

Salvation Lasts Forever

Last Sun. of Church Year – 11/21/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 51:4-6 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 6 [The LORD proclaims,] “...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...”.

Introduction

✘ Maybe many of you remember seeing a commercial on TV with a beautiful woman, a handsome man, and a gold necklace with a sparkling diamond. As he gives it to her we are all to understand it as his expression of eternal love to her, which is then backed up by the slogan, “A diamond is forever”.

→ In fact as we wrapped up the last century in 1999, that was declared to be the “the number one slogan of the century” (<https://www.aaaa.org/timeline-event/diamond-forever-unforgettable-de-beers-tagline-thats-still-shining/?cn-reloaded=1>).

✘ But is it a true statement? Does a diamond really last forever? Granted, a diamond will outlast all of us in this earthly life. But forever? That’s a long time – a very, very long time!

→ In fact, God says through His prophet Isaiah, that we are to consider the heavens and the earth and know that “the heavens (will) vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and they who dwell in it will die in like manner” (v 6). So if the earth and all that is in it will eventually “wear out” that means that even diamonds will eventually be destroyed!

✘ But God’s salvation is different. Though the heavens may vanish like smoke and the earth will wear out like a garment, Isaiah assures us that God’s salvation is forever – literally forever!

→ Today on this Last Sunday of the Church Year, when we think about the end of time as we know it; when we consider that ominous day called “Judgement Day”, God calls us not only to learn the truth of His eternal salvation but even more to believe in it with assurance!

I. God’s salvation is forever already now and not yet.

✘ In verse five, we’re told that the gift of salvation from God “has gone out”. So it’s not just something that we look forward to in the future. God’s people – that’s you and me folks – we already have it!

→ So there’s no excuse for any of us to be uninformed. The LORD gives us a command in verse four. “Give attention to Me”, He says. “Give ear to Me, My nation”. He has made you His in Baptism. He has gathered His people together here in His Church. There’s an important reason why His Third Commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy”. So that we do not lose touch with our God and Savior; so that we will hear His Word every week and know that we have His gift of salvation each and every day. We have it “now”.

✘ Even in that truth there is still a dimension of something more to come in the future. Verse five says, “My righteousness draws near...and My arms will judge the peoples...and for My arm they wait.”

→ There’s a double meaning to this future-tense promise of hope. For the people of Isaiah’s day it was a prophesy of the coming Messiah; the one who would come in the flesh, born of the virgin (Is. 7:14), “despised and rejected” (Is. 53:3) on the cross to bear and pay for the “iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6).

→ You and I know that prophesy has been fulfilled in Jesus. He has done the work. He has earned our salvation once for all time. But as we live in the “now” of that salvation that we’ve

received by His grace we still wait for the “not yet” of the time that we will fully enjoy God’s salvation; a time without the burdens of this corrupt world and the constant torment of Satan trying to snatch us away from our Savior.

- ✘ When will that time of fulfillment be? As Jesus told us in our Gospel Reading, “No one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mk. 13:32). But just because we don’t know the timing, that doesn’t mean there is any doubt that He is coming.

→ He promised four times in the book of Revelation, “I am coming soon” (3:11, 22:7,12,20), so you and I must “stay awake” in our faith; always eager and prepared. Everything else that you and I might be tempted to think is so important will fade away “like smoke”. But the coming of Christ never will. When He comes again at the end of time, those who have already died in Christ will first be raised for eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. It’s then that the full enjoyment of the salvation we already have will be ours in glory.

→ It’s like having a box of frozen chocolate fudge bars in the freezer that you’ve been saving for a special celebration. They’re yours – you’ve got them already. But oh, how much more wonderful they are when you finally tear off the wrapper and bite into them with your guests. We are saved by Jesus, He has adopted us and placed us in His family where we worship Him and receive His gifts of grace and promise in Word and Sacrament. But when He comes, that’s when we see Him and experience Him and enjoy Him in all of His glory forevermore!

II. God’s salvation is forever for all people.

- ✘ In verse five the LORD says, “the coastlands hope for Me”. This word, “coastlands” occurs 15 times in the Old Testament – 14 of them in Isaiah. It’s a word that suggests “distant nations” and it refers to all the world’s peoples.

→ So yes, even those who are far away and removed from the majority “look” to God and “wait in hope” for His arm, that is His strong and saving work in Jesus.

- ✘ When we think of hope, what does that mean? It implies anticipation, yearning and expectation doesn’t it? a deep-down sense that God not only is able to save, but that He is doing it right now.

→ To wait and hope for our God – that’s our Christian occupation. Now, we may think of waiting as wasting time, but the better thought is that waiting is a matter of anticipating God’s salvation and His glorious revelation on the Last Day. Hoping is much the same: longing for and setting our hearts every moment of every day on God’s salvation – that’s hoping in Him.

- ✘ God wants all people to experience His forever salvation. That means you ... and it means your neighbor too. No one is excluded from God’s desire. There is the story of an eight-year-old who wrote a letter: “Dear God, I can’t wait to get to heaven because I know Sarah won’t be there! Sincerely, Teddy.”

→ We may laugh at that, but if we’re honest, in our hearts there actually are people whom we would love to see excluded from heaven. God knows of no such distinction. Romans 3:21 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Yet 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us that “The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

III. God’s salvation is given by God & no one else.

- ✘ The problem is that our world is the devil’s playground of temptation and false salvation. There are so many things; so many wonderful and attractive and tasty and power-filled things and people who offer us salvation in this world; even promising us heaven itself.

- But although these things are splendid, when and if we tie our hopes and dreams to what we can see and touch, hear, taste, and smell in this life, we then set ourselves up for disappointment and worse. For “the heavens vanish like smoke” and “the earth will wear out like a garment” (v. 6).
- Even your favorite T-shirt eventually ends up in the ragbag or the trash. Yes, even the most beautiful mountains and serene lakes will be destroyed.
- ⊗ Several years ago traffic-signal workers in Arlington, Texas, did an unusual thing. They erected a fully-functioning and “permanently” installed traffic signal at an intersection in the southern part of the city. But they attached signs to the signal that said, “Temporary Signal”. Why?
 - Because that signal was placed at an intersection that did not technically meet the criteria for a traffic signal. The intersection wasn’t busy enough to warrant a signal. But a person who had enough influence with the city was able to get the signal installed. So, the city attempted to deflect criticism with a sign that said, “Temporary Signal”.
 - Ironically, according to God’s Word, this was in fact the only honest traffic signal in town, because they are all temporary; because all that we fill our lives and times with in this world which is from this world is only temporary in the end. Even seemingly “ageless” stars and fitness gurus eventually wear out and die.
- ⊗ There’s a reason that God speaks in the first person, using “Me” or “My,” 12 times in these three verses, because only He is the true source of the only true salvation. He is the only One who can offer hope. He’s the one to whom we will all answer. And it’s only through Him that we have life now and forever!

IV. God’s salvation is a forever gift.

- ⊗ After telling us that the heavens and earth and all who dwell therein will wear out like a garment and die, there’s one very important word that we can so easily skip right over.
 - It’s the word “but”. God wants to be sure that we see here the huge difference between what God offers and what the world offers, “...but My salvation will be forever” (v.6).
- ⊗ A dream vacation lasts for days or possibly weeks; honeymoons eventually give way to the realities of daily life; a life filled with good health finally deteriorates or suddenly ends, but the salvation God won for us in Jesus lasts forever!
 - Of this you and I can be absolutely certain without even the slightest hint of doubt. Why? because it is not tied to this world. Instead it is secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and even now it is being prepared for all of God’s people by Christ Himself. John 14:2: Jesus says, “In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”
- ⊗ Verse six says, “...and My righteousness will never be dismayed”. This is how our text closes today. 1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Jesus in the flesh is the earthly expression of God’s righteousness.
 - So when we think of Him pierced and dying on the cross to endure the punishment of all of our sin, we know that as horrible as it is from an earthly perspective, it is God performing His righteous work to perfection.
 - And when Jesus rises from the dead three days later in victory over sin, death and devil, we see God’s righteousness shining brighter than the sun and all of the stars in the universe combined.

- ✘ This is the same righteousness that He wrapped around you friends in Your baptism. For God “...made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). This is what gives us confidence as we anticipate the Last Day.
 - ➔ Our sins have already been judged by Jesus and the punishment has already been paid on our behalf. When He comes again and we stand before His judgement seat, His righteous covering is what He will see over us. And so His salvation will be our salvation forever!

Conclusion

- ✘ This is God’s gift; God’s promise; God’s desire for us all. So turn away from the world and “give attention to” your God and receive what He has for you...forever! Amen.