

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 18, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 66, 37:3, 508, 345, 45.

Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-17, Ephesians 5:1-21, Matthew 12:14-21.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:5-7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

God promised Light, Joy, and Freedom to mankind. Today we look at God's promise of light, especially the fact that God's light is also sent to Gentiles.

As you heard in our Old Testament lesson, God is here speaking of 'his servant'. As we study this chapter and especially our sermon text, we must realize that the servant of God here is his Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He tells that servant: ***"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."***

Our chief focus will not be on the 'servant' pictures of our text, but upon the fact that

GOD'S SERVANT – JESUS CHRIST – WILL BE A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES

- 1. Jesus Christ is light and gives the light of eternal salvation.**
- 2. Jesus Christ freed us from bondage and darkness.**

These verses of Scripture, according to one source, are quoted or used in the New Testament at least fifteen times.

The Lord's servant was "***called ... in righteousness***". In connection with righteousness. The "righteousness of the Lord" is goodness and the perfection of the Lord, the standard by which he acts. He demands that the entire human race be righteous, that is, good, perfect, but at every step the human race – even his chosen people, Israel – has proven to be unrighteous, sinful. Even obedience to all the ceremonies of the Old Testament law has failed to produce a righteous people, for no one can obey perfectly as God demands.

God devised a plan to provide righteousness to all humanity. In accordance with his purposes of love and his plan to rescue his people Israel and the entire world, he called this Servant to do his work. The apostle Paul wrote ***"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."*** Romans 3:22 God called this Servant, Jesus Christ, to carry out his righteous will for the deliverance of all humanity.

This would be difficult. But God says to his Servant: ***"I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you."***

Jesus, God's Son, the Servant of whom this chapter in Isaiah speaks is the fulfillment of all God's covenants. He fulfilled the Old Covenant – the Law – perfectly, and gave his body and blood as a new covenant to assure us that he really died for our sins. We might say that he lived to fulfill the old covenant and he died to establish the new covenant, but that would be an over-simplification.

This is the God who is pleased with his beloved Son. This is the God who ***“so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** John 3:16 (NIV) That passage tells us of the fulfillment of God’s Servant’s work.

The New Testament letter to the Hebrew Christians speaks even more clearly of Christ’s new covenant: ***“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”*** Hebrews 9:13-15

Jews should understand covenants, and especially God’s covenants. But for Gentiles, to whom the idea of a covenant-God might not be so clear, the idea of light vs. darkness is clear. This Servant of God was sent to be ***“a light for the Gentiles.”*** That idea and those words are as plain for us as the words of the aged Simeon who held the baby Jesus in his arms in the temple, words which we sing in our worship services: ***“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”*** Luke 2:29-32, King James Version

What Jesus did for the Jews, he also did for the Gentiles. While the Gentiles didn’t necessarily understand the Jewish concept of covenant, they clearly understood light and darkness. The New Testament speaks often of being called out of darkness to follow the true God. We read in 2 Corinthians ***“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*** We also read in 1 Peter 2:9: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*** (4:6)

Jesus freed us from spiritual bondage. He gave us freedom from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Jesus did not go around preaching social justice, as we hear from many church leaders today who seem to think social justice is one of the most important church teachings. For if one does not believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ which preaches repentance unto eternal life is not the primary message of the Christian church, some other teaching will take its place. Jesus went around preaching the Gospel, that is, freedom from sins through the New Covenant in his blood. He proclaimed God’s justice, that God forgives our sins because Jesus himself paid for them. Jesus paid for our sins through his sufferings and death, through his blood. The New Covenant in His blood is sure and certain because of His complete obedience to God’s Law.

Jesus was sent as the Servant of God for both Jews and Gentiles – for all mankind. And of all mankind, it is unfortunately only those who believe this who will benefit from it and receive the eternal life promised to all believers. That makes the urgency of our mission to share this good news you are hearing again today all the more important.

You heard again today that Jesus came ***“to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”*** It is true that Jesus physically healed people of blindness while he was on earth. But this is much more than just that. Jesus came to open spiritually blind eyes with his Word. These words do not refer to physical blindness or physical bondage. History would show that Cyrus would deliver the Jewish exiles from the prison of Babylonian captivity, but God’s Servant will deliver all mankind from the prison of sin. Not only were the Jews, God’s special people, the ones chosen to bring the Savior to mankind delivered from the prison of sin, but also the rest of us – Gentiles – were delivered, too.

We can rejoice in the words of Paul to the Romans: ***"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."*** Romans 8:1-4

John the evangelist writes ***"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*** John 8:12

Because of sin, every human – by nature – remains blind to the truths of God. This Servant would provide the necessary insight to see the grace and mercy of God. Without Jesus Christ, all humans are in spiritual bondage. All humans are slaves to sin and doomed to eternal punishment. This Servant would bring release from sin's bondage and from the dungeon of eternal damnation. Isaiah has written by inspiration, as we read in Isaiah 9:2: ***"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."***

It is the Lord's plan to deliver all the world through this Servant – if only they will believe. And he even works that faith through his word: ***"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** Romans 10:17

This Servant, Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life of obedience to God's law on our behalf, because we could not.

This Servant, Jesus Christ, died to pay the penalty for our disobedience to God's Law, so that we need not be punished eternally for our sins.

You are free. Now go and rejoice – confess Christ and the truth of God's Word in all you say and do. You are no longer in the dungeon – the prison cell of Satan and death.

You stand in the marvelous light of God, the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In this season when many in the world are celebrating a "Festival of Lights" remember the true light – Jesus Christ and what he came to do for you.

O Lord, lead us to believe your Holy Word. Like the father who pleaded for Jesus to physically heal his son, we, too plead with our God: ***"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*** Mark 9:24

Remember the words from our Epistle lesson: ***"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord."*** Ephesians 5:8-10 (NIV) Amen.