

"Are You Okay?"

Text: Romans 9:30-10:4

May the peace of God fill your hearts and silence all doubt or uncertainty, assuring you of his continual love and forgiveness in Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, a trend has emerged in the past few years in what comes out of Hollywood – or wherever shows and movies are now made. Since that crowd has not shown themselves to be all that devout or Godly, we should be immediately wary of everything that they promote. The reasoning is that if Satan is calling the shots, we need to identify his angle – what it is that he's trying to do or accomplish. The devil *always* has a plan, and that plan is *always* evil. His goal is always and only the destruction of everything that God loves.

What, therefore, is the threat in this new trend where every character in every show continually asks every other character, "Are you okay?" The question has become ubiquitous, to the point of absurdity, along with the other absurdity that is also repeated endlessly today, no matter the circumstances: "You're going to be alright. Everything is all going to be fine." It's become a standard line to anyone in trouble, no matter the circumstances. A character in a movie could have been shot by a cannonball that passed through his sternum and still the question would be asked, "Are you okay?" followed immediately by, "You're going to be fine."

You have undoubtedly also noticed that this has bled over into our everyday greeting to one another. "How are you?" is just another form of "Are you okay?" There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with asking the question. At its core it's just a common greeting intended to show concern. At least that's sort of the idea. We tend to be a little put off when someone answers with something *other than*, "Good! How are you?" Most often we really don't want anyone to answer truthfully, unless the truthful answer is "Good!"

So what could possibly be dangerous here? What mischief could Satan possibly be trying to work through something so apparently innocent or harmless? By way of an answer, we turn to our text for this morning, found recorded in the 35th Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 35:4-7a** *Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."* ⁵ *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;* ⁶ *then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the*

tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

This is God's Word. One of the great gifts that our God wants to give us through the study of his Word is wisdom and discernment – the ability to recognize the cleverly laid traps of our great Adversary. We ask our God to so bless this morning as we pray: "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

I'd been pondering what could possibly be the devil's angle in the "Are you okay?" craze when one day I actually *heard* my answer. I was driving and happened to turn the radio on to a country music station, something I seldom do any more. The song that was playing was by a big ol' boy that goes by the rather unlikely name of Jelly Roll. Maybe you've heard of him. I never had. According to the internet (so you can be certain it's true) ol' Jelly Roll is "*an American country rap artist.*" I wasn't even aware there was such a thing, but whatever. A line in the chorus of this particular song flipped a switch in my head: "*I'm not okay, but we're all gonna be alright.*" A light came on. That's it. That's the devil's angle.

I wasn't sure until I read more about this Jelly Roll dude. His real name is Jason Bradley DeFord, and although I don't pretend to know his relationship to his Savior, the lyrics to his songs tell me I'm onto the devil's angle here, these words in particular:

*Might pop a pill, and smoke, and maybe drink, Talk to God and tell him what I think.
At first, he's gonna hate me, But eventually, He'll save me*

Since we don't pretend to know what's in the man's heart (and can't) we'll leave him out of this and focus only on that line from his song: "*I'm not okay, but we're all gonna be alright.*" The song, so I am told, resonates with countless fans around the world, including those of every imaginable religious (and non-religious) conviction. The answer to the question "*What's the appeal?*" also explains the devil's clever plan in all of this. No matter what you've done and no matter what you fully intend to keep doing, "*We're all gonna be alright.*" No matter what you believe, or refuse to believe, "*We're all gonna be alright.*" No matter if you lie, cheat, steal, commit adultery or idolatry, riot, overdose, or mass murder an entire city, "*We're all gonna be alright.*"

The devil actually *wants us* to perpetuate this baseless mantra. He absolutely loves the illusion that sin and unbelief will have no consequences, that human beings can face our God on Judgment Day with only sin and rejection of his Son Jesus in our hearts and yet *“We’re all gonna be alright.”*

No, you’re not. The idea might make you feel good. It might salve or quiet your troubled conscience for a time, but it’s false comfort. In the absence of saving faith, you absolutely are *not* going to be alright. Yet Satan would love for those who reject Jesus to believe otherwise. The idea doesn’t even make sense. Imagine someone is hosting a lavish, exclusive party. Attendance is by invitation only. The host sends out ornate, engraved passes that must be presented at the door to gain entrance. *“We’re all gonna be alright.”* is essentially saying that presenting a dry-cleaning ticket, a gas receipt, or any old scrap of paper at the door will get you into the party. It’s false hope because that’s just not the way it works.

That’s what the devil wants the world to believe about heaven. Entrance into God’s heaven’s is gained exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself made this clear when he said, **“No one comes to the Father but by me.”** Satan loves the false hope of *“We’re all gonna be alright”* because it gives counterfeit comfort to those who he knows will be bitterly disappointed on Judgment Day – as he also loves other nonsense mantras like *“many paths to God,”* *“all religions are the same,”* and *“God will accept me just the way I am.”*

Compare and contrast that nonsense with our text for this morning. On the surface, *“We’re all gonna be alright”* seems to be a rather appropriate summary of the words of the Prophet Isaiah here. Listen again to his divinely inspired words: ***Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”*** ⁵ ***Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.***

Don’t his words here sound suspiciously like *“We’re all gonna be alright?”* Not when you look at them carefully, and in context. We’re not *all* going to be alright.

This is where both Bible History and something called isagogics can prove helpful, *invaluable* even, in gaining the full meaning and application from a

Bible text. Bible History basically sets the people and events of the Bible on an historic timeline. Isagogics is an overview study of an individual Book of the Bible – its basic message, setting in history, and relationship to other Books of the Bible and their authors. Historians agree that Isaiah lived from about 740 BC – 680 BC. Why is this important? Let’s look at some other dates. 100 years after Isaiah’s death, after a century of warnings, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and carried a remnant into exile, where they remained for 70 years. In the 500 years that followed after the return of the remnant from their Babylonian captivity, the Jews struggled under the domination of one world power after another. In other words, not a single Jew that heard Isaiah’s words when he first wrote them ever enjoyed what they seemed to promise. Nor did the next 30 or so generations that followed.

By this we can know that what God promised in our text through Isaiah was *not at all* what the *unbelieving* Jews undoubtedly expected. Many understood the message to be, *“I’m not okay, but we’re all gonna be alright.”* In other words, *“Things are bad now, but we can still expect that things will get better any day now, even if nothing changes in our hearts and lives.”* The reality? They didn’t change and nothing got better. Not for almost 700 hundred years. Generations came and went and still there was no healing, no streams in the desert.

What happened 700 years later? What changed? Paul answered for us in Galatians 4:4-5: ***“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”*** What changed is that God sent Jesus.

But is that fair? Are we forcing our understanding onto Isaiah’s words and promise unfairly? Not at all – because we didn’t provide this explanation, Jesus himself did. Do you remember how John the Baptist at one point sent some of his men to Jesus to ask him for a definitive answer as to whether or not he was the promised Messiah? How did Jesus answer? He quoted these very words from Isaiah – our text – and pointed to himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s word prophecy: ***Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”***

^{ESV}(Matthew 11:2-6) Isaiah's promises in our text all pointed to Jesus. Jesus himself said so.

Now bring all of this home and apply it to yourself here and now. Are you okay? Physically, financially, mentally, or emotionally your honest answer might well be, "*No, I'm not.*" My bills are piling up, my knees and hips are shot, my eyesight is failing, my back is killing me, I have an incurable disease that is literally killing me, I'm anxious about the future of our country, I'm heartsick over my relationship with my friend or spouse, school is not going well at all – you fill in your own personal struggles. No, I'm really *not* okay.

But what about spiritually? When you consider Isaiah's words according to their *intended focus*, which is Jesus, together with your relationship with Jesus and your God-given trust in him as your Savior, the outlook changes dramatically, doesn't it. Then the obvious answer is "*I'm good to go.*" God never promised his children trouble-free lives on earth, but he did promise to preserve us through the hard times and deliver us to his eternal kingdom. He promised that we need have no fear that on Judgment Day we will be denied entrance because we based our hope on the devil's lies.

In you, personally, the prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled. Though you were "*blind,*" you have "*received sight.*" You now not only see Jesus as your Savior and recognize that he paid also for your sins when he gave his life on the cross, you have been given the ability to see the Bible as God's eternal truth and to therefore distinguish right from wrong. Where once you could not "walk" the path of faith, by God's miraculous healing you can. You have been cleansed from the disease of sin. Where once you could not hear with comprehension the Word of truth, now you can and do. You are one of the spiritual "dead" who have been raised to life. Jesus did that. He made it all happen.

Go back, one last time, to that song lyric by which Satan would give *false* comfort to the unbelieving world: "*I'm not okay, but we're all gonna be alright.*" Recognize that you and I can now turn that against our great Adversary. We can turn his deception into God's truth. As a child of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ, every single Christian is a member of the select group for which that line is actually true. Through faith alone in Jesus Christ, everything may not always be okay here on earth, but in Christ we are all going to be alright. We have God's forgiveness for our countless sins, and we have his promise of the heaven Jesus has earned for us. We've been promised, in other words, the absolute best "alright" imaginable. Amen.

^{ESV} **(Acts 3:1-10)** Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

^{ESV} **Mark 7:31-37** Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

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The 16th Sunday after Pentecost – September 8, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 246 (Red Hymnal)

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Acts 3:1-10) The occurrence of miracles in Bible times has long fascinated both Christians and unbelievers. Everyone likes the idea of problems suddenly disappearing through any means possible. The problem with our natural attitude toward miracles is that we fail to recognize the ulterior motive behind those miracles. While it is certainly true that those who miraculously healed had compassion on those who were suffering, the ultimate goal of miracles was to establish the credibility of Jesus and his disciples – and therefore also the truth of what they taught.

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 7:31-37) Our second lesson is the account of one of the many miracles Jesus performed – the vast majority of which are not specifically recorded in the Bible. Of special note here is the fact that Jesus instructed the man who had been healed not to tell anyone about the miracle. Jesus did not want the focus of the people to rest upon the miracle itself but upon the One who performed that miracle, and upon the message of forgiveness through faith that he was proclaiming.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (Projected on Screens)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 427 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord"

The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 35:4-7a (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Are You Okay?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Communion Hymn – 324 (Stanzas 1-2, 8) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -427 (Stanzas 5-7) (Red Hymnal)

"How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (16) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Tue-Thu	-10:00 a.m.	– WC Pastoral Conference in Loveland
Friday	-5:30 p.m.	– Women's Retreat Dinner Cruise
Sat-Sun	-7:30 a.m.	– Women's Retreat
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– No Sunday school or Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Sam Rodebaugh has accepted the call to St. John's of Okabena, MN. Pastor Zachary Sipper has accepted the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye. St. Stephen of San Francisco has called Pastor Drew Naumann.

Sunday School Teachers Installed – Our two Sunday school teachers for this school year, Peggy Lewis and Grace Loeb, are scheduled to be installed during the service this morning. We thank them for their willingness to use their God-given gifts in the service of their Lord and the congregation's youth.

September Schedule – The following events are scheduled for September:

- September 9-12 – WCPC in Loveland, CO
- September 13 – Retreat begins with Dinner Cruise on the Missouri River
- September 14-15 – Women's Retreat in Bismarck
- September 15 – Church Council Meeting
- September 16-18 – CLC Board meetings in Eau Claire
- September 25 – Midweek Classes resume