

Sharing Love



SABBATH—JUNE 5

LOVE NEVER FAILS. A Jewish cantor (worship leader) and his wife in the United States began receiving threatening and obscene (dirty) phone calls. They discovered that the calls came from a leader of an American hate group, the Ku Klux Klan. They knew this leader and could have reported him to the police. But they decided to try a different method. They learned he was crippled, so they showed up at his door with a chicken dinner! He was greatly surprised. His hatred for them melted because of their kindness. The couple kept visiting him. They became friends. He even thought of becoming Jewish!

“The kind of fasting¹ I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression [injustice] and the yoke [burden] of injustice, and let the oppressed [people who suffer] go free. Share your food with the hungry [people]. . . .” (Isaiah 58:6, 7, TEV). The Jewish couple were fasting the way God wants us to fast when they shared their food with a hungry oppressor.² In this way, they set him free from his own chains of unjust (unfair) prejudice!³

This week, let us learn more from Isaiah about what true fasting really is.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: What did salvation cost? Why was God unhappy with His people’s worship? How does God expect us to treat poor people? What is true religion all about? What are the blessings that come to people who give of themselves for other people?

MEMORY VERSE: “If you give food to the hungry [people] and satisfy those [people] who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon” (Isaiah 58:10, TEV).

¹fasting—refusing to eat, sometimes for religious reasons. In Isaiah 58:6, 7, we learn what true fasting is.

²oppressor—a person who makes other people suffer.

³prejudice—hating people because of their skin color, religion, or sex; not liking people because they are different from you.

SUNDAY—JUNE 6

**BUY SOMETHING FOR FREE
(Isaiah 55:1-7)?****What is strange about Isaiah 55:1?**

Isaiah asks people to accept forgiveness freely (Isaiah 55:7). Yet the word *buy* shows that what God offers people to meet their needs and desires is very important. Receiving forgiveness requires a transaction (business deal) involving something of worth. God freely offers forgiveness as part of a restored⁴ covenant⁵ with His people. But forgiveness was not free for Him.

**What did forgiveness cost God?
1 Peter 1:18, 19.**

How is Isaiah's way of salvation the same as the New Testament's way of salvation? Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Isaiah summarizes salvation in the Old Testament. It is the same as salvation in the New Testament. There was no "new covenant" of salvation by grace to replace an "old covenant" of salvation by works. God promised Adam and Eve a Savior (Genesis 3:15). Ever since, there has been only one way to salvation: by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). "The free gift of God is eternal⁶ life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Roman 6:23). People have tried all different ways to find salvation. But all ways are fruitless (useless). This is why people need to know about what Jesus has done for them at the Cross.

Salvation is free because there is nothing we can do to earn salvation. Our works can never be good enough to save us, but salvation can cost us everything. What can salvation cost us? Luke 14:26; Luke 9:23; Matthew 10:39; Philippians 3:8.

MONDAY—JUNE 7

**HIGH THOUGHTS AND WAYS
(Isaiah 55:6-13).**

Why does God say that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours? (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Even simple things in God's creation are hard for us to understand. All of His ways are mysteries to us. The knowl-

⁴restored—to make something as it was in the beginning.

⁵covenant—an agreement between God and His people.

⁶eternal—without beginning or end; lasting forever.

edge that God is far greater than we are should make it easier for us to humbly receive His help. Read Isaiah 57:15.

What is the greatest of all God's mysteries? Isaiah 55:6-9.

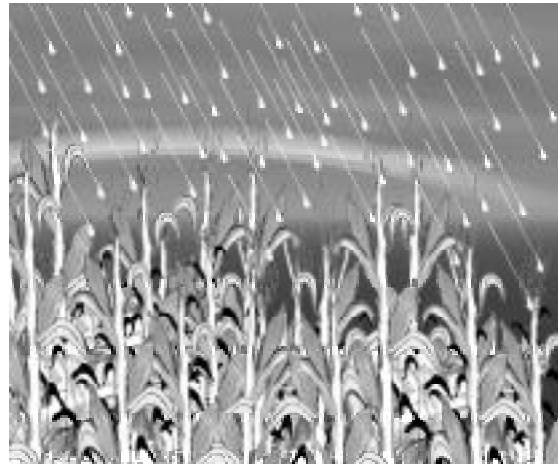
The greatest of all God's mysteries is the plan of salvation (Ephesians 6:19). It is a mystery that the Creator of the universe became a human. It is a mystery that He would work hard and suffer. Then He would die for our sake as a sacrifice for sin! It is a mystery that by doing all this, He could forgive us. This is an eternal truth that thrills the hearts of God's people.

"The theme of salvation is a theme that angels want to study. Salvation will be the science and the song of saved people throughout eternity.⁷ Salvation also is something we should study now.

"The subject of salvation is never tiresome. The study of Jesus as man, His sacrifice for us, and His work as High Priest in heaven will keep a serious Bible student busy for as long as time shall last. Looking to eternity, the student will say, 'Great is the mystery of salvation.'"—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 360.

Think about the bad things you have done and the people you have hurt. What unkind words have you spoken? How have you disappointed other people and yourself? Jesus can

forgive all these things. And you can stand right now perfect and righteous (holy) in God's sight. Salvation is the greatest mystery!



“ ‘My word is like the snow and the rain. . . . They make the crops grow. So also will be the word that I speak’ ”
(Isaiah 55:10, 11, TEV).

TUESDAY—JUNE 8

FAST FRIENDS (Isaiah 58:1-8).

What does the “fast”⁸ mean in Isaiah 58:3?

This must be the fast of the yearly Day of Atonement.⁹ The Day of Atonement was the only fast God commanded (read Leviticus 16:29, 31; Leviticus 23:27-32). Isaiah supports this in Isaiah 56:3 by using the words “humble ourselves.” Hum-

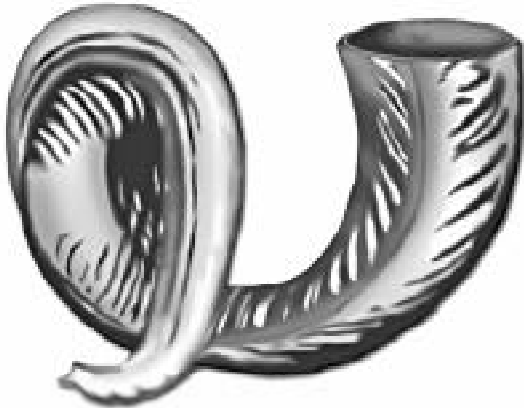
⁷eternity—life without end; forever.

⁸fast—a time of not eating, often for religious reasons.

⁹Day of Atonement—a yearly ceremony when the earthly sanctuary was cleansed. The ceremony symbolized cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

bling ourselves means denying ourselves. Denying ourselves includes fasting (Psalm 35:13; Daniel 10:1-3, 12).

The Day of Atonement setting in Isaiah 58 explains God's command to "Lift up your voice like a trumpet!" (Isaiah 58:1). The ram's horn trumpet is called a *shofar*. It was to be blown as a reminder ten days before the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:24). Every 50th year, on the Day of Atonement, blowing the trumpet announced the beginning of the jubilee year of freedom (Leviticus 25:9, 10; Isaiah 27:13).



A shofar.

What is the Lord complaining about in Isaiah 58:3-7? What was wrong with the people's fast?

The people were expecting God to praise them for their fasting on the Day of Atonement. But their fasting was really supposed to show their praise to a God who could cleanse them from sin. They were to praise God on the day that the high priest went before God to cleanse the sanctuary and to cleanse them from sins. These sins were the sins that had

already been forgiven (Leviticus 4; Leviticus 16). Their fasting was to show thankfulness and appreciation to the God who saved them in the day of judgment. It was the sins of the people that had made God's sanctuary dirty. The sanctuary had to be cleansed with blood that was shed because of the sins they had done.

Isaiah 58:1-8 shows the difference between religion and being a true follower of Jesus. Describe that difference in your own words. The people of Israel believed that their religious services showed they were really following God. How might we be tempted to believe that our religious services show that we really are following God?



This is the kind of fasting God wants us to do!

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 9

FAST FIGHT (Isaiah 58:1-12).

Ten days have passed after the trumpet reminded God's people that God is their King. But on the very Day of Atonement the people still are proud to think that fasting shows their loyalty to their

King. Then Isaiah lifts up his voice like a trumpet to declare they are really rebelling against Him (Isaiah 58:1).

What acts does God say are true acts of denying ourselves? Isaiah 58:6-12. Is it harder to skip a few meals, or to use your own time and money to feed homeless people? Explain your answer. Why are the acts in Isaiah 58:6-12 true religion?

Anyone can take part in religious services. But taking part in religious services is not all God wants. Jesus was faithful to the religious services of His time. But the New Testament writers wrote much more about His acts of kindness, healing, feeding, and forgiving people in need than they wrote about His attendance at religious services.

God looks for a group of people who will preach truth to the world. But what will people pay more attention to: following strict diets, or a willingness to help hungry people; strict rest on the Sabbath, or a willingness to spend your own time and energy helping people who are in need?

What do James 1:27 and Matthew 25:40 tell us about true religion?

Think about the blessings in Isaiah 58 that will come to people who try to minister to (help) people who need help. Are these blessings God's actions in our lives if we do these things? Or is God telling us of the natural blessings we receive when we help people? Explain your answer.

THURSDAY—JUNE 10

A TIME FOR US (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

Why does Isaiah discuss the weekly Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13, 14? What connection does the Sabbath have with the Day of Atonement in Isaiah 58:1-12?

Isaiah 58 is about the yearly Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was a Sabbath day. So what Isaiah 58 tells us about the Day of Atonement is also true for the weekly Sabbath. No work was allowed on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-32). No work was allowed on the weekly Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11). Early Seventh-day Adventists recognized that the period of rest for the Day of Atonement was from evening to evening (Leviticus 23:32). So the period of rest on the weekly Sabbath day must also be from evening to evening. In the same way, what Isaiah 58:13, 14 teaches us about the Day of Atonement is true of the weekly Sabbath.

What kind of day is the Sabbath supposed to be? Isaiah 58:13. How can we make our Sabbath experience like the one shown in Isaiah 58:13, 14? When you think about what the Sabbath means, why should it be the kind of day described in these verses?

Isaiah 58 deals with three main themes: (1) denying ourselves, (2) social kindness, and (3) the Sabbath. What connects these three themes?

First, all three themes involve our devotion to God and His work, and our dependence upon Him. Second, by doing all three themes we learn to be holy by doing the things Jesus did while He was on earth (Leviticus 19:2). Through Jesus, God humbled Himself (Philippians 2:8). God, too, shows kindness through self-denial (John 3:16). And He rested from labor on the Sabbath at the end of the Creation week (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11).

Other connections between the themes of denying self, social kindness, and the Sabbath, are: Sabbath freedom from weekly work is kind to people because it gives them rest (Mark 2:27; Exodus 23:12). Jesus showed that kind acts are proper on Sabbath (Mark 3:1-5; John 5:1-17). True Sabbath keeping brings joy (Isaiah 58:14). Helping other people also brings joy (Isaiah 58:10, 11). What must you do to change your own life so you can experience this joy?

FRIDAY—JUNE 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “No one can show the true religious spirit without denying self. Only by leading a simple life, denying self, and handling money carefully, can we succeed in doing Jesus’ work.

“Pride and worldly ambition must be put out of our hearts. In all our work, we need to be unselfish as Jesus was unselfish. Live simply so you can share your homes with poor people, give clothes to people who have no clothes,

¹⁰mercifully—with kindness we do not deserve.

¹¹merciful—to be full of mercy. Mercy is kindness we do not deserve.

and food to people who have no food.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*, p. 206.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at the question Isaiah asked the people of his time: “Why spend money on what does not satisfy? Why spend your wages [money] and still be hungry?” (Isaiah 55:2, TEV). How are we spending money on things that do not satisfy? Why is it so easy to spend money on things that do not help us draw close to Jesus?
2. Denying self, social kindness, and the Sabbath were important on the Day of Atonement. How are they just as important in the end-time day of atonement (Daniel 8:14)?
3. What do you think Isaiah means when he wrote we should turn away from doing our own pleasure on the Sabbath? How can we call the Sabbath a “delight” if we cannot do our own pleasure on the Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13)? As you answer, remember the main message of Isaiah 58.

SUMMARY: In Isaiah 55 and 58, Isaiah encourages his people to give up their thoughts and ways and return to God. God’s plan for their happiness is so much higher than their own plan. He mercifully¹⁰ forgives their sins and then requires them to be merciful.¹¹ This is in keeping with the Day of Atonement and the Sabbath. Why? The gift of God’s forgiveness completely changes the heart if the person truly receives God’s forgiveness.