

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Isaiah 51:1-8
Sunday, August 27, 2017

Comfort from the Lord

1. In striving to serve God, have you ever felt a profound loneliness, like you are the only one, or one of a few who seems committed to doing right and walking with God? I don't mean this in a melodramatic way. I mean it in the sense that we see a world that doesn't care about God, and sometimes, the more we try to walk with him, the lonelier the road gets as we seem like aliens or outcasts in our culture or community.
2. The other day at lunch, several of us were discussing Colin Kaepernick, the NFL QB without a team who has raised controversy over his refusal to stand for the national anthem. For many, he is a hero for standing up for his beliefs, and they believe that he is being unfairly vilified now. While that is a debatable issue- and, in reality, if he was a star football player, he would be on a team right now- there is this feeling that he, and by extension, others, should be able to take unpopular positions and never have to face the consequences for them.
 - a. Isn't the very thing that made him a hero to some and a villain to others that he was willing to do something unpopular despite the personal cost? If there is no personal cost, then what he did carries very little weight, because he risked nothing to take his stand.
3. We as Christians need to be prepared for the cost of standing for Christ. Jesus says that it won't be an easy road. He says that the world will hate us on his behalf. In the beatitudes, he actually says, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." We need to be prepared to pay the cost of being a Christian.
4. Isaiah 51 is written to give comfort to Israel- particularly those who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord. We need to bear that in mind as we apply it to ourselves. However, I do believe that the truths here are not specific to Israel at a certain place at a certain time. The reason the truths of this passage could be comforting is because they are true- always. Thus, I think we can use this passage the same way- to find comfort in the Lord in the midst of turmoil and hopelessness.

Comfort in three ways

1. In the passage, God speaks through Isaiah to provide comfort in three ways to those of his people who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord. The good people of Israel are having to suffer alongside the bad and unfaithful, and they are facing persecution around them.
 - a. We experience much the same. We face what Jesus said we would face as his disciples. Christians are often painted out as some of the worst of American culture because we stand against the evil ways of the world- or, more accurately, we stand for the good ways of God. So, we should take the same comfort in this as God was giving Israel. *We*, as long as we are Christians who seek after God and his righteousness should be hopeful for the future, despite any discouragement in the present.
2. In verses 1-3, God gives the comfort and encouragement that we few faithful are enough for God to bring great things through. He says that if Abraham and Sarah are enough to

make the great nation of Israel, then those faithful to him now are enough for him to restore his kingdom through. For Israel, that would have meant a return to the Holy Land. But, for us- and for all believers now under the New Covenant, we can understand it on a grander scale that it isn't just an earthly kingdom, but *the* Kingdom of God.

- a. Take comfort and joy in knowing that one day our entire existence will be joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and song in the presence of the Lord.
3. In verses 4-6, God promises an eternal salvation; something that outlasts all of his creation. Not only his salvation, but his righteousness will last forever. The very thing which we pursue, struggle with because of our sin, and are marginalized for, will last forever, and we with it, glorying in his salvation and righteousness.
 - a. At this point, this is also God pointing to Jesus, for that is where his "forever" salvation comes from. The righteous of Israel could take comfort in something God would do in the future; we have seen that God has already provided it by sending his Son to die to bear our sins and to grant us his righteousness.
 - b. That is so important. Christ fulfills both promises from v. 6 in the same act of dying on the cross. Our sin is nailed to the cross with him, and his righteousness is granted to us. Because of this, we live with God's salvation and righteousness, which should be of great hope and comfort in this dark world.
4. In verses 7-8, God offers comfort to those who suffer the reviling of their fellow man (human). This is where we often feel the struggle the most. Our views are ridiculed and mocked. We are called bigots because we have a firm belief in objective moral values. We are marginalized and told to keep our religion separate from any aspect of life that isn't completely private- as though that is a possibility. We are often afraid for others to know what our true beliefs are for the very reason that know when we take a stand we may face consequences.
 - a. So what a great comfort that God promises to bring justice upon those who reject him and revile his people; and that he will vindicate his people. There is nothing for us to fear, because we have a God who loves and saves us. We need not seek vengeance, nor live with our beliefs hidden in fear, because our God will vindicate us, and does so eternally through his own justice.
5. We should find this passage of great comfort to us because it serves as a reminder that, though this world may be against us, it is really against our God; and our God is so much bigger than anything or anyone who would oppose him. Things may be, and often are, difficult for us in this life as we walk with God. But he has prepared an eternal home that will never pass away, his salvation and righteousness are eternal, and he will vindicate us from those in this world who would hurt us.

Isaiah 51:7-8: ⁷ "Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. ⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool, but my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations."