

The Sympathy of The Lord for His Own

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 63, we read there, and we want to fix our thoughts around verse 9, these well-known and instructive words, where we read, in all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them, in his love and in his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them, all the days of old, particularly words, in all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.

I want to think with you this evening about the sympathy of the Lord for his own. In all their affliction he was afflicted.

It's quite common if you're interacting with people, talking to them about God and their belief in God, it's quite common to hear folk who do believe in what they would call a supreme power, a creator God of some kind, God who said, let there be, and the big bang happened.

Some people take that view, and they kind of have a notion that there is a God out there somewhere. And these folks don't really think that God can interact with us, that he can meet with us, that we can know him, that we can worship and serve him, and that he speaks to us through his word.

They're not there, they're not into this kind of closeness with God. And they're certainly not into the view that God sympathizes, that he is alongside, that he supports his people in their distresses.

[2 : 04] Even though God himself, according to the Bible, has brought these distresses into the experience of his people. He supports them, he sympathizes with them.

In all their affliction he was afflicted. But you don't need to look outside the church to find people who think that way, who think that God is a way out there somewhere, that he's not near, that you must have some other way of connecting with God.

And you will know very well, a certain church within the broad Christian community will say that Mary is a co-mediatrix with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And she is far more understanding and far more sympathetic. And therefore it's through her you go to God. She has the ear of God, she's a woman, she has more sympathy and so on.

You perhaps know that teaching. Or it may be some of those who have been canonized and who are saints according to that church's view.

[3 : 21] And what is wrong here, and it is wrong, is that you're putting people in the place of the Lord himself, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In all their affliction he was afflicted and the messenger, here translated, the angel of his presence saved them. This expression, the angel of his presence is the messenger.

It's that person whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's a reference to him before he became man, before he was born of the virgin in Bethlehem all these centuries ago.

It's a reference to him being around among the Israelites in ancient times. And so we have to take issue on the basis of the Bible's teaching with that system that would put Mary in the key place and the saints a little bit further down.

Because they are very much like ourselves and can sympathize with us and understand us better. We have to take issue with that. We have to say, no, hold on.

[4 : 35] You're cutting across the Bible's teaching here. You're taking away vital teaching, or you're ignoring vital teaching on the person and the work of the Son of God.

But you don't need to simply look in that direction. You can look at the Protestant church, broadly speaking. And you get people and ministers too, and others who don't see the Lord as close to us in this way, as sympathetic to us, as identifying with us.

He's again, he's a way out there some way. And that what we have to do is rely on each other, put our trust in one another, in people.

Because the Lord has ordered it that way. That again is contrary to the Bible's teaching. Jesus himself said in the days of his flesh in this world, that he didn't commit himself to any man.

For he knew what was in men. You find it at the end of John's Gospel, chapter 2. And right away, there was a man who was of the Pharisees.

[5 : 57] Nicodemus, he was a rabbi. And there's an interesting connection there between the end of John 2 and the, here's a man. A man among men, a teacher, a scholar, a learning person.

Jesus didn't commit himself to any man. For he knew what was in men. And so the notion that we rely on people for all our comfort and encouragement, takes us away from seeing how sympathetic and how connected the Saviour is with his people, or ought to be to his people, if they would best see it.

And we have a reminder in this wonderful passage of the deep and the abiding sympathy of the Lord for and with his people.

In all that affliction, he was afflicted. And the angel, or the messenger of his presence, saved them. He saved them.

And we want then to spend a wee while looking at this, recognizing that we have one in the Son of God, who understands us in our limitations, in our oft failings, our wanderings, our departures from the truth, and consistency in the faith.

[7 : 22] But he's there for us. He's near to us. We are to call upon him. The way on in the faith is to know that he knows how to deal with us, and help us, and bring us on.

And so what I want us to do is, is to look at this passage, and to notice first of all, the affliction of the Lord's people, the Lord's distressed people.

Because that's what this is about first, in all their affliction, or in all their distress, he was distressed.

And what we've got here is, is teaching about the Lord, and his sympathy with his people.

He after and all has mapped out the way. He has made his people his people. That's the first thing.

He has made us his own. We did not make ourselves the Lord's people.

He brought us to understand, and he brought us into his covenant community, his believing people.

[8 : 33] And that was true in the days of old, as we've been reading in Isaiah 63. He made the people his people. He chose Israel. He fashioned Israel, a nation in Egypt, who were slaves.

And he brought them out by his mighty hand, to make them his people. And he worked on them. And he led them.

But his intention was to bring the Gentiles, into that commonwealth of Israel. That's the apostolic teaching, isn't it? That although he was working in Israel, among the Israelites, down through the ages, it was with a view to bringing light, to the Gentiles, and to bringing them into his family, into his commonwealth.

He purposed to do that. But all the way down, through the history of Israel, they were afflicted, and distressed. Sometimes, they brought it on themselves.

We sing it in the Psalms. They brought it on themselves. And we can identify with that. Sometimes, when we go wrong, the Lord corrects us.

[9 : 50] We brought the correction on ourselves. Whom the Lord loves, he disciplines. That's New Testament teaching. Hebrews 12. It comes from the book of Proverbs.

My son, don't despise the discipline, the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged, when you are chastened, or disciplined.

And so, God was working like that among the Israelites. He was correcting them. But he wasn't doing it in a harsh, merciless way. He was doing it as a loving father, to his rebellious people.

And Israel's history shows us, how they endured, painful opposition, and hard opposition, from their enemies.

God, God himself almost, if you would have it, made himself an enemy of theirs, and used people to correct them. He turned against them.

[10 : 54] We read that in the passage. That they rebelled. You see verse 10. Let's go back to verse 9 there.

In his leaven and his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them, all the days of old. But, they rebelled, and grieved his Holy Spirit.

So, he, turned himself, against them, as an enemy. See that? And that's consistent, with his love.

For his people. He will correct them. He will make them go, in the right way. He will bring them back. He will make them see sense. And that's where we're told, he became like an enemy to them.

He fought against them. He used others, to bring them to their senses. Sometimes it took a long while, but all the while, God was at work.

[11 : 59] As the one who cared for them. As the one of whom it can be said, in all their affliction, in all their distress, he was distressed. He wasn't indifferent.

He didn't take some gory delight, in what was happening. He was working, in his love, and grace, and tenderness, to bring them to their senses.

And I think, you see, that too often, when we're looking at the history of Israel, we, we, we, we impute to the Lord, some, some harsh, negative attitude.

instead of seeing it as the discipline, the loving discipline, of a father for his erring children. That's the way to see it. For that's what it's about.

God working, in this way, to bring his people through, to make them better, to refine them, to bring them to a more robust, and consistent faith, in him.

[13 : 07] That's the way he operates. And church history is full, of examples of this. Nobody courts, nobody in their right mind, as a Christian, courts persecution.

We're not, throwing the doors open, to being persecuted. You'll be next, to do that. But the fact is, there are times, when it'll come.

It has come, to our brothers and sisters, in many countries, of the world, we, we, we pray, in fact, some of us can remember, 20 years ago now, I'm sure, more, when we were praying, as younger Christians, we were praying, that the iron curtain, as it was called, of communism, where Christians, were persecuted, brutally, where children, were taken, from their, Christian parents, and indoctrinated, in atheism.

And we were praying, that God, would break down, that curtain, and, and free the people. And, we know stories, don't we, of pastors, for example, in Romania, one remembers, when it happened, it happened, so speedily, so unexpectedly, God acted, and suddenly, communism, collapsed.

But, all the years, after that, there was some, of the most, brutal persecution. Was God, uninterested, was God, unconcerned, was he, unaffected, of course not.

[14 : 42] The Lord, in all, that affliction, he was afflicted, in all their distress. They were distressed, but, he was not, uninterested, in what was happening.

And, in our own day, all around, in many places, there's, you'll be following the news, I hope, and, see that there's elections, going on just now, in southern Sudan.

Which is a wonderful thing, for a, for a, a Christian, southern Sudan. which is largely Christian. And, they've, they're, they're, they're, they're full of thanksgiving, that God has at last, given them the right, to elect leaders, and they're hoping, and praying, that they'll be left at peace, by the Muslim North, and that they'll be able, to function, as a separate country.

But, think of the years, of, of distressing, tribulation, of trial, that they endured. Other countries too, you can name this one, that one, and the next one, where, God's people, are persecuted, and in distress.

But, these things are not new, we're reading about it here, in Isaiah 63, you read about it, in the New Testament, Paul said, in distresses, often, often.

[16 : 10] It's part of the lot, of the Lord's people. sometimes, sometimes, to demonstrate, to the spiritual forces, of, of wickedness, that God, keeps his people, that God, brings them through.

Sometimes, to improve upon, sometimes, to correct them, when they go astray. But, in all of it, far from being, uninterested, in their affliction, he is afflicted, in their distress, he is distressed.

In other words, there's a nearness here, of the Lord, there's a concern, a heartfelt, care, for his people. At the prayer meeting, we've just started, looking at, the compassion of Jesus, we're thinking, on Thursday evening, on his compassion, in reaching out, to the unclean, and the unloved, and the, the isolated, the leper.

There was that, feeling for, that going out, towards, and that's, what's here, in this passage. So that, whatever, is happening, in our lives, whatever, our, our inner struggles, whatever, the, the difficulties, we confront, out with us, or within our own hearts, let us recognize, that the Lord, is far from, uninterested, he is near, and cares, and in our affliction, he is afflicted, in our distress, he is distressed.

We, we sometimes, pray, don't we, in prayer meeting, about the terrible, state of our land, and about all, that's going on, and, sometimes, we come pretty close, don't we, to talking, as if, one, the Lord doesn't know, and two, as if he doesn't, really care, like we do.

[18 : 16] That we care, more than he does. I wasn't looking, at John, just because, he just happened, to be there, I wasn't taking, a swipe at him. No, it's important, to, to think about, how we

sometimes, do that, unintentionally, it's almost like, we're saying, Lord, wait a minute, you know, this is serious stuff.

but, he knows, and he cares, and for his own, infinite, holy, reasons, he's brought it to pass, but, but, you see, we are to, to recognize, that that's the way it is, he cares more, than we do, about his cause, in Scotland, in the UK, in the western world, in the world, he cares more, than we can ever care, we can't begin, to care, like he cares, and it's good, to just check ourselves, on that, similarly, we bring that, right home, to little self, you, and me, he cares, for our spiritual life, more than we care for it, he cares, for our family, that we pray for, our unsaved family, he cares more, than we care, and our workmates, our colleagues, our circle of friends, he cares, he cares more, than we care, and it's important, for us, to believe that, we can't say, in the face of anyone, there is someone, for whom Christ, has not died, we can't say that, Christ Jesus, came into the world, to save sinners, and as long as we can say, so and so is a sinner, we can tell them, of Jesus, the mighty to save, our business, is not to determine, this one's for the kingdom, and not that one, that's not our area, and so, we remember, that he cares, that in our distresses, he is distressed, and you see, we can, as the Lord's people, we can, recognize, that all that's happening, the lowering of standards, in the nation, he cares about, the lowering of standards, in the church, he cares about, you know yourselves, that nowadays, people don't seem, to Christians, don't seem to, to, to, to be too concerned, about the odd lie, here and there, the odd bit of stealing, or swearing, or sexual immorality, what do they call it nowadays, lifestyle choices, as if that gives, a nice, acceptable, face, drunkenness well, it's not that bad, is it, the Bible says, consistent drunkenness, will bring a person, to eternal ruin, that's what the Bible says, that's what God says, and therefore, we are, not to be unconcerned, about these things, but, we're not to go off, the idea, in our distress, that he's not distressed, I mean, he cares, it matters, now, I'm very conscious, here, that we're using, words, and we're using, human language, but, we're using it, in a way that, God has given it, to us, so we have to be, very careful, that we don't, reduce, his, sense of distress, and, his sense of affliction, to nothing, by that I mean, it's easy for us, to understand, what distress is, to us, it's easy for us, to understand, what affliction is, to us, but we mustn't say, well God can't be distressed, and God can't be afflicted, that's not what the Bible tells us, some way, that's meaningful to him, to the extent, that he can put it, in scripture, about himself, he feels it, he sympathizes, with us in it, that's what I'm saying, and, we have a situation, that we've looked at briefly, about how, the Lord's people, can be afflicted, and distressed, by all that's going on, and, and, and we see it, we see it, in church life, people are perhaps not, taking the action, they should take, they don't want to get involved, they don't want to get into trouble, and they leave things, to get out of hand, and it distresses us, we feel, afflicted because of it, but, we remember, that in it all, the Lord's distressed people, have won, who in, a real way, a way that is perhaps, at one level, beyond our ken, but he, was, and is, afflicted, and that brings us, to the second thing, which we want to conclude with, the Lord's sympathy, for his people, there's a curious translation, of this, which if you listen to it, is pretty meaningless, but it is a legitimate translation, in all the reflection, no, adversary, he, you can make of that, what you like, but I prefer, the simple, straightforward, common, translation, the common rendering, and I'm very happy, to say that, there are great, and godly, and, able, Hebrew scholars, in the Christian fold, like E.J. Young, and Alec Macher, of a recent, vintage, who prefer, this rendering, and what is being said, is he identified, with them, in their affliction, he shared, in their tribulation, and we sing it, for example, like as a father, pities his children, so the Lord, pities those, who fear him, he remembers their frame, he knows their death, he's not unconcerned, he's not unaffected, he's not ice cold, aloof, he remembers our frame, and it's clear, you see, from what follows here, that God, wants us to understand, that he really cares, and that he really, sympathizes, with his people, the angel, of his presence, the messenger, of his presence, the son of God, before he came, into the world, as man, was with his people, all the days of old, you see that, he remembered, the days of old, [25 : 35] Moses and his people, saying, where is he, who brought them up, out of the sea, with the shepherd, of his flock, notice that, there's a distinction, between Moses, the shepherd, and the one, who brought them up, out of the sea, the one, who led them, the one, who led them, in the bush, and in the pillar, of cloud, and of fire, there's an emphasis, here, on the work, of the son of God, before ever, he became man, he was with the people, in a real sense, delivering them, the redeemer, who himself, shepherded them, if you go, way back, to the days, of Jacob, in, you find

the reference, in Genesis 48, 15 and 16, we're told, that, that, that, the, the Lord, the redeemer, shepherded the people, in days of old, that was,

Jacob's own testimony, he was a shepherd, and yet, he knew, that the son of God, the messenger, of, the Lord's presence, shepherded, his people, all, all their days, and there's, beautiful language, here you see, used, to describe, the Lord, in his deep sympathy, for his own, he shepherded them, he saved them, in his love, and pity, he redeemed them, and carried them, all the days of old, despite their rebellion, in all their affliction, he, was afflicted, some of you, will remember, that, plaque, you see, you may have one, yourself, with the, the footprints, in the sand, and, there's a wee piece, that goes with it, that, when the believer, lacked a sense, of where the Lord, was in, in their affliction, and couldn't trace, the Lord, being with them, and there's only one, set of footprints, in the sand, and, the, the wee story, that goes with it, says, that, my child,

I carried you, I carried you, and, of course, it comes from, a passage like this, the one, who, bore them, verse 9b, and bore them, and carried them, and carried them, all the days of old, he was with them, you see, and, when they didn't know, what was happening, in their affliction, he was right there, he was carrying them, he was looking after them, and, this is a, this is a, a wonderful passage, that encourages us, that, when providence, seems, to, contradict, the promises, of God, we are to remember, it only seems, to contradict, we haven't got, the pilot's view, we haven't got, the view of him, who is in control, that was true, of Abraham, on Mount Moriah, although he said, to his, son Isaac, on the way up, eh, eh, the Lord himself, will provide a lamb, don't suppose, that Abraham knew, how it was going to happen, he just believed, the promise, that in Isaac, his, seed, eh,

Messiah, through Isaac's line, Messiah would come, but, but, Abraham was asked, to do, eh, something that, that on the face of it, contradicted the promise, take Isaac, your only son Isaac, the son of promise, that is, and this bundle of wood, and go up, and sacrifice him, on the top of this mountain, Moriah, kill him, as a sacrifice, and off Abraham went, and there was an old preacher, who said, eh, eh, eh, concerning, eh, this reference, when, eh, Abraham was commanded, to slay Isaac, he says, if God, gave you his promise, the day may come, when, in the trial, of your faith, the sharp knife, of his providence, may, come, within, in an inch, of the life, of the promise, of the promise,

I like that, way of putting it, what he's saying there is, as in the case of, Isaac, Isaac, the son of promise, the knife, came with an in, an inch, of slaying him, and the promise too, but it didn't, slay the promise, or the son of promise either, and, and the lesson for that, out of that, for you and me is, that we are to hold fast, to the promises, there, yea and amen, they will never be forfeited, God can't, renounce his promises, he can't go back on them, what he says, he will do, if he says, that he will keep us, in all our ways, he'll do it, Paul was persuaded, and Paul had a history, an autobiography, that is staggering to us, the things, he endured for Christ's sake, the punishments, and torture, and near drownings, and stonings, and all sorts of things,

[31 : 34] Paul could say, I'm persuaded, that he will keep, what I've committed to him, against that day, I am persuaded, we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us, he has promised, to be with us, in all our ways, and, to keep us, to the end, he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you, and therefore, we may be bold in him, and you see, that is true, when we are afflicted, and distressed, it's true, when, providence, seems to contradict, the promises, he made to us, and what we are to do, is not, be judging God, by the providence, but by the promise, he is faithful, who has said it, and will do it, that, to the extent, that, even, in our, infirmities, in our, sicknesses, and the diseases, that invade us, he has, a part, we are thinking about that, in terms of the level, how he identifies himself, with us, he doesn't become sick, or diseased, but he comes, so close to us, as to make us, realize, how, much, he cares, he himself, took, our infirmities, upon himself,

David Brown, I think it was, in his commentary, he said, they attach, to him, as it were, he feels them, attaching, to himself, because, they belong, to his people, and, when we feel, unable, at times, to cope, with the providence, God lays upon us, let's remember, that he is there, to carry us through, we were thinking, not, so many weeks ago, in that wonderful text, in, Psalm 73, verse 26, my flesh, and my heart, fail, but God, is the strength, of my heart, and my portion, we were thinking, this very morning, on, on, on, how, we are to, have our strength, renewed, in the Lord, so that we sow, on, on the wings of faith, as the eagle source, we are to recognize, just, how, sympathetic, he is, to us, isn't that, what the, isn't that, what the, the writer, the Hebrews says, of Jesus, let us hold fast, our confession, for we don't have, a high priest, who can't be touched, with the feeling, of our

infirmities, that's the word, infirmities, disabilities, weaknesses, sicknesses, we haven't got, a high priest, who cannot be touched, with them, but he was, at all points, tempted, like as we are, yet without sin, in other words, we have one, who understands us, where we are at, and who understands us, far, far better, than we can really, grasp, but we are to grasp, this much, that he is, absolutely, and utterly, and perfectly, sympathetic, to us, and his sympathy, is there, in order that, we may benefit, from it, we rely on him, we speak, to him, as one, who understands us, where we are at, and who lifts us up, he doesn't deal with us, according to our sin, but he pardons, and cleanses, and renews, and sets us, a going, in the way, we have in him, the one, who is the true shepherd, of the flock, who, in all our distresses, is distressed, he is the, messenger, of God's presence, to us still, and by his own, Holy Spirit, he, meets with us, and helps us, we have in him, our true, sympathetic, and faithful, high priest, we have in him, a real friend, let's use him, let's rely on him, and not abuse him, by neglect, in all that affliction, he was afflicted, and the messenger, of his presence, saved them, in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them, all the days of old, and he redeems us, and he bears us, and he carries us, still, and will, until the end, of our journey here, Amen.