

The Bright Righteousness of Christ

1/16/22

God's Word comes to us this morning from our Old Testament reading where we hear these words once more: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. (Isaiah 62:1-2) This is the Word of the Lord.

Sometimes in our life it's not easy to be a shining light, is it? We don't always feel like glowing, shining, bright lights of Christ's righteousness and joy. But the Lord tells us that we ought to. Isaiah describes for us why we are lights. We are reminded that Christ's righteousness shines through his church. And Psalm 37 describes how we can do this: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday." (Psalm 37:5-6).

Isaiah could hardly restrain himself. Even the Lord couldn't restrain himself concerning the great joy that he was going to tell his people. The Lord was going to let the world know that his church is here to stay. His church is here to bless mankind. The terms "Zion" and "Jerusalem" in our text simply refer to God's church. And Isaiah writes the sentiment of the Lord: "For the Church's sake I will not keep silent, and for the Church's sake I will not be quiet."

So, how does the righteousness of Christ shine through the church?.... "I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch." Here there are two different comparisons of light, but both... are unstoppable. Think of the dawn. When we get up early enough, we wait for that morning dawn. And at last the sun comes up. So now - in the daylight hours - we sit in the brightness of the day. We cannot stop the sun from rising... and we cannot change it. The Lord says his righteousness BE as unstoppable as the light of dawn.

The children of Israel didn't have flashlights with million-watt powered light bulbs. But they did have torches... and the burning torch could be seen a long ways away. Our text says that salvation - Christ's righteousness - is going to brightly shine through God's church.

And there's even more. The Lord says to them and to us today: "You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God." God himself would hold on to his church. God would - and does - treat his church with loving respect and honor as a crown and a diadem.

Now, a crown and a diadem that sit on the head of a king are both the same things. In splendor and glory as the crown... God's people would - in a sense - be on top of the world. When a king - or anyone wearing a crown - walks into a room, that person is noticed. God's people, then... are also to be noticed...."The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory."

Beloved... there are many - in our country, our neighborhoods... even in our lives - that sit in darkness and feel comfortable there. They don't care... they don't care to look to the true light of the world. They would rather look to light in this world... the accumulation of wealth and possessions. By God's grace ... and purely and simply out of God's grace... he has made us HIS burning torches... his royal crown. That any believe... that we believe, friends... is a divine miracle.

St Paul writes, "For God - who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' - has shone in our hearts... to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6). God - who created the heaven and the earth - made his light shine in our hearts. That too, brothers and sisters... is Epiphany: the appearing of the light of God in our hearts...and then... the appearing of the light of God... in our lives.

As this world sits in darkness, many are content to put their feet up, relax and take care of themselves... and no one else. It is all the more important that you and I as believers... as God's light... show our love and concern for others. What would happen if this world only had all selfish people? What if everybody only took care of themselves and didn't care about their neighbor or their friends... or even their family?

Today, it is only because of believers... that there is some shining light in this sin-darkened world... and we, friends... are only a single step away from the unbeliever... but by God's grace. Everyone is born into this world in the same condition:... as enemies of God. In John's gospel he writes: "... this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light... because their works... were evil." (John 3:19).

That is the challenge of the church. The Church is surrounded by the evil deeds of mankind. Many times our deeds are evil... and our thoughts are not so good... and our actions are wicked. The Lord has given us his light to know the

difference... the difference between what is right and what is wrong. Only by grace can we walk in the path that is right.

What do people recognize you as, beloved? How do they see you in this life? First of all, by your name and they know you by that name. Second, they know you by your occupation or they know you by your family... how well they were raised or how well they weren't raised. Maybe they know you by other associations. Hopefully, always, continually... they see you as the light of Christ. As Christ's righteousness shines in you and then through you... people around will see - in you - the reason for your living:... the fact... that Christ lived and died and rose again.

The world is not to praise your deeds, nor praise your good life... but praise your Father. What a blessing to have others say of you - whether you hear it or not - that they know who you are... and whose you are... because of your Christian faith. Christ's righteousness shines through His church through you, because you are a splendid royal crown held fast in the hand of God. And so you are united with Christ in a joyful and blessed marriage.

Isaiah continues: "... you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give." The people knew a lot about new names. Abram was changed to Abraham, the father of many nations. Jacob was changed to Israel, and his twelve sons are still known as the twelve tribes of Israel. The list goes on.

Isaiah says the new name is going to be important. God describes this new name: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate." Probably at this time the Israelites were not thinking the Promised Land was going to be forsaken or desolate. It was the land that God had promised to them... a land flowing with milk and honey. But we also know - because of their repeated disobedience and their rejection of God - God rejected them. Time after time, they were defeated by their enemies and dragged out of the Promised Land. The land was forsaken and desolate. Jerusalem was torn down and the temple was destroyed.

And so God declares new names: "... but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married." The nation is not going to be an orphan. It is not going to be by itself. It is not going to be desolate on this earth. Rather... it is going to be part of the Lord.

"as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." God... will rejoice... over you. The Lord is going to rejoice over these people who time and again he had to chasten and punish with his severe, righteous rod of wrath.

They would become slaves and foreigners in alien lands. But still... the Lord would rejoice over them and their repentance. The Lord would rejoice over them and their faithfulness. The Lord would continue to rejoice over them... His creation.

This is our God, brothers and sisters... who gave himself up for us. He is not an avenging Allah. He is not Buddha or some other false god that demands perfection and doesn't give his followers anything except demands and orders. This is the Lord God who loves us with a perfect love... more perfect than a husband can ever love his wife... more perfect than a wife can ever love her husband... more perfect than we can love our children... more perfect than our children would love us... more perfect than we would love one another.

Citing Hosea, Paul writes in Romans: "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved... I will call 'beloved.'" (Romans 9:25). Our sins separate us from God... but God takes away that barrier of sin and makes us his loved ones. God paid the price for our sins, and calls us his people.

How is Christ's righteousness going to shine through SJN? As Isaiah says, "with rejoicing and joy in our life." There are enough "sad sacks" in this world to go around. There are enough fear mongers who try to scare people. It's not that we live unconcerned in this life. But we can live with confidence... because we have the surety of salvation. We know exactly what the future is for each and every one of us. This faith knowledge brings great joy in our life.

But there are things that try to distract us on our way... things that cause concern and distress... just watch, listen or read the news... it is filled to the brim with distractions and horrors... but heaven... heaven... is our home. God is our Bridegroom. The church is his bride. We can celebrate every day at the feast of the wedding of the Lamb... at the marriage of Christ and his church.

John writes in Revelation: "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7). That is how Christ's righteousness shines through us... as if we were celebrating every day... preparing to go to a wedding. The joy that is there on that day... is our joy... every day.

In this Epiphany season we are reminded of Christ's righteousness. His light shines through his church which is the only place it is going to shine through. Sure we see God's glory in nature... but not Christ's righteousness that saves mankind. The righteousness of Christ only shines through his church. You and I and believers everywhere ARE that church... and we are placed in the crown of glory... in the hand of God.

The Lord also says we are united with him in the most intimate way possible - as people who are married. People - as they grow in faith - know what God wants and are anxious to do it. In this way Christ's righteousness shines through us with a joyful life. And yes... It does take work... and effort... to live a joyful, Christian, light-shining life. But what doesn't take effort that is worthwhile in this life?

Daniel sums this up: "... those who are wise (wise in faith, wise in the ways of the Lord, wise in the wisdom of God, wise in the knowledge of salvation) those shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Daniel 12:3). Daniel is not talking about the righteousness of a believer... but leading others to Christ's righteousness and then shining like the stars for ever and ever. Christ's righteousness shines through the church. We... are the church... and Christ's righteousness shines through us as his royal crown. Christ's righteousness shines through us as people who belong to him... that joyful marriage of bridegroom and bride.

During this Epiphany season.. may the Bright Righteousness of Christ...always shine through us, beloved... shine as unstoppable as the force of the dawning day... every day. This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.