



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 31, 2011  
New Year's Eve Worship  
Sermon Text: [Isaiah 51:1-6](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 90](#)  
First Lesson: [1 Peter 1:22-25](#)  
Second Lesson: [Luke 13:6-9](#)

### Wait In Hope

At this time of the year you get all those countdown shows on the radio and on TV, right? They go back over the year. You might listen to the top hits on the radio stations. It's kind of fun to see some of the clips over and over again on TV, watching on ESPN, the top 10 best plays of the year and the worst of the worst of the year. I mean, who cannot enjoy watching Ryan Braun falling down over and over and over again as he rounds 3<sup>rd</sup> Base? You see the failures and you see the successes in a lot of these countdown things.

That always seems to be where we have our attention drawn, on the things that went horribly wrong, or the things that went incredibly well...our joys or our sorrows...as we look back over time. Isn't that the way it goes?

This evening as you think about that in your own life, maybe this last year has been a really tough year. Maybe it's been a great year. Maybe it's been the worst year of your life. Maybe it's been the best year of your life. When our God speaks to us through the prophet Isaiah this evening, he reminds us that as we wait in hope as time passes by, he tells us there are certain places where we really need to look and focus. As we go through great things or as we go through terrible things, it really doesn't matter. He tells us to look where we've come from and look at what is going to happen to all the things we so often worry about as we live our day-to-day life. That's kind of what you hear God saying in here.

You have to remember, when Isaiah wrote this, he was writing in the first 49 chapters of his book telling Israel to repent and turn back to God or God is going to take you back off into captivity. He spoke words of warning. He's telling them it's going to happen and they didn't listen and God is going to carry them off. Then in Chapter 50 and following, now he is writing to those people in exile and telling them "You think it's bad, but your God hasn't forgotten you, no matter how it might feel like he has." He writes to those in captivity even before they go into captivity to tell them "God wins. I've read the end of the book. Our side wins." That's kind of what the whole point of Isaiah is.

In this section that I just read to you from, the Suffering Servant, the Messiah himself has spoken through the prophet and said that he would accomplish his Father's will. He would win the victory for all people. He is about to talk in Isaiah 52 about all the suffering he would have to go through in order to do that. Now our Lord points us to focus on these truths to these people who might have been saying "Where is God?"

We're in Babylon. We're not by Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in ruins. Temple worship has come to a halt. God doesn't seem to be in control anymore." He says, *"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn."* Then he points them to Abraham and Sarah, their forefathers. They are descendants of Abraham, children of Abraham. You and I are children of Abraham by faith, so this passage applies to us as well. Not all those who are descendants of Abraham are true Israel. Paul said, "Those who are of Abraham are those who are of the faith of Abraham." (See [Romans 4:16](#).)

Think about the faith of Abraham for a minute. God came to him when he was 75 years old and childless and had no heir and said, "like the sands on the seashore, like the stars in the sky, that's how your offspring is going to be." (See [Genesis 15:4-6](#) and [Genesis 22:17-18](#).) If you're Abraham, you have to be tickled pink by that promise, right? How do you feel after 24 years of waiting and not having the promise kept? Sarah still hasn't had any children by you. You have to be wondering, "Where is God? Why isn't he doing what he said? God doesn't seem to be in control. Things aren't going well." Certainly there are other areas of Abraham's life where he could look and say "God has richly blessed me." He was a very well-to-do man. So he had the joys and he had the sorrows. He had them both. But when he truly succeeded, when he was truly blessed is when he kept his focus on his God.

When he kept his focus on his God and clung to God's Word and to God's promises, then Abraham's faith soared to heights that were unbelievable, like when he was willing to offer his own son Isaac, who finally was born when Abraham was 100 years old. We are told in Hebrews that he was willing to do it because God had said that the Savior would come through that son and he figured if God told him to kill him, God would raise him from the dead. (See [Hebrews 11](#).) That was his trust in God's promises.

So when God tells us to look at our past, look where we've come from, look who has gone before us, and look at how God has kept his promises, even when it looked to all eyes like he wasn't, he tells us God keeps his Word, and our job is to continue to trust in God, to continue to turn to his Word and find our strength, our comfort and our purpose in that Word.

When we go through those sorrows and we say, "God, where are you?" Look to the rock from which you were hewn. Imitate Abraham's faith and cling to God's Word and to God's promises. When you are blessed greatly in your life and when blessings come, Satan is still whispering in our ears telling us that we did it all by ourselves and God had nothing to do with it, and we attempt not to thank God but thank ourselves, so look for the rock from which you were hewn. Look at how Abraham went around wherever he went and called on the name of the Lord. He worshiped the Lord publicly to acknowledge that all the blessings he had came from God and not from himself. Imitate that faith.

You say, "Abraham, he was the guy who was a super Christian. He's not like me." Abraham was just as weak as you and I are. When Abraham looked to himself,

remember what he told Abimelek, "That's not my wife. That's my sister." (See [Genesis 20](#).) He was no different than we are. He was a sinner. He fell, and he fell at times to the depths that you and I fall. But when God tells us as time passes on and you experience joys or sorrows, look to what you come from, he's really telling us to look to him. When Abraham's faith soared to those heights that we would love to imitate, it's because his eyes were firmly on the promise of the Savior.

That promise of the Savior is what Isaiah is talking about. The Holy Spirit is having him focus on that promise of the Savior. He's saying, "My salvation is coming speedily." The Suffering Servant would come and he would win salvation for all people. It's coming "speedily" God says. That was 700 years before Jesus was born. That doesn't work on our timetable. We don't always remember that, but God works on his timetable, not on our timetable. What we need to always remember is God keeps every one of his promises in his time, when he sees fit, and what he knows is best.

Look at what Isaiah said here. All the nations would know. It wouldn't just be the physical descendants of Abraham. To the nations, to the whole world his salvation would go out. We are evidence of it. We are children of Abraham by faith, not by blood. But that's still the same rock we were hewn from.

So when our God says to us, "*My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations,*" we believe it because of the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We at times need to remember that as we experience joys or sorrows as time marches on. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in the joys and the sorrows and the life we are living day to day that we forget that God's righteousness draws near quickly and speedily, and not just the Messiah coming, but the Messiah coming again. I think that's what Isaiah gets to talking to us about at the end of what I read to you earlier.

He says to look around you. Don't just look to where you came from, the rock from where you were hewn. "*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath.*" It's all beautiful. It's all there. God brought it all about, but look at what he says. "*The heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.*" The world we live in with its joys and its sorrows is not going to be here forever. It is going to die like the flies that collect every fall in your light fixtures. Isn't that kind of the picture he uses? Isn't that annoying? You look up. You think you just cleaned it, and it's full again. That's what God is saying the world is like. It is going to be here but it's going to be gone. It is going to be like clothes that wear out and you get rid of them. That's what God is going to do with this world. This world isn't the be all and end all to everything.

It's hard for us to remember that at times because it's what we can see. We know as Christians we are supposed to walk by faith and not by sight, but we often find ourselves walking a lot by sight, don't we? In the midst of sorrows, it's hard to see the promises of God because that requires faith. In the midst of joys, it's hard to see the

hands of the blessing of God because that requires faith. God is telling us that as you go through life, as time passes, remember the world we are living in is just temporary. We are just aliens and strangers here as he often says in Scripture. But the day will come when he will either call us out of the world or he'll end this world, and it's all gone. Then all those things that we fussed and worried about, all those things that kept us from getting closer to our God and finding more peace and comfort and confidence in him won't amount to anything. What he's really telling us is to remember that so you always make it your goal to stay close to your Savior.

Stay close to him in his Word and the Sacrament. Let the Spirit strengthen your heart and your faith as the amazing love of our God who lived in our place and died in our place comes to you and says, "I don't care where you are or what you are going through or what you have done, I love you and I have taken away those sins and I hope in heaven for you." So set your sight there and not just here, and wait and hope as you do that.