way we live?**

23. Carrying on religious practices has been done in many ways by many peoples down through history. Even if we have the right rituals at the right time with all the right formulas, it does not make us true followers of Christ. In order to be true followers of Christ, we must be willing to follow His life and example as closely as possible.
24. **The life and death of Jesus Christ give us a choice: We can live, as far as possible with the Holy Spirit's help, like Jesus lived; or, we will die separated from God, resulting in that awful second death the way Jesus died. God is asking us to preach and to practice the example of Jesus to all around us.**
25. In Isaiah 58, God through Isaiah made some startling promises. Do you think this implies that God intends to bless us by supernatural acts? Or, that we will naturally be blessed when we are kind to others and stop being selfish, greedy, and self-absorbed?
26. Having discussed the Day of Atonement and its implications at some length, why did Isaiah turn suddenly in Isaiah 58:13-14 to talking about the Sabbath?
- Isaiah 58:13-14:** ¹³ The LORD says, "If you treat the Sabbath as sacred and do not pursue your own interests on that day; if you value my holy day and honour it by not travelling, working, or talking idly on that day, ¹⁴then you will find the joy that comes from serving me. I will make you honoured all over the world, and you will enjoy the land I gave to your ancestor, Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken."—*Good News Bible*.*
27. We need to remember that the word *sabbath* means rest; so, the yearly Day of Atonement was a sabbath day. And on that yearly sabbath, the Jews were supposed to set aside their normal work just as they were expected to do during the weekly Sabbath. Another reason for believing that these two Sabbaths were to be treated similarly is Leviticus 23:32: "From sunset on the ninth day of the month to sunset on the tenth observe this day as a special day of rest, during which nothing may be eaten."—*Good News Bible*.*
28. This is another example of the fact that God gave us our days, beginning at sunset and continuing to the following sunset. Sunset and sunrise are the only points in time precisely definable without advanced tools.
29. So, having read Isaiah 58:13, what is supposed to happen on Sabbath? Do we make our Sabbath like what we read in Isaiah 58:13-14? Are our Sabbaths marked by self-denial and social kindness? What are the relationships among self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath? All three do involve concentration on God, His priorities, and recognition of our dependence upon Them. If we do as God directs on those days, we will be pursuing our goal of being more like Jesus. (Compare Leviticus 19:2.)
- Look at these other ties between the themes of self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath as depicted in Isaiah 58: Sabbath freedom from weekly toil is kind to people because it lets them be refreshed (*Exod. 23:12, Mark 2:27*); Jesus showed that kind acts are appropriate on the Sabbath (*Mark 3:1-5, John 5:1-17*); true Sabbath keeping brings joy (*Isa. 58:14*), as does helping others (*Isa. 58:10, 11*). What must change in your own life in order to experience these blessings yourself?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, March 11.[§]
30. It is clear that during His lifetime on this earth, Jesus went out of His way to show us what should happen on the Sabbath. His life was filled with deeds of kindness and loving service.
31. Whenever I read John 5:1-17, I notice a couple of interesting things. Verse 3b and verse 4 are not in the oldest manuscripts. But, the story does not seem to make sense if you do

not include the information in those two verses. It seems like relatively early in the transcription process, someone looked at the document from John and wrote those notes in the margin for the benefit of people who did not understand what was really happening at the pool of Bethzatha. Instead of leaving those notes in the margin, later copyists included them in the text. What does that say to us about the inspiration of Scripture?

32. The second thing that always amuses me is that when the Jewish authorities questioned the man about who had performed such a miracle, they certainly knew, without any question at all in their minds. Who was the only Person in Jerusalem who could perform such a miracle? But, they wanted the evidence to try to “nail” Jesus.

No one can practice real benevolence without self-denial. Only by a life of simplicity, self-denial, and close economy is it possible for us to accomplish the work appointed us as Christ’s representatives. **Pride and worldly ambition must be put out of our hearts.** In all our work the principle of unselfishness revealed in Christ’s life is to be carried out. Upon the walls of our homes, the pictures, the furnishings, we are to read, “Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house.” On our wardrobes we are to see written, as with the finger of God, “Clothe the naked.” In the dining room, on the table laden with abundant food, we should see traced, “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?” Isaiah 58:7.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 206.3.† [Doesn’t this mean that we are to share what we have?][‡]

33. If we apply the teachings of this lesson to our day, are we spending our money for that which is not bread and our labor for that which does not satisfy? (See Isaiah 55:2.) Aren’t self-denial, social kindness, and Sabbathkeeping just as important today as they were in Isaiah’s day? We need to remember that we are living in the end-time day of atonement, which began on October 22, 1844, and will continue until Jesus returns.
34. What does *Sabbathkeeping* mean to you? Do you think of a lot of legalistic rules? Or, do you look forward eagerly to the coming of the Sabbath each week and the rest, refreshing, and focus on God that it brings?

Isaiah 58:13-14: ¹³ “If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot

**From doing your own pleasure on My holy day,
And call the sabbath a delight,** the holy *day* of the LORD honorable,
And honor it, **desisting from your own ways,
From seeking your own pleasure
And speaking your own word,**

¹⁴**Then you will take delight in the LORD.**”—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update.* (1995)* (Isaiah 58:13-14). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.^{†§} [The italic type is present in the Bible version cited.][‡]

35. How can you turn away your foot from your own pleasure on God’s holy day but at the same time call the Sabbath a delight? Is that not a contradiction?
36. Would you accept the statement that what God wants for us is the happiest possible lives? Are we willing to follow His will in order to experience that kind of life?
37. Isaiah 55 is unique in Scripture. There is no question about the fact that it suggests that salvation is a free gift; forgiveness is a free gift; God’s love is a free gift; God’s mercy and grace are free gifts. So, how should we respond to God’s free gifts?
38. Why is it that so few people are experiencing this kind of loving acceptance? Isaiah 55 tells us that it is offered freely; but, we need to buy without money and without price. But, we must respond. We must decide that that is what we really want. In Isaiah 55:3, we see a

very clear Hebrew parallelism.

A. “Incline your ear,

B. and come unto me:

A’. hear,

B’. and your soul shall live.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 146.

39. The Hebrew word used in the expression, *your soul shall live*, seems to suggest “coming alive again or to revive.” Do we accept that the only way to find true life as a nation or as an individual is by hearing God’s invitation and going to Him? In Isaiah 55:6-13, we find that idea somewhat reinforced.

Isaiah 55:6: Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near.—*New Revised Standard Version*.*

40. The word *seek* in this verse in the Hebrew is a command. It implies consulting with God, inquiring, seeking guidance of, or seeking with care. That was supposed to be the experience of Israel right through their entire existence. But, sadly it was not.

41. Seeking the Lord is also an individual experience. Way back when Rebecca felt the twins fighting each other in her womb, she sought the Lord. There are two ways in which we can fail truly to seek the Lord. One is to seek for other sources of meaning and worth in our lives besides *Yahweh*. The other is to seek Him with ritual or in ways which are not meaningful.

42. In the days of Isaiah, the northern kingdom of Israel had departed so far from God’s plan for them that He was forced to allow them to be overrun and sent into exile by the Assyrians, never to be heard from again. But, the southern kingdom of Judah was rapidly following in their footsteps. Finally, Isaiah said in Isaiah 59:2 (*NKJV**) : “But your iniquities have separated you from your God.”

43. Sin is the great separator. It separates us from God, tearing us away from the Source of life.

44. The only way to experience true life is to return unto the Lord. He will have mercy. He will abundantly pardon. He will accept us.

45. So, what has been your experience in the study of God’s Word?

Can you believe that when the poor sinner longs to return, longs to forsake his sins, the Lord sternly withholds him from coming to His feet in repentance? Away with such thoughts! Nothing can hurt your own soul more than to entertain such a conception of our heavenly Father. **He hates sin, but He loves the sinner, and He gave Himself in the person of Christ, that all who would might be saved and have eternal blessedness in the kingdom of glory.** What stronger or more tender language could have been employed than He has chosen in which to express His love toward us? He declares, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” Isaiah 49:15.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 54.2.†

46. Have you experienced that kind of relationship with God in your own life?

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Last Modified: January 24, 2021

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