

A Focus for Fulfilling Faith in Times of Crisis- Rev. Callum Macleod (Retired)

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Preacher: Rev Callum Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn together to the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 49.! I'm going to read at verse 13.!
Isaiah 49 at verse 13.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth.! Break forth, O mountains, into singing. For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.
But Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me. My Lord has forgotten me. And so on down through the following verses.

Now as we journey on through life, there are many things that challenge our interest in God and our faith in God. And one of the big challenges that we do face is that there are these oops or oh dear moments in life when our circumstances change.

And when circumstances change, then our faith is assaulted with doubt in so many ways. Whether we are in school at a young age or at the end of our Christian journey, circumstances affect us in life.

[1 : 22] It's the natural thing that happens. If something surprising comes, then I have to learn to cope with that. And down to the pages of the Old Testament, there were many surprising things happening in the lives of the people of God.

They were surprised because these things came unexpectedly. And very often what was unexpected was not unexpected because God didn't tell it was going to happen.

It was unexpected because they didn't listen to what God was saying. Whatever the reason, when circumstances change, our faith is challenged.

We'll read through this prophecy of Isaiah. It's an interesting book, like every other book in the Old Testament. We have a book of kings up to chapter 37, where God wants to show the people that every king, even the best kings that they had, were not up to the position of being king over his people.

They needed another king who is Jesus. From chapter 40 onwards into chapter 55, we have the book of the servant king.

[2 : 43] The people of God Israel, they were the servants of Jehovah, but they failed to be so. And so God prepares his servant to come and rescue the people from their plight.

And part of that plight is that they are going to be away from home. And home for them was Jerusalem.

That's where God dwelt. That's where God's king dwelt. That was their covenant comfort zone. As long as they were in Jerusalem, it didn't matter what was happening in the nations around them. They felt secure. They felt they had a claim upon God, and they had a right to the blessing of God. But because of their rebellion against God, God drove them out of their comfort zone in Jerusalem. And their enemies carried them away to Babylon. Major crisis. Major change. Major change in circumstances.

[3 : 55] And God here through these chapters in this section of this book is writing to these people who are going to be in that crisis so that they will read these words and so that they will understand what God is doing.

And that's the marvel of what God does. He writes for us, gives to us promises in His Word, not for today.

We need them for today. But He writes in His Word the things that are providing for us so that when we hit the wall and when the calamity comes, that God's promises are there.

And bearing these things in mind, I want us to look at these words in this chapter this evening and to think of them as they would come to people who are going to live in 586 in Babylon. Words that were written in the 750s for them. How circumstances affected them and how the Word of God was here to help them.

[5 : 09] And I want us to think of a focus for faltering faith in a time of crisis. And I want to see, first of all, there is a call to celebration.

And such is this call to celebration that that goes out from God. It impacts not just on the people of God, but the whole of creation is called upon to rejoice and to sing because of who God is and what God is doing.

That's what we see in verse 13. Sing for joy. Not the people. Sing for joy, O heavens. Exult. Make the name of God great, O earth.

Break forth, O mountains, into singing. Words that remind us of the singing that will come when God blesses this world in which we live.

The singing that will come in the days of the new heavens and the new earth. The singing that we read of in Isaiah 55 where the whole of creation is going to break into singing and into celebration.

[6 : 29] And at the outset this evening, God wants us to think not just about ourselves, but to think about the world in which we live and that there is a cause for celebration in the very creation itself.

Romans 8. The creation groans waiting to be freed from the bondage. Here it is, a celebration because the bondage has been removed.

But what is the cause of the celebration? The creation itself is going to celebrate because of what the Lord has done for his people.

This is the covenant God, the God who took Israel out of Egypt, who took them to Mount Sinai, who bound himself to them at Mount Sinai, who promised to be with them.

The God who ultimately sent them away from Jerusalem because of their rebellion. Here the celebration is because the Lord has comforted his people.

[7 : 38] And when I think of comforting in the Old Testament sense of the word, I think of breathing deeply.

I think of deep emotions and feelings. I think of something moving from within myself in the light of devastation and something moving in order to relieve, in order to bring comfort, in order to come alongside those who are in need.

And here is the reason for the celebration that God, who is the God of this people, even when they're away in exile in their changed circumstances, this God has comforted his people.

And when I look back to chapter number 40, the very beginning of the section of this book, and I hear God saying through Isaiah, comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Her warfare has ended. The struggle is over. Her iniquity is pardoned. In chapter 52 at verse 9, comfort his people because God has redeemed Jerusalem.

[9 : 08] There's a great work of redemption. There's a great work of forgiveness and of pardon. That's the comfort. It's not coming alongside somebody and simply placing his arms around those who are in need.

It's coming alongside those who are in need and communicating to them, opening a channel for them so that his redeeming power and love, so that his forgiveness, which he has secured for his people, so that that becomes theirs.

perish. Let's think of the people in Babylon. What do you think they need to hear most?

It is that God's promised redemption is still alive. It's a live issue. It's an ongoing issue. Distance and exile has not cancelled out God's redeeming love.

And that's why the creation has to celebrate. That's why the people of God lift up their voices because God is fixed in his plans and in his purposes.

[10 : 28] And he will have compassion on those who are afflicted. he will stoop down low into the difficult conditions that they are experiencing and he will lift them up from there.

The cause for celebration. It's so easy for us to come to the conclusion that our changed circumstances mean that God has changed.

And God wants us tonight to discount that. To pack that whole idea. To push it to the side and to think about who God is and what God is still doing in the sense of building his kingdom and his church but also in the sense of what he's doing for you personally.

his interest for the faith community does not mean that his interest is not focused upon you and upon me.

Let God tonight drive that truth home into our hearts. That his redeeming love is still working. That his pardon is still powerful.

[12:00] That his compassion is there to lift up and to restore. door. That's what we see earlier on in this chapter itself. In verse six he is bringing back the preserved.

In verse number nine he is saying to the prisoners come out. In verse number ten he who has pity upon will lead them. There is a journey out of the crisis.

There is a shepherd to lead his people out. There is a bursting open of the prison doors. There is a setting free of those who are in need.

the call for celebration. There is a return. And perhaps for you this evening that's what you feel you need.

Perhaps this evening that you see yourself exiled from God. Exiled from God as someone who is the child of God.

[13:10] or exiled from God as someone who has not yet put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The sense of exile, of distance, of being far away.

This call for celebration is for you. In either of these categories you are to celebrate because of the redeeming love and the grace of God that from every direction in which they have need of he's going to visit them.

And as we read earlier on in the chapter as well and perhaps as we thought this morning they are going to make their journey back and they sing on all of the mountains and the highway is going to take them back to where they want to be with God and they're going to celebrate together celebrating the God who does not change and whose purposes are fixed in a favorable time and the time of need and Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6 behold now is the favorable time behold now is the day of salvation perhaps for you behold now is the time when your exile from God is over when your sorrow is to be removed and when you are going to be overcome and filled and overtaken with the joy of the Lord as your strength as your song and as your salvation the call for celebration secondly there is the crisis of confidence but in verse 14 but

Zion said here are the people of God we read in Psalm number 132 that God has chosen Zion as his resting place he delights in Zion where Solomon's palace is where Solomon's temple is on that high mountain where the people of God gather Zion is the place but Zion is also the people of God comfort Zion saying to Zion in chapter 51 saying to Zion you are my people the people of God who are where they are and who understand where they have come from these precious people of God are saying there is a commitment crisis and the commitment is not on their part the crisis comes because there is a crisis as far as God's commitment is concerned what are they saying what creates the crisis the Lord has forsaken me the Lord has distanced himself from me

Adam and Eve come together and the man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife there is a forsaking there is an abandoning and there is a coming together and Zion is saying here the Lord has forsaken me the relationship that he has formed the marriage into which he has entered with me that commitment of faith and of love that has come to an end the love which bound that relationship is no longer working God has so moved away from me that his commitment to me is questionable and is now being challenged by me and when the child of God comes to that place

[17:58] I hesitate to say that this is the wrong thing to say because it is the wrong thing but I'm hesitating because it's exactly what the people of God sometimes say because when the floods come in upon them when circumstances change so much when life has moved on and where they are now bears no comparison to where they were when all of that happens it's our natural response the Lord has forsaken me the Lord has gone he has left me where is God's commitment have you ever asked that question or made that statement have you ever questioned that

God is with you or said that you feel he is no longer with you that he is no longer committed to you there are great promises in this prophecy itself when you pass through the waters I will be with you there is also the statement in chapter 40 verse 27 my way is hidden from the Lord my right is disregarded by my God this is real life's experience faith's experience in times of adversity times of affliction questioning the commitment of God and along with that there is a power crisis what is it that changed my life what is it that changes my life it is nothing less than the power of God the power of the spirit of God coming to dwell in my heart to make something new in my inner being and to give me the song of salvation and to create this new relationship with God it is a

powerful work it is a powerful love and it is a love that is powerful takes over life but here sign saying my Lord has forgotten me it feels like pulling the plug on the power supply there is a disconnection there is this sense of ignoring me and of forgetting my circumstances and forgetting where I am the challenge of our circumstances that God has forgotten and in the Old Testament when God remembers he works powerfully God remembered his covenant in Exodus chapter 2 and we have all of these plagues and we have the openness of the Red Sea as a people of God because there is God's great redemption of the people of God because he remembered his covenant but here the people of God are saying that God has forgotten in other words his salvation is not working his redemptive power is no longer in my life in other words everything that spoke to me of God's commitment to me has now gone and I'm powerless I'm lifeless I'm fatigued in my faith I cannot walk another step in the life of faith I am crushed because of my circumstances and there is the greatest of all crises in my life and in my faith and so often we read of the same thing in the Psalms in Psalm 13 how long will you forget me Lord friends may forget us it's painful family may sometimes forget us for various reasons it's really painful but when we think that God has forgotten us that's real pain that's hitting at the nerve center of my relationship with God and of my life before him my communion with him and my enjoyment of him when there is a forgetting by God everything seems to grind to a halt my faith seems to stop working my love is no longer engaged because how can

[23 : 22] I love someone who has forgotten me how can I love someone who has forsaken me everything seems to stop working and we may ask ourselves this evening are we in such a crisis that we are letting our circumstances crush us in our faith and tonight do we need to take to heart that as much as that kind of response is justified in circumstances that the word of God speaks into your circumstances tonight and says to you that you should instead be celebrating because of what God has done in redeeming power instead of sorrowing because God isn't working as you would expect there is the crisis of confidence and finally there is the consideration of character what is the answer for you and for me and for them when we face such a crisis in life because of what we are going through it's to consider the character of God and that's what God is doing here in verse number 15 can a woman forget her nursing child that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb is it possible for a woman to forget her nursing child can she possibly wipe that child out of her memory and erase every memory of that child as if that child did not exist is such a thing possible that there is that sense of erasing or forgetting or that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb a compassion that speaks to us of the natural relationship between mother and child the child of her womb!

Part of her! Connected to her! Sustained by her! Carried by her! Through her pregnancy until that child is born into the world!

The emotion and the bond that is beyond every other emotion and bond between a mother and child is it possible that a mother could do all of these things?

And because of the kind of sinful people we are and the kind of sinful world that we live in and we see it in the society in which we live today God is saying even these may forget! do!

[29 : 06] of love and of remembrance or whatever it might be. As we saw last week at the Remembrance Series, there is that sense of engraving. So there is the professional skill of hollowing out to leave something that's readable, something that carries forth a message.

And here God is saying to us that he has inflicted upon himself the hollowing out of our names and that he has done so on the palms of his hands.

They are part of the fabric of his being. His character is what works in their relationship. But his name, his relationship with him, they are part of him.

And the whole picture is one of God spreading out his hands over his people with the self-inflicted wounds of the name of Zion engraved in his hands.

Does God care? Does God forget? Look at my hands. Your name engraved on the palms of my hands.

[30 : 30] I have engraved you collectively and individually. And as we read through this prophecy, as we read into the New Testament, it is so easy for us to make the connection of, between the hollowing out of God's engraving of the names of his people on his own hands, and to think of the servant of Jehovah, to think of the one who was wounded for our transgressions, to think of the one concerning whom, Psalm 22 says, they pierced my hands unto my feet.

Put here your finger, says Jesus to Peter. And then in Revelation chapter 1, every eye will see him, even those who have pierced him.

And he stands in the midst of the throne in Revelation 5, as the lion of the tribe of Judah, and the lamb as if he had been slain, engraved on the palms of my hand.

I can think of God tonight with his hands of blessing over me as the child of God, communicating to me that I'm part of his heart and of his mind, of his memory, part of what he is doing.

And that is unchangeably true. And I can also think of the way in which my Savior went to Calvary's cross.

[32 : 23] Think of him being nailed there, bearing my sin as the great statement of God's love for my salvation and statement of God's love for the world.

This is love that God sent his Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins, to turn away his wrath, the wrath of God.

so that there may be peace engraved on the palms of my hands. That's how secure we are tonight through faith in Jesus Christ.

Whatever circumstances might do, whatever we have to pass through, these are the unchangeable truths. Your walls are continually before me.

The stonework of the walls of Jerusalem that were to be rebuilt when the people of God came back. The boundaries of the people of God. Your walls are continually before me.

[33 : 30] Your life, my life, the life of all of the people of God. Always before God. Protected by God. Kept safe through this world.

Until at last, he takes us safely out of it to be forevermore with himself. May God grant tonight that our faith would not falter.

That whatever happens tomorrow or the next day, that we would remember the character of God. And when we see ourselves going into the crisis, that we will rescue ourselves by reminding ourselves that God does not forget.

And God does not abandon or forsake. But that he is with us forever to the very end of time. And may we be encouraged in our faith to so live trusting in him and going forward, celebrating, singing the song of salvation and with God's creation, exulting, making the name of God really great because he has done great things for us.

May God bless his word to us. Let us pray. Most gracious God, we bow before you and we are thankful to you for your mercy and for your favor that you never forget us, that your mercies are new every morning, that your faithfulness is great, that your steadfast love keeps your people close to you even in times of great need.

[35 : 07] May you so bless your word to us tonight and may you so encourage us in the Lord and may you so strengthen our faith that we may be able to live for you day by day more faithfully and more lovingly and more committed to you and therefore experiencing more and more of your power and grace and love and being shining lights for you in the world in which you will live.

So bless your word to us we pray and hear us. We pray these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. The closing psalm is psalm number 27 and sing psalms.

It's on page 32 and we're going to begin singing in the middle of verse 9. Psalm 27 page 32 in the middle of verse 9.

O God, my Saviour, leave me not. Do not reject my plea. My parents may forsake me, Lord, but you will welcome me. We're singing from the middle of verse 9 to the end of the psalm to God's praise. Amen. O God, my Saviour, leave me not.

[36 : 28] Do not reject my plea. My parents may forsake me, Lord, but you will welcome me.

Teach me, O Lord, how I should live, and lead me in your way.

Make straight my path, because my foes oppress me every day.

Give me not over to the will, for you.

All favorite enemies. For liars rise to slander me.

[37 : 53] And glee that gloom at ease. Yet I am sure that in this life.

God's courtesy will see. Wait for the Lord.

Be strong, take heart. For him we pray gently.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God the Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.