

Speaker 1:

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

Speaker 2:

Amen.

Speaker 1:

You may be seated. We have some wonderful passages today. The Old Testament in particular I find extremely interesting. The Israelites are grumbling and complaining. No big surprise there. But doing that for a long, long time. What surprises me here is this is towards the end of their wandering in the wilderness. They've been wandering around for roughly 40 years. They were at the Promised Land. They rejected God's promise and they were afraid of the people. And so God sent them into the wilderness to wander for 40 years. And they are at the tail end of this. Aaron, the high priest, the brother of Moses has just died because he did not trust God at the last moment. And so he like the rest of the generation is going to die in the wilderness, but they're almost there.

And yet they're still complaining not just to God because they're wandering around, but they're complaining because they left Egypt some 30 odd years ago and they're still pining after the wonderful food that they had in Egypt. For 30 years, they have been free and they no longer were slaves. They've seen God working throughout their daily lives and yet still, they're pining after what was. They want their comforts back or what they perceive to be their comforts. They don't realize they were a slave to their comforts. And so they're getting ready. And so God is finally again frustrated with them and sends serpents into their land. The serpents bite them, they start dying and then they start confessing. "Oh, I'm sorry we sinned against God, against you Moses, please tell God to get rid of the snakes."

Notice however, God does not get rid of the snakes. The problems of this world still persist even when we trust in God. See, as much as I would like to say I don't understand the Israelites I unfortunately do. How often do we in our regular daily lives complain about the things that we have? "It's not quite good enough. The house is not quite big enough. The food is not quite rich enough. The bank account is not quite big enough. The job isn't quite good enough. This is not good enough. Our kids are not quite ..." The list goes on and on and on. You can have a good day, you can be praising God, and then something happens. You spill your coffee on your lap or you get off on 301 or your boss yells at you and suddenly you're complaining again. It doesn't take much for us to start complaining.

Unfortunately, we are very, very much like the Israelites. How many years has it been since God has saved us? How many years have we heard the grace of God in His mercy? How many times have we gathered together on a Sunday morning to receive His gifts and to be reminded that we are forgiven of all of our sins, and because of that, we have the hope and the promise and the certainty of everlasting life, and yet we complain? And God does not let us just be removed from this world. "Oh, I'm free." No, but He teaches us. He teaches us in the midst of the trials that we can trust His word for the hope of salvation.

Moses set up a bronze serpent in the wilderness. Now, was it the bronze serpent that healed them of the snake bites? No. It was a bronze serpent. It couldn't do anything, but God's Word said, "Look to the bronze serpent and you will be saved." It was the Word of God that they put their trust in. When they believed God's Word who said, "Look," they looked and they followed the Word of God and they were saved. They listened to the Word of God and they were healed. And the message is the same for us. What are we called to do but listen to God's Word? When things are not going our way, when snakes seem to be attacking us, when we seem to be in the midst of trials and tribulations in this world, what

are we called to do? Look to the Lord. Look to not the bronze serpent that was lifted up, but Christ Jesus who was lifted up on a tree. And here we come to the gospel lesson, John three.

Now we're all familiar with John 3:16. "For God to love the world that He gave His only son." He gave his only son for what? For what? We need to go to the previous verse where Jesus says, "Just like the serpent of the wilderness was lifted up so also will the Son of Man." Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him. Now, I don't know if you remember this, but this passage, John 3:16 comes in the midst of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. In the middle of the night where Nicodemus is asking Jesus about life and salvation. And this is where he says, "You must be born again." And Nicodemus goes, "How can I go back into my mother's womb and be born? That doesn't make any sense." This follows right after that. This is about being born again. This is what it means to be born again. It means to listen to the Word of God, to trust that God is the one who will save us and it is His son who has given himself for us.

We should not just remember verse 16, but verse 17. "For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." Yes, we recognize our sin. Yes, Christ died on the cross to forgive our sin, but the point of His coming was not to condemn us, but to save us from the condemnation that we already have. And He did that as a free gift. As Paul says, "He has given us this free gift, not by our own doing." There is absolutely nothing we can do. We cannot decide. We cannot move in the right direction. We cannot make promises to God. It is God who does it in us, by His grace through faith, which is given to us in our baptisms freely. We are the children of God. He has saved us. He has redeemed us, even though we still grumble and complain almost every single day.

Partially, why do we grumble and complain? Because we want the things of this world to go well and smoothly. We want our life to be at ease and comfortable, but the reality of this world is short of God coming again, that's not going to happen. There are always trials. There are always tribulations. There are always things that could be better and are not. And yet we are still called to give Him praise in the midst of all of it. Why? Because He has loved us through His son. He has not condemned us, but He has saved us. He has given us the gift of salvation. Not only that, not only has He given us salvation, He's also given us the good works that we're supposed to be doing.

See, you don't have to sit around trying to figure out what good works should I be doing for God? I mean, if I don't get it right, maybe this isn't going to work. No, you don't have to worry about that. Even your good works are given to you by God as He says, "They were given before the foundation." Before Him, before He even created the world. He gave you the good works to do. So what is our job? How are we to figure out what those good works are?

Well, the first thing we need to do is listen. Listen to God's Word. What does He have for us? What is His will for us? That we might serve Him faithfully, that we might love Him, that we might trust Him in all things. And if we trust Him in all things, that means we trust Him. When things are not going well, it means that we still believe that God is good and that our life is in His hands when nothing seems to be going right. When we are suffering, when we are struggling, we still praise God and thank Him for His salvation. Now, I know that's a tall order and it's not one that we are going to commit to and be able to follow perfectly, but it's still something we are called to strive for so that we might do these good works that God has prepared, so that others might give glory to God, so that they might know that God did so love the world.

See, that's what our good works are for, is to share the love of God with those who do not yet know. Your good works don't do you any good. They're all for your neighbor because you have already received everything from God. You already have every blessing that He has ever promised is yours right now. And so now that we know that we have every blessing of God, let us go forth and do good and

serve our neighbor out of thanksgiving, out of thanksgiving for His good gifts. And what is the good works? Pretty much everything you do is a good work unto the Lord if you do it unto the Lord. So being kind to your neighbor, changing a baby's diaper, working a regular job, being honest and fair with your friends and neighbors, sharing the love of God with all that you meet. Every moment of your life is an opportunity for good works unto the Lord, even when you're by yourself to praise Him and thank Him for the gifts that you have given.

See, this is our life. He has not just come to save you. For God's love [inaudible 00:11:29] world that He saved you. And now it's all good. You don't have to worry about anything else. Well, you don't have to worry about anything else, but He has called you for a purpose. You know how much He loves you. The rest of the world does not. And that's our task is that others might know, others might know and understand the precious gift that has been given to them. They're complaining about they have no food, they have no drink, and they hate this worthless food. They don't see the benefits they've been given. They don't understand that everything is a gift from God. And our job is just to share that it is all His gift and that He loves them, and that even when things are bad, He is with them always to the very end of the age.

So I encourage each and every one of you pray to God that every aspect of your life might be conformed to His Word, that you might look to the one who is raised on the cross for your hope each and every day, that you might stand firm on the foundation of your salvation and standing firm, declare the glory of God to those that you come in contact with, with everything that you do and all that you say. Trusting that when you fall, when you grumble, when you complain, He is right there to forgive you and to offer you His peace. And may that grace and that mercy and that peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen. We confess the faith that God has given to us. In the words of the Apostles Creed, page ...