

Grace and peace to you from God the Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.  
Whatever things were written before were written for our learning. That  
Scripture which forms the basis for our patience and comfort today comes  
from

**Isaiah 65:1–9 (NKJV)**

- 1 “I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ To a nation that was not called by My name.*
- 2 I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way that is not good, According to their own thoughts;*
- 3 A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; Who sacrifice in gardens, And burn incense on altars of brick;*
- 4 Who sit among the graves, And spend the night in the tombs; Who eat swine’s flesh, And the broth of abominable things is in their vessels;*
- 5 Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, Do not come near me, For I am holier than you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.*
- 6 “Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will repay— Even repay into their bosom—*
- 7 Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together,” Says the Lord, “Who have burned incense on the mountains And blasphemed Me on the hills; Therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom.”*
- 8 Thus says the Lord: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, And one says, ‘Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,’ So will I do for My servants’ sake, That I may not destroy them all.*
- 9 I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, And from Judah an heir of My mountains; My elect shall inherit it, And My servants shall dwell there.*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

**A Blessing is In It**

1. God Stretches Out His Hand Back Then
2. God Stretches Out His Hand Today

**PRAY: Dear Heavenly Father, speak to us as to Your dear children. Remember us for the sake of Your Son and cause us to remember You by Your Spirit. Amen.**

In the name Jesus Your Savior, dear fellow redeemed,

Perhaps you’ve watched the Antiques Road Show on PBS. This show travels to different places and invites people to bring their supposedly antique belongings in for appraisal. After watching just one episode you will likely notice the importance of expertise. You’ll find one individual who brings in something that he paid \$200 for at an auction, only to find out it is a fake, worth 19.99. Another will bring in something

she got at a rummage sale only to find out it is worth hundreds of thousands dollars. You really need an expert to find the true value in antiquity.

God is an expert above all experts when it comes to assessing value. He keeps no waste, and He wastes no value. He views this creation, full of our waste, full of our sin, and stretches out His hand to see if there is anything of value within. He seeks something hidden, and precious – an antique which He placed there. He stretches out His hand in order to find a blessing in it.

## **1. God stretches out His hand back then**

This picture is framed within the kingdom of God in Old Testament Israel. We first look back to that kingdom as it was present among the nation of Israel to see God stretching out his hand back then.

“All day long,” He says. All day long He stretched out His hand to a rebellious people who walk according to their own thoughts. God looked out over a nation that He had called His own. He first stretched out His hand to Abraham with a promise that from his seed He would bring forth a great and prosperous nation. This nation would become God’s own through Abraham’s grandson, Israel. So those descendants of Israel are separated by God. He rules them. They carry the ark of the covenant along the promises that have been extended to them. They have been given that great promise, from them would come forth One to save them from their sins, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And so Isaiah addresses this people, some 7 centuries after Abraham, some 7 centuries before Christ. And what sort of people does he address? The children of Israel have become corrupt in their ways. They walk according to their own thoughts.

Time and time again God has stretched out His hand of grace. He saved them from the Egyptians. He preserved them through the wilderness journey. He granted them the promised land of Canaan driving out great and mighty nations. He continues to visit them with words of promise – as Isaiah has written: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

Literally, He says in our text – “I let Myself be sought by those who do not ask of me; I let Myself be found by those who do not seek Me.” “I am right here!” He says to a nation which does not call upon Him.

God stretches out His arm all day long, revealing His great plans to save, speaking both words of rebuke and works of hope.

The unbelief that has been spread among the nation of Israel is demonstrated in their actions. This includes several references in our text to pagan practices. They are

“sacrificing in the gardens and burning incense on altars of brick.” These actions were a complete rebellion against what God had prescribed in His covenant. God had directed His people to always worship him in connection with the hearing of His Word and the forgiveness that was symbolized in Temple sacrifice. Always God wanted His people to be drawn to those elements of His gracious presence which set Him apart from these generic gods – the proclaimed Word and symbols of the covenant. Yet the people were raising local altars where you can worship the god of your liking. They were partaking of the most unclean elements of worship – death (“among the tombs”) and unclean animals (“eating swine flesh”). These were the practices of the pagan nations. And now His people were doing such things – not in weakness, not in hidden guilt, but in boldness – “right to His face.”

In this rebellion, they have become lost in self-righteous works. They say, v.5, “keep away from me, for I am holier than you.” To put this into perspective, this is really no different than what is done today when people try to invent works to appease God. This is no different than us supposing that coming to this church or that style of worship makes us holier than others. This is no different than supposing that a good education or hard work or a committed financial plan will keep us separate from the troubles of this world or provide an answer to our sins. They were sacrificing to a god that does not exist, to a source of security that cannot protect them, to a savior that cannot comfort them.

The smoke has risen to God’s nostrils. In all these incense offerings they call themselves holy but God smells only hypocrisy. As with their fathers, so things have continued. They walk in a way that is not good.

And yet why are they not destroyed?

***8 Thus says the Lord: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, And one says, ‘Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,’ So will I do for My servants’ sake, That I may not destroy them all. 9 I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, And from Judah an heir of My mountains; My elect shall inherit it, And My servants shall dwell there.***

God is the expert above all experts in assessing value. He sees a blessing within. Even as the cluster of grapes has fermented and will produce good wine, so God says, do not destroy Israel. God stretches out His hand to find a blessing in it.

And for God, this value is not seen with the eyes. God sees this value as an expert sees an antique – a hidden value, something truly antique. This ancient treasure is contained in a promise that has been since time began. To Abraham this was spoken: “In Your Seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”

In the words of Isaiah: “He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground. He has no beauty that we should desire Him. He is a Man of

sorrows and we did not value Him.” The value can only be seen by an expert. God sees this value in the humble form of this Jesus of Nazareth, born a woman, born under the Law. As it says in our text, “I will bring forth from Jacob, a blessing.” God has found a blessing that will be to all nations. For He was bruised for our sins, He was wounded for our rebellion, and by His stripes we are forgiven.

## 2. He stretches out His hand today

Without Jesus you and I are no different from that people which Isaiah addresses. You don't need to go out back and build an altar to be caught in the sort of sins in which Israel had found themselves. It can be as simple as not thinking about the words we are praying or deciding to spend a late night out with friends when we know we are coming to church the next morning. It can be as tempting as looking at something we should not be looking at or touching something that we should not touch. It could be a self-righteous attitude that has invaded our hearts. Perhaps we start thinking because we are in church this morning that other sinners should keep away, that we are holier than them.

But God stretches out His hand of grace. Within the midst of a cluster gone bad, God finds a blessing. Even today, despite our sins and weaknesses – new wine is poured out in richest measure. This is the new wine of the new covenant which not only includes Jesus, but also includes all who believe in Him. The promise is given by God's immeasurable grace which overcomes our measurable works and multitude of sins.

A blessing is in it. From with the tribe of Jacob, God will bring forth a blessing. Even in Israel back then, God had preserved a people that truly were His own. There was a remnant that did truly believe and love Him. Paul writes in Romans, “They are not all Israel who are of Israel... Even so, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” And Isaiah himself writes: “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved.”

God sees this value not in terms of anything we've done, but only in terms of His Son, the truly righteous One. God has extinguished the false worship in our lives, and has kindled a new worship. To know and hear of Jesus is our assurance that God is well pleased with us. The blessing in it is that the good news of our Savior is being proclaimed today. The blessing in it is that God has put into your heart to know this undeserved love that chose you while you least deserved it and is preserving you when you deserve it even less. “If by grace, then it is no longer of works.”

You are the elect. Your baptism and the Word prove it. As it says in Ephesians 1, “You were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world ... In Him we have

redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” And Jesus’ words will not fail – “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”

As we view the sort of sadness that has struck the Cameron family, these words are ever true – a blessing is in it. In the midst of the most troubling of times, the most confusing of circumstances, as we fear the unknown, and are left with the unanswered – God assures us, “a blessing is in it.” The cluster of sin and death that has bound this world by the curse of Adam constrains itself, squeezes us who stand in its midst. Yet God works all things together to give Jeff the greatest of blessings – a place of eternal rest, a place of pure joy. And for those who are left behind – the same. Only by consulting the Expert of all experts can we see this right now for what it is. God sees the course of events from the moment Jeff passed to today, to the end of the world and is working to strengthen our bond in Christ, to work faith and hope in Him, to equip us for future witness and comfort, and to bring more souls to know and believe – a blessing is in it.

Through the worst of experiences, even through death itself, God overcomes and performs a blessing. “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus could not be held by the strains of death and sorrow, nor shall we.

And so we ever strive to find the true value of God’s blessing in every cluster of trouble we face. We turn away from these sins which lure us away and consult the expertise of the gospel. We seek those antique treasures which God has preserved in the ancient words of Scripture. We find the cross where alone our sins are forgiven and we stand in the empty tomb where eternal life is yours. Yes, a blessing is in it. Amen.