

What a week this past week has been, Christians! Everything seems to have gone wrong. If we thought that 2021 was going to be different than 2020, I think this past week has put that all to rest. We've heard reports of riots in Washington, D.C., riots at the Capitol, and even new controversies surrounding our president. It's enough to make us wonder: what will the future hold? What's coming if this is how 2021 is beginning?

And it's probably a little difficult to believe everything that we've heard, too. And what I mean by that is that we live in a situation where we don't always get the full story. Just think of things like Facebook or Google, which openly admit that they control the flow of information. That based on the information which they have gathered about you personally, that's how they decide what to show you and in what order they're going to show it to you. And that can tremendously influence the way in which we think about the world. Or even think about the media, for example. You have news anchors who openly admit that they're presenting not an unbiased presentation of the truth, but their own opinions, their own take on everything, and their own "truth" as they like to put it. And even if it's just a handful of them, that's enough to make us wonder: can we believe everything that we hear?

And those two things together--the events of this past week and that nagging doubt which we always have--are enough to make us weary, to discourage us, and to make us wonder: what is going to happen in the days ahead? But Christians, God speaks to you today in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 42 to address just that situation. God speaks to those who are weary. God speaks to those who are discouraged. God speaks to those who are wondering what the future might hold. And he points us to that which gives us strength. He points us to that which encourages us. And points us to that which gives us hope. So let's pay attention to what God has to say to us today in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 42.

Because [...] how does God talk about those He's speaking to? You'll notice in verse three he calls them "a bruised reed." Not a mighty tree, something that can withstand anything, like a wind blowing against the tree that is unable to knock it over. But a reed which has been bent and bruised by the things around it. That it's discouraged. It has lost all hope. It's wondering where is it going to turn in the days ahead. And Christians, there's plenty of reason to be discouraged these days. Just all the reports of the things that are happening, and also wondering: when's it all going to end? What is this country coming to? Where will we finally turn in our time of need?

And God is also speaking to those whom he calls "a faintly burning wick." Not a roaring fire, like a campfire out in the rain which can stay lit, but a sputtering flame, like a candle which is just about to go out. If you've ever watched a candle at the end of its life, you know how it wavers and flickers until it finally exhausts itself. That's the kind of people that God is talking about: those who are exhausted. Those who are tired. Those who are wondering where they will find strength. Because these days, Christians, there's plenty to exhaust us. There's plenty to make us wonder. After all, the events of this past week will probably be in the news for weeks and weeks and weeks, just like the coronavirus has been in the news for over a year. It becomes exhausting. How will we deal with this situation?

God is also speaking to those whom he says in verse seven are in darkness, wondering where they will find light, wondering when that light will come and bring them out again. When will

we find relief in the midst of all of this turmoil? When will we find comfort in the midst of this grief? And Christians, that's who God is speaking to: to those who are discouraged, to those who are exhausted, to those who are wondering what the future might hold.

But maybe this past week hasn't affected you personally all that much. And that's good, that's fine. But there are certainly times in our lives where we struggle with these same concerns, wondering where we will turn, wondering how we will find the strength to carry on. But God says to you, either in this week or in any week when we might wonder what the future might hold, he points you to the one who has come. God says: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights." God points us to his chosen Servant, the one who has come to give us strength. The one who has come to encourage us. The one who has come to give us hope. And that is, Christians, our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that because Matthew in Matthew chapter 12 quotes this passage when talking about our Lord Jesus. And so God here is describing his Son and what he has come to do among us.

God says about him: "I have put my Spirit upon him." We saw that in our Gospel lesson for today, when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus at his baptism. And the Father spoke over him: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." And that Spirit is not just him being anointed with the Spirit only. This is a sign of him being the King. Because the Old Testament kings were anointed with oil and with the Spirit. And Jesus anointed with the Spirit comes not just as a king, but as the King of Kings, the one to whom all things belong, the one under whom all things will be put. Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and we see that in the Spirit descending upon him. And even in the midst of our political turmoil, Christians, Jesus is still king. Nothing changes that. Jesus will reign as king forever, and his kingdom will have no end.

And what has this king come to do among us? God says this King "will bring forth justice to the nations." He will come among us and establish his rule, establish his kingdom, bringing a real justice, a real righteousness among us. Not the way the world thinks about righteousness and justice and equity and all of those things. But according to God's justice. We want to find a good society. Jesus brings it to us in his kingdom. And when all of the nations of this world, when all of its kingdoms, when all the countries of this world have passed away, Christ's kingdom will remain. It will never come to an end.

This king "will not cry aloud." You could translate that as "to scream" or "to shriek," as if in fear. Jesus is not afraid, Christians. The events of this past week or the events of any of these weeks have not frightened him. They're not going to change his mind. He has everything in his hand, and he will keep everything in his hand. Nothing's gonna catch him off guard or frighten him, because he is the King of all.

This King "will not lift up his voice," as if he was bragging, as if he was trying to puff himself up and make himself look good. Jesus comes in humility as one who doesn't need to boast, as one who has no reason to try to make himself look better than what he is. He comes in humility among you today to give you his kingdom and to bring you to himself.

This King "will not make his voice heard in the street," as if he was trying to toot his own horn or trumpet it aloud. As if he wanted the world to pay attention to him. What does he care about what the world thinks? The world will end. But Jesus' kingdom will go on forever. So he does what he does because it is right and for that reason only.

This King "will not break a bruised reed." Those of us who are discouraged, he's not going to disappoint us further or leave us to just struggle all on our own. Jesus comes among you to lift you up, to strengthen you. He's not going to leave us to just sputter around. He wants to take care of us in every single moment.

And "a faintly burning wick he will not quench." He's not going to leave us to sputter out in the dark without hope for the future, but he will strengthen us with his strength, as if he is lighting our weak fire with his own holy fire. Because Jesus is the one who comes to help his people.

And above all, Christians, this King "will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has establish justice in the earth." The events of this past week, or any week for that matter, do not set him back. They do not make him grow tired or weary or discouraged. It's not as if he saw what happened and said, "Oh well, I guess my kingdom's gonna have to wait a little bit longer." Jesus has all things in his hand, and nothing, absolutely nothing, will stand in the way of Christ carrying out his will. Not this past week, not this past year, not any year. Christ will do what he says he's going to do, because he is the King of heaven and earth. And Jesus will rule all nations with a rod of iron and put all things under his feet, because he is our everlasting King.

So Christians, don't be discouraged. Don't grow weary or faint. And don't lose hope. Jesus reigns as King forever. Nothing is going to change that. Not this past week. Not this next week. Nothing. So maybe what we need to do is just turn off things for a while. Turn off the computer. Don't pay attention to the news on the TV for a while. Maybe even set down your smart phone. Those things have a way of distracting us from the reality of what is. But call upon the Lord your God, the one who has promised to be with you. And then you will see the future for what it really is: as something that belongs to God, as something that is in his mighty hand, and that nothing, absolutely nothing, will stop the kingdom of Christ among us. Jesus is with you today, Christians, and he will hold you in that hand of his forever.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.