

# Not Forsaken

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[ 0 : 00 ] my soul. You may be seated. Well, good morning, church.

It's good to be with you all this morning. Would you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 49, verse 14. Isaiah chapter 49, verse 14.

That's page 571 in the Pew Bible. Page 571, Isaiah chapter 49. If you're visiting this morning, we're glad you're here. Given the heat today, our sermon will be a little shorter than normal.

So if you're thinking, wow, that went by fast, don't worry. Once the weather cools off, we'll spend more time diving into God's Word. Or you might think, wow, I hope it's hot every Sunday because that sermon went by really fast.

But, well, as it is this morning, we'll keep it on the shorter side. So Isaiah chapter 49, verse 14. Let me pray for us as we come to God's Word today. God, grant us today hearts that hear and receive your Word.

[ 1 : 11 ] Encourage us and comfort us, God, with your grace and love. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. All right. Verse 14 of Isaiah chapter 49 says this.

But Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me. My Lord has forgotten me. But Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me.

My Lord has forgotten me. Have you ever been so downtrodden, so discouraged, that you just can't seem to believe that God loves you, that He remembers you?

That's the situation we jump into here in Isaiah 49, 14. Last week, Pastor Matt opened up for us the beginning of chapter 49, which was all about the glorious servant Messiah who would come and bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

What good news! And yet, here the people, upon hearing this good news, are so downtrodden, so discouraged, so despondent, that they just can't believe it.

[ 2 : 21 ] But Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me. My Lord has forgotten me. They look at their circumstances and they think, God's forgotten us.

Perhaps you're going through something right now. A job loss, a difficult relationship, a health crisis, a spiritual crisis. And you think, the Lord's forsaken me.

My Lord has forgotten me. Well, what is it that God wants to tell us today through this passage of Isaiah? Well, the word that He had for Old Testament Israel then and the word that He has for you and me today is this.

Look at verse 15. Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? 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. To our downtrodden hearts that just can't hear and believe God's love, God comes tenderly and He says, Look at that nursing mother holding her child tenderly in her arms.

[ 3 : 37 ] Do you think that mother could forget her child? Now ask any mother here and I'm sure they'd tell you the same thing. Never! You would never forget that. I could never forget.

And the Lord says, I'm like a nursing mother. And if possible, even greater. I will not forget you. Like a diamond carving the most solid of stones.

Like a diamond carving its way into granite. The Lord says, I've engraved you on the palms of my hands. You know, it's funny. You can sort of always see your hands, can't you?

If you're kind of going about your day. They're always sort of there in front of you. And if you tattoo your hands, you always see it. And that's why the next line says, Your walls are continually before me.

City walls in the ancient world defined and protected the city that they surrounded. So God is saying poetically here, All that you are, all that you need, I have it constantly in my mind.

[ 4 : 40 ] So to those of us feeling forgotten, this passage affirms in the most unrestrained way that God will never forget His people. But you know, God doesn't stop there.

He doesn't just sort of affirm His unforgetting love. He unpacks it. He wants to come with a healing word, with a comforting word, to those who are discouraged and despondent and bitter in soul. So in the rest of chapter 49 and 50, He drills down into this love. He sort of picks up the diamond of His love and He starts turning it around so the rays might continue to reflect out of it and capture our gaze and so that our downtrodden hearts might believe it again, this love that He affirms for us. So first God says, I see your losses and I will restore you. This is verses 17 through 21. God says, I see your losses and I will restore you.

In verse 17, you'll notice there's an ESV footnote if you're looking at the text open, right there in verse 17. It's saying that the word builders could also be translated children and I actually think given the context, that's a better read.

[ 5 : 50 ] So listen to me read verses 17 through 21, picking up that alternate reading. Here God speaks to His bereaved people who feel like they've lost everything and He says to them, look, your children 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 all on as an ornament. You shall bind them on as a bride does.

Surely your waste places and your devastated land, surely now you'll be too narrow for your inhabitants. Those who swallowed you up will be far away. 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's brought up these?

Behold, I was left alone from where have these come? So do you catch the imagery here? God's people are pictured like a childless parent here, bereaved and empty. But God says, I see your losses and I will restore.

[ 6 : 53 ] I'll bring your sons and your daughters back to you and they will fill your land to such an extent that you'll think you've run out of room. It's as if the Lord comes to us and says, do you see the empty rooms of your home?

Do you see those empty rooms that you wish were filled with the laughter of children? Do you see those empty rooms that you wish were filled with the dirty dishes and the played with toys of a vibrant and bustling family?

Take a look at those empty rooms. God says, I'm going to fill them. I'm going to fill them so full that you'll think you'll need an addition just to fit them all in.

Those empty rooms that feel so spacious and cavernous, now I'm going to fill them with so much life that the rafters will feel like they're going to break. Now this promise was spoken to a people in exile, but the fulfillment is so much greater than the historical return from exile in the 6th century. As miraculous as that return was, this promise had a scope, a spiritual scope that was so much greater. After all, the return in the 6th century didn't break the bounds of the land of Israel.

[ 8 : 03 ] The return was pretty meager at first. No, this promise that God was making here was about something greater. It was about the full flowering of the gospel, the pouring out of every spiritual blessing in Christ.

It's about the sovereignty of our good God restoring what the locusts have eaten, not just in this life, but in the life to come when He will make all things new.

You see, Christian, there's no loss that you experience in this life that God will not heal and restore 100-fold. Will you experience some of that restoration in this life?

Many times, yes! But none of us will experience it in the full until we see the new creation dawn and we are raised anew with Christ.

You know, the older I get, and I'm not that old, the more I long for heaven, to be honest. Not because I don't love this world, I do, but because I know and what God's Word tells us is that what's coming is so much greater.

[ 9 : 16 ] the consummation, the healing, the restoration of all that sin has devoured and taken away. God's love, friend, sees your losses.

They're not lost on Him. He sees your losses and He says, I'm going to restore. That's how much I love you. But the Lord goes on to those of us who are so discouraged and so downcast and so

despondent that we can't believe God loves us.

He says, not only do I see your losses and I'll restore you, God says, I see your enemies and I'll fight for you. This is verses 22 through 26.

God says, I see your enemies and I will fight for you. Let's pick up in verse 22. Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up my hand 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 their 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.

[10:23] Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame. Can the prey be taken from the mighty or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? 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'll 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 Savior and your Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob. So the picture here is of a God who stands up for his oppressed people.

They're trampled, they're used and abused and God says, I see your enemies and I'll fight for you. And this imagery is strong, isn't it? The nations here, Israel's enemies, God says, they'll bow down to you and lick the dust of your feet.

In other words, God says, they're going to be a complete reversal. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. And in verse 26, there's talk of the oppressors eating their own flesh and being drunk with their own blood.

[11:34] And that's a graphic image, is it not, of utter self-destruction. Like a skyscraper kind of crumbling from the inside out, collapsing under the weight of its own decay and deterioration.

These enemies seem so powerful, so invincible. Those who trample you underfoot despise you and use you. But God says, I see and I know.

You might feel like he's forgotten you, but far from it he will fight for you. And then in verse 24, this promise of God, it just seems too impossible to believe that people say, can the prey be taken from the mighty or captives of a tyrant be rescued?

You know, can a squirrel be saved from the jaws of a wolf? I don't think you'll find anything left after you pry that thing from its mouth. Can an evil tyrant be expected to just release their captives? And humanly speaking, the answer is no. Perhaps some of the opposition you feel up against seems just as insurmountable. The ravages of sin, the rain of the wicked, and the ever-present shadow of death.

[12:49] But God says, listen, I will contend with those who contend with you. So I had the privilege of growing up with two older brothers.

Not just one, but two. And of course, you know, there is a cost to being the youngest of three boys. Whenever my brothers wanted to try out a new wrestling move that we had just watched on WWF, guess who was the recipient?

You know, when Jimmy the Superfly Snooka jumped off the top rope to body slam and pin his opponent, you guessed it. I was often the opponent, right? But I say I had the privilege of growing up with two older brothers.

Because out in the world, you know, when we were done sort of playing, I knew that anyone who wanted to contend with me would have to contend with them.

They weren't going to let anyone mess with their little brother. They would step in and fight for me. Now, maybe you didn't have older brothers like that. But here's the good news.

[13:59] You do have a God like that. This is the God who contends for his people, who fights for them. This is the God who enters the battle against sin and death, who triumphs and who wins the victory on our behalf.

And so do our downtrodden hearts, our hearts that feel forsaken and forgotten. God comes and says, I'll never forget you. I see your losses and I promise to restore.

I see your enemies and I promise to fight for you. But our text from Isaiah goes even deeper. It's tempting to doubt God's love when we've experienced loss.

Sometimes we experience grave loss and feel forgotten. And it's tempting to doubt God's love when we've experienced defeat, when we're feeling trampled and ridiculed and we feel forgotten.

But you know, these external circumstances, real as they are, they perhaps don't touch the deepest place of our despair, the deepest place of our doubt.

[ 15 : 05 ] Because the heart that cries out, the Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me, the heart that makes that cry, from the most despondent place, from the most kind of wretched place, is the heart that does so not merely because of external losses or because of external opposition.

The deepest despairing of God's love comes from a place of our own internal failures. When our sins and our wrongs feel like a wave crashing over our heads, then our heart cries out with despair, surely the Lord has forsaken me and my Lord has forgotten me.

Not because of what others have done to me, but because of what I have done or failed to do before God. And in that bitter place of despair, we think, surely God has forgotten me.

But listen, as our text continues into chapter 50, God says, I don't just see your losses and I don't just see your enemies, but I even see your sin and I haven't forgotten you.

I see your sin and I will redeem you. Let's pick up in Isaiah chapter 50, verse 1. Thus says the Lord, where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away?

[ 16 : 43 ] Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Now, the answer to these rhetorical questions is that there is no certificate of divorce.

God has no creditors. How could the God of the universe owe anyone anything? The people in exile might feel utterly forsaken, but God has not given up His covenant love with them.

They might feel sold off into slavery, but God doesn't have any debts that He has to pay. So He says to them, where is the supposed certificate of divorce that I gave you?

Who are the supposed creditors that I had to sell you to? There are none. So why are they there?

Let's pick up. Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.

Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there no one to answer? You see, the exile wasn't because of some lack in God, a lack of God's power or a lack of God's covenant marital faithfulness to His people, or even a lack of God pursuing them, coming to them, calling to them.

[ 17 : 56 ] The exiled people were there because of their unfaithfulness, because when God called, no one answered. So God sees their sin, and He sees ours.

But is that the end? The passage continues. God says, Is my hand shortened that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?

Behold, by my rebuke, I dry up the sea. I make the rivers a desert. The fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their covering.

God says, Don't think for an instant that I can't rescue you. The imagery here in these verses is from the Exodus. God drying up the sea, turning the daylight black to save His people in power.

But the power of God, the power of God, isn't the ultimate expression of God's redeeming love. The Almighty God sees your sin, yes, and what does He do?

[ 19 : 09 ] Well, at this point in the text, on to the stage after God has just declared His boundless power, on to the stage steps the servant.

In verse 4, the third of Isaiah's servant songs begins. The first of these texts, these songs, as they're sometimes called, the first of these servant songs was back in chapter 42, verses 1 through 9, where the servant was seen bringing justice, that is bringing rightness and wholeness, bringing justice to the nations.

And then the second servant song was in chapter 49, verses 1 through 13, that we looked at last week, where the servant is seen bringing salvation, not just to Israel, but to the ends of the earth.

And now the servant steps back into view here in chapter 50, verse 4. Just when God has exposed our sin, just when God has exposed our unwillingness to listen when He calls, just when God has exposed our unwillingness to respond and turn when He comes, just when our sin is open and exposed, God says, I'm mighty to redeem, and redeem you I will.

And how will I do it? Through my servant, the servant who will listen and who will obey and who will suffer and who will be vindicated for your redemption.

[ 20 : 39 ] Let's read verses 4 through 9. The servant comes onto the stage and now speaks and says, The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.

Morning by morning, He awakens. He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious. I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

But the Lord God helps me. Therefore, I have not been disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like flint and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me. Who will declare me guilty?

[ 21 : 38 ] Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment. The moth will eat them up. Now, this third passage about the servant portrays him in verses 4 through 5. Did you catch that?

As perfectly innocent. He hears God's word and he obeys. But nevertheless, in verses 6 and 7, he's willing to be struck as a result of that obedience.

To take the disgrace and shame for Israel. But he's able to take on this substitutionary role with God's help. In verses 8 through 9, his vindication comes from above and any accusers who might try to condemn him or declare him guilty, their case will be devoured like a cloth by the moths, full of holes with no substance at all.

Now, what does this mean for us? Well, first, is it not clear that this servant song is speaking about the work of Christ who gave his back to those who strike, his cheek to those who pull out the beard, who didn't hide his face from disgrace and spitting?

And Christ did this for you and for me. So how should we respond when our sins testify against us?

[ 22 : 56 ] When we're tempted to doubt God's love in light of our many transgressions, our only comfort comes in such moments from looking to the suffering servant.

He was innocent yet stricken on our behalf so that we might be free from condemnation. That's why Paul can say, who will bring any charge against God's elect?

It's God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Jesus Christ is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is interceding for us. You see, friends, God won't forget your losses and he won't forget your enemies, but he will forget your sins.

What matchless grace! Because of the servant's suffering obedience in our place, God can forget our sins without forgetting us.

Do you doubt God's love, friends? Are you feeling forgotten? Look to the cross. Do you see what God was willing to give up for you? Do you see how God was willing to have his hands pierced for you?

[ 24 : 12 ] I've engraved you on the palms of my hands, Isaiah 49, 16 says. And of course, for hundreds of years before Christ, every reader of the Bible thought that was just a metaphor. But when the risen Jesus comes to his frightened and despairing disciples and says, look, do you see the scars?

I've literally engraved you on the palms of my hands. For eternity, the Lord Jesus will bear the marks of his love for you. Forgotten?

Ever. You are loved forever in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And so, how will we respond this morning?

Well, our passage ends by saying there's only two ways to respond to this great display of God's love. We can trust in the name of the Lord or we can try to build our own fires and light our own paths.

Look with me at verses 10 and 11. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

[ 25 : 26 ] But behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches, walk by the light of your fire and by the torches that you have kindled. This you have from my hand.

You shall lie down in torment. You see, if we harden our hearts to God's love, if we try to walk by the light of our own fire or by some other torch that we've kindled, the end won't be joy but torment. No other love can rescue us from sin. No other love can rescue us from shame and guilt. No matter how brightly we try to stoke some other fire, it will never be able to light our darkness.

But God's love can. The love of Christ certainly can. His love that will never forget you. His love that will never forsake you.

The Father's love that was willing to send His Son to suffer and rise again for you. This is a love that will light up your life. This is a love that's worth living for. This is the love that will restore us and fight for us and redeem us.

[ 26 : 35 ] Let's pray together. Father, we open up our hands before You this morning and we open up our hearts to You and we pray that by Your Holy Spirit You would give us eyes to see the depth of Your compassion and love and faithfulness to us, Your people.

Lord, I pray especially for those who are downcast and burdened and despairing. Would Your comfort draw near to them? Help them, God, to look up to Christ and see the love that can light their path and grant them the faith to trust in You.

We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Friends, let's stand and let's sing together.