



God in the Middle – TouchPoint for August 19, 2020

Isaiah 51:1-6 (MSG) ¹⁻³ *“Listen to me, all you who are serious about right living and committed to seeking GOD.*

Ponder the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were dug.

Yes, ponder Abraham, your father, and Sarah, who bore you.

Think of it! One solitary man when I called him, but once I blessed him, he multiplied.

Likewise, I, GOD, will comfort Zion, comfort all her mounds of ruins.

I'll transform her dead ground into Eden, her moonscape into the garden of GOD,

A place filled with exuberance and laughter, thankful voices and melodic songs.

⁴⁻⁶ *“Pay attention, my people. Listen to me, nations. Revelation flows from me. My decisions light up the world. My deliverance arrives on the run, my salvation right on time. I'll bring justice to the peoples. Even faraway islands will look to me and take hope in my saving power.*

Look up at the skies, ponder the earth under your feet. The skies will fade out like smoke, the earth will wear out like work pants, and the people will die off like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my setting-things-right will never be obsolete.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; But my salvation will be forever and my deliverance will never be ended.”

The words from Isaiah are spoken at an interesting time in Israel's history. The remnant from the exile to Babylon has returned to the promised land. They are no longer the majority in their old country. They have sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion. They have struggled with singing the Lord's song in a foreign land. And when they come back, it is not to the old glory days. Israel has not been made great again. They are strangers in their own land. So, when these words from Isaiah come to them, it comes in the midst of a deep sense of confusion of who they are. Who God is. And where they are going.

The words are not spoken out of some Pollyanna sense of denial. This is not some cheap “It will all work out in the end” platitude. You see, the problem with the statement, “It will all work out in the end” is that I am not at the end. I am “in the middle” of it all. And while I am glad it will all work out at the end. I need to know where God is in the middle of it all. Because that is where I am. It is of little comfort to me to have a God who stands above the fray yet will be there at the end. I need a God who is there in the middle of it all. Because that is where I am. In the middle of it all – sometimes feeling like I am living in a time of exile. Often times asking myself what strange and foreign land I am living in, even as I live in my home surroundings.

Now if you have never felt as if you lived in exile. If you have never felt like you are living in a foreign country. If you have never felt out of place, out of step, out of the loop... Then I have just one question for you. Have you been paying attention? We are in the middle of something unprecedented in our lifetimes and I have been exiled to my home, in my home. I am in the middle of something I can't get out of. Don't tell me, “It will all work out in the end.” I don't need God at the end. I need God in the middle.

And so, the words of Isaiah come to a people struggling for focus, direction, and hope. And he says to those who are serious about seeking God, that they don't look deep within themselves, but look to God. You see, even our commitment to God is not rooted in ourselves.

And so, Isaiah points them in 3 directions:

1. Isaiah points them to the past...

“Look to the rock from which you were hewn. And the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and Sarah who bore you. For he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.”

In other words, you come from blessing. That is your beginning. That is your core. That is your center. You come from blessing. You are blessing. Now the problem is we often confuse being a blessing to being blessed. And those are 2 different things.

I remember back when I was a parish pastor and I had come back to my office after a text study with other pastors on the upcoming bible readings for Sunday. I was talking to my bishop on the phone, and I won't mention Howie Wennes' name because I don't want to single him out. But I told him how frustrated I was by the conversation and what a waste of time I felt it was, and that I certainly wasn't blessed by it. And he said, “Well maybe you weren't supposed to be blessed by it.” And I screamed back, “Then why am I even there?” And he replied, “Maybe you were to be the blessing.” I always hated it when Howie was right. Still do in my conversations with him.

Or perhaps it is like Tevye, in Fiddler on the Roof, who when faced with one more crisis and struggle in his life, looks up at God and says, “I know we're your chosen people, but once in a while, couldn't you choose someone else?”

Being a blessing and being blessed are not always the same thing. But both are grounded in God.

2. Isaiah points them to the future.

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; But my salvation will be forever and my deliverance will never be ended.”

Let that sink in. *“My salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.”* At the end of time, there will only be one thing standing. At the end of existence, there will only be one thing existing, “The salvation of God.” That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Now we need to be clear on what this word ‘salvation’ means. It is not a next life, future life term. It means healing, wholeness, restoration. So, when God says *“My salvation is forever.”* He's not talking about an eternal afterlife. He's talking about his continual healing, and restoration being forever. God will not stop healing. God will not stop restoring. God will not stop making whole. The blessing of wholeness upon which creation was founded will be there at the end. In fact, there will be no end to God's salvation and deliverance. It is and will always be ongoing.

I am reminded of the words from Revelation, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”* In the beginning, blessing. In the end blessing. In the beginning wholeness. In the end, wholeness. In the

beginning, deliverance and restoration. In the end, deliverance and restoration. All by the hand of God.

Perhaps now we can finally throw away this idea that life is a test. That somehow God created us not quite good enough and is forcing us to prove we are somehow worthy of life with Him. What a sick and twisted image of God!

“My salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.”

You were formed out of blessing. And that blessing will never end. Now that doesn't mean that there aren't trials, tests, and temptations along the way. Heck, my patience gets tested every time I get behind the wheel of my car and drive on these roads around here. I had teenagers once. That was a trial I thought would never end.

Sometimes you're the blessed. Sometimes you're the blessing. But both are grounded in God.

Look, I find it interesting the wording that Isaiah uses at the end of this passage.

“My deliverance will never end.”

God's deliverance is never ending. Which I think would imply, that we are constantly in need of deliverance. In other words, the struggles, doubts, and confusion are ongoing in our lives. And this is the third place Isaiah points the people to.

3. Isaiah points them to the present.

“I will bring my deliverance swiftly; my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the people.”

God isn't just a God of the beginning and the end. God is a God of the middle as well. God isn't one who creates and then stays above the fray, until the end. Riding in after all the chaos is over and setting up shop. No, God isn't just a God of the beginning and the end. God is a God of the middle as well.

And we have no clearer example of that than in this meal. In the middle of the chaos. In the middle of the night in which he was betrayed. In the middle of the night in which Judas and Peter and the rest of them had no clue who they were, out of sorts, and struggling with where things were headed...

In the middle of it all

Jesus takes bread and wine, and says “This is me, for you.”

“I called you in blessing at the beginning of our journey. I will bless you with peace in the resurrection at the end. And here in the middle, my salvation goes out to you. My deliverance of you will never end.”

God at the beginning. God at the end. God in the middle.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit Divine

Spirit of Love, enfold and teach us. Spirit of Peace, rest deep within Spirit of change, transform and heal us Spirit Divine

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

The Lord's Prayer

The Meal

Healer of Our Every Ill

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow. Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness. Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. Refrain

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding
Give us all your vision God of love. Refrain

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.