

Isaiah 54 2

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 54, reading at verse 7.

Isaiah, chapter 54, reading from verse 7. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.

In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me.

For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth. So have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee. For the mountain shall depart and the hills be removed.

But my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that doth mercy on thee.

[1 : 17] Now looking at the first six verses of this chapter last Sabbath evening, I reminded you that there is a very real connection between chapters 53, 54 and 55.

Chapter 53 speaks very clearly about the coming sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 54 introduces us to the glory and the blessings of the church for which he died.

And chapter 55 opens with a very gracious and extensive invitation to all who hear to come and receive the blessings that Jesus purchased for his church.

In the opening verses of this chapter, we saw that the church is the means through which God is bringing his own glory and his own grace to bear upon our lost world.

[2 : 45] Salvation is coming to the world through the ministry of the church of God.

At the time that the prophecy was written, that the church as it was identified then with Israel, was because of a sinfulness and a disobedience, a hastening fast towards the captivity in Assyria and in Babylon.

But nevertheless, God had a great purpose of mercy and grace for that church. And that is what is introduced to us in verses 7 and 8 here, the purpose that he has for us.

For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.

And then he goes on in verse 9 to give her this wonderful covenant guarantee that there is a connection between the waters of the flood and his dealings with his people.

[4 : 12] And as he swore that the world would never again be destroyed by a flood, so has he sworn that he will not destroy his own church.

And then thirdly, in verse 10, we have the immutability of this promise introduced to us. By way of another illustration, the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness will never depart from thee, and so on.

Let us look then at the purpose that God has for his church in the Jews to us in verse 7 and 8. Though her present condition may seem most unpromising, to say the least.

Now her present condition here is introduced to us in verses 7 and 8 in this way. For a small moment have I forsaken thee.

And then in verse 8, in a little wrath, in a little wrath I hid my face from thee. And notice how these two things are brought together.

[5 : 26] The forsakenness is but for a small moment. The hiding of his face is the expression of a little wrath.

At the time of the captivity, the church might have thought that she was abandoned, rejected, given over to the reproach of the enemy.

And very often this may be the experience of the Christian church in the world, maligned and ridiculed, downtrodden, oppressed, not listened to.

Her voice very often muscled by those in power. The church may seem to think that she is forgotten.

The church, generally speaking. And if you narrow this down to the members of the church, those who comprise the church, the individual member of the church, there are times when he or she may feel like this, quite forsaken.

[6 : 31] The faith of God hidden from her. We sang in Psalm 77, the way the church expressed it, the way the psalmist expressed it in his own day.

Is it true that the Lord has forgotten to be gracious? Is it true that in his wrath he has shut up his mercy?

Again in Psalm 44, the church as she was experiencing great difficulties and great stresses, looked at her experience and said, all the day long we are a countless sheep for the slaughter.

The apostle Paul takes up that verse and write in Romans chapter 8. And he says, using it, there may be circumstances in a believer's life where he may think that he's cut off from the love and the favour and the mercy of God.

There may be things that suggest to him in themselves that God's face will never again shine on him. That is, that God will not be favourably disposed towards.

[7 : 40] There are times when in his forsakenness, he may be tempted to think that he will never again be remembered by the Lord.

And so Paul takes up that verse and says, yes, it is possible for a person to feel like that. But then behind all that, at the back of all that, is God dealing with him in mercy and in grace and love.

And together with that, God says to the church here, you may experience that forsakenness. You may know something of the hiding of my face from you. But remember he says, it is a small moment.

It is only for a small moment that I am forsaken. And the hiding of my face is the expression of a little wrath. Now this is very interesting.

Because people can feel these experiences very long indeed. You know what it's like maybe. When through anxiety or pain you're not able to sleep awake.

[8 : 54] And you see every owl on the face of that clock beside your bed. You think the night is never going to end. Day will never come. It's the longest period you've ever experienced in all your life.

It is so long. And yet, in the light of other things, it's just like a flash. Few hours. These few hours can be interminably long.

And so it is that experiences, spiritual experiences, spiritual experiences which trouble us all, can weigh so heavily upon your heart and your spirit that you think that this is never going to end.

But the Lord says, it is only for a small moment. It is only a little wrath.

And if, if these experiences are the expression, expressions of God's displeasure with his people in this world, what will it be like in a lost eternity when his wrath will not be a little, but the outpouring of his fierce anger upon those who are lost.

[10 : 21] And there's something else to be said here. This is God's fatherly dealings with his people. There are some people of the opinion that God is never angry with his people.

That God loves them all. And that there is never any expression of, or any dealing of God with his people, but that of love. Now, of course, that may be true.

But his love, the love of the Father, can be expressed in anger because of displeasure and because of disobedience and because of waywardness and because of sin.

This is how God dealt with his people. He was very angry with them because they wouldn't listen to his voice. They wouldn't obey his pleadings and his leadings.

And so he will be with you and with me. But nevertheless, he says, it is only for a little while. And then he brings in the comparison.

[11 : 23] For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great kind mercies will I gather thee. The forsakenness is replaced with the gathering towards him.

The small moment is replaced with the great mercies with which he's gathering. In verse 8, in a little wrath, I hid my face from thee for a moment.

And that is now contrasted with this, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer. I will gather thee with great mercies and I will have mercy on thee with everlasting kindness.

And what he's saying is this, that in spite of all that she's experiencing and in spite of all the conclusions to which she will come. And very often, as I said, you and I will come to wrong conclusions concerning God's dealings with us.

He deals with us tenderly and mercifully. And the tender care and the mercies of God endure.

[12 : 34] He speaks here of the rich abundance of his mercies. Going to revive and refresh and renew and receive the church to himself.

And this is the history of the church. There has always been a neb and a flow in the spiritual history of the church of God. There are times when she is at a distance from her God.

Other times the Lord gathers her to himself. This is what happens, for example, at a time of revival. Revival begins with its own church in the world.

It begins within. And the effect of it is that they are brought to him. That the distance between them and the Lord seems to vanish.

And there is this renewing, reviving and receiving of the church to himself. It is true in the history of the individual soul. There is the ebb and the flow of spiritual life.

[13 : 40] Times of real deadness and coldness and indifference and distance. Maybe you're like that tonight, for all I know. Feeling at a tremendous distance from God.

And yet, others may be experiencing the Lord receiving them unto himself. And there will come a day when this will be eternally true of the church.

When she will leave behind her all the ebbs and the flows of her Christian life. And she will be brought into the immediate presence of God. And their experience, the eternal loving kindness of his God.

Now there are times, and Paul makes this point, I think I made it last week, when Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, there are times when in the wonderful mercy and grace and kindness of God, people are enabled, even in the very midst of their most trying circumstances to rejoice in the glory and in the blessedness of God.

When you and I speak about problems and our troubles and our difficulties and our persecutions and our oppositions and so on, we seem to major on these things so much that nothing else seems to matter but them.

[15 : 11] Listen to Paul as he speaks about a man who suffered may be far more than you and I do. A man who had to endure much in the service of Christ and yet he says this of his troubles, we are troubled he says in every side but we are not perplexed, we are in despair but we are accused and so, remember what he says in chapter 4, but we are not given over to despair and so on.

For he says our light affliction which is but for a moment. That's what Paul, that's what the Lord is saying here to the church, your afflictions, they're only for a moment and that's how Paul viewed them.

He went through a tremendous amount of suffering for year after year after year in the service of the Lord and Paul must have looked his age before he left this world and more than his age and yet as he viewed them he was able to say their only light and they're only for a small moment how could he say it?

He tells us because he says we look at the things which are unseen not that the things which are seen for the things which are unseen are eternal but the things which are seen are temporal and there are many people in the world tonight who can testify to the reality of the grace of God sustaining them and enabling them in their most trying circumstances to rejoice in eternal realities and this is what God is bringing before the church here the eternal reality of his own kindness of the everlasting nature of his own love that though our experiences may alter from day to day and year to year there is no change in his love there is no end to his love and the mercy of God flows freely to the church from the greatness of his love and one other thing the Lord here seems to be playing on the world on the world overflowing he's going to introduce us to this in a minute he's going to speak about the flood that overflowed the world for a small moment

I have forsaken for a small moment I have hidden my face from thee and in a little wrath I have done this but with great mercies with overflowing mercies with mercies flooding towards the church the love of God flowing towards her even in his fatherly chastisement of her that introduces us to the second point here the covenant guarantee that he gives her and he uses the first of these two illustrations for he says this is as the waters of Noah unto me for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee let me say at once that these well known words on the prophecy of Isaiah probably words which many of you here tonight know of by heart are words which in many respects

[18 : 43] I find difficult to understand what is the Lord saying here this is as the waters of Noah unto me well I think that he's here containing the theme that he's dealing with in verse 8 he's speaking about his own love flowing freely time of conversion when a person is brought to the Lord time of revival in a congregational community time of rich Christian fellowship and Christian love amongst the members of the Church of Christ look at look at how clear it is to you then that the love of God is flowing into your heart but what about now what about tonight how many here tonight may be afraid that the flood has stemmed it isn't what it used to be far far from it well the Lord says this this he says is as the waters of Noah unto me

God's love never ceases to flow and he never ceases to love the Church and the illustration he uses is the illustration of the flood at the day of Noah what caused the flood how did it happen it happened in two ways it rained and I think this is the word that the Bible the Old Testament used it rained supernaturally from the heavens the heavens opened and the water poured down upon the earth but that wasn't all we know also from the Bible that the wells of the deep opened up there were tremendous conversions under the surface of the earth and they broke through the surface of the earth and rain came up water came up just as surely as the floods came down and that period of time the whole world was covered by the flood it covered the world the water flowed to that extent that the whole earth was covered this he says is as the waters of Noah unto me so is my love towards mine own church so is my kindness and my love incomparably great no wonder the Bible speaks of it as the love of God which cannot be known which cannot be measured which cannot be fathomed this to me he says is like the waters of Noah just as they flooded the earth so is my love flooded towards mine own church and then he goes on to say this for as I have sworn that the water of Noah should no more go over the earth so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee and what does this refer to it refers to what we write in Genesis chapter 8 and 9 the promise the oath the confirmation the assurance that God gave to mankind through Noah after the flood

God gave this assurance I will never again destroy the world with a flood and he gave Noah the sign of that assurance the rainbow in the heavens have you ever thought after the flood how Noah and his family must have felt when the first downpour hit the earth after the flood I often wonder if they were afraid it's this is it again but in India because God had given him this assurance Noah and through him to the whole world never again will the world be destroyed with a flood we know from the New Testament that the world is going to be destroyed but not with a flood he will the elements will melt with a fervent this world will be destroyed at the end of the ages with fire that's a picture that Peter draws for us in the letter part of which we read here tonight well he says

I have given my oath that I will not destroy the world and now he says I give you my oath to you my church and the world that I will never destroy you what's he saying is he saying to the church here never again will you have a period of tribulation like you had that you're going to have in Babylon if that's the case what would the church in 70 AD say when Jerusalem was raised to the ground what would the church of the middle ages have said what would the church of the post reformation church have said in the midst of all the fierce fires of persecution that she endured what would the thousand believing Jews have said during the holocaust in the century itself what would the church have said in many periods of her history looking at this version would she not say how could this happen the Lord swore that he would never again treat us like he treated the world in Noah's day but the point is this he has said he will not destroy the church he hasn't said the church won't have difficulties and tribulations and trials and distresses indeed Jesus the great head of the church said in this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer

I have overcome the world Peter writing to the church of his own day said this you're complaining he said you're feeling this trial well he says there's worse to come there's a fiery trial still to come if you're a Christian here tonight don't think that because you're a Christian that that is going to mean that there'll be no problems or difficulties or distresses or persecutions or desertions or desolations in your life don't run away with that idea you're not immune to these things because you're a believer as a matter of fact being a believer may expose you to these things but remember what Jesus said no one he said shall pluck them out of my father's hand no one will destroy the church and that's a message of this chapter towards the end of it no weapon that is formed against thee will prosper people he says will gather against you people try to destroy you as they try to destroy

[26 : 06] Christ himself and as they will try to destroy him to the end of the ages notwithstanding what the Bible says there are still people who are bent on the destruction of the Christian church want to obliterate it from the face of the earth but God says I have sworn just as I gave my oath to Noah never again so have I sworn that you will not be destroyed destroyed and in all the difficulties and the distresses and the afflictions and the persecutions of the Christian church she learns to say what we sang here tonight God is our refuge and our strength and straightens our present day therefore although the earth remove we will not be afraid she learns to say with Job though he slay me yet will I trust him she learns to believe that through the fire of persecution she will come forth as gold and the new testament picture of heaven confirms the church's confidence who are these are red and white robes these are they who have come through great tribulation and have washed their robe and made them white in the blood of the lamb they have triumphed through faith in him and they have become more than conquerors through Christ who loved them that is the covenant guarantee that he gives the church and then finally he gives her this assurance the immutability of his own promise and he used another illustration for the mountain shall depart and the hills be removed but my kindness shall not depart from thee neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed saith the Lord that doth mercy on thee now this is a wonderfully simple illustration

I was saying to some other people here in another place today you know that the older I get and the often I read my bible and the more I try to preach the more thankful I am that God in his world has accommodated my limited understanding he comes down to my level and he uses these wonderful word pictures and these wonderful illustrations so that I can understand better what he's saying look at this one he uses the illustration of the mountains and the hills and he says this they will be removed I want to take you for a moment in your imagination to the hills of Harris to the Barman hills between Gress and Ness to the hill to Monag perhaps even at the castle grounds to Gallows hill and I want you to think go back over the years and over the centuries you think of all the people

Lewis and Harris who saw these same mountains and these same hills they've gone but the mountains and the hills are just the way they were aren't they they haven't changed you see there are other real estate that God used from nature he speaks of the grass and he says to you you like the grass you're here today it's gone tomorrow takes up the idea of the flower look at these flowers and bloom today decayed tomorrow all flesh is as grass even the trees seem to be so stable but what does the Bible say as the tree falls so shall it lie so shall you be and the contrast here is this surely the changeableness of man and the unchangeableness of the hills and the mountains that's how you may seem to think and it brings this before you that you and I are immortal my friend we are immortal

I know that we're changing I know that we're changing I know that the people are here before us the generation have gone they saw the same hills and the same mountains they've gone they've gone from this scene of time but their spirit lives on and though you may think that the mountains haven't changed and though the hills haven't off but I'm sure that experts in geology would take you and me to these mountains and these hills tonight and say to us do you see that see the way these have changed you know this a hundred years ago it wasn't like that but there's one thing certain one day they will be removed all that seems so stable today will one day be removed because the bible tells us that at the end of the ages these mountains are going to fall and these hills are going to depart and as they fall and this is the picture that Jesus paints for us as they fall at the end of the ages there are some people who would who are going to pray to the mountains and to the hills fall on us cover us because of their fear confronted with the wrath of the lamb of God so he takes up this illustration he says yes he says the mountains will they depart and the hills shall be removed but my kindness shall not depart from thee neither shall they come to my peace be removed saith the Lord and what's he saying well generations have come and gone the mountains and the hills will be removed and will depart but my kindness will not depart from thee and the covenant of my peace shall not be removed you see

God alone is steadfast and God's love alone is steadfast fixed on his people from all eternity loved with an everlasting love loved in time with a love that cannot be destroyed loved throughout all eternity with a love that they will go on to know more and more and more of nothing he says will sever you from my love nothing will alter my love nothing will overrun my love nothing can change my loving kindness many waters as the old testament cannot quench it the floods will not overflow you love ebbs and flows of course it does even the person you love most in the world times when you love fervently other times maybe just like a little trickle that's not the way the lord loves he loves unchangeably and in that unchangeable love he has united himself to a mortal creature such as you and as me and then he says this the covenant of my peace shall not be removed he is the author of this arrangement he is the god of peace and he sent his son the king of peace into the world to effect peace to purchase peace so that that peace will be offered to you and to me and while he was in the world he said to his disciples my peace

[34 : 52] I give unto you not as the world giveth give I unto you you see this peace is indestructible it is unbreakable it cannot be breached it is as the bible tells us like a wall round about his people as the walls are round about Jerusalem so the lord is round about his people in his peace it's a peace which abides when everything that the world offers will fade and vanish away oh how many people tonight are looking for peace probably one of the most precious commodities and experience of an individual experience of a family of a home all the homes in the world tonight that would give anything just to have peace between themselves the many hearted are distressed anxious worried concerned oh for peace and the world comes to people with all its own allurements and with all its own offers and it extends peace to them and Jesus says he acknowledges that the world gives peace but this is what he says

I give peace not as the world give it let not your heart be troubled neither be afraid what's he saying he's saying this that if you take what he offers you have something which abides with you when this world changes and when you will leave this world with all that you have in the world tonight you're going to leave it all behind aren't you the things that you're seeing tonight one day you won't see them anymore the people you're with one day gone forever yourself gone forever but this peace you see it surrounds you and it protects you and it will be with you because he is our peace this covenant of my peace says the God of peace will not be removed what assurance do you and I have of this well there are two words here in verses 8 and 10 that give us this assurance

I will have mercy on thee saith the Lord thy redeemer verse 10 my kindness shall not depart from thee neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed saith the Lord that have mercy upon thee this is a warrant that the Lord saith we have the word of his grace the word by which this world was created the word that keeps this world in being the word that gave you being into this world and the word that one day will terminate this world in which you and I live the word which comforts his people and which sustains his people the world which the church has been commissioned to preach and to go out with the world which comes to you tonight my friend with the offer of peace in the gospel of peace the world that will never fail heaven and earth says

Jesus will pass away but my word will never fail no wonder Paul said writing to Timothy this word is worthy of acceptance Peter in the passage right here tonight said this is the word which liveth and abideth forever and that's our support these are our support tonight as we travel on from time to eternity the pillar and the support of the Christian church the immutability of God the warrant of his love the the warrant of his word rather the unchangeableness of his love and its stability and also the permanence of his covenant relationship and in a changing world what better pillars could you have tonight as you move on through it towards the end of it do you have this possession that will never change that will never fail of which the psalmist said my heart my flesh they faint and fail but God fails me never into this covenant engagement you are encouraged to enter with him however he will not thirst come ye to the waters why delay when there are so many spiritual advantages to be gained so many blessings to enrich the bow and the cloud the next time you see a rainbow you remember my friend a test of eyes to God's covenant faithfulness and just as he bore and sustained

Noah in the ark on the floods so will he bear you and sustain you in all the floods that confront you along life's way and there may be many and there may be someone here at night who is only too painfully conscious of the problems and the difficulties and the distresses that this world brings but here is one in the midst of everything who is unchangeable in his love in his relationship through his word and who extends that offer to you yet again my friend there is no other hope that can sustain you no other passion that can comfort you no other love that will abide permanently with you but this one whose love is everlasting and whose kindness will not be removed if you put your trust in him let us pray oh lord our god we beseech thee to bless our souls fill our hearts with thy love we pray thee and enable us by grace to trust thee to know that we are resting in thy covenant relationship of love and peace with thy people give us grace to honor thee in all that we do and forgive our sins for

[42 : 09] Jesus sake amen