

PM Isaiah 49:14-26 The LORD has Forgotten me!

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Date: 23 June 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Our studies tonight in Isaiah's prophecy found in chapter 49. For those with a church Bible, you'll find it on page 738.

738. This morning we looked at verses 1 to 12. And I hope all saw how this prophecy is fulfilled, both in the people of Israel at the time or around the time that it was spoken, but also in the Lord Jesus Christ and also still in the church that he left.

And so continuing from verse 13, we pray that the Lord would open this scripture to us as well. Isaiah chapter 49 beginning at verse 13.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exalt, O earth. Break forth, O mountains, into singing. For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.

But Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me. My Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

[1 : 2 0] Even these may forget. Yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me.

Your builders make haste. Your destroyers and those who laid you waste go out from you. Lift up your eyes around and see. They all gather.

They come to you. As I live, declares the Lord, you shall put them on as an ornament. You shall bind them on as a bride does. Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land, surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants.

And those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears, The place is too narrow for me.

Make room for me to dwell in. Then you will say in your heart, Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, Exiled and put away.

[2 : 3 0] But who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone. From where have these come? Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up my hands to the nations and raise my signal to the peoples, and they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

Kings shall be your foster fathers, and queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground, they shall bow down to you and lick the dust of your feet.

Then you will know that I am the Lord. Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame. Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the tyrant be rescued?

For thus says the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued. For I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.

I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood, as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord, your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

[3 : 54] May God add his blessing to the reading of his word. O Lord Jesus Christ, you said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and so we pray that you would not allow us to stray from you, who are the way, nor to allow us to distrust you, who are the truth, nor allow us to trust in any other thing than you, who are the life.

Teach us by your Holy Spirit what to believe, what to do, and wherein to find our rest. And we ask this for your own namesake.

Amen. As I mentioned earlier, this evening's passage of scripture is a continuation from this morning's, and brings the 49th chapter of Isaiah to a close.

This morning we considered how the first half of the chapter encouraged us to recognise Christ as our covenantal Saviour, bringing salvation, not just to the land and people of Israel with his sword, but to God's people further afield through the arrow of his word.

This evening we find the prophecy entering new waters as God's people call out to the Lord with their concerns and he answers them.

[5 : 29] And it is my prayer that the encouragement that the Lord gives these people in the prophecy may also be of encouragement to you. Now the Lord begins by making a triumphal declaration.

Indeed, it's very similar in that sense to Psalm 95. He encourages the people to sing for joy and exult because the Lord has comforted his people.

He will have compassion on his afflicted. Not only is this excellent news, but it's an answer to the prophecy again found in Isaiah chapter 40.

I quoted it earlier. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, and that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Note the slight change in tense. No more is the instruction to comfort, but rather comes the declaration that the Lord has comforted. This is thanks to the actions of the servant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 44] Remember Paul's words in Romans chapter 8. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

It is important for us to remember, and I possibly should have said this this morning, that this is a prophecy. And sometimes, prophecy timelines can become a wee bit confusing.

They don't always run chronologically throughout the prophecy. We have to be careful how we read it. While in Isaiah chapter 40, the Lord will comfort, in chapter 49, he has comforted.

However, as we heard from Romans, this creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption, showing that this ultimate freedom will come at the second coming of Christ.

While the Lord Jesus has certainly overcome sin and death and won for us eternal life, the final, absolute, total freedom will only come when Jesus returns again, as I was saying to the children earlier.

[8 : 15] And a little like the catechism from earlier, this evening's passage is also made up of questions and answers. Three times a question is asked and three times God, through the prophet, gives answer.

So let us explore these. The first question, and we find this fairly early on. Verse 14, but Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me.

My Lord has forgotten me. Okay, I admit, this one is technically not a question. It doesn't end with a question mark, although it is questioning, I hope you'll agree, or challenging the previous statement that God has had compassion on his people.

How can he have had compassion on me if he's forgotten me? Zion is as good as asking. Interestingly, this question was also asked in a form in chapter 40 from which I quoted earlier.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord and my right is disregarded by my God? And then the words which, whenever I read them, I think of chariots of fire.

[9 : 33] Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.

His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength.

The Lord has an answer in our passage. To the accusation of forgetting his people, God answers that he never would, that he never could.

He asks in verse 15, can a woman forget her nursing child? That she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

Maybe like me, your minds are drawn from this passage to another incident involving mothers in scripture. Indeed, there are a number. We could consider how the mother of Moses was not prepared to allow the Egyptians to murder her son, so went to the effort of preparing what we would now call the Moses basket, sailing him off down the Nile in the hope that he would find safety somewhere else.

[10 : 52] And who can forget the immediacy of the story with which she presented herself to Pharaoh's daughter when the Pharaoh's daughter looked for somebody to nurse the child.

That's Exodus chapter 2. The mother, placed in an impossible situation, would never allow the slaughter of their child or children without first fighting.

Although, even if Moses had sailed off down the Nile, you can be fairly sure that she would never have forgotten him. Or maybe, your mind was drawn to the legal dispute that took place between the two women and one king's.

Wise King Solomon, fairly soon into his reign, praised that the Lord would grant him wisdom, and then immediately afterwards, is presented with a challenge.

He's presented with a case where two women, the ESV describes them as prostitutes, each have a child, one of whom dies, sadly, after the mother rolls onto him in her sleep.

[12 : 00] The claim is that the mother of the dead child stole the living child and passed it off as her own, leaving the other mother with the dead child.

And do you remember how when Solomon proposes to cut the child in two, one half for each woman, the real mother cannot bear the thought and so begs the king to give the child to the other woman if it means not cutting the child in two.

Although she desperately wants the child back, she would sooner it go to the other woman than be cut in half. We can then read, this is 1 Kings chapter 3 verse 26, then the woman who was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, O my Lord, give her the living child and by no means put him to death.

Her heart yearned for her son. She was prepared to undergo anything for the sake of that child. And here, in our Isaiah reading, the Lord asks, can a woman forget her nursing child?

Of course, the imagery then continues when we consider how much the real mother in the courtroom case was prepared to go to to see her child live and compare it with how much God the Father was prepared to endure to see his children, you and me, live.

[13 : 38] It is simply mind-blowing. However, God then goes on to declare, even these, even these mothers, these women, may forget, yet I will not forget you.

We will perhaps have seen the news reports which show the worst of mankind and seen how, while far from the norm, and praise God, in exceptional circumstances, there are some parents who have such derangements or manias or illnesses that yes, they do unspeakable things to their children or do indeed forget them.

This is terribly sad and we do of course pray for such children, for their parents, and yet this is not unknown in scripture either.

we sang in Psalm 27 just a moment ago, for my father and mother have forsaken me but the Lord will take me in.

And then of course we can remember that sometimes turning to Christ will be enough to turn father against son and son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law and so on.

[15 : 00] And yet above all, above all of that, we can take comfort that even when familial blood ties are not strong enough or when everyone else has forsaken you and fled, the Lord won't have done.

Do thy friends despise forsake you, says the little hymn, take it to the Lord in prayer. And why is this? God reassures us in verse 16 that he has engraved us on the palms of his hands.

Turn with me, if you will, to the Song of Solomon, not a biblical book I've preached a lot from, but in chapter 8 of this book, and I'll try and find the page for you, although your translations may be a little different to mine, but Song of Solomon, at chapter 8, it's right at the end of Song of Solomon, and it's possibly one of the best-known or most recognisable passages.

One party asks the other to set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death.

Jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

[16 : 39] If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. Marking our bodies with the signs of loved ones is something that many people do.

For many of us, it goes no further than wearing a wedding ring, a constant or ever-present reminder of the covenant we entered into with our spouses. Some more adventurous people, and I should add I'm not one of them, will have a tattoo with their lover's name on a part of their body, often an unmentorable part, which of course is fine until they fall in love with someone else.

However, in many ways, a tattoo with your husband's name on it or a ring is no different to the image that God is giving here.

God will never forget because he can never forget. We know, of course, that God doesn't have hands, so he has only metaphorically engraved our names on his palms, but the message is still clear.

He will not forget us because he sees us and thinks of us wherever he looks, just as I, every time I see my left hand, think of my wife.

[18 : 00] You'll remember how I said this morning that this prophecy is speaking into three different situations. Firstly, it concerns the people of Israel, the actual people of the time.

Secondly, it speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thirdly, through Jesus, it speaks of the church. And sometimes it can be a bit difficult to work out whether each bit of the prophecy is speaking to each person or whether there are different bits for different people.

In verse 17 of our reading, the Lord is clearly speaking of the rebuilding of the earthly Jerusalem. Jerusalem. From this verse, we can see that God intends to rebuild Zion.

And we can see this from his declarations in Isaiah chapter 44, verse 26. God says of Jerusalem, she shall be inhabited, and of the cities of Judah, they shall be built, and I will raise up the ruins.

Romans. However, as Christians, we can also read from this how one day, through Jesus Christ, who let us not forget, is the new temple, he compared himself to the temple, that though it be cast down in three days, he would build it up again.

[19 : 22] So too, through Jesus, the servant about whom the entire prophecy is written, those whom he calls to himself will one day dwell in the new Jerusalem, in the new Zion.

It will be inhabited by Jesus' people. So desperate for the people to see his God, that he reuses some language that may be familiar to us from two kings.

In the passage, Elisha's servant fears the surrounding army. He fears that they are outnumbered. You can see this in two kings at chapter 6. Elisha prays, O Lord, please open his eyes, that he may see.

So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, Elisha's servant, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses, and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

O Lord, please open our eyes this night, that we may see how one day we may dwell in the new Jerusalem with thee. The second question, from verses 20 through to 21, is, I will admit, a sub-passage of this scripture that I found a little harder to work through.

[20 : 52] But let's look at it together. The first thought I have on it is this. Well, I'll read it first. The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears, this place is too narrow for me, make room for me to dwell in.

Then you will say in your heart, who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these?

Behold, I was left alone. From where have these come? The Lord is here promising that when the exiles return into the promised land, that is into Zion, into Jerusalem, they will fill the land in a glorious way.

Now, it's important for us to recognise that where they say this place is too narrow for me, etc., in verse 20, they're not complaining that the land is insufficient in some way.

They're not saying, oh God, you could have given us somewhere bigger. Rather, they're rejoicing. They've gone from the land being deserted and abandoned and destroyed by a foreign power, to returning and filling it in a glorious way.

[22 : 04] The tide has changed entirely for the people of Israel. The land that had been abandoned, as we read in verse 19, as a waste and a desolate place and a devastated land, is now a fruitful place full of God's rich blessing.

This is no bad thing. In fact, this is very good. The second thought is this, in verse 21, we heard, Then you will say in your heart, Who has borne me these?

For I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away. But who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone. From where have these come? Here we should see that God's great and abundant blessing for his chosen people, will come to them as a great surprise.

Of course, we can see a fruitful return to Zion in two ways. In, to quote David Gluzik, a near and a far fulfillment. It was seen both in the exiles' return to the land of Israel and in our return to the new Jerusalem of which we read in Revelation and which I mentioned earlier.

and even though both of these returns are well foretold in Scripture, never does the day go by when I don't marvel at what the Lord has done for me and those who call upon his name.

[23 : 30] In many ways, the promise seems too good to be true. Yet God confirms it with an oath to the nations. God will rescue Israel from both their immediate and their ultimate captivity.

This oath to the nations comes in the next few verses, a form of answer found in verses 22 to 23. Now we all know the Scottish courtroom practice, raise your right hand and make an affirmation or an oath, and while Scripture would say that we shouldn't make oaths in God's name, here we see God lifting up his right hand to the nations and making a solemn promise in their sight.

What is the promise? The Lord promises, in verse 23, kings shall be your foster fathers. Luzick explains that this teaches that one day the greatest in the nation will love and care for the children of the church.

That was Calvin's view as well. For those of you who don't know much about John Calvin, he was a minister of the Reformation in Geneva and the church he set up there saw a real interrelationship between the state and the church.

There's much more to it than that, but this was Calvin's view on this passage. He explains, Calvin used to explain how Calvin used this to explain how one day the nation will protect the church in the way that the Westminster Confession describes the role of the magistrate.

[25 : 23] And I'll quote a little of it. The magistrate hath authority and it is his duty to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure, entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed.

That's a very long way of saying that the church should look after the state, and the state should look after the church, each in its own way. And yet, looking at the history of the church in this land, we can see that we are not at that stage yet.

In fact, some would say we're going in the wrong direction. Our own free church was formed in 1843 for the very opposite reason, state interference in the church, to the detriment of church order, and church authority.

And yet, even though the day has not yet come when kings are the church's foster fathers, we can claim this promise as a solemn oath of the Lord.

One day, the church will be given freedom and protection to spread the gospel according to God's laws. And friends, what a day that will be.

[26 : 47] it may not look like it does at the moment, but God promises that the day will come. Now, while images of kings bowing down before the authority of the church are fun to picture, we should take care that we don't misunderstand the image.

It is not suggested that one day the church will, or indeed should, lord it over the rightful leaders of a nation. The Lord has given us rulers, and we should accept them, and indeed pray for them.

Remember Paul's instructions to the Romans, a Christian group of people living under Roman authority. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment, for rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

The image of kings bowing down and licking the dust, images incidentally also found in Psalm 72, are instead, says Clark, general poetic images taken from the matters and manners of the country, they denote great respect and reverence and were intended only as general amplifications of the subject, the subject being that the state will look after the church, the church will look after the state.

[28 : 28] The final question in this passage, found in verses 24 through to 26, are really a question of God's might. Can the prey be taken from the almighty?

Can the captives of a tyrant be rescued? For thus says the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, and I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.

I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood, as with wine. can God even rescue those who have been taken away into captivity?

They are asking. And of course, this is a very serious question for the people of the time, because Jerusalem, the land of Israel, had been sacked. People had been dragged away into captivity.

The Lord answers their skepticism with the verses by declaring that not only can and will he rescue the people from their enemies, but that he will show his strength and love for Zion by giving to Babylon what Babylon gave to Zion.

[29 : 46] That's to say that just as the people of Israel were taken into captivity by the Babylonians, eventually not only will they be released, but that their captors will be treated in the way they treated Israel.

This was true when God freed Israel from Babylon's captivity in the Old Testament, but it's even more true, friends, for those set free from captivity to Satan.

We can see this in how Jesus speaks in Luke chapter 11 at verse 21. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe.

But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

Satan, our enemy, is indeed powerful. We can read in 1 Peter 5.8 that he prowls around us like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And yet, God is more powerful.

[30 : 55] He takes away his arms. He destroys his fortresses, that he may set us at liberty. What an encouragement this is. We see in the Old Testament how this particular part of the prophecy is fulfilled, as the exiles do eventually return to Jerusalem, and so we can be doubly sure of God's promise to ultimately free us from the tyranny of the evil one.

He will undoubtedly be our deliverer whenever our enemies lay us under their feet and oppress us with cruel bondage. just like this morning, there is a lot of meat in this passage of scripture, and while I've endeavoured to explain it, again you may well be sitting there wondering what merit this information serves, why I'm telling you about it.

Well, firstly, I'm telling you about it so that you can see how the prophecy was fulfilled in Old Testament times. and in the time of Christ. But there is more still.

Because from this prophetic passage, we can know for certain that however far we think we have fallen from God, he can and will draw near to us when we call on his name.

There is hope even for those who are currently prisoners to sin, whether they be loved ones in our family, or even one of us here tonight. Even those who are currently firmly in Satan's grasp, who are going along the wrong path, or have turned away from the Lord altogether, these people are not necessarily lost forever.

[32 : 45] While we must understand this truth in the light of the gospel concerning predestination, that is to say that God has already decided those to whom he will reveal himself, we can also take great comfort that just because at this precise moment somebody is not walking with the Lord, and in fact at this precise moment they may be going in totally the other direction, firm in Satan's grasp, this alone is not enough to stand in the way of God's gracious plan for their lives.

Even as we speak, God is delving into the dregs of mankind and calling people to his son. Let's not forget Saul of Tarsus.

What a great scourge on Christianity that man was. He took such great delight in destroying the Christian faith. He murdered so many people in his mission to eliminate Christianity.

Christianity. And yet, Christ spoke to him on that road to Damascus. He was not too far gone to be saved.

The fact that Saul had sinned, had done unspeakable things, it didn't mean that Christ couldn't save him. The fact that you or a loved one have sinned before does not mean that if the Lord has said his mark on your head before the foundation of time, that he can't do the same for you.

[34 : 23] Furthermore, we can take great comfort that the Lord loves us with such an unquenchable love that our names are graven on his hands.

That wherever he looks, he sees us and sees our names in a way that he can never forget us, that he never will forget us.

no matter how much we who are saved and know Christ struggle under the power of sin, for that is a very real problem in our lives, as we all know, we need to know that the Lord never forgets us and never stops loving us, no matter how unlovable we may be at times.

so be encouraged and know for sure, friends, that through Christ's application of his blood to our account, we can never fall from the Lord's grip, we can never lose our salvation, while at times we may face difficulties which threaten to overwhelm us, difficulties that would lead us to cry out that the Lord has forgotten us, remember that he would never forget us, just like that mother in one Kings could never truly forget her child.

God's salvation is absolute, his love is unending. One day, once we reach the new Jerusalem, as we are promised, even those darkest and most difficult times in our lives will make sense, and we will see how God's providence was present, even where we could not discern it.

[36 : 12] After all, to quote Alistair Begg, providence is something that we rarely see through the windscreen, but frequently see through the rearview mirror. And lastly, friends, know for sure that the Lord promised in the prophecy that the land of Israel, at that point deserted, ravaged, abandoned, with her people taken off by a foreign oppressor, would once again be for his chosen people.

Once again, the land would teem with inhabitants. Once again, cries of praise would ring out in God's sanctuary. We see how this really happened in Old Testament times, and similarly, he promises that those who believe in Christ will one day inherit the new Jerusalem, where there will be joy and peace forevermore, that all flesh shall know that I, God, am the Lord, your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Jacob. May the Lord bless these thoughts to our hearts, and may our delight forever be found in him and the scriptures. Amen.