

## Anxious/Parched Souls are Comforted/Quenched

16<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 09/08/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 35:4-7a Pastor Keith Besel

v. 4, (a literal translation) **“Say to those having a hasty, dismayed heart, “Be strengthened; do not fear! Look, Your God! He comes with vengeance; with the reprisal of God. He comes to save you.”**”

### **Introduction**

✘ How many of you might be just a bit anxious or concerned about things in our world today? With the never-ending conflict over in the middle east and between Russia and Ukraine; with the political climate in our country that is basically split in half, causing not just simple disagreements but outright hostility and hatred among neighbors; with the many things that everyone faces in our personal lives – relationship struggles, health concerns, financial woes galore, this is one text, my dear friends, to which I’m confident we can all relate.

→ “What happens,” for example, “if he/she becomes president? What if that war escalates into a world war? How are we going to pay for our mortgage – or even our groceries this month? What am I to say or think when my friends/family challenge what the Bible says?”

✘ The specific reasons for concern may be different, but having what Isaiah calls an “anxious heart” is nothing new for our generation. Twenty years before Isaiah recorded the words of our text today, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the mighty Assyrian army. Now they are threatening to destroy those in the Southern Kingdom of Israel; in Judah as well.

→ We can understand why they might have anxious – even panic-stricken hearts, considering all the calamity they’ve already experienced and their apprehension over what unknown tragedy might be ahead.

✘ The Hebrew word that is translated as “anxious” is מָהָר (mahar) which literally means “hasty, rash, terrified and dismayed”. The “hasty” part of that word connects to the fact that they are likely quite anxious for God to act in haste on their behalf; to get back at those people who have harmed them, or are threatening to destroy them. In their impatient hearts they think God is taking too long; that He should just plain hurry up and pulverize their enemies!

→ But what they are likely missing is the fact that they actually deserved the trouble and destruction that they received. It was the just punishment that God warned would come because of all their idolatry and other sins against Him.

✘ Nevertheless, Isaiah still prophesied the destruction of their enemies even before they would come in the form of the Babylonian armies in 597 BC; before Nebuchadnezzar would utterly destroy Jerusalem, the Temple and take them away as slaves.

→ Though things might have looked on the outside like God’s kingdom had been destroyed beyond repair, neither His kingdom nor His promises were even slightly at risk. For His is a Kingdom that is eternal; a kingdom that stands firm against all powers, principalities and evils here in this world and in all of the universe. Yes, Isaiah’s promise to God’s people is God’s own promise to His people in each and every generation; the promise that He “comes to save you!” (v.4)

### **I. The Promise: “Be strong; Do not fear!”**

✘ The “terrified” and “anxious” hearts that you and I deal with; that the people in Isaiah’s day had, should be comforted by God’s encouragement for us all to “be strong” and “do not fear!” (v.4)

→ Yay, sure Lord! But you don't seem to know what we're facing right now. Those armies are very real with real armor; real bombs. That evil against our faith; trying to restrict our freedom to believe and teach Your Word; the threats of punishment – even jail time if we will not bow to the cultural pressures, telling us to change God's teachings on marriage or gender issues or about an unborn baby's right to life – those threats are real! Just look at the people who have died in other parts of the world because of their Christian faith. "How can you say, 'Be strong;' 'Do not fear'?"

✘ But Yahweh, our God, does know what we are facing. He knew what His people had to endure in Isaiah's day. And so He promised them, as well as you and me that He is our God; that despite the anxiety that Satan is using to try and tempt you to doubt and give up on God right now, His promise will not fail! He is coming with vengeance against His and His people's enemies (v. 4).

→ That term "vengeance" in the Hebrew is נָקָם (nakam). It is a word that speaks specifically about the justly deserved punishment against all who oppose God; all who have fought against Him by doing harm to His people and His kingdom. This is the judgement-aspect of God's work that cannot rightly allow evil that is done against His perfect Law; against His will to go unpunished. 2 Thessalonians 1:6 says, "...indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict" His people.

→ Look, God has already displayed His vengeance throughout history, bringing both the Assyrians and the Babylonians to justice for the evil they exacted upon His people.

→ In fact every other kingdom has eventually fallen over time except for the kingdom that Jesus founded; the kingdom of which you are a part. His kingdom still stands, just as God promised in Daniel 2:44 saying, "[I] will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. ...it shall stand forever."

✘ Yes, God's kingdom stands because Jesus came to destroy our greatest of all enemies: the devil. 1 John 3:8 says that very thing, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." We see Jesus do that in our Gospel today when He runs Satan's demon out from within the Syrophenician's daughter (Mk. 7:29). We see it when He conquered the devil in the wilderness after His baptism (Mt. 4:1–11). And we see it once and for all when Jesus crushed Satan's head as He died on the cross for all mankind (Gen. 3:15); as He rose on the third day in victory over sin, death, and the devil!

→ And we see Jesus' victory over the physical results of sin and Satan even as we remain here in this world and await His return. It is only by the power of Christ that we see things like sickness and disease healed and cured here in this life; when He guides us to new technologies that make it possible for someone who is deaf, like Scott, to be able to have a cochlear implant and hear, or someone like Richard and Greg who were in the ICU on life-support, to be able to be made strong enough again to walk and function as they do.

✘ God blesses us with these "smaller" victories, dear believers, so that all who are a part of Christ's kingdom can now be confident in His promises and power that strengthens us for our long-term future ahead; so that we are not afraid or impatient with God.

→ You see, His promise has two parts; not only vengeance against His enemies, but also that He will bring His "recompense" when He comes as well. The Hebrew word translated as "recompense" is גְּמוּלָה (g<sup>e</sup>mûl) which refers to God's "reprisal or reward" that He promises for us, His saints. Those who have suffered here on earth because of their faith in Jesus; because they would not be silenced from sharing their faith and speaking God's truth, they/we will be paid back in the resurrection when Jesus returns; rewarded for all that they/we have endured.

✘ Even here, during His time on earth, Jesus gave us a foretaste of His recompense as He physically healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, opened the ears of the deaf and strengthened the lame so that they could jump and dance with joy.

→ Beyond the physical, Jesus makes things right for you and me and all believers in Christ when He comforts and quenches our souls spiritually as well. As the Bible clearly says, you were born spiritually blind; deaf in your understanding; lame in your ability to walk in God's ways; mute in confessing His name or singing His praises. But look at you now as you live in the transforming grace of Your baptism. Now, your sin-parched soul has been quenched as you have heard the Gospel of Jesus proclaimed here in church. The Holy Spirit has opened wide the eyes of your heart to receive with joy God's promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation. And look at the difference. Now you readily and confidently follow Jesus, singing hymns of thanksgiving for His gracious gift of salvation; sharing God's Word and serving all in His name.

## II. The reversal is real...for you, in Jesus.

✘ It's quite the reversal that Isaiah promises some 2700 years ago, isn't it? His words in verses 6-7 about water in the wilderness and streams in the desert were virtually impossible for the people at that time to fathom. Even our semi-arid, high-desert climate has more moisture than they could ever dream of experiencing.

→ That's why God uses these images of flowing water and constant streams in a symbolic manner to describe for them the extreme joy that the Spirit's work brings into the lives of His anxious and parched people.

→ For the Israelites, this imagery would remind them of how Yahweh brought them refreshment and joy in the wilderness when He brought water gushing out from the rock (Ex. 17:1-7, Num. 20:2-13). This then is a promise of God's unfathomable power; the certainty that if He can bring water from a rock, He can certainly calm and refresh their desert-like souls!

✘ And so, when Isaiah proclaims at the end of verse four that God...“He comes to save you”, this is a promise that God's people can trust – even though all of the earthly evidence they have endured; that they seem to be facing at the moment tempts them to question whether or not it can ever be true.

→ They know, they can trust it; they can believe it because of whose name is connected to the promise – the name of Yahweh.

→ Even the Hebrew word that Isaiah used makes that important connection. The word translated as “to save” is יָשַׁע (yasha) which means to liberate or save. But you see that's the same root of the Hebrew name יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (Yeshua) or Jesus. And the name Jesus means “Yahweh saves”, which points us directly to the manner in which our God, Yahweh has come to save us all – through the sacrificial flow of the blood of His Son, Jesus; the blood poured out from the cross upon the sin-parched souls of all mankind!

✘ Yes, every one of our souls, just like the Israelites in our text, fully deserves the wrath of God's vengeance as a righteous judgement issued out against us. For we have all committed idolatry as they did; worshipping ourselves and others; bowing to the unbiblical and ungodly influence of political and societal pressures – either out of fear or because in some cases we might actually believe what our culture says is true over what God's Word has declared from the beginning.

→ Yet, even in our sin; even in our disobedience, God has come to us in His Son, Jesus, to save us; to liberate us from the clutches of the devil's lies and our sinful nature, and in the ever flowing grace of His blood flowing from the cross in our baptism, He covers our sin with His own righteousness. As verse seven says, He turns the “burning sand” of our hearts and the “thirsty

ground” of our minds into a life-giving “pool” of refreshment; into that “spring of water welling up to eternal life” that Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:14.

→ How is this possible? Because as Jesus promised regarding the gift of His Spirit alive within us now until His return, “Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (Jn. 7:38).

✘ This is the water that brings such joy to our once mute tongues so that all we can do is sing of Jesus at the top of our lungs (v.6). It is the water of our baptism, the objective promise of God at work within us every day.

→ It is the Last-Day promise to which Isaiah points us all when he says in verses five and six, “Then...”. For it is on the Last Day, at Christ’s promised return that all of God’s perfect promises and justified judgements will be brought to fulfillment.

✘ And that includes His proclamation of grace upon you and me and all who believe in His Son’s saving work in our place – the fact that He proclaims us innocent of all sin and forgiven for all time because of Jesus’ blood flowing over us.

→ Yes, “then” all imperfections and impurities brought by sin will be washed away and healed. “Then” you and I will literally be able to “leap like a deer” as verse six says because Jesus has made us His own for all of eternity.

## **Conclusion**

✘ So my fellow saints in Christ, as Paul says in Ephesians 6:10, “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” now today. Have no fear of your enemy, Satan or of the ills that he and your own sin have brought upon you, for Jesus has defeated him and all his works.

→ His is the victory that comforts your hearts; that quenches your souls today and for all of eternity. To Him be all the glory forevermore. Amen.