



Sermon, Sunday, December 10, 2023 “All People Will See God’s Salvation”

SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:1-6 ¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Introduction: Isaiah, John the Baptist, and the writer of the Gospel of Luke

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. There is less than a month left in 2023. A lot of things happened at home and abroad this year. This year, there was no quiet day, regardless of whether it was at home or abroad. The era in which Jesus was born, raised, and active 2,000 years ago was like today. In other words, incidents and accidents that were no different from today occurred as usual.

Today's text, Luke 3:1-2, lists people who were at the center of history at the time. Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, governor of Judea Pontius Pilate, tetrarch of Galilee Herod, Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas, the high priesthood. All of those mentioned in this passage directly or indirectly influenced Jesus' fate.

According to the Gospels, the first person to prepare the way for Jesus was John the Baptist. John the Baptist proclaimed the kingdom of God before Jesus. Additionally, John received widespread support from the public. So people were baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Jesus was also baptized by him. John strongly proclaimed to the people that they should repent because the kingdom of God was near, and he was killed while publicly criticizing Herod Antipas.

In today's text, **Luke 3:4-5, John the Baptist says, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”** This verse is a quote from Isaiah 40:3-5.

Isaiah was a prophet who worked in the 6th century BC. This era was a very miserable time in Israel's history. The southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC and taken captive. Scholars refer to this event as the Babylonian Captivity.

However, the prophet Isaiah exclaims that the people of Judah will soon return to Jerusalem from their **Babylonian captivity**. The prophet Isaiah describes this metaphorically in Isaiah 40:3-5. He tells us that the people of Judah will cross the wilderness and return to Jerusalem.



However, the people of Judah do not have the strength or ability to make their way through the wilderness and return to Jerusalem. So the prophet Isaiah calls out to the people of Judah to prepare for what God will do. So what will God do? **As described in today's text, every valley shall be filled in, the crooked roads shall become straight, and the rough ways become smooth.**

These verses mean that God will destroy all the oppressive and evil orders of the Babylonian Empire. The order of the Babylonian Empire is one in which those with power stand in high positions, and those without power must go down to low positions. However, God will be destroying this order of the world.

So why did the writer of Luke quote Isaiah's prophecy in today's text? This is because he thought that the era in which he lived was no different from the era of Babylonian captivity, so he quoted Isaiah's prophecy with the hope that the world would be completely renewed. Why did the writer of the Gospel of Luke think that the world could be completely renewed?

Body: All flesh shall see the salvation of God

Today's text, **Luke 3:6, says, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God."** In other words, the writer of the Gospel of Luke declares that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God meaning that God's salvation was realized through Jesus Christ.

But do you agree with these claims of the Bible? Also, is there sufficient evidence in the world we live in to support these Biblical claims? According to the words of the Bible, the human world must become just. However, it seems that not much has changed from the past to the present. In the world we still live in, the powerful must stand in high positions, and the powerless must remain in low positions. Nothing has changed in the world we live in, so can we say that God's salvation has been accomplished through Jesus?

In fact, this phenomenon is not much different in the areas of our personal lives. Do you think there is something that clearly distinguishes those who believe in Jesus from those who do not? Can we confidently say that Christians are more moral, more conscientious, and more sacrificial than people who do not believe in Jesus? Of course, there are very good Christians around us. I think you are one of those people. However, despite this, it is difficult for us to confidently answer 'yes' to the above question, because we are too weak and sometimes too selfish. Are the words spoken by Luke in today's text a false promise? **"All flesh shall see the salvation of God."** No, this is not a false claim.

There is something we must remember when understanding God's salvation achieved through Jesus. In other words, salvation presupposes that humans cannot save themselves and that they must be saved.

In the era when Prophet Isaiah was active, God's salvation for the Israelites was for them to be liberated from the oppression of the Babylonian Empire and returned to their homeland. And Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled, and the Israelites returned to Jerusalem. The people of Judah rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem and reestablished the Davidic dynasty, but the world still did not change. Persia, Greece, and Rome emerged as empires in place of the fallen Babylonian Empire and ruled over small countries around them. And this history continues to repeat itself to this day. However, the early Christian community experienced fundamental salvation through Jesus Christ. It is a salvation experience that cannot be shaken under any conditions.

So what does it mean for us to be saved by believing in Jesus? Maybe you and I know the answer. That is, Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected from the dead. In other words, we are freed from sin and death through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The Bible says that this is the salvation accomplished by God through Jesus Christ.

Of course, there are no Christians who do not accept this fact. However, not many people truly understand, experience, or enjoy this truth.



I ask you: Are you still bound by sin, death, and despair? Or are you free from sin and death? The sin I am talking about is the desire to believe that one can perfect oneself, and death is the separation from God that occurs because of sin. We can escape this desire to believe only through Jesus' love on the cross, and we can become one with God, who is life, through Jesus' resurrection. Anyone who believes this is a Christian.

Conclusion: The Problem of Liberation from Sin and Death

Now let's summarize today's sermon. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Today, on the second Sunday of Advent, I ask you whether you are free from sin, death, and despair? For those of you who answered **"yes"** to this question, I hope you will be able to fill your life with the fullness and grace that the Lord gives and share that abundance with your neighbors. However, if you answered **"no,"** I hope you will move away from worldly concerns and pay attention to what the Bible claims about humanity and salvation.

If you are having a hard time because the issue of **'sin and death'** has not been resolved despite your long religious life, please do not be discouraged. **'Liberation from sin and death'** is a topic of faith that we must think about until the moment we die. Therefore, when we do not become discouraged about this issue and continue to ponder it until the end, we will experience the words of today's text: **"all flesh shall see the salvation of God."** May the joy and peace of the Advent season fill us all.

