

Isaiah 51:1-11  
November 7, 2015 + Morning Prayer  
Doxology Encore + Chiara Center, Springfield, Illinois  
Pastor Tim Pauls

In the name of Jesus. Amen

"Listen to Me," declares the Lord. He demands the ear of His people. They're the faithful trapped in Babylon, hauled into exile because the nation all around them refused to listen to God, exchanging His gifts and mercies for a stew of idolatry, immorality and violence. So now God's Israel lives in Babylon, mixed in among the rest of the Israelites. This is how nations disappear. This is how peoples are forgotten.

The Lord has not forgotten. He calls out to them, and He calls out, "Listen to Me!" Not "Look at Me," but "Listen," because the Lord works by His holy Word. As far as looking goes, "Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him." Look to Abraham so you can see how God worked by His Word. Oh Israelites in Babylon, you're miracle children who were born of an old man and a barren woman. But God spoke and God promised and God blessed, and so you are a people. You're God's people, for you have heard His promise to you.

"Listen to Me," says the Lord. Don't be like Adam and Eve, who listened to the serpent instead. Their turning of ears made creation a waste place. Oh Israelites in Babylon, you were not the first to be exiled, for Adam and Eve's disobedience had them cast out the garden and into the wilderness outside; but the LORD spoke and He promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the dragon's head, and so you live in hope. Babylon is not your end, for the LORD comforts Zion. Eden will be restored.

"Give attention to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, My nation," declares the Lord. Behold! His people are still a people—"My people!" He says—even though they are beaten and exiled. This is not the end, He declares, because a teaching goes out from the Lord. He sets His justice for a light to the peoples. A light, He says: a searing, exposing shaft for those who do not believe, and so they run for the outer darkness. But for those who listen, this justice enlightens and fills with hope. It is righteousness to be given freely, it is salvation that goes out to be received.

When that Light does come, it's hung up high—with the help of some nails on a lamppost planted on a hill just outside of Jerusalem; but when this Light is lifted up, He draws all nations to Himself. See this Light with ears, not eyes: "Give ear to Me," commands the Lord. As far as looking goes, then "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;" for as you look around, you know that the days of Babylon are numbered, for the end of sin is death, always death.

But listen! Not all comes to an end: "My salvation will be forever," declares the Lord, "and My righteousness will never be dismayed." That Light that is briefly extinguished on a Good Friday shines again in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Those who walk in His light and wear His righteousness will never be dismayed.

"Listen to Me," insists the Lord once again. This Father will not stop comforting until His children are consoled. "Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings, for the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool." Oh Israel, listen and rejoice!

When you listened before, the Lord placed His teachings in your heart through your ears; and He made you to know righteousness so intimately that you *are* righteous by His speaking.

That Word divides, of course. If you are righteous, you are no longer unrighteous; and as a consequence of sin, the unrighteous will revile you and reproach you during your time in Babylon, for what kind of a God would let you come to this? But as you can see, they too are perishing unless they repent; and the attacks of moths and worms fuel their fear and anger. In the meantime, the Lord promises again that His righteousness is forever, and His salvation is to all generations.

"Listen to Me," bids the Lord. In a world where talk is cheap and actions speak louder than words because of the deceptions and weaknesses of man, the Lord bids His people to listen, hear His Word and believe; because He always keeps His promises.

It is true for those Israelites who lived in Babylon. It is true for you who live in Babylon now.

Listen, then. And trust the Word you hear far more than what you see. You see Babylon, the idolatry and immorality. You see wilderness and waste places. You see the earth wearing out like a garment, the moth and worm eating away, the cancer and dementia sapping life. Not all you hear is helpful either. The world wants to fill your ears with reproaches and revilings, trying to shout down the Word of God until it goes away. That is why one of the greatest afflictions upon the Church today is fear, and that is why one of the greatest temptations for you is dismay.

But the Lord speaks. He has opened your ears, and by His grace you listen.

So you know that you are miracle children too: you look to Christ and the mother who bore you—His bride, for you are born again by water and the Word into His Church. You're joined to Christ and clothed in His righteousness—and His righteousness will never be dismayed, because His salvation is forever.

You give attention to the Lord, for His salvation draws near to you. He visits you in His Word with His promise and blessing and grace. He gives you His own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, and so He sustains and preserves you in this wasting wilderness until Eden is restored.

You listen, and you know that Christ bore all the reproaches and revilings of man to the cross so that He might speak a better Word about you.

As He has opened your ears, so He opens your lips and you join in the earnest prayer of God's people: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago." Or, as the saints of Revelation cry out, "How long, O Lord?" You pray not in anxiety, but with glad confidence: the Lord has promised to "awake," and He always keeps His promises.

It is He who cut Rahab into pieces and pierced the dragon—it is He who crushed its head on Calvary.

It is He who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep and made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over.

It is He who has made you His people, bought by the blood of Christ. Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be dismayed at their revilings; and do not believe a word they have to say.

No, listen: you are the ransomed of the Lord. You shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be on your heads. You shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

In the name of Jesus. Amen