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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 18, 2015
2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Romans 10:1-10, Luke 4:14-22

Hymns: 296; 297; 307; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 8:16-22

Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples.

17 And I will wait on the Lord,

Who hides His face from the house of Jacob;

And I will hope in Him.

18 Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!

We are for signs and wonders in Israel

From the Lord of hosts,

Who dwells in Mount Zion.

19 And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and
wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their
God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the
law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this
word, it is because there is no light in them.

21 They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry; and it shall
happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse
their king and their God, and look upward. 22 Then they will look
to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and
they will be driven into darkness. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the source of all truth, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Judah's Distress --

Spiritually it was a dark time in the land. Isaiah was a prophet to the kingdom of Judah during the reigns of several kings, some unbelieving and wicked kings, some who were faithful to the Lord. Isaiah's life came to an end during the reign of Manasseh. For many years Isaiah prophesied of the judgment that would come because of the sin and impenitence of the people of Judah. There were times of crises and times of prosperity during this long ministry, but there was a persistent spiritual failing among the people. Even though Isaiah prophesied of the grace and forgiveness of God and the salvation that would come with the appearance of the Servant of the Lord, he also consistently warned of the judgment that was to befall this people because of their impenitence. It would be easy to conclude that the future looked bleak for the nation, very bleak indeed, all because of the spiritual apostasy that just hung on. Where could the faithful turn to –

THEME: Find Hope and Direction for the Future?

Isaiah presents the answer to that question in our text. Hope and direction were to be found in --

I. The Security of the God's Testimony.

Isaiah 8:16 “Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples.

In these opening words of our text we hear God's command to keep the Word of the Lord secure for His people. The Word of the Lord presents His grace and His power to save. He promised them a future as His people and deliverance from their enemies. There was hope for the faithful in the Word of the Lord.

And our text presents faith's response.

Isaiah 2:17 “And I will wait on the Lord, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him.”

In this response the prophet lends his voice to all believers. When we are in the Word we will find hope, and perseverance, even in the darkest of days. We will wait on the Lord. We will be confident that He will deliver us and keep us safe and secure, because that is exactly what He promises in His Word. We hold unto that Word with the confidence that we shall not be put to shame. We won't be the ones who will be embarrassed because we were foolish enough to believe in some old book that doesn't really mean anything. That will not be the case. God's Word is sure. His promises are true from everlasting to everlasting. That is as true today as it was those many centuries ago when Isaiah first wrote these words by inspiration.

They find their substance and fulfillment in Christ our Lord. We have a marvelous prophecy of Jesus and His relationship with His Church in these words. "**Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me**" (v.18)! These are words that gave hope to the faithful when Isaiah wrote them. The Lord was present with them. God would care for them and preserve them. We are told in Hebrews 2 that these words find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Hebrews 2:10-15 "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying: 'I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.' 13 And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.' 14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

This brings the spiritually oppressed the confidence of faith. Hear the response of God's children in this prophetic dialogue:

Isaiah 2:18b "We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the Lord of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion."

The faithful among the Jews, (and there always were some faithful to the Lord in spite of the flagrant idolatry and wickedness of the land and Judah's kings) those faithful to the Lord were signs and wonders from the Lord of hosts. He was the One who kept them safe and in true faith. He was the One who gave them hope and life. As long as they were in the midst of the people the testimony and the Law of the Lord was also present among the people as a witness to the hope that the Lord brings through His promises. And so the Lord in His grace sent our Redeemer.

This is no different today. The promises of the Lord have been fulfilled. He has sent His Son into the world. As our Brother Jesus suffered death for us that we might be delivered from sin, death and the devil. These words remain for us today: **‘Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me’** (v.18)! He keeps us as His children and we continue to serve as a sign and wonder before the world of the truth and power of the Lord to save. We are a sign to the truth of the Word of the Lord and the testimony of His grace in the world.

And yet we also still find ourselves in the midst of an unbelieving world that seeks hope and guidance for the future from themselves and --

II. The Futility of Worldly Wisdom.

Isaiah 8:19 “And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?”

While the people of the Jews that were faithful to the Lord were mocked as being foolish, the blatant idolatry that persisted in the nation that included all sorts of horrible sins of the flesh, and even human sacrifice was exalted as being a reliable resource to secure hope and direction. People went to mediums and soothsayers, and fortunetellers and the prophets of the false gods who spoke and chanted in mysterious whispers, and they thought, “How marvelous!” They thought it more sensible to consult the dead

about the future to seek guidance for the living. Didn't they consider the wisdom of the **living** God?

All this still goes on today. People praise the merits of many false religions and even endorse the ridiculous superstitions of reincarnation and spiritism while they mock Christians who believe the Bible, and trust the Word of God to be true and reliable for all matters of faith and life. We are encouraged to put our confidence in scientists and philosophers, and psychologists and politicians, and trust that they will have the answers we need to find hope and peace. The Lord encourages us to stay in the Word and the truth of God our Savior. Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians:

Colossians 2:6-10 “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

Stay rooted in the truth of Christ, and don't let others lead you astray with promises of security and glory that is only temporary. Don't be cheated out of your eternal hope. You are complete in Christ our Lord.

Things in this world can look pretty gloomy from time to time. Headlines make the future look dark and uncertain. Terrorists are out there, and they want to kill you! We all heard about the terrorists attack on a political cartoon magazine, but what didn't get as much attention from the world was the continuing slaughter of Christians by the extremist group ISIS, or the slaughter of an entire community of Christians in Nigeria in which an estimated 2000 Christians were slaughtered for being Christian. In America it's all about the economy. While the economy looks good one day, everybody is worried about it the next. Too many people are unemployed or underemployed, or the low price of oil is good to give people more money, but others fear it is undermining the stock market. The press declares that politicians don't know what

they are doing either to defeat terrorist or bring economic security to the world. The world is not so good at --

III. Dispelling Despair.

Isaiah' prophecy addressed this as well. The Lord's answer was the same as we have been talking about. The concluding verses of our text remind us of the difference between the way of the Lord and the way of the world.

Isaiah 8:20-22 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. 21 They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. 22 Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness.

Isaiah spoke of the coming hard times that would befall the Kingdom of Judah. He clearly foretold how all they had cherished and trusted would fail them when they needed deliverance the most. The faithful then more than ever would need to turn to the Word of the Lord and recall how God testified of His care and love for them. When the unbelieving majority looked up they would just be angry with the Lord, and in frustration and despair they would curse their king for failing them and then they would curse God, against whom they had sinned with idolatry and unbelief! What is left but for them to look down to the earth and all they see is trouble, and darkness, and gloom, and despair.

When all that the world can see is darkness God still reveals His light of life and salvation. That was what Jesus preached to the Jews. In our gospel lesson He spoke to the people of Nazareth of deliverance from the oppression of sin and healing for the brokenhearted. But they were not willing to hear this message from Jesus.

Now He brings that same message to the world, and to us here in Austin, Minnesota. When times of trouble afflict us in life, when the world looks very bleak and the future looks dark, then hear the cry of the Prophet, "**To the law and to the Testimony!**" We need

to continue to look to the message of God's Word for there the Light of life shines. We see Jesus as the One who has secured a glorious future for us. He alone dispels sin's darkness and despair.

Time and again throughout Scripture we are encouraged to see the light that God shines from His Word so that we might find our way in life. We are all familiar with the passage from Psalm 119; "**Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path**" (Psalm 119:105). It is true in every way. God brings light to us in our lives, for He has shined that light into our hearts, and He directs our paths according to His light so that we might walk in the way of righteousness. We are told that in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). So when we need direction, and hope and light hear the words of the prophet, "**To the law and to the Testimony!**" and in His Word we will find the way to life everlasting. Recall the words of our Lord and know that they are true, "**Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it**" (Luke 1:28)!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.