

## **Sermon Transcript for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Laetare, March 14, 2021**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, when you read that Isaiah 49 passage, you should really have heard a lot of the message of the coming of the Messiah there. We even have the whole idea of the mountains being made roads and the highways raised up, along that same line that we make straight the way of the Lord in the wilderness, that message of John the Baptist that he proclaims, that he is preparing the way for the Messiah to come. We also have the idea that they will be fed along the way, that the prisoners will be set free, those in darkness will appear and there will be peace in the land, and we're going to sing for the Lord has comforted the afflicted. All of this is talking about the Servant of God, the Son of God, who is going to come and take over the promise of the salvation of the people.

See, in the Old Testament, they were following the law. And as we learned in Galatians, the law is a slave master. There is no freedom in obeying the law, in obeying the Ten Commandments. If we think that by obeying them we can somehow gain our salvation, if we think that the message of the Bible is actually obey the Ten Commandments, then we have missed the point entirely. The Ten Commandments are there for one purpose in our lives, since we are sinners. They serve three purposes, but the primary and main purpose is to show us our sin, to be a mirror, to reflect the true nature of our soul. And the Ten Commandments make it clear that there is absolutely no way we can look at our own efforts, our own actions, our own fulfillment, or lack thereof, of the Ten Commandments and say, "Yes, I've done enough. I have fulfilled all of these from the day I was born to the day I died without any complications."

Because again, not only are we to obey the law and the Ten Commandments, but we're to be perfect in doing it. If we fall short of that perfection, then the law gives us no hope. Now, once we have been given salvation from the freedom of Christ, from our baptisms where we are made free and declared to be children of God, as a gift given to us without any merit or worthiness, without any works or actions on our parts, then after we know that we are saved, then we seek to praise God and to give Him things by following the Ten Commandments, by doing those things that God has told us are right. But we do them out of thanksgiving, out of praise to God, out of a desire to thank Him and to serve Him and to serve our neighbor for the great gift of salvation that is already ours.

So we have this whole combination of Hagar and Sarah, and Hagar being the slave woman and her son being the result of slavery and not through the promise. She was a young woman. She was able to bear children. So there was nothing miraculous or remarkable in her giving birth to a child. But Sarah was well past the child-bearing age, and for her to give birth, that was a miracle, just like it was a miracle for Mary who was a virgin to give birth to a child as well. Both of them signifying that it is by grace, by the promise of God, by the will of God through His Word that we have hope. Now, when the people were gathered together here in our Gospel lesson, we see them following after Jesus, because He does seem to be the one who is fulfilling this Isaiah 49 passage, the prophet of God, the promised one who will come to save Israel. But they are a little shortsighted in what they're looking for.

They are looking for fulfillment of physical bodily needs. And so often we unfortunately also do the same thing. We think that God is pleased with us and that He is blessing us when everything is going well, when we don't have any problems, when things are going smoothly, the finances are on track, our kids are on track,

everything's going well, we don't have anything to worry about. Then we say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Obviously, He loves us and He cares for us and we thank God for it. However, when we face hardship and affliction, when things don't go the way we would like them to go, when we don't quite know where our next paycheck is coming from, when we don't know whether the cancer has spread throughout all of our body or just a little bit, when we don't know how the future is going to play itself out, or whether the government is going to be allowing us to continue to worship freely or whether they're going to come and suppress our language and our preaching, when we don't know these things and when things don't go well, do we still bless the Lord? Do we still thank Him and praise Him for the gift of daily bread?

Because it's more than just the physical. In fact, the physical gifts that He gives to us, health and wealth and food, and the various things that we need to support this body in life. He does promise to give them to us, but that's just the minor gift. That's not the thing that we should be looking for. The true gift of God is that which no one, no man, no spirit can give. And that is everlasting life. That is the forgiveness of sins. See, all of these signs of releasing the prisoners, of bringing those out of darkness into the light, of giving to those who hunger and thirst and to protect them from the scorching winds and the trials that come our way, all of those things are the physical that represent a greater gift that is given to us in the spiritual, the gift that is given by the free woman, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that He died to forgive our sins, that He submitted himself to the covenant of Mount Sinai.

He committed himself to that covenant of slavery and He fulfilled it. He did it perfectly. He is the only one that can claim, "Yes, I fulfilled all the Ten Commandments." But He was not saved, for He did not need to be saved, by following the Ten Commandments. Nor were we saved by His following of the Ten Commandments, that the following of the Ten Commandments and the perfection of following the Ten Commandments just put Him in a place to be the sacrifice for us. See, when He followed the law perfectly, He then stepped in our place and erased all of our footsteps and basically took it all upon himself. By fulfilling the law perfectly, He walks in our place and stands in our place before the judge, so that when the judge punishes for sin, Jesus Christ stands in the place of all of humanity and says, "That punishment I will take upon myself, and I am the sacrificial lamb that comes to take away the sins of the world."

And when He does that, when He sacrifices himself on the cross, that is why our sins are forgiven. That is why we have Jesus Christ on the cross and we remember His presence on the cross, because it is in His suffering and death that we are free, that we are born again and born anew. Our baptisms are connected to the blood of Christ and we are baptized in His name and in His death so that we are covered by His grace and mercy. We thank God for the physical gifts that He has given to us, but we will never be fully fulfilled. We will never have the easy life. It will never be fully done in this life. So why would we focus and thank God and only thank God when the physical things go well, when they're temporary, when they don't last, when they will disappear, when rust and thieves and scorching heat will take care of them and moths and everything else that God talks about? Rather, hold fast to the one treasure that is everlasting, Jesus Christ and life with Him.

That is the promise. That is what truly happens when we are brought out of darkness into light. That is what He's really talking about when He sets the prisoners free. That is what He's really talking about when we hunger and thirst. It's not just the physical, but we hunger and thirst for righteousness, and He gives that to us. And we are blind to our sin and He opens our eyes and then forgives our sin. We are blind to the promises of God, and He opens our eyes to His salvation. Those are the gifts. Those are the fulfillment of the prophecy.

That is what the prophet, the priest and the king, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gives to us, not by anything that we have done because we have not done anything worthy of His attention or His love, but simply because He made us, He loves us, and for the sake of His Son, He forgives us. That is truly a thing to rejoice in. May His grace and mercy and peace be in abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.