

1 Ad te levavi – Jeremiah 23:5-6

“The days will come,” says the LORD, “when I will raise for David a righteous Branch Who will rule as King and act wisely. He will create fairness and righteousness in the land. When He comes, Judah will be saved, and Israel will live safely. This is the name that He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. – Jeremiah 23:5-6

Are you able to be secure in your salvation? This is what the Scriptures teach. St. Peter says that your inheritance is kept safely in heaven for you by God himself (1 Pet 1:3-5). He is preserving your faith in Christ by the power of his gospel. Your faith is secure, because it does not rest in your own good works or habits. It doesn't rest in the traditions of your church, however wholesome and edifying these may be. No, your faith rests only in Christ who took all your sin upon himself and gives to you his own righteousness. He is your righteousness. He is your salvation. He is your safety and security, sitting at the right hand of the Father. When you rely on his sure promise, then you are safe and secure in your salvation.

In the meantime, God also blesses us with other outward things, which are meant to keep our focus on his Word. He provides parents to teach their children and raise them in the fear and discipline of the Lord. He provides a church with regular services where you can hear God's Word and grow in the knowledge of your Savior. He gives us structure and order so we can live quiet and peaceable lives in this world. And yet, for all God gives us in our parents, our family, our friends, and our church, the security of our souls comes only from his sure and certain Word of life. You are not declared righteous before God because of where you go to church, who your parents are, who your spouse is, or what kind of routine you follow. All of these things should serve to point you to the only source of security and salvation. Because despite how beneficial these other good gifts of God are, they cannot atone for your sins. Your righteousness and blessing are only found in Christ, his work of salvation, and his sure Word. He alone is your righteousness and salvation.

We naturally feel safer and more secure when the structures and routines remain stable. This easily deceives us into thinking that as long as we keep the traditions alive then we can know that all will be well. Of course, keeping good traditions alive certainly has its benefits. Families should stay together. We should work to keep the church doors open. When we give our offerings, talents, and time as sacrifices to God, then he blesses us with good things. The church bells keep ringing at the right time, the family dinners go on as they should, and God continues to provide. We thank God for all of this. But our security – the certainty that we are righteous and saved before him – does not come from anything other than his pure and certain Word.

I once got into a conversation with a man whose church was falling into serious errors. They had been ordaining women to be pastor for several years, promoting the popular sins of our age, such as sexual perversions and abortion. They were even saying that God's salvation can be found in other religions, which do not worship Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation.

This man was rightly troubled by all these things, and he knew they were wrong. So I invited him to the Lutheran church where we submit to the teachings of the Bible and proclaim

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Christ alone as our salvation. He appreciated the invitation, but he said he couldn't leave his congregation. Why? Because it was the church where he grew up. His mom was still a member there. It's what he's always known. So he wasn't ready to leave.

This is a very common and normal way for people to behave. You want to stick with what you know. It gives you a sense of safety and security. When things are familiar to you, then you can still hold onto some sense of normalcy. It seems safe and comforting. Of course, it's good to have a building, a well ordered service, Sunday School, confirmations, weddings and funerals, baptisms, and all the other events. But none of these things mean anything if we don't pay attention to what is being taught. Our security isn't in the fact that X number of people were baptized or came to church. Our security is in the promise God gives us in baptism, where our Lord joins us to his own death and resurrection, promising to keep us secure in his Word and faith until we die. Our security isn't in the fact that we are able to get someone to fill the pulpit on Sunday morning. Our security is in the words of life God calls that man to proclaim. Our safety isn't in whether the building is kept open. Unless the Lord builds the house, then we all labor in vain. Your church can have multitudes of volunteers for all sorts of things, but what do those willful workers believe and confess?

If your sense of security and safety comes from imagining that things are operating the way they should, then you aren't secure or safe at all. You're only fooling yourself, relying on the works of your own hands, imagining that all will be well just because you keep up appearances.

The people of Israel and Judah were blessed with a beautiful place of worship. God promised to be present with them in the temple, which Solomon had built when he was king. The sacrifices kept going every evening and morning. And as long as all that was still taking place, the people thought they were safe. The teachers and prophets told them that all would be well. But they weren't listening to the Word of God, which he had first given to them through his servant Moses. They were sacrificing to strange gods, following the customs of the worldly culture around them. They were committing sexual sins, oppressing the poor, the strangers, the widows, and the orphans. They didn't recognize their need for salvation from the Lord. Yet they felt secure, because they still had the outward structure of their worship services.

God therefore sent his prophet Jeremiah to warn them. He said, "Don't trust those who deceive you by saying, 'This is the LORD's temple, the LORD's temple, the LORD's temple'" (Jer 7:4)! Jeremiah called the people of Judah to repent of their false worship and their immoral living. He admonished them to listen to God's voice. Because it is only in the words of the living God where we find our true security and safety from sin, death, and condemnation.

Sadly, the people wouldn't listen to Jeremiah. They preferred the preaching of the other teachers who told them, "Peace! Peace! Blessing! Blessing! All will be well!" But they didn't have any peace. Despite the fact that the temple services seemed to be going on as usual, the time was soon coming when the temple would be burned down and the entire city of

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Jerusalem would be destroyed. Then all of their security and safety would be brought to rubble and ashes.

In the days of Jeremiah, God referred to his church as Israel. Israel is the name given to Jacob after he wrestled with God. Israel means “Strive with God.” The true Israel consists of those who strive with God. Like Jacob who wouldn’t let go of God until he blessed him, the true children of Israel also hold God to his promise, cling to the truth of his Word, and find their rest and security only in his free gift of righteousness and salvation. They are the true church, the true Israel, the prized people of the living God.

God has always provided his people with physical signs to strengthen their faith. Just as he gave circumcision, the sacrifices, and the promises of the coming Savior to his ancient people, he gives us baptism, the body and blood of his Son, and the preaching of the Lord who came in the flesh, was crucified for our sins, risen from the dead, and promises to come again on the last day.

God attaches his promise to outward signs, because he wants us to be certain of our salvation. He wants us to know that as surely as the water wets our skin, his blood washes us clean of all our sin in the washing of our baptism. As surely as the bread and wine touch our lips, he is feeding us with his own body and blood in the bread and wine of his Supper. Through these outward signs, he gives us true certainty of our salvation through his sure and secure Word. The same blood of Jesus, which declared us righteous from the cross, continues to declare us righteous through the preaching of his Word and the distribution of his sacraments. He became the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS when he first came in the flesh and took our place on the cross. And he continues to come to us as our righteousness and salvation before God. This is how we remain safe and secure. As Jeremiah foretold, “When He comes, Judah will be saved, and Israel will live safely.”

We should give thanks to God that he has provided other outward gifts to us, which have pointed us to our Savior and his Word. Give thanks that he has provided you with parents who brought you to baptism, or friends or family who talk to you about the gospel, and any other good order that has allowed you to learn more about your Savior. Because when all these other things are gone, you will still have the security of your Savior in his gospel and sacraments. When you become too weak to keep the same routines, when your good habits become a thing of the past, when your body is wasting away, and death is at the door, you will still have the safety of your Savior. Though our sins rise up against our conscience, Jesus remains the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Let us pray:

Lord, Thy mercy will not leave me.
Ever will Thy truth abide.
Then in Thee I will confide.
Since Thy Word cannot deceive me
My salvation is to me
Safe and sure eternally. Amen.