

All right. Not bad. Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen.

So today we have the gospel of Isaiah. Yeah, I know we got Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But really, Isaiah is very often considered the fifth Gospel. And that is because here, especially in the latter part of Isaiah from like 52 on, we have this whole section of the suffering servant, and it talks specifically about Jesus Christ. This is where we hear, "By his stripes we are healed, and the iniquity upon us all is placed upon Him, and He cleanses us from our iniquities and sins." All of this comes, starting ... It is very clearly defined in Isaiah. In fact, it's one of the great discoveries that we found in the Dead Sea Scrolls that we found the Book of Isaiah, and we found that this book of Isaiah was written, well, at least 100 years, at least that's where the Dead Sea Scrolls go, 100 years before Jesus.

So what this told us was that indeed, the words of Isaiah were prophetic. They were written before Jesus was ever alive. They weren't added by Christians later on to try and make their case or try and change the Old Testament to be more favorable to their cause. No, these things were written before. We can trust them to be true, and they are prophetic. And what does Isaiah say here in this passage?

What he says is that God is going to call from all nations and bring us together, that He will be assigned amongst them, and He will send out survivors to all the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, Tubal and Javan, Florida, Hawaii, Wisconsin, Iowa, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Italy, India, and all the other nations of the world, He will call us together from north and south, east and west, and He will bring us to be a people. Not only that, even some of us will be priests and Levites.

In other words, the message of God and the connection with God is not just going to be reserved for the Israelites. Now we are all priests before God. We all have access to the holy of holies. We have all have access directly to God, and He has called some of us to be the pastors to proclaim that message to the flock. But we all, all of us, can speak directly to God, and that is the gift that God has given to us. That is the promise that He gives to all of us. That is what Isaiah is talking about, which is wonderful that we have received this great and marvelous gift because quite frankly, God is a consuming fire, as we hear in Hebrews.

In Hebrews, we hear about the struggle that we are going to face in this world. We know the promise. God saves us, but it's a narrow door as Jesus says, "That through which we enter that salvation," and that narrow door is Christ and Him crucified. Because if Christ did not die, and if Christ in His death did not take upon Himself all of our sins, then the resurrection would mean nothing. Nor would His birth. Everything revolves around the cross because that is the narrow door by

which we are saved, and that is what we are called to listen to, that is what we are called to focus upon, that we will bring our praise and worship to this God knowing that He has brought us through in our baptisms, claiming us and connecting us with the cross so that we might be confident of our salvation.

And that is good news for us because as I said, His Word is a consuming fire. God is a consuming fire. And we have here in the Book of Hebrews, the description of what is going on, specifically what is going on at Mount Sinai. But before we get to Mount Sinai, He mentions that the people have not struggled yet to the point of the shedding of their blood.

Now, if you remember last week when we talked about Jeremiah, he talked about them being sawn in two and all the horrible things that were going on there. The people of God have suffered throughout history, and we will continue to suffer throughout the rest of the history. What's the point? What's the purpose of this? Well, if you don't believe in Jesus Christ, it's just senseless violence. It's just agony and despair with no hope except to just end it all. But with Christ, there is hope because we know that no matter what we face, no matter what trials we experience, they serve a purpose. They discipline us and they train us.

Now, when we think of discipline, we very often think very negatively. Most of us growing up, we grew up in the era where if we disobeyed our parents, we got the belt or we got the switch or something. It was very familiar. Or if we didn't get it, we knew somebody who did. And we understood and the discipline, and it was not pleasant, but you grew and you learned from it hopefully if you were wise. See, that's what happens, that's how God disciplines us with the cares of this world, with the struggles of this world. He doesn't want these things to happen, but because of sin, they do happen. And so therefore, God redeems these things and uses them for our benefit in His glory.

All the trials that we face, all the struggles that we face, we have two choices. "Oh, woe is me. Why is this happening to me? I can't believe this. I've been doing this and nothing ever seems to work out. It's not fair," which is a pretty common refrain in this world. "It's not fair. It shouldn't be happening to me." The fact of the matter is pain and sorrow and suffering happens to everybody. Fair or not, it happens. And let's face it, if God were fair, what would we be suffering if He were truly and utterly fair? If He gave us what we actually deserved?

So we say, so God we do suffer in this world, but what does God say? He uses our suffering for discipline rather than wallowing in the misery of the pain and the sorrow of this world, we'd rather see that God is disciplining us and training us. How? Well, just like an athlete needs to train and practice in order to finish the race or complete in the game. If I tried to start running a marathon right now, I guarantee you I would pass out well before halfway through because I'm not

trained. I'm not ready to run that far yet, but if I build myself up, I can get there. But the same thing with the trials and struggles of this world, the spiritual discipline, if I do not train and learn and strengthen my trust in God when trials come, I don't have the endurance to face them. I don't understand the grace of God. I can't hold fast to His Word because I have not spent my time training in it and listening to it.

When we suffer, it drives us to look for hope someplace outside of ourselves. Because we're suffering, we don't have the answers, we don't know how long this is going to go on, we don't feel like we have the strength to endure it or make it through whatever this circumstance is. But when we allow God's discipline to train us, what ends up happening is we go to the Word of God. We go to find comfort in His Word. We go to hear about how He is with us to the very end of the age, that He will give us and has given us His grace and His mercy and His peace.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were on Mount Sinai where they received the 10 Commandments and the law of God and the earth literally trembled and shook, and they were sore, afraid, they were deeply afraid. They heard that voice from heaven. They saw the thunder and lightning, they felt the earth shake, and they said, "Moses, why don't you go talk to God? We'll just stand back here." They were afraid, they didn't want to come close because when God shows up, it's an event that should create awe and fear and reverence, and it does. But mixed with that, because we're on the other side, because we don't just face Mount Sinai with the law, we also get to come before God and Mount Zion. And Mount Zion is Jerusalem. Mount Zion is where Christ died, in Jerusalem to save us from our sins. So the law brings fear and awe and reverence. The gospel brings joy and peace and comfort.

And so even though we know the might of God, we also know the love of God, and we know that that love is for all times in all circumstances. After all, when Christ was suffering his worst, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It wasn't just His sorrow of being separated from God. It was also the joy of the task that was set before Him, the redemption of our souls and the forgiveness of our sins, which He demonstrated when He was on the cross. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," and also to the thief on the cross, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." He shows His grace and His mercy even as He is suffering, and we can grow and we can learn from that. Whatever trials we face, they are God's discipline or they can be used as God's discipline to strengthen our spiritual muscle, to strengthen our walk with Christ, to strengthen our focus upon heavenly things and the things of God.

Luther says about the suffering that we face, think about this. "If so many judgments, pains, deaths, martyrdoms, crosses, swords, fires of beasts with which

the Saints are chastised, are fatherly rods and loving chastisements, what will be the wrath of the judge over the ungodly?" If that's what the godly face, what do the ungodly face? "And if his judgment begins at the House of God, what will be the end of those who do not believe the gospel?" In other words, we need to hold our full hope and confidence in Christ because there's nothing else. If we don't hold fast to Him, the judgment that we receive is unfathomable what it is. And not only that, in our pains and martyrdom, think about the early Christians who faced death for their faith and only their faith. The Christians that were thrown to the lions in the Circus Maximus in Rome, the Christians that were tarred and burned at the stake, the Christians that were crucified, martyred and killed. What did they do when they were facing their deaths? What are we hear recorded?

They were singing hymns and praises to God. They were thanking God that they got to suffer for the sake of Christ because they knew that the suffering was God's chastisement, His purification. They knew that their suffering was temporary and that the greater thing was waiting for them, that heaven and earth, that will not and cannot be shaken, that is not affected by sin and death and Satan. So they could endure the cross. They could endure the shame. They could endure the swords and the fires and the beasts.

By not only could they endure it. By their endurance, they bore witness of the love of God. Even the Romans who were pretty bloodthirsty people eventually got a little tired of throwing these Christians into the circus, to the beasts because even they recognized that there was something different about these people. These people had a peace which surpasses all understanding. These people knew that their death was not their end. These people were not afraid to confess their faith, even if it meant a forfeiture of their life. And that bore witness. In a couple of hundred years, the Roman Empire had become Christian, and a lot of that was through the suffering of other Christians. Because when people see you going through the hard times that they themselves are going through, and they see the peace that you have and the hope that you have and the confidence that you have that your God will carry you through, some will ask questions. What do you know that I don't? Why do you have peace?

Because let's face it, peace doesn't come from the nations of this world. Peace doesn't come from mighty armies. I mean, yes, we have peace in this land, but there's still the other things that cause us anxiety and care in this world. Worlds can be shaken, nations can be shaken. We've seen that, but our home, our rest, our salvation cannot be moved nor can our Savior and therefore nor can we. So hope in the Lord, trust in the Lord and receive His chastisement with joy because He's clarifying you, He's cleansing you, He's preparing you to be His witnesses so that others from the north and the south, from the east and the west and all nations

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might see God at work in you and give Him glory and escape the coming wrath that is to come. We are at Mount Zion. We have peace. May His grace and His mercy and His peace being abide with you always now and forever more unto life everlasting. Amen.