

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity, November 15,

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 523, 524:7, 524: 1-6, 529:1-4, 529:5
Lessons: Isaiah 35:3-10; Revelation 7:9-17; Luke 12:35-43
Sermon Text: Isaiah 54:7-10
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

As we come near to the end of the church year, our thoughts are drawn to think also of the end of this world and this temporal life. The end cannot come too soon, for we are weary of all our earthly tribulations. The Bible says, ***“Sin is lawlessness,”*** 1 John 3:4, the breaking of God’s commandments. It is sin that has resulted in all the corruption, the problems, and the tribulations of this life. It is sin that has resulted in wars between nations, corruption in government, disunity in churches, gang-related crime, and all other problems. It is because of sin that we call this world a vale of tears.

In the midst of all our earthly troubles and problems, our sicknesses, suffering, and grief, we might be tempted by Satan to think that God does not care what happens to us or that he has forsaken us. Therefore, we need to be assured of God’s love for us. This is what we may learn from our text that is taken from the Old Testament Scriptures. Of these Scriptures Paul says, ***“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope,”*** Romans 14:4. Let us, then, learn about,

THE CERTAINTY AND EXTENT OF GOD’S LOVE.

- 1. We need assurance because of our earthly tribulations;**
- 2. We have the assurance of God’s eternal love and faithfulness.**

The prophet Isaiah wrote the words of our text in the days just prior to the fall of the Kingdom of Judah and the 70-year exile in Babylonia. Isaiah recorded God’s words to the believing remnant of the Kingdom of Judah. ***“For a brief moment I abandoned you, ... I hid my face from you for a moment.”*** When the Jews of the two southern tribes (Kingdom of Judah) were led into captivity and King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, it would indeed seem to the believers among them that God had forsaken them. The ten northern tribes (Kingdom of Israel) had already been taken into permanent captivity in Assyria. They never returned to their homeland.

The Second book of Kings tells us why God was so angry at the southern Kingdom of Judah. It tells of a wicked king by the name of Manasseh and how he led Judah into idolatry. ***“Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down,”*** 2 Kings 21:11-13.

Isaiah the prophet described the people of the Kingdom of Judah. ***“Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. They have forsaken the LORD; they have***

spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him,” Isaiah 1:4. The people of the Kingdom of Judah saw their temple and the city of Jerusalem destroyed, and they were taken into captivity. Indeed, God said of them, *“I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes, because they have done evil in my eyes and have provoked me to anger from the day their forefathers came out of Egypt until this day,”*”2 Kings 21:14-15.

It was because of this that the remnant of believers in Judah needed assurance in their time of tribulation. They needed to hear *“For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,’ says the LORD, your Redeemer.”*

The words of our text may be applied to God’s believing people throughout history. No doubt, these words were of great comfort to the Apostle Paul when he suffered so much for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. He speaks of what he suffered, *“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move,”* 2 Corinthians 11:24-26a. He worked hard, often went without food and water, and was cold and needed clothes. He suffered persecution at the hand of the unbelieving Jews. Besides this he faced the pressure of his concern for all the churches. He surely needed the comfort of God’s love.

Luther also applied the words of our text to his own situation in working to restore the Gospel of Christ to the people. He suffered because wicked men would not let the Word of God stand. He commented on the endless tribulations of this life. *“Who can believe this, that every one of our tribulations is momentary and that God’s wrath is a point in time? Nobody can believe this, but he says, ‘The Lord is always angry,’ as in the psalm (Psalm 85:5): ‘Wilt Thou be angry with us forever?’ So in our feeling every tribulation seems eternal, although in the sight of God it is momentary,”* Luther’s Works, Vol. 17.

Surely it must also seem to us sometimes in this life that God has forsaken us or forgotten us. We are tempted by Satan to doubt that God really rules over this world. The days are so evil. Nations are constantly fighting against each other. There is a movement of a secular culture to remove God from the picture entirely. Our freedoms in this blessed land are threatened. In the various church bodies God’s Word is rejected more and more, and human opinion decides what shall be taught. Few people care enough to use God’s Word faithfully in their home or to teach their children to know Jesus as their Savior. We experience personal tribulations when we become sick and our troubles seem to increase more all the time.

These are the reasons why we need to be **assured of God’s eternal love and faithfulness.**

2.

Therefore let us now put the emphasis on God’s promises, *“With deep compassion I will bring you back. ... With everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,’ says the LORD your Redeemer.”* In times of tribulation the assurance we need above all else is that our sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ our Savior. This truth has been proclaimed to God’s people of all times. Isaiah wrote, *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine,”* Isaiah 43:1b. Paul wrote, *“In him (Jesus) we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding,”* Ephesians 1:7-8. Peter wrote, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power unto the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials,”* 1 Peter 1:3-6.

2

We may be assured that God's love is not a momentary thing. Our text speaks of **"everlasting kindness."** There is everlasting kindness, unending love and mercy, from God because he is **"the eternal God,"** Genesis 21:33. The Lord Jesus who came to this earth, and was made man for our salvation, is also the eternal God. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,"** Hebrews 13:8.

The certainty of God's love is made very clear to us in these words of our text, **"To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again."** When Noah and his family had gone through the experience of the great flood, and then later heard thunder and saw lightning, they would have wondered how much rain would fall again. But God put all their fears to rest when he put his rainbow in the sky as a token of his covenant with Noah. God said, **"Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth,"** Genesis 9:14-16.

No matter what the conditions are, no matter how great our tribulations in this life, God will continue to love us and deal with us according to his mercy and kindness. He says, **"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.** Mountains and hills seem to be very firm and lasting. Yet the solid earth is often made to shake and tremble when God sends an earthquake. God with his power can make mountains and hills disappear from sight as when a volcano erupts. But God's kindness will not depart. His love toward us will never change.

God in our text speaks of his **"covenant of peace"**. That is the same covenant that God made with Abraham when he promised that the Messiah would be born from Abraham's descendants. Even as God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled, so also all the promises we have about our forgiveness for Jesus' sake will be fulfilled. The psalmist David wrote, **"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us,"** Psalm 103:10-12. Paul wrote, **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,"** Romans 5:8. Paul also wrote, **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,"** Romans 3:23-24. God loved us so much that he gave his Son to die for all our sins. Now they are no longer counted against us. Therefore we have **"peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"** Romans 5:1.

This is a matter of certainty for us poor sinners, because God's Word tells us that **"the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,"** Romans 6:23. God has promised to take us to heaven when we die as believers in Christ. If this is our assurance, and God cannot lie, then why should we fear any tribulations of this life? Jesus says, **"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world,"** John 16:33. Paul gives us the words that express the proper attitude of a believer in Christ, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us,"** Romans 8:18. May this be our comfort through all our earthly life. Amen.

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