

Pentecost 7
July 11, 2010

Isaiah 66:10-14
576-538-760*-537

*Worship Supplement, "When Peace Like a River"

God Encourages His Discouraged People

- I. To rejoice in the comfort of being a Christian.
- II. To enjoy His abundant blessings.
- III. To be confident of the ultimate triumph.

Dear Christian friends,

Have you ever had days where you've been so discouraged and FED UP that you're ready to just GIVE UP? I'm sure we've all have. **Maybe** as a child we got discouraged TRYING TO LEARN the **multiplication tables** or **how to ride** a bike without falling down. We got older and the problems became BIGGER and MORE SERIOUS. Finding a job. Making ends meet. It can be serious health or **marital** problems. Let's NOT FORGET that we can also become discouraged in our **spiritual** life. We love our Lord Jesus but we often have a hard time showing it in our daily lives. The **sinful nature** keeps acting up and causing us **all kinds of grief**. We try to share God's **Word** and **love** with others but they don't want to BE BOTHERED. Standing up for what God says can get you branded an **unloving "troublemaker."**

When we get discouraged we can easily lose sight of God – question His love – doubt His **power** and **promises**. Then we need verses like these. God here ENCOURAGES HIS DISCOURAGED PEOPLE. God **encourages** His **discouraged** people 1)to rejoice in the comfort of being a Christian, 2)to enjoy His **abundant blessings** and 3)to be confident of the **ultimate triumph**.

I. To rejoice in the comfort of being a Christian.

If you want to talk about BAD TIMES – discouraging days – just take a look at the days of Isaiah. God had been sending prophet after prophet to His people – but they just wouldn't listen. They refused to repent of their sins. They wouldn't return to their God. Isaiah's book begins with God saying, ***"I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me. 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."***

God had Paul warn the Galatian Christians, ***"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction."*** We see just that in the days of Isaiah. **During Isaiah's time** the northern ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel were conquered and carried off into captivity – NEVER to be heard from again. **Isaiah** himself lived and worked in the **southern kingdom** of Judah – but conditions were NO BETTER there. Isaiah had to announce the **upcoming** Babylonian captivity. God had Isaiah proclaim, ***"They (the Israelites) have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of His hands. Therefore My people will go into exile for their lack of understanding."***

Things were bad in Judah. **Idolatry** and **immorality** were RAMPANT - and ACCEPTED. But there was still a **"remnant"** – the FAITHFUL FEW who listened to God's prophets and took to heart God's Word. These were TRYING TIMES for them. They became discouraged.

We can relate to that, can't we? We see the moral and spiritual decline of our country and it's **discouraging**. Instead of being ashamed of their **sinful ways** people are OPEN and PROUD about their sin. We see the toll society is taking on Christians. Many stop following Jesus and stop coming

to church – EVEN THOUGH they were **brought up** in God’s Word and ways. You try to reach out to those who **don’t know** Jesus – but you just GET BRUSHED OFF. You can feel like the faithful of Isaiah’s day – DISGUSTED and DISCOURAGED.

We turn to our God. God doesn’t deny the REALITY of our problems – but He focuses us on ANOTHER REALITY – the He is also real – that His love for us is real – that we REALLY ARE His people.

“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her.” Jerusalem was the capitol of God’s **people** – the center of the worship of God. Jerusalem became the name and symbol of **God’s people** – the CHURCH. What we see going on can cause us to **“mourn”** and **be concerned**. But we can also **“rejoice and be glad.”**

HOW SO? ***“For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance.”*** Isaiah pictures the Church as a MOTHER NURSING her baby. It’s a picture of tender love. God uses it to picture the LOVE HE SHOWERS on us through the Church – the comfort of being a Christian.

Think HOW WE COME to church. We’re battered and banged up by **another week** in the real world. We’ve been seriously wounded in **our battles** with sin and Satan. We’ve had some KNOCK-DOWN BRAWLS with our **sinful natures**. We’re burdened with **guilty consciences** – and with the problems and **worries** of life.

WHAT COMFORT God has for us! What a relief to BE HONEST with God about our sins and the way we’ve treated Him – AND THEN to hear the words, “You are FORGIVEN – God STILL LOVES you.” Isn’t the absolution – the **announcement** of God’s forgiveness – one of the HIGH POINTS of the church service? “God our heavenly Father has been merciful to us and has given His only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” With Scripture readings, **sermon** and **hymns** we ARE FOCUSED again on Jesus – the Son of God, our Savior. We see again the **holy life** He lived for us and in our place. We stand again at **His bloody cross** where Jesus personally paid for all our sins in full. We look again and his **empty grave** and know anew that our Redeemer lives. We feast again on His holy Supper – the very body and blood Jesus gave into death **“for the forgiveness”** of all our sins. The world has nothing to offer COMPARED to the **precious means of grace** that God nourishes us with THROUGH His Church. As we drink deeply of that gospel – we’re like that nursing baby. At first we’re ANTSY – so hungry – so worked up. But THEN we settle down – we’re refreshed – we’re satisfied. That is THE COMFORT of **being a Christian!**

II. To enjoy His abundant blessings.

When we get discouraged and **down** it’s easy to forget HOW GOOD and GENEROUS our God is. We become so focused on the BAD - on our PROBLEMS. We need to hear again, ***“This is what the LORD says.”*** What does God say to His DISCOURAGED people? ***“This is what the LORD says: ‘I will extend peace to her like a river.’”*** Peace – ***“like a river”!*** Not a FEW DROPS – or even a gallon or two. Peace – ***“like a river”*** – peace OVERFLOWING IN ABUNDANCE!

God could make war on us because of our sins. One of the Hebrew words for sin LITERALLY means **rebellion**. You CRUSH **rebellion** - you punish rebels. We owe God obedience – not EMPTY WORDS. We owe God our love – not a COLD SHOULDER. God could make war on us – but instead He sends us His Son to MAKE PEACE with us. The **“peace”** of sins forgiven fully and freely for Jesus’ sake. The **“peace”** of knowing God REALLY DOES LOVE us – that God really is WITH us and FOR us – that we really are GOING STRAIGHT to heaven when we die. Jesus tells us, ***“Peace I***

leave with you, My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

We can get discouraged about THE STATE of the **visible** church. We can feel like “**Why bother anymore?**” The devil wants us to FEEL LIKE FAILURES and give up trying to LIVE for Jesus – **give up** trying to SHARE Jesus. Why waste good money on **Christian education** and **missions**? Look how many children FALL AWAY from Jesus even though they went to a Christian school. Missions grow slowly over the years. When we get discouraged GOD SAYS, “**Take another look!**” See the WHOLE PICTURE - see God gathering His elect “**like a flooding stream.**”

The faithful of Isaiah's day were **discouraged**. The **vast majority of people** WOULDN'T LISTEN to God's Word. **In the gospel reading Jesus didn't paint** a GLOWING PICTURE of **one success** after another. John wrote in his gospel that “**Jesus came to that which was His own, but His own received Him not.**”

But look what GOD HAS DONE! Pentecost – **3,000** converted in one day. While such staggering success is **not often repeated** God is STILL BUSY gathering His people – often ONE BY ONE. We are still the Church MILITANT – the Church at war and **under attack**. But we are also the Church PREVAILING. The gospel is still “**the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.**” Through Holy Baptism **sinful babies** are still being reborn children of the heavenly Father. DAY BY DAY through the gospel God is QUIETLY ADDING to His Church – strengthening His people – calling them home to ETERNAL GLORY.

Mission work and **Christian education** are STILL HARD – usually SLOW – WORK. The results are **not always seen** RIGHT AWAY – or in IMPRESSIVE QUANTITIES. But don't get discouraged! Be ENCOURAGED! That seemingly little trickle is resulting in “**a flooding stream**” - “**a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb.**”

“**As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.**” See God BUSY AT WORK and...

III. Be confident of the ultimate triumph.

There have always been DARK DAYS in the life of the Church. **At one point Elijah thought** he was the only believe left in all of Israel. In Noah's day it was **down** to JUST EIGHT believers in the whole world! But God has promised that “**the gates of hell will not prevail**” – or as He said through Isaiah, “**My Word will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**”

So Isaiah now tells us, “**When you see this, your heart will rejoice..., the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, but His fury will be shown to His foes.**” Because the gospel is GOD AT WORK **saving** people we can be confident of the ULTIMATE TRIUMPH. Trusting in Jesus we can confidently look forward to life in that “**new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness.**” We may not have an EASY LIFE here on earth – but clinging to Jesus we can be confident of ETERNAL LIFE in heaven.

4 times in these few verses Isaiah uses the words “**rejoice – be glad.**” 4 times he also uses the word “**comfort.**” We can “**rejoice and be glad**” – we have that “**comfort**” – because these verses put our focus BACK ON our God. That's how God ENCOURAGES His **discouraged** people. Amen.