

ISAIAH 51:1-6

LOOKING BACK AT SALVATION

This text is addressed to those who pursue righteousness, and to those who seek the Lord. Since you're here today in the Lord's house I would assume that you're seeking the Lord and pursuing righteousness. Thus this text is addressed to you, as it was addressed to those whom Isaiah wrote to long ago. And the first message to you is that you should look to your history, look to where you come from. Does he mean that you should study your ancestry such as if your family came from Germany or England, or if your ancestors were shoe cobblers or bakers?

No, he means that we are to look to the history of our faith. He starts with Abraham and Sarah, the old couple whom the people of Israel came from, but then later on he goes back further to the Garden of Eden, and so that's where we'll begin our reflection on where we came from.

We begin our journey through God's plan of salvation at the beginning of all things. In Genesis chapter 1, the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, we get a picture of God creating our world. He started with the world and moved on to the stars, and finally to people. He did this solely by His Word, and as He spoke, things came into being. At the pinnacle of creation, God made the first man. God formed him out of the dust of the earth, much like a potter forming a clay pot, and then He breathed life into him. Humans were special, very good, as opposed to just good. They were formed in God's image, and they were formed to serve God, take care of God's creation, love it and cherish it.

Yet, this perfect creation didn't last. It was the Garden of Eden with joy and gladness, yet it would be turned into waste places, wilderness and desert lands as our reading describes it. Yet, take comfort, God plans on returning it to a land of thanksgiving and song. It had two special trees. One was the tree of life, and the other was the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Satan, one of those angels who were there when God laid Jesus as the cornerstone of our salvation, he rebelled against God. He sought to destroy God's perfect creation. He tempted Eve to join him in his rebellion against God. It started with doubting God, "Did God really say?". And it proceeded to disobeying God by eating of the forbidden fruit, by both Eve and Adam. They doubted God's Word. They doubted God's love, and they sought to go their own way, away from God. Their one act of rebellion against God now infects all things. Through their sin pain, decay and death came to all creation.

God then promised that one day an offspring of Adam and Eve would crush Satan. The damage that he inflicted upon this world would be reversed, and there would be thanksgiving and songs of joy again. God promised to

make all things new – humanity and creation – despite our continuous rebellion against Him. In Jesus Christ, the seed of Eve, this promise would be fulfilled, when He would die on the cross to pay the penalty for our rebellions against God and restore us to a righteous relationship with God.

Yet, Isaiah says that we still need to look back to Abraham and Sarah before we get to Jesus, and so let's turn to them now. God called Abram to leave his fatherland in Mesopotamia and travel with his wife, Sarai, to a land that God would reveal to him. Along the way God made four great promises to Abram: to make Abram the father of a great nation; to make Abram's name, his reputation, great; to bless those who bless Abram and to curse those who curse him; and to bless all the families of the earth through him. The Bible uses a term when referring to all the families of the earth, and not just the Israelites, and it appears in our reading – that is the coastlands. There again you're in our reading, you who hope for the Lord.

And this blessing of all the people of the earth is all over our reading. The arm of the Lord that the people wait for is a reference to Jesus. The Light to the peoples is a reference to Jesus. Jesus would come from the descendants of Abram, whose name God changed to Abraham, which means father of many nations. When Abraham was one hundred and Sarah was ninety they had a son and they named him Isaac, which means laughter, because they both laughed at God's promise of a child.

Most of us would likely laugh at God if He told us that we would have children next year. It's often hard to believe what God says. We don't trust His promises, and we don't like doing what He tells us to do. I know I annoy most people when I drive the speed limit on the highway, and people resent being told when they're breaking laws, bylaws, rules or regulations. We want to do what we want to do and we trust mostly in ourselves, and not in other people, and not too often in God. How would you do with trusting God with the order that He gave to Abraham?

I'm not talking about when God told Abram to move or that he would have a son, but when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son. Human sacrifice. Burn your son. Abraham didn't go through with it, but he started to, and then God stopped him. If God told you to do something horrific or ridiculous could you go through with it, or even start doing it? How much do you trust God? This is what Isaiah is telling us who seek the Lord to look back to. How much faith do we have in God?

It takes a lot of faith to believe what comes next, but this is the foundation of the Christian faith. As Abraham is about to kill his son Isaac with a knife, an angel stopped him and said, "Now I know that you fear God." 'Really, God, does it take me almost killing my son to prove my trust in You?' God already knew of Abraham's faith, and so was this to assure Abraham of

his own faith. Do the trials in your life assure you of your own faith, or lead you to trust more in God?

Well, when Abraham was stopped by the angel he saw “a ram caught in a thicket by his horns” and he sacrificed him instead of his son. Isn’t that wording striking. His horns, not it’s horns. This substitute sacrifice is seen by many to be a foreshadowing of Jesus and the crown of thorns on His head when He was sacrificed for us, for our salvation.

Our reading starts off by addressing those of us who pursue righteousness, and then it twice it pairs righteousness with salvation. This is addressed to us who are looking for salvation, and it’s telling us that salvation will come from Jesus. Look back to Abraham and you’ll see God’s plan of salvation in the almost sacrifice of his son Isaac, and the substitute of the ram. You’ll see that pointing to the sacrifice of God’s Son Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World – Jesus substituted for us.

Look back to the garden of Eden after the fall into sin and you’ll see God’s promise of salvation as God said to Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15). That offspring of Eve would be Jesus.

That’s not anything that people back then or today believe by their own effort. ‘How does someone dying pay for my sins and grant me eternal life?’ ‘Jesus, a man born of Mary is the Son of God? How does that work?’ Do you believe it? Look at our reading. It’s not about what Abraham did or believed; it’s about what God did. God called him. God blessed him. God multiplied him. God comforts us by bringing back joy and gladness. God sends out His Arm, His Son Jesus to us who hope in Him. God sends out His Light, His Son Jesus to all people.

On the cross while the people mocked Jesus and said, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:35, 34). We may be drawn to thinking about us forgiving, or asking God to forgive our enemies at this point, but what about asking God to forgive us for our sins against God for we know not what we do? It’s us for whom Jesus suffered and died. It’s His forgiveness that we ask for and receive every Sunday.

Every Sunday we’re told the most unbelievable things such as that Jesus rose from the dead. How could you possibly believe that? You believe because by looking back over the history of Your faith you see God’s promises coming true. You see that the Holy Spirit has given you faith as you look back to your baptism from which you were raised up. You see that this Word of God that you hear nurtures your God given faith. Amen.