

Sermon for February 23, 2014 – Epiphany 7

Isaiah 49:13-18 (NKJV)

Theme: Count on Christ's Compassion.

- 1) *He remembers you every time He looks at his hands*
- 2) *He will keep His promise to deliver and glorify you.*

¹³ Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted. ¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, And my Lord has forgotten me." ¹⁵ "Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me. ¹⁷ Your sons shall make haste; Your destroyers and those who laid you waste Shall go away from you. ¹⁸ Lift up your eyes, look around and see; All these gather together and come to you. As I live," says the LORD, "You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, And bind them on you as a bride does.

Have you ever felt forsaken by the LORD? I know of at least one woman, who felt that way - a fine Christian lady, who came to every service and Bible class. She was convinced that the LORD was punishing her for a sin she had committed and repented of a long time ago; even though the hardships she faced had little to do with that past sin.

All tenderhearted Christians are tempted to think like this lady. When we face hardships, the devil tries to convince us that God is mad at us: that the LORD has forsaken us and removed His care from us. But, as our sermon text reveals, this is most certainly not the case. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹

With the prophet Isaiah as our guide, let us learn to **count on Christ's compassion.** *1) He remembers you every time He looks at his hands. 2) He will keep His promise to deliver and glorify you.*

Part One: He remembers you every time He looks at His hands.

Our sermon text begins: *¹³ Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted.*

The LORD's compassion and mercy are certainly things to sing about: that He can patiently bear with the rebellion and sins of his people – calling them to repent. This was the way the Lord dealt with Old Testament Judah during Isaiah's time. Sadly that chosen nation rejected all the prophets the LORD sent to get it to turn from its wicked idolatry. The people refused to listen. So what would the LORD do? What He warned He would do: send a foreign army to conquer and expel the people from their promised land and bring them into exile.

But this was not the end of the story. Because of his promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David (and also for the sake of the small remnant of believers still living in the land) the LORD would restore Judah after their 70-year exile in Babylon. They would repent, and he would forgive them. They would return to Canaan and rebuild.

The Lord's restoration of Judah serves as a picture of an even more important restoration. Believers are God's people and we are all in exile – scattered throughout the nations of this earth. We suffer under the slavery of sin. We long to return home – to be with our God in His everlasting, heavenly Kingdom.

This is why God tells us to rejoice. Why? Because the LORD promises that His Savior would win our salvation and rescue us into his kingdom.

We hear the promise, but it can be hard for us to accept – especially during times of tragedy and hardship. Like the lady I mentioned in the introduction, we might feel as if all the problems we face are a direct result of our sins – that God is punishing us. And so, with captive Judah, suffering in Babylon, we are tempted to say: "*The LORD has forsaken me, And my Lord has forgotten me.*"

But is that true: has the LORD forgotten us? Listen to what He says! "*Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb?*"

Can you imagine how hard it would be for a mother to forget her nursing child? The physiology of the female body - the production of milk and pain associated with it if a nursing child is not fed - makes it nearly impossible for a nursing mother to “forget” her hungry child! On top of this there is the emotional bond mother and child share. A mother's heart cries out for her child – especially when that child is hurt or in need. God so wonderfully created mothers for this most noble task – placing in them a little hint of the divine compassion He feels toward his creation.

Can a mother forget her nursing child and not have compassion on her son? Such a thing seems extremely unnatural – and yet there are, every so often, shocking news reports about such women. This is not a result of creation, but of sin. This is why the LORD says: *Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you.*

God is not a sinful human. He can never stop having compassion and love towards us. With an even greater love than the best mother can have, the LORD disciplines, encourages and cares for us – his children through faith. The tough times He allows in our lives are not “punishment” for our sins, but are meant to call us to repentance and train us in righteousness – as the Scriptures say: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.* ⁱⁱ

“See,” the LORD says, *“I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.* With hands a person works, and all the works the LORD does are for us – that we might be saved. He is constantly thinking about us. Do you want to know why? Because when Christ looks at his hands, he sees the scars where the nails of his crucifixion went through. Our names are on those scars. For our sake He suffered and died on the cross. For our justification He rose again.ⁱⁱⁱ Can there be any doubt of His love? Can there be any doubt that He will deliver us from all that we experience on this sinful earth and deliver us safely to his kingdom,^{iv} as the Scriptures promise: *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*”

No matter what you, as a believer, face in life, you can count on Christ's compassion. He remembers you in love every time he looks at his hands and uses them to act. *“Your walls are continually before Me,”* he says. In other words, the LORD has your back. He knows how to protect you and He will shield your soul with the Gospel until the day of His deliverance.

Part Two: He will keep His promise to deliver and glorify you.

Our text continues: *Your sons shall make haste; Your destroyers and those who laid you waste Shall go away from you.*

Think of what this verse meant to the believers exiled in Babylon: a day was coming when their children would return to Jerusalem. The armies that conquered them would leave. The Promised Land would be theirs again.

Oh, what a promise! It seemed too good to be true, but it was true. The Lord says: *Lift up your eyes, look around and see; All these gather together and come to you.* At the moment, the Jews could only look forward to that day with the eyes of faith, but when the time of their deliverance would come, they would see with their own eyes the multitude of people returning home with them.

And how certain was this: *As I live," says the LORD, "You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, And bind them on you as a bride does.*

Did you know that this is the only verse in the book of Isaiah, where the LORD swears by His very own life? And just think what that means: "If this promise does not come true,' says the LORD, "then I don't exist. If this promise doesn't come true, then you should seek after another god. But I will most certainly deliver you. I will restore my captive people. Just as a bride richly adorns herself, so my city Jerusalem will be richly adorned with my people whom I love and treasure."

And, fellow Christians, don't imagine that this prophecy is merely about the restoration of Judah after the Babylonian captivity. As I mentioned before, God uses the real history of His Old Testament people to illustrate a greater spiritual reality.

A day is coming when God will gather all his children - all who believe in His Son for the forgiveness of sin – and bring them home. On that day the LORD will cast into hell every demon, unbeliever and anything else that tempted us to sin, caused us pain or tried to separate us from the love of God. On that day we will see the dead rise. We will see the great multitude which no one can number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues^{vi} who believed in God. We will see them gather together to go home. To which home? *To the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*^{vii} Our very own eyes will see this happen. The LORD stakes his life on it. And then, as our hearts throb in joyful anticipation, our dearest Father, who cared for us with more compassion than any earthly mother could have for her children, will welcome us home, with the angels announcing: *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."*⁴ *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*⁵ *Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."* . . . ⁷ *"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."*^{viii}

Brothers and sisters in Christ. We are living in exile in a sinful world. In this world we may experience such great pain and hardship that our hearts are tempted to cry out: *The LORD has forsaken me, And my Lord has forgotten me.* When you feel this way, remember our sermon text for today and how you can **Count on Christ's Compassion.** *He remembers you every time He looks at his nails scarred hands. He will keep His promise to deliver and glorify you. Amen*

ⁱ Cf. Romans 8:37-39

ⁱⁱ Roman 8:28 NKJV

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 4:25

^{iv} Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

^v Romans 8:32 NKJV

^{vi} Cf. Revelation 7:9

vii Revelation 21:2 NKJV

viii Revelation 21:3-7 NKJV