

God's Unfailing Love

The 14th of February is one day in the year that the world has set aside to celebrate romantic love. Every day of the year is when our Father asks us to celebrate His everlasting love. The greatest request from God is to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. How's that going for you? What's your relationship with Him like? How are you showing Him that you love him – with just words? Rather "love in action and in truth" – John 3:18



Lessons from Isaiah for living today, making the Bible real and personal.

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Isaiah 54:10

The purpose of my discussing the book of Isaiah has nothing to do with the man himself, or the people he was talking to at the time. I want to share with you some of the wonderful comfort and hope I have personally got from this ancient book and why I've come to love it so much. Some of this may be 'old news' to you, but making the Bible come to life in a real and personal way is always exciting. I pray each of us can be more passionate about our God and His wonderful Son and touched by how our Father reaches out to us in love and more motivated by His infinite patience and generosity.

A personal message

The other point I want to make before we look at this is: since I am an heir with Abraham according to the promises, then any message for Israel also applies to me. I am a spiritual Israelite, part of God's family. So then, the words of Isaiah, or any of the prophets are for me today, as much as for them then. God even spells this out in Is 63:16:

"For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us (that's you and me), and Israel does not acknowledge us; You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name."

(Twice here in the Old Testament, God is already telling me He is my Father, even though I'm not a physical child of Abraham).

I started writing out passages of scripture as if God had written to them specifically to me and noticed the passion and emotional language God uses when He talks about His people and how much He loves them.

"I, *(insert your name)*, will tell of the kindness of the LORD, the deeds for which He is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for me, yes, the many good things He has done for the house of Israel (those who are God Mastered), according to the **abundance** of His steadfast love. For He said, "Surely she is my child, a daughter who will not be false to me." And so He became my Saviour. In all my distress, He too was distressed, and the angel of His presence saved me; in His love and mercy He redeemed me; He lifted me up and carried me (like a Father). But I rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore, He became my enemy". Is 63:7-10

I love all the emotive words used in this passage about God:

Kindness . . . compassion . . . distress . . . steadfast love . . . mercy . . . grieved

God sees our suffering and cares deeply about us. Even in Exodus (3:7-9) He says "I have indeed seen the misery of my people . . . I have heard them crying out . . . I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them . . ." He is intimately acquainted with our sorrows and sufferings, so He sent Jesus "a man of sorrow and familiar with grief" to rescue us from ourselves.

Our response

It didn't matter where I turned in Isaiah, I couldn't miss God begging us to respond to Him. In ch 65 God says "Here am I, here am I. All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people".

He pleads with us to come to Him. I had never considered God as "pleading" or "begging me to repent and turn to Him". It kind of showed God in a different light. Every chapter or section has God's judgement on Israel, or me, is then a promise or a plea. For the first time it began to penetrate: God really loves me, despite who or what I am, and He was and still is begging me to change and come to Him.

In Isaiah 54, notice how passionate the language is that's used about God:

Vs 7-8 "For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer. "

Vs 10 ". . . but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

Deep compassion . . . everlasting kindness . . . unfailing love

This is the God of the Old Testament - not an angry, judgmental autocrat, but the same Father, who, in Jesus' parable, saw me when I was still a long way off. He was watching for me, waiting for me to come back to Him. He was full of compassion for me and ran and, showing His emotions openly, threw His arms around me and kissed me, touching the untouchable, unclean woman.

Some of you may have seen or read a book called "The Prodigal God". I was incensed when I saw the title, because when I was at Uni we learned that a Prodigal was legal term used for a spendthrift - no control over money - spends wildly - wayward. How on earth could anyone call God a prodigal? It is defined as "recklessly extravagant" or "having spent everything".

Jesus shows us a God, a Father who spends until He has nothing left, even gave His Son in the greatest expenditure of the world, because: He loves me. He is reckless in His giving of grace to me. As John says "How great is the love the Father has LAVISHED on us . . ." why? Because He WANTS us as His children. He WANTS to be a Father to us. He WANTS me to come inside and celebrate with Him in His house, with His family.

So, this is one side of Isaiah: The overwhelming evidence of God's unfailing love, His gentleness and tenderness towards those who love Him.

"He who created and formed you 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name. When (not if) you pass through the water, I will be with you; and when you pass through rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned. (Isaiah 43:2)

Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of this world, but that you protect them." (John 17:15)

And, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews quoted Deuteronomy "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5)

Why? (Is 43:3-5) – For I am the Holy One of Israel your Saviour. I will give nations for you "Since you are precious and honoured in my sight and **because I love you**. I will give men in exchange for you and people in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, **for I am with you.**"

Scary?

And this is another side of Isaiah: I am a sinner. I identify myself so well with Israel: stubborn, rebellious – as Is 63 said: "But I rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit". When I look at verses like this that specifically say: I rebelled and grieved God – I find it really scary. The thought of God being my enemy and fighting against me is frightening.

Right from the beginning of Isaiah, in ch 1 vs 2, listen to this – God is talking about me personally:

"A Child have I reared and brought up, but she has rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's manager, but (your name) does not know, my child does not understand." Ah, sinful woman, laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, a child who deals corruptly! She has forsaken the LORD, she has despised the Holy One of Israel, she is utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? Your whole head is sick, and your whole heart faint. From the sole of your foot even to your head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds"

Not a very pretty picture of me. But in the same chapter He gives hope and comfort:

"I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities . . . afterwards you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful city".

In ch 65:2, again God says specifically to me

I have held out my hands to an **obstinate people** who walk in ways **not good, pursuing their own imaginations** – a people who **continually provoke** Me to My very face . . . (vs 5) people who say 'keep away; don't come near me, for I am scared of You'. Such people are a smoke in God's nostrils.

Balance

What I started to notice all through Isaiah was how upset God was/is with His people, but how every punishment or curse or complaint is balanced with a plea or a promise of His love, kindness, compassion towards His people who seek Him. As Paul says in Romans: “Behold, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

Look again at ch 65 : 13- 15

My servants will eat	But you will go hungry
My servants will drink	But you will go thirsty
My servants will rejoice	But you will be put to shame
My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts	But you will cry out form anguish of heart and wail form brokenness of spirit
To His servants He will give another name	The Sovereign LORD will put you to death

It reminds me of Deut 28– the blessings and the cursings. God always seem to offer both together – mercy and truth/goodness and severity.

Lessons

So far, I have learnt:

1. I am wretched and miserable, stubborn and rebellious
2. God is full of love and tenderness, and He desperately wants to help me

So, what is my response? Should I “continue in sin that grace may abound?”

“You come to help those who gladly do what is right, who remember Your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, You were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags . . . our sins sweep us away. There is no one who calls upon Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and do not remember our sins forever. Oh look upon us, we pray, for we are all Your people.” (Isaiah 64:5-9)

The other thing that struck me about God working in the lives of people was their response to Him. Look at

vs 5 “**gladly do** what is right” “who **remember** God’s ways” vs7 “**call** on His name” “**strives** to lay hold of” God

ch 65: 10 “for **My** people who **seek** Me”

vs13 “my **servants**”

As Paul said in Romans: “if we continue in His goodness...” (Romans 11:22)

Responsibility ... and action

This is a call to action. I have responsibility. No more wallowing in self-pity and misery. After lots of prayer and learning and tears, I was finally able to say with Hezekiah (ch 38:17) - **and really mean it:**

“Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In Your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; You have put all my sins behind Your back. For the grave cannot praise You . . . but the living, they praise You, as I am doing today.”

And with Job

"Mine ears had **heard** of You, but now mine eyes have **seen** You. Therefore I repent in dust and ashes." (42:6)

Isn't it amazing how stubborn we can be when God is working with us, and people like Hezekiah and Job (and me) have to be brought to the brink of death before we realise how privileged we are to have God as our Father. We were walking in darkness and saw a great light. We were living in the land of the shadow of death, and a light dawned. God increased our joy . . . for unto US, a child was born and a son is given, and **he is my wonderful counsellor, and he is my prince of peace.**

And now I can say with Isaiah, “I **delight greatly** in the LORD: my soul **rejoices greatly** in my God”. Or as the Message Bible puts it “I will sing for joy in God, **I explode in praise from deep in my soul**”

I have come to a place where I love and serve and enjoy Him for His sake, not mine. I love Him because He first loved me. I want to know Him and make Him happy.

“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love”. Gal 5:6

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