

Thanksgiving for Righteousness

(Isaiah 51:4-6)

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Text: ⁴“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 will make rest]. ⁵My 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. ⁶Lift 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. God’s people suffer and God’s people also receive the greatest news of the most wondrous salvation, so wonderful because we are guaranteed the day in which we will not be able to remember what we have suffered. I think of what I witnessed when my wife gave birth: first there was pain, but then after the birth there was great joy. Things went from one extreme to another. We suffer now, the world is in turmoil, we see it in wars throughout the world and we see it in the tumultuous conditions and heightened alert within our own cities. Warnings to our entire nation have gone out about travel that we once thought was safe; and cities in this nation are seeing a heightened security that resemble in some cases military zones. Closer to home, families suffer with illness, depression, anger, and fear. But there is something coming: look up to the heavens and look at the earth beneath, these seem so permanent, solid, unmovable, but there is something you have Christian that is more permanent, solid, and unmovable.

The fact is that the heavens and the earth will wear out, but what has been given to you in Christ is truly permanent, absolutely solid, and there is no force able to move it out from under you: the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ endures forever (Isaiah 40:8). This has been given to you, it is in you, in your ears, in your mind and in your heart: His law, His justice, His light, His rest, His mighty arm for you, His righteousness, and His salvation make you immovable, “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but [destruction] will not come near you.” (Psalm 91:7)

These things I speak of Christians are the basis for true thanksgiving. I don’t want to seem as a kill-joy for some of the more simple pleasures. They too are important. There is great wisdom for example in Ecclesiastes – don’t take your troubles too seriously, they are serious, but they do not define your life – so as Solomon wrote, “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink

your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.” (Ecclesiastes 9:7) If you are blessed to have a feast tomorrow, have it, thank God for it, take joy in it. But let’s face it, we can’t base our thanksgiving on these things. Don’t get me wrong, I’m excited for tomorrow: Traci got a big turkey, she’s making me a lemon meringue pie, Bryan is getting a pecan pie, Christina a pumpkin pie...Katherine’s getting all of them; Christina has already made my deviled eggs, there will be a ton of food, but I stand a good chance for indigestion and the Dallas Cowboys will probably lose...no my thanksgiving can’t be based on these things. If the heavens and the earth will not stand, these won’t even come close to standing.

And yet we try desperately to invest our greatest thanksgiving in the things that will pass. This is our sin: mistaking our greatest joys, our greatest hopes, and our greatest thanks in things that are created as we forget about the Creator; treating things as if they will save us – give us joy, give us hope, give us meaning – while forgetting the Redeemer. We want to turn the things of the world into the things of heaven, while treating the true gifts of heaven as if they were unreal, irrelevant, and insignificant. In our sin, we’ve got it all backwards. And this backwardness kills the soul. It makes us desperate, hopeless people in whom little thanksgiving resides.

Israel once stood strong and they started to trust in themselves: God’s people brought to the promised-land and they forgot about God. Then, their nation was taken away. They were defeated. They went into exile. What once seemed solid was no more. But the Lord then brought amazing news to them and what is exciting about this Old Testament word is that it includes us too...you’re included though it was spoken so many centuries ago.

Things were going to change for the Israelites who had seemingly lost it all. In chapters 44-48 of Isaiah they hear of their freedom from exile, but in chapters 49-55 they hear of the One who would bring this freedom and who would bring the greatest freedom: freedom from sin; freedom from hopelessness, and freedom from death. In these chapters they hear of the Suffering Servant who is also the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords; they hear of the Christ who is also your Savior dear Christian! Be clear as to who this SERVANT is, He’s your Savior! Know Him, and you know true thanksgiving!

Luther: “[Isaiah] is calling us away from errors and therefore showing us someone else...The prophet points us to the Incarnate One and says that in this Head alone, in the unity of faith, we who were formerly scattered must be brought together...This was not written for Christ’s sake but for ours, so that we may be sure, about His work, and teaching and may have certainty about the emptiness of our idolatry. Nobody understands these things unless he believes. You must believe that Christ is a servant. It is as Paul says (1 Cor. 2:2): ‘I decided to

know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.'...This Christ is an offense to the whole world. Therefore, in order to give us certainty, this commendation of Christ is necessary. We see from experience that nothing is more absurd to the wisdom of the flesh than Christ, the Servant, and His Word. All are offended because of Him. All of us want to be God's servants while we please ourselves. Everything will be taken up and entrusted to Him alone. We should receive this with thanksgiving..." (AE 17:60-61)

So we know what true thanksgiving must be about: remember Jesus! He has opened the Kingdom of God to you; He has invited you to the eternal feast. He the reason for our true thanksgiving!

To help us realize how important our Savior is, Isaiah 51:4-6 describes what Christ brings! Again, He brings the real, lasting gifts, not the kind that are here today and gone tomorrow, but the gifts which include -- again -- His law, His justice, His light, His rest, His mighty arm for you, His righteousness, and His salvation. This is what the servant brings.

This is good news, this is the Gospel. The Lord sees us in our helplessness and how easy it is to feel helpless. Helpless in the face of all that sin has brought into our lives, impacting our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. In our condition, we cannot initiate hope and freedom. We are truly helpless, so at Isaiah 51:4 what the Lord gives will "go out from [Him]"...these gifts are sent to us. God doesn't wait for you to come to Him (He knows you can't, so He sends salvation...He comes to you!). Talk about cause for true thanksgiving!

There are many gifts that go out and they are all important. In this reading from Isaiah 51:4-6, the law is God's *torah*, His instruction which includes the Gospel of salvation. His Law is a royal law, the golden law, the law of victory, the law of God's love and mercy which cannot be overcome by sin; and He sends justice that is His justice in Jesus: Jesus fulfills all justice and Jesus becomes our light -- He is the light of the world -- and Jesus gives us rest. The word "rest" is in the Hebrew here at Isaiah 51:4, but not in our English translation: Jesus comes and showers you in the light of His grace; and this love and mercy is your true rest in Christ: "[Jesus says:] Come to me all of you who are tired and with a heavy load and I will give you rest!" (Matthew 11:28)

Later in the text, He speaks of His mighty power in the imagery of His arms and His arm. These exert the judgment against all that threatens us; and is the basis for our hope as His arm is strong to save us. Then He gets to the climax of our reading at verse 6: consider how solid, how certain, how permanent and how immovable your salvation is. The heavens and the earth will "wear out like a garment," but for you, God's righteousness and salvation will keep you

enduring, because the Word of the Lord endures FOREVER and since this Word is in you, YOU will endure FOREVER Christian in the love of God.

But I want to highlight being thankful for God's righteousness. This is a word – "righteousness" – that we hear a lot of in church, in the Bible, in the talk of God and faith, but it is not really that familiar to us. We don't typically use it in our "everyday" language and way of communicating to one another. It is a special word and takes on different shades of meaning depending on the biblical context, but here it is all good. It is a word that we want to know; it is a word that is good news for you this Thanksgiving. We should be exceedingly thankful for this righteousness.

This attribute of God called "righteousness" means that God does the right thing – in His love and mercy – to keep His promise of salvation. His righteousness is directly related to His faithfulness and this righteousness is not on us (that is something *we* fulfill), but on Him (something *He* fulfills). God is love. God is mercy. And His righteousness fulfills who and what He is; it guarantees that His righteousness will save us. Let's read of this righteousness from the Psalms. This is the basis for our true thanksgiving:

Psalms 5:8: "Lead me, O Lord, in your **righteousness** because of my enemies; make your way straight before me."

Psalms 31:1: "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your **righteousness** deliver me!"

Psalms 71:2: "In your **righteousness** deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me!"

Psalms 89:15-16: "Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face, who exult in your name all the day and in your **righteousness** are exalted."

Psalms 119:40: "Behold, I long for your precepts; in your **righteousness** give me life!"

Psalms 143:11: "For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your **righteousness** bring my soul out of trouble!"

As we trust in God's righteousness as Abram believed and was counted righteous (Gn 15:6), so are we! God's righteousness for us is in Jesus. Now we know He passes over our sins! God is righteousness becomes He justifies you; because He declares you righteous in Jesus as

you trust in Him! Your faith is now counted as righteousness (Ro 4:5)! This righteousness which God gives IS His salvation for you Christian! In it, you are delivered from sin and death; pardoned for all guilt and shame; renewed just when you were sinking in death, and promised a glory that will outlast the heavens and the earth.

This is our thanksgiving. Technically, tomorrow is a civic holiday, not a sacred one, but for you, thanksgiving is always sacred: it leads you back to Jesus, your righteousness who took your sin; your righteousness who conquered your death; and your righteousness that will make you outlive the heavens and the earth. Have your feast tomorrow, but don't forget the eternal feast that Jesus has won for you. Be thankful for this!