

Mercy and Might for the Thirsty

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[0:00] When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, the Lord, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, lately, my little girl Mia has been absolutely in awe of God's power. Incidentally, she's also been really interested in Superman. I don't know if those two interests are related or not.

But she's thinking about all the cool stuff that God can do. She's asking questions like, can God fly? God can do anything, right? Now, I haven't gotten a straight answer from her on the dilemma that C.S. Lewis raises somewhere. Is it possible for God to make a boulder so large that he himself couldn't lift it?

I ask her that. She's most likely to say to that one that she doesn't understand the question. Which is more or less what Lewis says, actually.

I think that's a pretty good answer, as far as I'm concerned. Now, in our Old Testament lesson for today, we see a reminder of the extraordinary might of our God. He can and does do things that we might think of as impossible.

[1:37] What seems impossible to us is not impossible to God. To say that God is mighty, though, only gives us part of the picture.

Our Isaiah reading points us to another reality. Reminds us of what one of our colleagues tells us. That God declares his almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity.

God is, as one great hymn reminds us, both merciful and mighty. God is merciful and mighty, holy and loving.

And for us, that means that we can trust him. That means that we don't have to be afraid. That we can know that he is able and determined to keep his promises to us.

Now, keep in mind for a second the prophet Isaiah's context as we think about that. He's dealing with the painful reality of God's people being in exile in an ungodly land.

[2:37] They've been taken from their homeland. It seemed that all hope was lost. But God is a God who rescues his people. Who provides hope in the midst of despair.

Whose light shines in the darkness and cannot be overcome. Although, as we read Isaiah, we see that Isaiah does not shy away from the painful reality of God's judgment.

We also see God's promise to give new life and to restore. In the near term, to restore his people to their land, to end the exile.

But even more than that, Isaiah consistently points us forward to Israel's promised Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. And the new life that will be found in him. Now, in our verses from Isaiah, for this morning, we see a couple of things.

God's willingness to save and restore. And God's power to save and restore. Let's take a look at our Isaiah passage, starting in verse 17.

[3:43] When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, the Lord, will answer them.

I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. Now, I think from what I can tell that Isaiah is talking here most immediately about the exiles who will return.

But I think it really applies more broadly. Here in verse 17, we see a powerful, powerful reality. God is near to those who need him.

To those who have no one to help them. God answers those who cry out to him for mercy. When we are thirsty. When we can find no water.

When we have no other hope. The Lord will answer us. He will never forsake us. Do you believe that that is true? Following verses.

[4:41] We go on to demonstrate. The might and the power of the Lord. But verse 17 sets up for us an amazing context for God's power and might.

He is good. He is faithful. He is merciful. And mighty. So how will God answer the thirsty? I will open rivers on the bare heights.

And fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water. And the dry land springs of water. In other words. God's plan isn't just to point the thirsty to a water fountain.

He is going to do more than that. He will bring water where there wasn't water before. The wilderness. The desert. Will flow with water for all who are thirsty.

The dry places will be renewed. God's goodness is extravagant. We go on. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.

[5 : 44] I will set in the desert the cypress, the plain, and the pine together. So God's willingness and his ability to bring new life, that is extravagant.

It doesn't just stop at bringing a drink of water to the thirsty. It goes beyond that to the imagery of plant life flourishing in the wild places.

God's ability to bring life knows no limit. And God's desire to bring life in restoration is clear. What he desires, he will do.

God will demonstrate his might and his mercy, his power and his faithfulness, and his goodness to his people in their restoration, in renewal, so that they may see and know, may consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this.

The Holy One of Israel has created it. God will be glorified. It is mercy. And in his power to renew and to save.

[6 : 56] Now, we can think of these words given through the prophet Isaiah as something that happened a long time ago. But think about this for a second, and this is important.

God's character doesn't change, does it? God's mercy and might do not change, do they? Do not the promises of the Lord stand forever?

So we see Isaiah pointing us forward to the exiles returning. But Isaiah consistently points us forward beyond that.

Isaiah consistently points us to the redemption found in our Lord Jesus. It's not a stretch to say that this passage points us forward to consider what Jesus would accomplish for our salvation.

Water in the desert, in the wilderness, in the dry places. Light where death once reigned supreme. How can we read that and not think of what God has done in Christ?

[8 : 09] Jesus, who calls out to the thirsty, who calls out to the poor, who calls out to the needy, who calls out and says, I will give you living water so that you will never thirst again.

The gospel is the only answer for those who thirst. The gospel is the only answer for those who know themselves to be poor and needy.

The gospel is the only answer for those who need new life, who need renewal. So Jesus searches out those who are poor, those who are needy, those who are in captivity to sin, those burdened by the weight of guilt.

And Jesus, they are promised that they will be answered and that they will never be forsaken. It's like streams of water erupting from the desert, this light that is found in Jesus Christ.

How can water erupt from dry places? Well, maybe we should ask, how can life and victory emerge from death?

[9 : 19] And swallow it up forever. You see, if it were up to us, these things would be impossible.

But with God, not an impossibility, but a certainty. Certainty because Christ has died, His blood washes away the sins of everyone who comes to Him in faith.

Certainty because Christ is risen and death is no more for all who are in Christ. Certainty because Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us, so that we have a perfect mediator and high priest who is willing and able to be a sure and certain advocate for the salvation of sinners.

Reality. Certainty. Because Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin and bring about the advance of the life-giving gospel of grace.

Certainty. Because Jesus is coming again to raise the dead, to make the whole creation new, and to dwell with His people forever. Certainty.

[10 : 28] Because our God is merciful and mighty, and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. However, certainty. Because we have a crucified and risen Lord who is reigning at the right hand of the Father.

Certainty. Because Jesus is the life-giving vine. Isn't that what we see in our gospel lesson for this morning? If we are in Christ, if we are in the vine, we are joined to life itself. We are joined to the one who is life. We live. We flourish. We bear fruit. And it's not because of anything good in us.

Jesus is clear. We can do nothing apart from Him. But in union with Christ, water erupts in dry places. Those who are dead in trespasses and sins find forgiveness and transformation. In us, in union with Christ, who is divine, fruit springs up where there was only death and dryness before.

[11 : 33] Through the death and resurrection of the crucified and risen one. Through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. And isn't that awesome? We need to hear that.

It is so easy to get discouraged. Sometimes we take an honest inventory of our lives. We look at the world around us.

We look at the state of things. And we can fall into despair because the dryness and the death that we see can be overwhelming. But, the saving, renewing, might, and mercy of our God never change.

God is just as merciful and mighty as He was when He delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God is just as merciful and mighty as He was when He sent the exiles back home.

God is just as merciful and mighty as He was when He gave His only Son to suffer death on a cross so that whoever believes in Him would not perish. God is just as merciful and mighty as He was when He raised Jesus from the dead for our justification.

[12 : 42] God is just as merciful and mighty as He was when He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and 3,000 people were saved. We cannot, ourselves, bring new life to our own dry and dusty hearts.

We cannot cause new life to flourish in dead places. But we know the One who can, our merciful and mighty Lord Jesus, the Risen One who has brought life through His own death, who has brought victory when we were expecting only defeat, who found us when we were exiles and brought us safely home.

He can do it. He can do it. He calls us to abide in Him. Not to rely on our own strength, but to rely completely on Him as branches depend completely on the vine.

Abide in Him. It's so easy to get discouraged at our own sins, our own failures, our own shortcomings.

But He is merciful and mighty. We are justified with His very blood and we are forgiven. He is able and willing to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and to be glorified through us.

[14 : 04] Do you believe that this morning, that our Lord Jesus is mighty to save and to give life, and that we have only to abide in Christ? That is our only hope.

The crucified and risen one who has brought new life and victory over death through His death. Now, looking beyond the scope of ourselves, we have to admit that we live in a dead, dry, and troubled time.

In a dead, dry, and troubled culture. Now, I was talking with someone recently about how we should be engaging the culture and bearing witness to Christ in our culture.

And as we were talking, he pointed out that he thought it was ridiculous that I believe that our culture can be re-evangelized. Well, I guess I'm ridiculous, because I do.

I do think that our culture can be re-evangelized, and I am not ashamed of that. Why is that? We have a God who seeks out and answers the thirsty.

[15 : 09] We have a God who causes water to flow in dry places. We have a God who brings life where death reigns. How would we say it's impossible for the culture to be re-evangelized?

So, we don't have to be afraid. We do not have to feel defeated. We do not have to be shy about bearing witness to the gospel, as if that won't do us any good.

Why is that? Well, even though the circumstances of our culture might change, even though there may be fierce opposition to the gospel, even if it seems to us that all hope is lost, Jesus does not change, and He is our victorious Lord.

The spread of the gospel will be victorious, and we are victorious in Jesus. Brothers and sisters, we are not fighting a losing battle.

We are fighting a battle that is already won. All that we are called to do is to abide in Him, to be transformed by our union with Christ, to bear fruit, glorifying the Lord with our lives, and fearlessly

and boldly proclaiming the gospel.

[16 : 35] All praise be to our glorious Lord, who is the vine, who gives living water to the thirsty, who changes death to life, who makes the wilderness a pool of water, who makes the dry land springs of water, who is merciful and mighty, and who never changes.

So we can say, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. He will answer us. He will never forsake us.

Glory to His precious name. Amen.