

Three Important Views of the Same “Rock”

11th Sun. after Pent. – 8/24/14 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 51:1-6 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1, [Yahweh says,] “...look to the rock from which you were hewn,”

v. 4, “**Give attention to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, My nation.**”

v. 6, “**Lift up your eyes to the heavens ... My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will never be dismayed.**”

Introduction

✧ So, why is it that you came here to this service today?

➔ I know some people come out of a sense of obligation; some come because they’re feeling guilty; some come just to see friends; and some only come out of habit.

➔ But perhaps you came here this morning for the reasons that Isaiah mentioned in verse one of our text; because you want to “pursue righteousness” and “seek Yahweh”.

✧ If that’s you, then my friends, you are pursuing and seeking after no easy thing, because, you see, you can’t just go out and purchase Yahweh on aisle six of *King Soopers* or *Safeway*. Nor can righteousness be achieved even if you are pursuing it with dedication and hard work in the same way that a person pursues a healthier and leaner body through dieting and exercise.

➔ In fact, we who “seek Yahweh” and “pursue righteousness”; we are considered quite odd by an ever-growing majority of people today. Why? Because we are seeking for someone that can’t be seen with the naked eye. We are pursuing something that can’t be touched or felt in the common, earthly sense of pursuing things here in this earthly life.

✧ But still that is exactly what God Himself is calling us to do here in His Holy Word today. In verse one He calls us to “listen” and “look”; to “give attention” in verse four, and in verse six, to “lift up [our] eyes” to a number of different ways that He makes Himself intimately present and intentionally active in each one our lives.

➔ Yes, God is calling you and me to put all of the senses He has given to us on alert here today; to be open for all of the clues and markers; to pay attention to everything around us. And if you do so, I’m confident that you will leave here satisfied in the pursuit that led you to this place this morning.

✧ One of the important metaphors or images that God uses in this text is that of a “rock”. And Isaiah directs us to see three different views, or perspectives, of that rock to which God engages our senses today.

I. The Rock of our past (vv. 1-2)

✧ The first view is the Rock of our past. In verses one and two Yahweh says, “Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.”

➔ What is God getting at by equating Abraham and Sarah to a rock; or even more, to something that has come from a chunk of granite originally buried in the ground?

✧ As we confirmed with the kids earlier, rocks are dead! They have no ability to make themselves do anything at all. If a rock does actually do anything, it is only as a result of some outside force acting upon it; something else that has changed in its surrounding circumstance.

- As a couple, Paul says in Romans 4:19, that Abraham (and Sarah) were “as good as dead” in their ability to reproduce and become the founders of the great nation that God promised to Abraham. He was 100 and she was 90 years old. We’ve got a few among us in this room that are in that age range. So, what do you think their chances would be of conceiving and having a child at this point in their life?
- Yet God opened Sarah’s barren womb for Isaac to be conceived and be born.
- ✘ So, what Yahweh is calling the people of Israel to do, is look back at the way that He worked in Abraham and Sarah’s lives, and then apply that to their current situation.
- You see, those Israelites had become quite proud of themselves. That’s why He sent Isaiah to them. And we could say, “that’s also why He’s calling us to read and hear this same message today here at Mt. Calvary”.
- Because, it is so easy for us to get caught up in our pride as well. When we close our eyes and ears to the truth of where we’ve come from, every one of us can be quite arrogant about how hard we have worked and toiled to make ourselves the fine, upstanding, “better-than-the-other-guy” people that we are today. Just think of the last time you looked at or talked about someone else; about how you disagree with or can’t stand or wish he/she would do something differently. (In fact, I’d bet most of you have already done that more than once this morning.) That’s self-centered pride.
- ✘ But Yahweh tells us here to look back into our past and remember that we were all no more than a rock buried in the ground at our beginning. We could do nothing for ourselves, physically or spiritually, when we were born.
- We all know how our parents had to feed and care for us; nurture and teach us as we grew. But remember, even the fact that we had life itself; how that began and was nurtured inside our mother’s womb – that is only from God! And the fact that our bodies know what to do with food, and our brains know how to process what we’re taught — that is only from God!
- Then when we look at our spiritual lives, the contrast is even more profound. Our very nature is nothing but sin and selfishness; totally separated from God. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul points us to our past as well and he says, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked”.
- ✘ But if that’s where we stop looking at Abraham we still miss the main point. For we know that it was God’s miraculous work; taking that “one” man and making him and his descendants into an entire nation as God’s holy people!
- This is why God sent Isaiah, because as he tells the Israelites earlier in chapter 17:10, “you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge”. So, because of that deep and constant sin, Isaiah told the people that they were about to get what they had wished for. They were indeed going to be conquered by a pagan nation and forcefully taken into slavery in Babylon. Even worse, they would be separated from God’s holy presence in His temple.

II. The Rock of Right Now (v. 3-5)

- ✘ In our text, this then is where it’s as if Yahweh were physically taking hold of our heads, along with those of the Israelites, and directing our gaze away from the past; where we’ve been humbled by the view of our shortcomings and inability to do anything on our own. And He turns us all to look and see what He has made us to be right now today.
- And as we focus on that present reality, notice that our view of the “rock” changes as well. Instead of the dead and helpless nature of rock, God directs us to “give attention” (v.4) to and

celebrate the positive side of the rock – how He; God Himself is “the Rock” of great power, justice and steadfast mercy for us all.

- ✘ God knew that the news of their impending exile would understandably cause the Israelites to struggle with fear, and grief and trepidation.

➔ And look we get that, don't we? Whenever we fall into sin; whenever we face the earthly consequences of punishment, we are all taken out of our comfort zone. Add to that this world's continued rejection of God's Biblical definitions of righteousness and justice, and things can look awfully grim at times.

- ✘ These are the times that we need verses 3-5; that we need to see what our Rock does for us as His people right here and now. The image He paints is that of a wasteland being transformed back into the Garden of Eden.

➔ Verse three, “For Yahweh comforts Zion (that's us, because in Christ He has brought us all into His temple on Mt. Zion); He comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of Yahweh; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song”.

➔ This transformation, my friends, is the miracle of God taking you and me from being dead in sin to having a new, vibrant and fully-blessed life and relationship with God in Christ! It's the contrast between a barren wasteland and the lush Garden of Eden. And yes, even in the midst of all the struggles around us, this is our reality right now today, here in God's Zion; here in His Christ-centered Church.

➔ It's here that He brings us into His very presence and as verse three says, we are filled with “joy” and “gladness”; with “thanksgiving” and “the voice of song”.

- ✘ How can we be so comforted and content with all that we face; all that's going on around us right now? Verses 4 and 5 overflow with the reason. Notice that 12 times in these two verses God uses the 1st person pronouns, “I”, “me” or “my”.

➔ Not only does this humble us to know that we aren't the ones controlling our joy and comfort, but it is 100% God. This also takes us away from thinking that our righteousness or justice; that this world's, or our friend's, family's, political party's, boss's, or even the court system's justice or righteousness is what can bring us joy or purpose or salvation. No, any and all true blessings come only from God, by God and for us, His people!

➔ Listen again to how He directs our attention to see Him; His work and His love alone in our lives today. “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” (vv. 4-5).

- ✘ In the end, all of that points to Jesus, doesn't it? For in Philippians 1:6 Paul says, “I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”.

➔ It is all His work – His justice, His righteousness, His “arms” spread out on the cross, bearing our sin and guilt and shame, so that by His bloody death and His glorious resurrection given to us in the waters of baptism, He can look at you and me right now today and say, “They are “My people”; “My nation” — made so by “My salvation”.

➔ In 2 Samuel 22:2-4, King David opens our eyes to see Yahweh as He truly is for each of us right “here and now”. “Yahweh is my rock and my fortress,” David says, “and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold

and my refuge, my Savior; you save me from violence. I call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved (present tense) from my enemies.”

III. The Rock Forevermore! (v. 6)

✧ That is so great! But, “What about the future?” you might ask. The Israelites aren’t the only ones who had a grim future ahead of them, in that coming exile. No, many of us may be looking at the days, months and years ahead and thinking, “Things ahead don’t look all that cheery”.

➔ I mean, do any of us really know about our future; about our freedom, health, or ability to survive at all?

✧ So Yahweh guides the eyes of our faith one more time; this time to the future in verse six. But it seems like He’s not starting us off with a very good view. He says, “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...”.

➔ Those are simply the facts. No earthly thing or entity will last forever. Everything is ultimately coming to an end. There will be a day when the United States of America will be no more; when The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod won’t exist; when your health is going to deteriorate, when your jobs, marriages, freedom, safety and family – all of this earthly life will be no longer.

✧ But none of that, God says, is a reason to be concerned or to worry at all! Why? Because of His third view of “the Rock”, which focuses on His permanent; unchanging nature.

➔ God’s Gospel perspective in verse six says, “but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will never be dismayed.” Isaiah 26:4 says, “Trust in Yahweh forever, for Yahweh God is an everlasting rock.”

Conclusion

✧ You came today, seeking the LORD and now you know that He is the one who actually found you! He found you – as dead as a rock – and He brought you to Himself; He saved you and He made you His own. Likewise you entered this morning pursuing righteousness and now you see that the righteousness of Jesus is yours already. It has been so ever since Your baptism. It is right now today. And it will be forevermore, because of the Rock – Jesus Christ!

➔ To Him be all glory yesterday, today and forever. Amen.