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Topic: Isaiah 38:17: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness..!"

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We are glad that we can come together, hear the Word, and be blessed.

It is actually close to my heart that we seek and find a connection with God together.

You know, one can hear the Word and be blessed by it. But this personal fellowship with the Lord, which we perhaps (I'm speaking for myself now) at some point had more intimately than we do today, that we do not merely, as just said, hear, but actually experience that God fulfills his promises, as we heard from the Word from the prophet Isaiah. That God can do us good according to his promise by fulfilling it, that is a most glorious Word.

As for the external situation at the moment, it does indeed look as though war could break out there at any moment. Our thoughts are particularly with Israel. We have said it often enough here: Israel is closer to us than our own country, than our own people, because we do indeed belong to the people of God, and the bond that God creates goes far beyond national borders and unites us most intimately in divine love. So may the Lord indeed be especially close to his people Israel in these hours and days, be gracious to them, and may what is right happen at the right time.

Here too, one might ask: Why must so much hardship and suffering come upon the whole earth, and even upon the people of Israel, the chosen people? When we think of the millions who perished in the most horrific ways during the Second World War or in the era of the Third Reich, the German-American whom Brother Branham mentioned, he said, "Where was God when all those martyrs had to die? Did he fold his hands? Did he stand by and watch? Where was God?" But we shall never fully fathom God's ways on earth. Blessed is the man who can say yes.

And we have read together here from Isaiah 38, verse 17:

[17] ***Behold, for peace I had great bitterness...***

You don't always see that straight away, but it does bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness. And God knows exactly what he allows and what is for our good.

And it goes on to say here:

[17] … ***but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.***

I have recently made two visits to prison in the last few weeks, and have had to reflect on how even servants of God and men of God have had to walk difficult paths.

When I read today that Joseph spent two years in prison simply because a woman accused him of wanting to rape her, when in fact it was the other way around. She wanted him, and she grabbed his jacket and said later on, "Here is the jacket, so the proof is in my hand," [Gen 39:12–20] and the man was sent to prison and sat there, and the one to whom he had given a good interpretation promised to remember him, but later forgot. Later he forgot completely, and lo and behold, the two years were fulfilled.

And this Joseph, who was betrayed by his brothers, sold, thrown into the pit, and whose brothers lied to and deceived their father, dipped a garment in blood and said, "***Wild beasts have torn him to pieces***," [Gen 37:31–33] and Joseph later says to them, "***Don't blame yourselves, for God sent me before you, so that we all stay alive.***" [Gen 45:5] Yes, we might have said, "My goodness, now I will give you a bit of a shake and clear your heads!" No, God walks such paths with his people, and we cannot ask, "Did all that have to happen? Did all that have to happen?" We cannot ask that. Blessed is the man who can thank God.

I asked myself this very question this evening. You all know about the tax matter here. When I think of all the hours and days I've spent with lawyers and so on, and how one suffers and is worn down by it, nobody can imagine it, because I am the one who is always the target everywhere. And one simply has to say that the trials God allows serve us for good.

And I'll tell you quite honestly: there was a time when I was at the point of saying to the Lord, "You really ought to punish this man who is in the wrong and has wronged us; you really ought to punish him." I said that to the Lord. And I went one step further in a very dark hour of my life, and said, "If you don't do it, I'll do it." And you know, we are all only human. But then God's grace came upon me. Then I was able to pray, to pray truly from the heart.

And I would like that you pray for me, so that when the meeting takes place on the 25th of January with these very people, that God may grant me grace. I say this because I believe that through everything God is to be glorified. And Brother Schmidt has just read it out: "***you will be brought before the authorities***" and so on. [Luk 12:11] And I mean, whatever the occasion, that's what came to my heart, so let God turn everything to good. Perhaps these are people who would otherwise never have heard the Word, and now God is seeking a way for them to hear the Word. So nothing at all happens without God's will. And especially when we do what is right, not much can happen to us anyway. It's just that, as I said, life can become a little more difficult for us.

But verse 15 here in chapter 38 is just so precious:

[15] ***What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it.***

There really isn't much left to say, only to give thanks and praise the name of the Lord, who gives his Word, bestows his promises, and then carries them out and fulfills them. And I think we've all experienced that often enough.

This thought also came to me during the last hymn, which was about faithfulness: that God has remained faithful. Over the last few days, I have asked myself several times what I would most like to emphasize in eternity, what has become most significant to me on earth. One can extol God's love, God's grace; one can indeed extol many things, and rightly so. But I must say quite honestly that to this very day, God's faithfulness is to me the most wonderful thing of all. In how many situations have I found myself thinking, "God is faithful; God remains faithful"? And this faithfulness of God, I would like to praise for all eternity.

The Scripture also says: ***'Even if we are unfaithful, God remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.'*** [2 Tim 2:13]

Nor can he deny us, who have been begotten and born of him, we have indeed become sons and daughters of God.

It goes on to say here:

[15] ***I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.*** [Is 38:15]

It may well be that our soul is troubled, perhaps so that we do not become overconfident. Who knows? In any case, we can walk in peace and trust the Lord completely, even when our soul is troubled. Yet, despite the troubles of our soul, we believe that God will bring all things to good for the glory of his holy name, for we know God no other way.

Then it continues here:

[16] ***O LORD, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.***

And then comes that verse:

[17] ***Behold, for peace I had great bitterness.***

As I said, there is much we do not understand. And the Lord himself once said: ***'What I am doing now, you do not understand; you will understand it later.'*** [Jn 13:7]

And so God's ways may be incomprehensible to us. It is also written: ***'How unsearchable are his ways!'*** [Rom 11:33]

Give thanks to God in all circumstances. We went through this here recently. It is not easy, we must all admit that. God must help us with this. But we do want to reach the point where we can give thanks to God in all circumstances.

Now the verse about faithfulness, verse 18:

[18] ***For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.***

[19] ***The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day.***

That is simply a most wonderful word. We, as those who live with God, may praise his faithfulness. We may praise him, for God is a God of the living and not of the dead.

There is a passage on my mind that I read earlier this evening. I may not find it straight away. That is indeed how it looks like. In any case… Oh yes, Exodus 34, Exodus 34 from verse 6.

[6] ***And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,***

[7] ***Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.***

[8] ***And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.***

[9] ***And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O LORD, let my LORD, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.***

We have all experienced this ourselves, both in ourselves and in our dealings with one another. We are not as obedient to the Lord as we ought to be, we all know that. But here, let us pray together, as the man of God prayed:

[8] ***And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.***

[9] ***And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O LORD, let my LORD, I pray thee, go among us.***

That, I believe, is also the desire of us all: that God may come into our midst, that he may begin to work, that he may be heard, felt, and experienced here. That we may truly experience the things we proclaim, and not merely proclaim here, but also believe and be a witness to, namely that God has reconciled us, that is, humanity, to himself on the cross of Calvary, and that the gulf has been bridged, that God has

built a bridge, and that the middle wall of partition has been removed, and that we have fellowship with God. What does this fellowship with God look like in practical terms, in our lives of faith? That is the question.

And here, Moses prayed if he had found grace, that the Lord might indeed walk among us. May that be our prayer today: "Lord, if we have found grace in thy sight, then come into our midst, then walk through our ranks, then move about, then confirm your Word, save the lost, heal the sick, baptize with Spirit and fire, fulfill your promises, do something that confirms your presence in our midst." And then: "***And pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.***" We too can say no more than this: "Lord, forgive us, but let us be your own, and walk among us, reveal yourself."

And lo and behold, the Lord has heard. It is written in verse 10:

[10] ***And the Lord said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a wonderful thing that I will do with thee.***

This is a glorious promise. And I believe we are right in our assessment when we assert and believe that the greatest is yet to come, that the best is yet to come, that God will visit us once more in his mercy. He will forgive, he will wash us in his blood with the washing of water by the Word, [Eph 5:26], as Brother Schmidt has read. He will fill us with the Holy Spirit, equip us and be with us.

Then the Lord answered. And we know that the answer which was given here in words has indeed come to pass. It was not merely a promise, but God kept his promise. The prayer was and is answered. And then came the Lord's reply, and he said, "***Behold, I make a covenant.***" Let us boldly declare to one another today: the Lord made a covenant with us on Calvary. He said, "***This is the new covenant in my blood.***" [Luk 22:20] He has given the yes and the amen to all the promises. So it now depends solely on our faith.

Then the Lord replied, "***Behold, I make a covenant.***" And in this covenant with the people of Israel, God contractually committed himself to be with his covenant people. What did God do in Christ on Calvary? He gave the yes and the amen, for in him are both the promise and through him the fulfillment has also come. "***Behold, I make a covenant.***" And because this covenant was made, he was able to say further, "***Before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation.***"

I believe that. I know that we are not Paul or Peter here, nor Moses or Elijah, I know all that, no one needs to tell me. But I also know that God is God. And that it does not depend on the weak or the strong, the great or the small, but on faith and on the promises that God has graciously given us for these days. And if these are promises that we believe, then we too will experience the day, just as Hezekiah

did, when he could say: "***You have given the promise and have also fulfilled it.***" What more can I say now? Say no more: praise, extol and give thanks that God is faithful and will fulfill his promises. It is a glorious Word: "***Before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation.***"

The words are still there in the Gospel of John: "***The works that I have done, ye will do also, and even greater than these will ye do.***" [Joh 14:12] It is written in the plural, not addressed to a single person, "The works that I have done, you alone will do." No, we can read it together in the Gospel of John; it is in the plural: "***The works that I have done, ye will also do.***" John 14 verse 12:

[12] ***Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.***

So, "***verily I say to you***": you, whoever believes in me—and we claim that we believe in our Lord, biblically and correctly—and that is why we have confidence in the Lord that he will fulfill every Word he has promised us.

Now back to the word here in Exodus 34:

[10] ***…before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD… …shall see the work of the LORD.***

They shall witness it, experience it, all who belong to the people of God.

[10] ***And all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord, for it is a marvelous thing that I will do with thee.***

This promise too is simply wonderful, not just "what I will do in your midst", or to Pharaoh, or here or there, but "what I will do to you", to the people of God, to us, to me, and to you: ***for it is a wonderful thing that I will do with thee.*** [Ex 34:10]

We have often sung, '*Great things*'—how does the song go?—'*Lord, you have done great things for us here*'. And indeed, it must become so evident that God is doing great things for us.

As I said at the beginning, I wished that we might all have a better connection with God. That our prayers may be heard, that God may answer, that he may bless, that he may fulfill his promises. And to that end, today in prayer of faith, we will seek the face of God, truly asking him to walk and work among us, in our lives, amongst his people, to confirm his word and to bless us all.

God cannot do otherwise, as Moses said, ***"We are a stiff-necked people."*** [Ex 34:9]

Perhaps I'm too. What do we know? We don't even notice it in ourselves. Generally speaking, we only notice it in others. As for ourselves, we don't notice it so quickly,

but perhaps others notice it in us. We do not wish to reproach ourselves or others. But one thing seems certain, that we all have a longing to enter into God's presence, so that he may walk and work among us, as he has promised.

And I believe that we can do this through faith. Today I read a scripture about fasting in the prophet Isaiah, and one might well advocate that. And even if we had the time today, we won't be able to do so today. For today we wish to pray. But even if we were to speak of it, fasting itself is of no use unless it is done in faith and in the right manner before God. This is very clearly set out in Isaiah 58, and I would like to read just a single verse from it. Isaiah 58, verse 5:

[5] ***Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?***

We could do everything outwardly. We could put on such a long face, as it is written here, '***You let your face hang down like a reed.***' And what I'm saying now, I don't mean it in a derogatory way. But you know there is a Pentecostal movement, a Latter Rain movement, which originated in South Africa and is also represented in Germany and throughout Europe. They fast in sackcloth and ashes. And if I hadn't seen it myself, I wouldn't believe it. But they have a sackcloth for everyone and a salt shaker of a larger size, about the size of a pepper shaker. And as I said, I was there, I saw it. And then they go into the sackcloth, then ashes are poured over them, and then they fast. But the Lord says here:

"Is this what you call a fast, to bow your head, to clothe yourselves in sackcloth, and to lie in ashes? Can you call this a fast, or a day acceptable to the Lord?"

Beloved, I am telling you the truth from the Word of God. Unless God helps us in prayer, in fasting, in everything, we can do all these things without thereby becoming pleasing to God. But we have a sincere desire to do things in such a way that we become pleasing to God, be it fasting, be it praying, be it with or without ashes. Be that as it may, most people did indeed repent in sackcloth and ashes, I believe in Nineveh, but Krefeld is not Nineveh. Everyone, when we read the Bible, here this happened, there it happened differently. God doesn't copy anything at all. He just wants us to be at his disposal and for us to find grace in his sight, as Moses said, in everything.

I've also been thinking today about what a privilege it is that God has given us the ability to truly understand his Word through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. I don't read books from cover to cover, but I do occasionally dip into books to see what others have said and written. I did read one book quite thoroughly about the image. In it, a man writes a whole book about the image. By that he means the image from Revelation. And then all he has in mind is the television. That, he says, is the image that can speak. [Rev 13:15] And if this man had only read one passage

correctly, it would have been written there about the image of the beast, but not just any image, but the image of the beast. Before I can know what the image of the beast is, I must surely know what the beast is. And do you see how urgently revelation is needed? There is an image, and then he sees the image, and then he writes hundreds of pages about the image and has written right past everything.

Yes, I'm not saying this now to look down on anyone. I'm just saying what a blessing it is that God has given us, that we too may honor brother Branham's ministry. For we wouldn't know all these things, would we? And we must keep reminding ourselves of this again and again in this place.

If God hadn't had Paul, we wouldn't know many things. And shall I tell you something? Paul went home, he wrote his letters, some say in the year 64, others in 68. He wrote his last letter, and lo and behold, John wrote in the year 96, some 30 years later, things that Paul hadn't even known or taught yet. He didn't say a single word about the millennium or other things that were only revealed later. But today we have the grace of actually having a complete overview.

And we have said that often enough here. Had God not sent brother Branham in our day, we would be groping in the dark just like everyone else today. And would be following the same path as them. With trumpets and cymbals, with hallelujahs and so on.

So thanks be to the living God for all his servants and prophets, whom he has sent at all times with his Word to his people. And that is why it is written, ***"Whoever receives you receives me; whoever hears you hears me."*** [Mat 10:40, Luk 10:16]

And by this we don't glorify any man. We thank God that he has kept his Word in our time too and has truly sent someone who did not present himself or a doctrine or a denomination, but someone through whom God could speak and place the Word upon the lampstand by revelation.

Now all we need is one thing: the same connection with God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the supernatural working of God, just like that man had it. So we all need it, and I am convinced that the Lord will grant it to us. For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. [Heb 13:8]