

The 13th Sunday After Pentecost, August 27, 2022

Rev. Gerald Luck

Text: Isaiah 51:4-6

Theme: Prevailing by Grace

Concept: God's righteousness will never wear out; by it we shall prevail.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Heavenly Father through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 1:2)

Isaiah 51:4-6

“Give attention to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, My nation; for a law will go out from Me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. My righteousness draws near, My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for Me, and for My arm they wait. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will never be dismayed.”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus our Lord. Friends: God's righteousness will never wear out, and by it we shall prevail as His holy people.

To understand this statement, perhaps, more effectively, we could step back a little bit and look at what scripture reveals in the words leading up to this text which is before us. Back in the previous chapters of this Old Testament book, the Isaiah was alluding to Israel's future captivity. Led by God's Spirit Isaiah said that Israel's disobedience would lead to the fall of that nation and that even the people of its capital, Jerusalem, would be enslaved - they'd be held captive in Babylon.

But when that captivity would finally be broken, the prophet continued, a remnant would return to Jerusalem blessed by God. Why just a remnant? Well, because during their captivity, many will have forfeited God holy and true light for the idolatrous lights of their captors.

And what might those idolatrous lights be? The very same lights that captivate this world today. Those who loved lawlessness would have continued on loving the lawlessness of their new neighbours - their captors. Those who loved themselves would have continued on loving themselves in and amongst their captors who loved themselves. And those who were struggling to keep the law by their own means would have continued to struggle to keep the law according to the means set before them in keeping with the worship practises of their captors, who believed in other gods.

In other words, their ways never changed. It was as good for them to stay in Babylon rather than to be uprooted by God's righteousness in keeping with His promises.

But such is the problem of the sinful heart. If you're in love with your sins, in love with yourself or in love with your own feeble works - you're either manufacturing or investing in a false light that can only lead to death.

God's Word clearly tells you that your faithfulness will never be enough to save you, your own body will fail, die and be buried in the ground and your sinfulness will destine your soul to hell. That's why, in the verses leading up to our sermon text, God says, "Who is among you that fears the LORD, That obeys the voice of His servant, That walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God." (Isaiah 50:10)

Our sermon text echoes that thought. There God says, "Give attention to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, My nation; for a law will go out from Me, and I will set My justice for a light to the peoples."

I think we all need to marvel for a moment at these words. We need to marvel, because the complete righteousness of God is being set before us as a fine banquet upon which we can truly feast. For the One promised to lead us out of captivity isn't Cyrus the Great who would lead the remnant of God's people out of Babylon as God promised Israel, but rather Jesus, the Christ, whom God appointed to redeem us from everything that enslaves.

It's His holiness that precedes Him. He is both the perfect Judge of this world and its Redeemer. Jesus is the One who knows the sinfulness of every heart and the solution to that sinfulness. He knows the cross that He alone can bear for our sake. Read the next sentence in our sermon text and you'll see His involvement in our salvation:

It's our Saviour's righteousness that draws Him near to us. It's His salvation that goes out to us from that cross. It's His arms that carry us across that sin filled chasm to bring about our acquittal before God. And it's His arms which carry us

over from death to life. None of these great things being done here are of us. We are weak and unable even to raise our eyes before God because of our sinfulness, but He who is strong grants them to us of His own free will.

In that sense we're just as well off as Abraham, that wandering Aramean whom God chose out of obscurity and who, in ignorance worshipped the gods of his fathers. He too was a sinner, but God chose him to be the father of all nations. Abraham was for all intents and purposes dead - he was advanced in his years. And Sarah was barren, but God opened up, Sarah's womb and granted her a child, and not just Sarah. God did the same for Rebecca and Rachel and granted them each a son too, to increase that nation. And, through them - through their offspring - Jesus would be named.

The Apostle Paul said "Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead," in Ephesians 5:14)

Each one of us who are sinners and each one of us who have been sucked into living like those of this world, who have been blessed by God to know His redemption, can now arise, trusting in Christ's forgiveness and return to God's holy house in freedom.

Each one of us who were, at one time, living for ourselves, who have been blessed by Christ's selflessness can now arise, trusting in the humility of Christ, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Cf. Philippians 2:6-8)

We can arise, trusting in Christ, who when speaking about our exile from God and our bondage to sin said, "It is finished," upon the cross. He arose to life eternal and so can we! We no longer have to look to ourselves for salvation.

We don't have to look to anything else in this world or make any kind of light to guide our way through the darkness, because nothing else will save us, except Christ, as our sermon text so clearly explains: "The heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but God's salvation will be forever, and His righteousness will never be dismayed."

This righteousness is yours by the grace of God, Prevail by that grace, my dear Friends. God's grace will never wear out,

in Jesus' Name,

Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen (Philippians 4:7)