

Isaiah 51 1-8 Nov 4

Isaiah 51:1-8 (NKJV)

¹ "Listen to Me, you who follow after *righteousness*, You who seek the LORD: Look to the rock *from which* you were hewn, And to the hole of the pit *from which* you were dug.

² Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah *who* bore you; For I called him alone, And blessed him and increased him."

³ For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the LORD; Joy and gladness will be found in it, Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

⁴ "Listen to Me, My people; And give ear to Me, O My nation: For law will proceed from Me, And I will make My justice rest As a light of the peoples.

⁵ My *righteousness is* near, My salvation has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon Me, And on My arm they will trust.

⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My *righteousness* will not be abolished.

⁷ "Listen to Me, you who know *righteousness*, You people in whose heart *is* My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, Nor be afraid of their insults.

⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment, And the worm will eat them like wool; But My *righteousness* will be forever, And My salvation from generation to generation."

I am not sure if anything teaches us about our relationship with God more than being around small children. If there was such a thing as a perfect parent, it wouldn't matter. Their children would still pose a challenge. A parent could give the perfect response to modify any behavior or to teach anything needing to be learned. And a child would still find a way to disobey. The child would still find a way to miss learning the obvious lesson.

How many times have those of you who are parents said to yourself, is my child just that stupid? Can he or she not see that their disobedience never gets them anything that benefits their lives. Can't they see it just brings them pain? Can't they see how stupid they look when they keep playing a game they will never win. Why won't they just listen? Why won't they just listen?

And then we read the story of Adam and Eve. And we wonder, why didn't they just listen? And then we read the stories of the Jewish people. And we wonder, why wouldn't they just listen? Then Christ came to save them. And we see their

rejection of Christ. And we wonder why didn't they just listen? And then we read the book of Acts and see some of the things that happened in the church. And we wonder, why wouldn't they just listen?

But we all know the answer. We all know why they didn't just listen. And we know it is for the same reasons that our histories showed that we wouldn't listen either. We don't listen because we have a fatal sin disease. We were born in a state of sin. We exist in a state where **pride dies a slow death** and **humility is hard to come by**. Ultimately we want what we want. Really we would like to be God. But since that position is not currently available, we want to resist Him at every turn. Every step in yielding our wills to God is a hard step. We die to ourselves a little. We take up our cross which is an instrument of our own death a little.

Every step in turning **from** God is an easy step. Our old nature takes to it like a duck takes to water. It is an instinct. It is a pre-programmed response from the days we lived without a relationship with Christ. It is muscle memory of our pre-Christ life.

Ashley's son William came to a place one day that he realized that if his mom was preoccupied with other things, he could not be sure that she was really listening to him. So for her to give a fleeting glance or to look out of the corner of her eye while listening to him was no longer enough. One day he just asked, No Mom, look at me for real. What he meant was, look me in the eye so I can know for sure I have your full attention.

This morning we are being called to look at God for real. In vs 1, 4 and 7 the verse begins with Listen to Me. The listening we are being called to is the same listening we wished our small children would do. It is the kind of listening that both hears and obeys. It is not an appeal to just **gain content**. It is listening to **gain guidance** in our lives, **direction** in our lives, boundaries in our lives. It is the life giving word of God. It is light that is to intrude into our darkness. It is truth to chase the lies and deception.

In our text this morning, listening is listed 3 times but righteousness is listed 5 times. Why? Well it is a similar appeal to the one Jesus gave.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" ([Matthew 5:6](#)).

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What is righteousness? Well, it is pretty simple. Righteousness is basically what is right as opposed to wrong. Righteousness is perfect right-ness. It is moral perfection.

When dealing with righteousness we have to keep in mind three things.

The **first** is the righteousness of God. God is perfectly right all the time. We can know what right is by looking at God. We can know that everything God says is right. So that is perfect righteousness.

The **second** is the **imputed righteousness** we receive from Christ. We need perfect righteousness. We can never attain it. So we must receive it from outside of ourselves. We need to receive the perfect righteousness of Christ **by faith** in His completed work for us. It is imputed in that it counts **for** us, but it was not **from** us. It is still not **our** record. It is **Christ's** record. He did not make us righteous in that he **imparted** his righteousness to us so that now we are morally perfect. It is that His righteousness **took the place of** our moral failure. His record **replaced** our record for the purpose of judgment. And we became righteous by virtue of His righteousness. His righteousness was **imputed** to us, not **imparted** to us.

Then **third** is the righteousness **we** are to exhibit as believers because we are followers of Christ. We are to do the right thing because of who Christ has made us. **Romans 8:3-4 (NKJV)**

³ **For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,**

⁴ **that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

You and I, if we are followers of Christ, have been enabled to do the right thing. Our record will never be perfect. But we have been empowered to do everything that we are called to do. And we are expected to be living by the Spirit, living in obedience to what God says. So we do not become righteous by our good works. But we do good works, right works, righteous works because we have already been proclaimed righteous. And we are expected to grow in behavioral righteousness. Our actions should be more righteous today than they were last year at this time.

OK, I think we are ready for our text.

Here is the outline.

The attentive listeners: reassured by God

- 1. God's comfort is life-giving ([51:1-3](#))**
- 2. God's power is world-transforming ([51:4-6](#))**
- 3. God's righteousness is courage-inspiring ([51:7, 8](#))**

¹ "Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, You who seek the LORD: Look to the rock *from which* you were hewn, And to the hole of the pit *from which* you were dug.

Who are **those who follow after righteousness**? I think we have to conclude this is talking about God's people. No one else would follow after righteousness. No one else really seeks the Lord.

Really, who would live in such a way that **their failures** loom larger than **their successes**? Who really wants to even try to measure up to a standard of moral perfection? Who wants to accept such a standard that **is sure** to make us look bad? Who really wants to strive **to perfectly please God** because we love God so much? This would have to be people who God has already worked on their hearts and changed them. A miracle has happened in these people's lives.

So He is talking to His people. Now what does He tell them to focus on?

Look to the pit that you have come from. Nice touch. It sounds like, look at the hole you have crawled out of. But that really isn't the essence of it. He is calling them to **look at their origins**. Now, sometimes we are called to look at our origins to remember how humble they were and how unlikely a candidate we were for God's grace. But that is not what this is. This is a call to remember the faithfulness of God. Look where you came from. It is like they are a rock and God is pointing them back to the quarry they were dug from. Now what is He referring to? Fortunately we do not have to guess.

² Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah *who bore you*; For I called him alone, And blessed him and increased him."

This is the story of how Israel became Israel. Where did the nation of Israel come from? It came from a supernatural act of God. This God who is calling them to listen is a life giver. He is where real life comes from.

Our text is about listening to God with a heart to obeying what we hear. Now, does everything you hear appeal to you? I truly hope that you are better people than me. Because some of what Christ commands does not appeal to me much at all. I don't want to risk people's displeasure to talk to them about their souls. I can talk about the weather and remain in good standing. But if I bring up Jesus they may quickly reject me, or I may be talking to this person all day and it will interrupt all of my other plans. I do not want to impose a standard of **righteousness** to everything I watch or listen to. I don't want to discipline my body and mind in order to accomplish as much for the Kingdom as possible. So if you are like me, all of that goes against listening to what God says.

Well verse 2 is to give us a counter argument in our heads. This is why it is **to our advantage** to listen to God. The response is designed to help us to overcome some of our resistance. What is the point here? The one we are to listen to is a **life giver**. Essentially the Jews were in the line of God's blessing because God gave life to Sarah to bear Isaac. That is the quarry they were dug from. And how about us? Our quarry was Jesus. He was the life giver. He brought life to our dead bones. We have been born into a long line of people who believed in God to do the impossible. We were born in impossible situations. But God showed His power and brought us to Himself. So when God asks us to do things that go against our flesh, we need to remember this. We need to remember that the one that is **commanding it** is the **one who gave us life**. This isn't just someone who was appointed our boss randomly. This is our life giving savior who is commanding us to act. And what is our Savior like when He asks us to do things or face things that are going to hurt?

³ For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the LORD; Joy and gladness will be found in it, Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

John Piper calls this an appeal to future grace. The **salvation of Israel** and **our salvation** both come from the same quarry, the same mind, the same source. And we are assured that the **giver of life** has in mind where that life will finally reside. He has eternal bliss in mind for anyone who He truly gives life to. Does God call you to hard things? Does He ask you to trust Him in devastating loss? Does He ask you to believe Him when it looks completely unbelievable? Does He ask you to give up things that are very important to you? Does He ask you to pay prices it doesn't look like anyone else has to pay? Does He require to obey Him in places in your life that you simply do not believe that you can do so? Does He ask the impossible of you so that you will be forced to rely totally upon Him? That is not unusual. And it is no small thing. In fact God recognizes that we as humans will need comfort. **Needing** comfort assumes we had **a lack of it**. We must see a way that the price we are paying is worthwhile. He knows what we are like. We must see a way that it will pay off. So He gives us glimpses. What would you do to have a garden of Eden like existence that could never be undone by the deception of a sneaky snake? What would you do knowing that it would result in an eternity of bliss? A place that will be described as a place of joy and gladness and thanksgiving and music? That is our destiny as Christians. Is that not **worth** whatever this **listening** will cost us? This lifegiver gives life from

beginning to end. He gave us life to begin with and will take us into eternal life. Is that not an excellent reason to listen to His voice, to His words, to His commands?

⁴ "Listen to Me, My people; And give ear to Me, O My nation: For law will proceed from Me, And I will make My justice rest As a light of the peoples.

⁵ My righteousness *is* near, My salvation has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon Me, And on My arm they will trust.

⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished.

Have you ever considered how short lived all of the projects and causes on planet earth will be? Look at environmentalism. I have a quote from Harrison Ford lately. He said that global warming will be found to be the greatest moral crisis in our world today. Saving our ecology from the effects of mankind's technology is the greatest issue of right and wrong. That is what he believes. And the task is about as futile as painting a house that is in the direct path of a tornado. There is some pending danger that is much greater than the status of the planet. There is a God and the human beings He has created have offended Him. They have ignored the instructions He gave for living this life. They have rejected what His Son did for them by dying on the cross. They have provoked His anger, and yet they are more worried about how many gasses their car might emit. They have a far greater danger than the danger they pose to themselves.

Most of what hits the headlines as being so very important is not important at all. It is a blip in time and space. But look at what God says is important.

For law will proceed from Me, And I will make My justice rest As a light of the peoples.

⁵ My righteousness *is* near, My salvation has gone forth,

God is announcing the salvation available through Him. That is the big news that God cares about. And do you know what? That is the project whose effects will last forever. Whether the republicans win or the democrats win, that is all a blip in human history. If one person comes to Christ. That is eternal. That is a significant event. The gospel being proclaimed is the most important message for all humanity. And it is going to have results that overshadow all of the greatest projects of mankind. All military conquests, all political reigns, all worldly ideologies, all business endeavors, all individual exploits, all of it.... A tiny blip. The gospel message and its effects- angels and saints will sing of this for all eternity.

Its effects will be measured in the eternal life of humans experiencing life as it was created to be lived. This is the message the world needs to hear.

This world will see it and some will be shocked into life by it. It is an unlikely project. It appears to be nothing at all. But to some they are struck by the grace of God and it changes everything forever for them. This is what Mr. Oswalt says:

The power of self-denial, the power of self-sacrifice, the power of innocence, the power of faithfulness, the power of holy love—this is the power for which all the world waits in breathless anticipation. Does it always know that it so waits? Hardly! Yet when the Servant/Messiah, the "arm of the Lord," is revealed to them, there is frequently that immediate sense of recognition, that satisfying click of a key fitting a lock, of a vague memory suddenly coming to full consciousness

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This is what God is doing in human history. This is why human history exists. Humans always think that life is about them. They fail to see that life is always about God. His purposes are the **important** purposes. And when they are completed this will be the global warming people should fear.

For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished.

So

1. God's comfort is life-giving ([51:1-3](#))
2. God's power is world-transforming ([51:4-6](#))

Now

3. God's righteousness is courage-inspiring ([51:7, 8](#))

⁷ **"Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, You people in whose heart is My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, Nor be afraid of their insults.**

⁸ **For the moth will eat them up like a garment, And the worm will eat them like wool; But My righteousness will be forever, And My salvation from generation to generation."**

Look how God's people are addressed here. Isn't this amazing? You who know righteousness. You people whose hearts have in them God's law. This is clearly talking about believers. Those are descriptions of Christians. We know Jesus. We know that He is our righteousness. And by Him we are righteous. We intimately **know** righteousness, even though we have completely disqualified ourselves **from** righteousness. God's law is in our hearts. We are driven to live for Him from the inside out. We have a desire now to do the right thing that goes completely

against our flesh. There is something odd about us. We are conflicted when we sin. We desire to do right, not because we fear being caught doing wrong, but because we want to please our Savior. We do not want to grieve Him. So this is addressing believers.

Now what is prohibited here?

Fear. And specifically, fear of what people can do to us.

Now for the Babylonian captives, they were being controlled by fellow human beings who appeared to hold their futures in their hands. People seemed to hold all the cards. Fear must have been a significant issue to these people. Isaiah addresses it again and again. And not in a cursory fashion. Fear is right up their with idolatry in his warnings.

What is most of our fear based on? It is based on bad things we can imagine happening to us. And the truth is, most of the things we fear could actually happen to us. It is ok to not want them to happen. That is called sanity. No sane human looks forward to agony. So all that is fine.

I am sure these Babylonian captives could imagine all kinds of bad things being done to them by their captors. Their captors appeared to have the power to do whatever they wanted.

But not wanting to suffer does not give us an excuse to fear what could happen. Follow the reasoning in these verses. We are not told to not fear because nothing bad will happen to us. No. Do you see the focus here?

For the moth will eat them up like a garment, And the worm will eat them like wool;

Do you get the gist of this? Do not fear these people because these people are temporary. They are mortal. They are not part of the eternal cause. They are not the focus of human history. They will die and be eaten up. They are not the ones that God cares about. They are not the ones that God saves. They are not the ones with their names engraved upon His hands.

Now let me ask you, is that comforting? I had to laugh as I was preparing this. I think I would be a lot more comforted if I knew that they could do me no temporary harm. But that is not what is promised. They can do us no **permanent** harm. That requires trust in God. That requires an absolute trust that whatever God **puts us through** God will **take us through**. It requires that God knows what He is doing with the pain He allows in our lives. It requires that we will allow our eternity to adjudicate any apparent injustice from pain we experience that seems to be unnecessary or without any meaning. It requires we apply that word “wait” in every situation we find ourselves in.

And what is the contrast?

But My righteousness will be forever, And My salvation from generation to generation."

God will do the exact right thing forever, in contrast to what the wicked will do.

And God will be saving people until time no longer exists.

Here is the project that will last. Here is the project worth any sacrifice God calls us to. Here is the project that the folks in the insanity of God movie showed us was worth the prices they were paying. This is where God is sinking His investment. Here is what is most important to Him. And this is what Jesus told us we should be about.

How will we align our lives with this truth? What price are we willing to pay?

How will we show it this week?

The elders have been working on a couple of focuses. We want to be sure that every individual at our church is prepared to do evangelism and discipleship. So we are going to train on some tools in that effect. In Sunday School we hope to go over the discipleship tool over the course of 5 weeks. We will be asking the Sunday School teachers to join us in the adult Sunday school class for that. We will announce the weeks.

We also have plans to go over this tool for members who do not regularly attend Sunday school. The goal is that everyone here feels comfortable that they can begin the discipleship process with someone they lead to Christ. The tool is not perfect, but we can correct it as we go and adapt it to our needs. If you are a member of the church and over age 12 we would like you to take one for yourself and begin to look it over. Then bring it with you on the days we announce will be used to train the book.

We don't know what God will do, but we are asking for Him to move in our church and we believe we need to expect that He will. So we are preparing.

Does any of this seem uncomfortable to you? Maybe so. But the question to ask is, is it worth it? As Isaiah reminds us **My righteousness will be forever, And My salvation from generation to generation."**