



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 27, 2013

Epiphany 3

Sermon Text: [2 Samuel 22:26-34](#)

Pastor Jon Bare

First Lesson: [Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 19](#)

Second Lesson: [Acts 4:23-31](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 4:14-21](#)

### Put Your Hope In The Lord

When I come back from China and tell people that I've been living and working in Beijing China, you can probably imagine or think about some of the questions that I most frequently get. Lately the #1 question has been about the pollution that has been in the news so much over here. Yes, it is bad. I would say the #1 question that we hear when we come back and talk about our work in China is, have you been to the Great Wall? Yes, the answer is yes. We've been to the Great Wall. It's about an hour away from Beijing where we live. It's an amazing thing. This wall that goes up one side of the mountain and down the other side, a feat of engineering that was built to protect China and Beijing, the capitol, from its enemies. We know in history that the Wall didn't do what it was said to do. The Wall eventually would fail and the enemies of China would be able to cross over it. It would fail.

As we consider today God's Word before us, we have a reminder from God that we have something that is much greater than the Great Wall of China, or any other manmade invention, something that we might put up to put hope in. We have the Lord and a reminder today that we can and we should put our hope in the Lord.

It's a reminder that we need often as we live and work in China. It's an atheist nation. That means, according to the law, there is no God. Children are brought up in schools believing that they are merely the product of evolution, waiting for the next best thing to evolve from them.

The modern Great Wall of China isn't something built with stone. It's a way of thinking, a way of training people that says if you do the best you can possibly do, if you make a better future for yourself and for your children and for the next generation, then you've done all that you can do. But when it comes to a God or any sort of divine being that's bigger than us and any idea of eternal life, well that's just nonsense, and why would you believe it. The modern Great Wall of China is summed up well with a model for an education company that is advertising all over Beijing. It says "In education we trust." It's a really good model for the way of thinking of so many people, that if I can learn as much as possible, if I can study hard so that I can get a good job, that's something I can put my hope in, my trust in.

As a result of its beliefs, the nation of China has set up laws that also regulate what kind of work religiously can be done. Churches have been allowed in a limited way, or in a controlled way, so there is a legal Christian church in China. But foreign

missionaries are not to go into China to be spreading the Gospel. People are not to be saying, I want to go to a place where I believe the same thing that's being taught there. So persecution is great against any sort of house churches or small groups that gather together and say, we want to be able to know for sure what we are learning is right, is correct. As if that wasn't enough of a thing, of a wall against us going into China, we also have the personalities or the people of China themselves who have been brought up in this system.

We all know that here in America we aren't perfect either. We are going against sinful natures. The Bible makes it very clear to us that when we're spreading the Gospel, we are going to be going up against people who want nothing to do with it, who will reject it, who will reject us as a result of it. As a church, we live and we work here in America in an age of universalism and relativism. Universalism says it doesn't matter what you believe or who you say your God is because we are all just worshiping the same thing anyway, aren't we? And we're really all just going to the same place anyway, so why can't we just all be friends? Relativism says you believe what you believe, I believe what I believe, and we can still just all get along because it's all just theories or philosophies anyway. In the end it doesn't really matter. These are the types of things that you as a church are fighting against.

These are the types of things that you as an individual are fighting against as you go and you try to share God's Word with coworkers or relatives or family members and you face cold relationships, perhaps colder than a Wisconsin winter, as you go and you try to share God's Word, you try to encourage with God's Word, and it doesn't seem to be doing anything. Then there's all the other problems in your own life. The problems with stress at work, a lost job, a failed relationship, problems between children and parents, problems between husband and wife, problems between friends and brothers and sisters. These problems that are there in your life and you can't seem to get rid of them, and no matter how hard you try, it seems like the other side is trying just as hard to fight against it, to not make this better.

As we face all of these different levels of problems in our lives, from the little ones that we face on a personal level to the big ones that we face as churches here in America, or over in China, it's easy for us to lose our hope. It's easy for us to look at our condition and say, "Man, this isn't working." It's easy for us to start to doubt God and what he is doing in our life.

As we look at this lesson before us from the Old Testament, it's good for us to know a little bit of the context here. Israel had been chosen by God to go into the Promised Land, the land through which God would provide his Messiah for this world, Jesus. As Israel was going into the land, they said "We want to be like all the other nations. We want to have a king to rule us." So God listened to their request and provided for them king Saul. King Saul, Israel's first king, didn't listen to God. He didn't continue to obey God. He disobeyed him. As a result, God said to Saul, "Because you have rejected me as your God, I now have to reject you as king of Israel. Your descendants will not be the ones to take over and be the next king. Instead, I have chosen another person."

That other person that he had chosen was king David. King David was a shepherd boy. He wasn't from a royal family. He wasn't something that from outward appearances looked like he should be the right person to take over as king. But he was the one that God had chosen.

As God brought him into the royal palace to be the one who would comfort Saul in his agony, Saul also saw him as the one who was going to replace him. He saw him as his enemy. Many times he tried to kill David, even throwing spears at him and trying to get rid of him. Eventually David had to flee the country because of this. For David, it had to have often seemed like this promise from God that he was going to be the next king of Israel was nothing more than a pipedream, nothing more than a figment of his imagination, or nice comforting words from God, but when we really apply them to our own lives, it doesn't really do much for my everyday life. For David, and for us today, as we live and we work in this world where we lack something to put our hope in, we need a reminder that we can and we should put our hope in the Lord.

The beginning section of this chapter, Chapter 22 vs. 1, says David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of his enemies and from the hand of Saul. God did remove Saul from his position as king. God did bring David back and set him up to be king of the people. God kept his promises to David. David in response sings this beautiful hymn of joy and praise to his God.

God has kept his promises. He kept his promises to David. He kept his promises through his prophet. He kept his most important promise. That was his promise of sending Jesus, the Messiah, the One that would come into this world to take the place of sinners who could do nothing to serve God, the One who came and put his arms up on a cross to declare to the world forgiveness, life and salvation, the One that we needed in our lives because of our sins of not putting our hope and our trust in God. Through Jesus, our sins are forgiven, all of them. It's the forgiveness of sins we hear every time we come to worship God in his house, and we hear those words, "Your sins are forgiven, go in peace." It's the forgiveness of sins that we receive as we tangibly receive the Lord's Supper, his true body and blood, in, with and under the bread and the wine. It's the forgiveness of sins that we need because we could not be perfect. We could not follow God. We could not put our complete hope in him. He forgives those sins. He leads us to see that he is the One that we can put our trust in. He is the One we can put our hope in.

You know what? He forgives our sins and he sends us back out into this world, doesn't he? We still have to face all those difficulties in our life. We still have to face all those worries, all those concerns, all the impatience that would love to take our trust and our hope away from God. We still have to face all those things. But as we do, he sends us out with his wonderful promise that David sums up so well and uses so many awesome pictures to describe. He says:

"You are my lamp, O Lord;  
the Lord turns my darkness into light.

With your help I can advance against a troop;  
with my God I can scale a wall.

As for God, his way is perfect;  
the word of the Lord is flawless.  
He is a shield  
for all who take refuge in him.  
For who is God besides the Lord?  
And who is the Rock except our God?  
It is God who arms me with strength  
and makes my way perfect.  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;  
he enables me to stand on the heights.”

Did you catch all those wonderful pictures that he uses? God is our light. When we don't know where we're going, when we don't know what's in front of us, when we can't see what we should be doing, he is the light for our path, leading us and guiding us.

As we work in China, this is so evident. God is our light leading us forward. There are so many times in the mission field when we don't know what we should be doing. I remember a couple years ago, as we were going about teaching and doing the Bible studies we were doing, our goal has always been that eventually Chinese would rise up and take over the Word. We can't be the one to start churches for them, but our prayer was that they would rise up and start churches for themselves. About two years ago, I was starting to really question what we were doing. Are we doing the right thing? Are we teaching the right way? Should we be the ones to start this church for them? Just as I started questioning everything we were doing, God provided for me and for our group in Beijing a small group of people who came to us and said, “We believe the same thing you believe. We studied with you. We know we believe this. We've tried to go to other churches, but we can't find anyone who teaches the same thing you are teaching us, what we believe the Bible says. We want to work with you to start a Chinese church because we believe that this message is so important and this belief about God's Word is so important that it needs to be out there.” Two Thanksgivings ago, eight people were confirmed. On New Year's Eve, they started their church. Last year they went from having eight members up to about thirty members. Nine more were baptized and confirmed this past Christmas day. An amazing blessing. Something we never would have expected. But God as the light is leading us forward.

That light continues to lead us forward as he provides ways for us to bring Christian education and seminary education to the leaders of those groups. So now throughout China, in three different cities, Yinchuan, Beijing and Wuhan, we have churches that are gathering around God's Word, Lutheran Confessional churches that are one with us in our faith and in our doctrine. We have leaders from those churches who are receiving seminary training. This is all not because of who we are, not because we are good in what we do, not because of our strength or our ability, but because of what David said here... God is our rock. He's not just some little pebble. He's a boulder.

He's our foundation. He's the One that gave us his Word, and he's the One who supports us the entire way. It is God who makes our feet like a deer so that we can go against those enemies, whatever they are, that come against us.

As we continue to live and work in China, God's Word and his power becomes even more evident every day. We can see it working in the lives of those around us. We can see those people who are studying to be leaders taking hold of it and now, just like I am today, preaching it to people who are gathering to hear God's Word. God's Word is something. God is the One that we can put our hope in.

As you go today, look at your life. Look at the ways that God is using you and your life to take his Word out into this world. Look at the ways he had provided for you by being the light for you in this world. It certainly is dark and you need that light. Look at the ways that he has been that rock for you, that foundation. Look at the ways that he diminishes the enemies before you and makes a clear path for you to be able to keep going forward.

We do live in a world where enemies do come up against us. The devil, the world and our sinful nature would have nothing more than stop us, than deter us from taking his Word out, from living our lives as Christians and bold witnesses in this world. But we have something much more powerful than this world. We have something much more powerful than sinful natures, much more powerful than the devil himself. We have God. He is the One that we can put our trust in. The result, when we see that, will be just like David, to sing out a song of joy to our Lord. He is the One who is going to redeem us. Eventually he will take us from this world to be with him forever in heaven. That's the truth. It's not going to change. He is the One who is going to be the light for our path every single day. He is the One who will equip us with every tool that we need to keep going forward.

In the end, we will say of our God as David did, there is no one like our God. There is no one. There is no one else and nothing else that we can put our hope in. We will sing together songs of praise to our God. That's exactly why we are here today, isn't it? Amen.