

In the name of our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.” ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. ⁷ The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. **This is God’s Word for God’s People.**

Dear Friends,

“Don’t be afraid – Fear Not.” How many times have those words been uttered in scripture? When God sent an angel to Zechariah in the temple to announce the birth of that special baby boy who would come to be known as John the Baptist, the angel had to start out with, “Don’t be afraid Zechariah.” And it was the same when an angel came to Mary with the message that she was going to give birth to the Savior of the world. He had to start with “Don’t be afraid.” Even at the tomb on the first Easter morning the angel had to tell the women, “Don’t be afraid.” Why is that? God sends a special message or messenger and it strikes fear in our hearts.

It all goes back to the Garden of Eden when God went looking for Adam and Eve after they had sinned. They were hiding because they were afraid. They didn’t want to face God. Their sin made them afraid of God’s punishment and judgment. We’re no different today. When we do something wrong, we hide. We avoid the one who might bring us punishment – whether we’re a child or adult.

That’s why we don’t always want to hear God’s message too. We don’t want to think about our sins and the results of those sins. We don’t want to be held accountable for what we have done and so we at times hide from God’s messenger. We stay away from church and avoid “church” people. They might know about our sins and we don’t like that.

When Isaiah wrote his Old Testament book, God’s people were far from perfect. They had cast God aside for other gods and they were doing a pretty good job of proving how arrogant and wicked they could be. Isaiah was God’s messenger and the message, especially in the 1st 40 chapters of his book, was a message of judgment and woe. But not all the people had sunk to this level of wickedness. There were still faithful followers of the one true God and so interspersed throughout his words of judgment, Isaiah included prophecies about the promised Messiah and various words of encouragement.

That’s the purpose of this section of scripture before us this morning – to encourage us to remain faithful to God’s Word and to remind us about our Savior and what he has done for us so we can, **“Be Strong and not have any reason to Fear.”**

I. What do you think about when you hear the word “vengeance?” For me, it brings to mind that someone has done something wrong and they’re going to get what they deserve. When Isaiah writes, **“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”** He is conveying in one short sentence the

fate of unbelievers and believers. Unbelievers will feel God's wrath while believers will be saved. But this sentence doesn't bring us a whole lot of comfort unless we consider everything it involves.

If you have the unfortunate circumstance of going before a judge and jury today you can't always be sure of the outcome. Maybe you will be found guilty or maybe you will be found not guilty. Maybe you can get off on a technical loophole or you can make a deal for a lesser sentence. God's court is a little different. We know what God demands, **"Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect."** (Mt. 5:48). And we know the sentence for failing to be perfect, **"The wages of sin is death."** (Romans 6:23). There are no loopholes in God's court and if we chose to defend ourselves, we lose because we have nothing to stand on. We are guilty and the sentence must be fulfilled.

But we have one who comes with divine retribution to save us. Jesus Christ defends us by pointing out that the sentence has been carried out – he himself has made the payment for our sins. That payment was nailed to the cross and stamped "paid in full" by God himself. Our trust in Jesus, our defender and Savior brings us a verdict of not guilty. As God announces, "Your sentence has been completed and you are free," we feel a sense of relief. Our sins have been forgiven.

That's the relief Isaiah wanted to bring God's faithful people and the relief he wants to bring us. Even as God announces judgment on the unbelieving world in which we live, there is salvation for all who faithfully trust in Jesus Christ for that verdict of "not guilty."

II. How do we know that Jesus is the one to defend us before God? Look at all he did while on this earth. Our Gospel lesson talked about how he healed the deaf/mute man. This man could now hear the comforting words of his Savior and shout for joy at the salvation he had received. Matthew recorded how Jesus brought sight to two blind men sitting outside of Jericho when they called out for mercy (Mt. 20:29-34) and John records how Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth as a sign to the Pharisees of his power (John 9:1-41)

There were plenty of other miracles of Jesus. He healed a paralytic and told him to pick up his bed and go home. (Mt. 9:1-8) and did so many miracles that if they were all recorded it would fill volumes.

All this was done to fulfill the scriptures – the prophecies about the promised Messiah so people would know that this is the one we have been waiting for – the one who will save us.

"⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." The words before us today are just some of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. I think the greatest promise of God Jesus fulfilled was the one given in the Garden and Eden to Adam and Eve about how he would "crush" the devil's head. Satan has been dealt a fatal blow. He still tempts us and tries to take us down with him but with the help of Christ we can defeat his attempts and when we fail to resist the temptations of the devil we can point to our Savior and know that our sin has been forgiven. He has removed the sting from the devil's accusations.

That's why Isaiah describes the result of the Saviors work as, **“Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. ⁷ The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.”** Isaiah describes the barren wilderness being changed and renewed by water. In a way he describes something that people would consider impossible but it fits well with the picture of Jesus, who describes himself as the “living water” that brings us life. He renews and refreshes our spiritual lives. Faith in Jesus brings us the water of life and gets rid of the wilderness of unbelief. That's why we look to God's Word to fill our hearts with life.

“Be strong and do not fear God will come.” Comforting and encouraging words for us as we ride the roller coaster of life. The evidence is all there – our Savior has done wonderful things – fulfilling all the prophecies and promises of God for our salvation. He assures of this and refreshes us through his word. God truly cares about us and he will come to take us to be with him at some point.

Trust in God and his promises. He will come again in glory to take all believers home to him in heaven. Until that time comes, hold onto him through his Word for it is God's Word that brings us true strength and comfort. Amen.