

**GUEST MESSAGE FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 2008,
FAMILY OF CHRIST LUTHERAN, GAGE ELEMENTARY, ROCHESTER, MN**

Text: Isaiah 51:1-6

Introduction

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ, our Rock, our hope for the past, for the present and for the future! Amen

I'm sure you've all heard the old clique, 'A PICTURE IS WORTH A 1,000 WORDS'. Being a visual learner myself, I know the truth of that clique. Last week end our daughter Jenny from Milwaukee was home and shared her pictures of a recent trip she had just returned from in Thailand and Malaysia. Wow! Her pictures spoke volumes and yet with just a few words about her experience behind each picture Jenny could change the whole picture with a deeper understanding and meaning about the beautiful green scenery, the colorful Buddhist temples and shrines and the numerous people's faces she saw and met.

That's really how God's Word works, also. When we see the picture of the world we live in via TV, inter net, movies, magazines, newspapers and even what we see in our own life's experiences. What we hear about God and His promises from His Word, His voice, changes the picture of our entire world view. From frustration, despair, hopelessness God's Word changes our perspective to confidence, conviction, promise and hope. God's Word converts how we see our lives and our world, past present and future.

In our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 51, by God's grace we are being invited to listen to God's Word. In order that we might see the picture of God's grace for us in whatever captivity or burden or fear or anxiety each of us are dealing with.

GOD'S VOICE, GOD'S WORD CHANGES OUR PICTURE, OUR VIEW OF EVERYTHING!
And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this morning.

I.

In verses 1, 2, 3 of our Isaiah 51 lesson God's voice gives us a picture of His work in the past. Picturing the hope of the past, in our present circumstances, give us a picture of hope for the future.

"look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the quarry from which you were dug".
Isaiah, is speaking to people who will soon be suffering under what is called the Babylonian Captivity of King Nebuchadnezzar. The Assyrians are at the gates of Jerusalem. God's people have been under a siege, basic necessities of food and water are becoming depleted. The ominous prophecy of that

Babylonian Captivity is being fulfilled firsthand. The lives of God's people are in ruins! I hope you can get the picture of the intense situation God's people were under at the time of Isaiah 51.

But, you see, it's in that intense context God through His prophet Isaiah enters this picture and lifts up God's voice. He calls for people to close their eyes of fear and hopelessness and simply listen. As He tells them once again of God's work in their past history to give them in their present situation a future hope. And isn't that what we all are looking for?

Yahweh, invites them to consider, Abraham and Sarah, wondering and barren nomads with no children, two strangers in a strange land. Remember the stories of Abraham and Sarah? And, yet, from these two insignificant people, God brought forth a whole nation - a nation from which the Savior of the entire world would be born.

God's voice, God's Word reveals the power of God to take the weak and use them for His strength. In **2 Corinthians 12**, some of my favorite verses of the entire Bible, it says **'My grace is sufficient for you' says the Lord 'for My power is made perfect in weakness ... for when you are weak then you are strong'**. God's voice, God's Word changes waste places and wilderness and desert to be like the Garden of Eden. I hope you are getting the picture, it's beautiful, it's miraculous. What an awesome picture of desert to garden, of you and me from nothing to living human beings. My youngest daughter, Rachel and her husband Brad are having my first grandchild soon. We got to see ultra sound pictures of the baby. Basically from nothing is being created by God's grace by God's design by God's plan and God's Word my grandchild! God's voice, God's Word brings comfort, joy, gladness, thanksgiving, the voice of song in the midst of sadness and mourning and anxiety and depression and illness for God's people 'you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord'. God's Word, God's voice does all that! 'listen', 'give attention', 'look', 'lift up your eyes'. Get the picture!

II.

When we look at the picture of the world we live in and see people's condition, our own condition, we can find ourselves in captivity as real as that Babylonian Captivity. It's not the Assyrians at the gates of Rochester, it's not a siege by King Nebuchadnezzar. But, life's picture can be pretty bleak at times, even in the midst of affluent Rochester people are in captivity to all kinds of issues and isms. I don't know what issues or isms have captivated you. But, I do know God's voice, God's invitation 'to listen', and 'to look to the rock' is coming to you and me as well. The rock the people of Isaiah's day were to look upon was their past through Abraham and Sarah. To see what God had done for them through these weak, sojourning, nomadic, childless people. The Rock God invites us to look upon is Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham and Sarah through whom God fulfilled His promise of a Savior

for the entire world. In whom we find and receive our righteousness in God's sight even when everything in our lives is all wrong. In Jesus, we have received God's righteousness and salvation, and that is rock solid! This is from the One who was born in a barn as God incarnate, who was crucified and died upon a cross as a common criminal in our place, who was raised from the dead for us. Through Jesus, God in flesh and blood, God has forgiven all our wrongs, all our sins and has declared us to be righteous in God's sight and free from the captivity of sin's guilt, Satan's accusations and lies and death's fears. So when we seek the Lord through faith, you and I see Jesus, God's Word, God's voice in flesh and blood, our Rock, 'upon whom the church stands, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'.

III.

In verses 4, 5 & 6 of Isaiah 51, God's voice - God's Word, in our text, is extended to all nations, to the coastlands, a light to the peoples, and we are a part of this great picture of salvation. God's voice opens our eyes to God's mission, to God's purpose for us to tell as many people as possible about Jesus, our Rock. So that in their captivity, in their anxieties, in their fears, in their wrongs they can have hope. Like we have hope to know God's righteousness draws near to them, also. Hope to know God's salvation has gone out to them, also. And it's simply received as a gift through hearing God's voice, receiving God's Word in the little, weak, empty, barren hand of faith. We see the big, the whole, the awesome picture of God's grace and love for us in Jesus Christ, our Rock.

When, in Isaiah 51, we're invited to '**lift up our eyes to the heavens and to look at the earth beneath**', we see the pictures of climate change, of increasing natural disasters, tornados, hurricanes, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, sectarian violence, wars, mortgage crisis, wall street jitters, family dysfunction, marriage divorce, diagnosis of disease, whatever! You get the picture! All of it picturing the truth of God's Word, God's voice '**the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth wears out like a garment**' and we are part of that picture.

God's Word - God's voice - God's picture is worth more than a 1,000 words. It gives us hope and offers us to see the big picture. Because of human sin this world indeed will not last, it is rapidly, rapidly changing. God's voice, God's Word speaks '**of His salvation which will be forever**', it will always last. When everything else is long gone, Jerusalem, Assyria, Babylon, Rochester, the United States of America, this old world or whatever, God's love, God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's salvation, God's righteousness will never end. What God has done for us through Jesus, our Savior, our Lord, our Rock, our hope when everything else is sinking sand, will always last. Your righteousness, your final verdict before Almighty God for Jesus sake is and always will be 'forgiven', you are loved by God and always, always will be. And that's the BIG PICTURE!

Conclusion

Our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 51, opens with people like you and me seeking and pursuing the Lord and His righteousness as they face some awful circumstances in their lives. By the end of our Old Testament reading what and whom they are seeking and pursuing are revealed = salvation and righteousness that are forever! That is the power of listening, of giving attention to God's voice, to God's Word. It gives you the big picture of God's love for you.

Whatever burden you carry this day, and whatever captivity captivates each of you, simply listen to the voice of God, the Word of God, to Jesus Christ, our Rock.

It gives you the whole picture to see God's salvation at work = in your past, in your present, and in your future, forever!

Romans 11 'Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God ... for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever'. And all God's people said 'AMEN'.

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in the one true faith in Jesus Christ, our Rock. Amen