

God's Lovingkindnesses

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 63:7-14

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If you will, look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 63 and I want to read for you from verse 7 down to verse 14 and speak with you about the Lord's lovingkindnesses. The Lord's lovingkindnesses. Here in Isaiah 63:7, he says,

7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses [notice the plural] of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. 8 For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. 9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. 10 But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. 11 Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? 12 That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? 13 That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? 14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

Now, for most people when you announce a title such as I have or a subject as what we have here, "The Lord's Lovingkindnesses," they get all sentimental. They think, "Oh good, this will be a soft message. This will be one that will make me feel good." But dear friends, I want us to consider what it is for the Lord to exercise mercy and grace toward sinners such as we are. It's not an emotional subject. It's not one that's just built on sentiment, but rather on truth. It has to be. When you consider that this is one of the attributes of God, his lovingkindness and his goodness and his love, people like to hear of that but it's never at the expense of his truth. It's never at the expense of his justice. And what brings comfort to my heart even as this portion is designed to give glory to God for his lovingkindness and for his mercy and his grace, is that it is built upon the foundation

of him being just and holy and having worked out a way, if I could put it that way, whereby he can show mercy to sinners such as we are and still be just; that this is a legal, this is a righteous lovingkindness that he speaks of here.

But first of all in verse 7, we see the revelation of God's goodness as God. Now, if I had to fault preachers that aim at exalting Christ in the Gospel today and I include myself, it is in not preaching enough about the love of God. You know, when the winds blow one way in a sailboat you have to lean hard the other way and in many ways we hear so much about God being love and God loving sinners, we hear that sort of message being declared that we tend to lean hard the other way and just talk about his holiness and his justice and his wrath. But when it comes to this matter of salvation as I've just read this particular portion for you, the reason, the foundation for which God even saves a sinner or looks upon a sinner is because he is love and because of his kindnesses and his mercy toward sinners such as we are, but never at the expense of his holiness.

I've used the example before of a wheel that has these spokes. You see, every attribute of God is equally important. You can't raise one above the other, just like you can't have one spoke longer the other, one shorter than the other. The wheel to be balanced and perfect has to have equal distribution of those spokes. Then you've got the hub of that wheel. The problem that most people have in describing God is that they put in the hub of that wheel the love of God and therefore they talk of that love. You can explain God's mercy in accord with his love. You can explain God's grace in relationship to his love, all of those things being equal, but where men have difficulty then is explaining how a God of love could send people to hell. It falls apart when you get to his justice now and therefore they wrestle with it and the wheel gets out of balance. But the reality is the hub of this wheel, if I may use that expression and it really is biblical. You've heard of Ezekiel's wheel, that was a vision given to Ezekiel described as a wheel that in that wheel is described all the character of God. But what is central to that wheel is not the love of God, it's the holiness of God. Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.

Do you realize that in the book of Acts and you can take your concordance and look this up, in all of the messages that the apostles preached, the word "love" does not appear one time. Look it up. That's not what is central to the message of the Gospel. It is the justice of God. It's the holiness of God and it has everything to do with how God can be just and justify sinners. If you have the answer to that question, you have the Gospel, because he does not lower his standards.

So when you put holiness in that hub and certainly that's what we've been seeing all the way through this book of Isaiah, is the holiness of God and his justice and how he cannot just overlook sin. We see it even in this portion that I read for you where it speaks of his love, yes, but look at verse 10, "they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit." You say, "What's the answer? Does he, like a grandfather in a rocking chair, just sit there and watch the kids disobeying and think, 'Oh well, they're just going through a phase'?" No, that has to be dealt with. You say, "Well, where was it dealt with?" Well, it's in the words as you see in verse 9, "the angel of his presence saved them," and you see in verse 9, "in his love and in his pity he redeemed them." The word "love" and "pity" in Scripture can

never stand alone with regard to God, it always has to be in connection with a just redemption and payment for sin. "And he bare them and carried them all the days of old." You put holiness in that hub and it explains every other attribute of God. We can understand how a holy God can send people to hell, that's why they go to hell. He loves his righteousness and will not in any way diminish that righteousness in order to save a sinner but also it explains his love. It's not that just God is love or God is loving. He is loving, he is love in accord with his holiness and his justice.

So that's what I want you to see here. That presents a perfect balance with every attribute. His grace is a holy grace. His love is a holy love. His wrath is a holy wrath. You see, there's not one of those attributes, his truth is a holy truth, not one of those attributes that you could state that does not fit with his holiness. But here we see him speaking particularly to his people and that's important as well. It's not that God loves everybody the same. The Scriptures clearly declare, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." There is no such thing as a general love of God that you find in Scripture. If he loves a sinner, he has loved them righteously; he has loved them specifically, particularly, redemptively, graciously.

A lot of different ways of describing that love but we see that here in verse 7 where Isaiah, by the Spirit, declares, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD." Another word that you could use there is "mercies." The lovingkindnesses of the Lord, the mercies of the Lord. When you stop and think about what "mercy" means and it's used a little later in this verse where it says, "which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses." The word "mercy" is God withholding from the sinner what that sinner deserves. That's a mercy. His being lovingly kind to them in spite of their rebellion and I believe that's why verse 10 is there. It's to remind us that none of this is merited.

I have a friend who has now passed on, but people used to get aggravated with him because every time you asked him how he was doing, he always responded, "Better than I deserve." Better than I deserve and at first I thought he was just saying that to be different, but he let it be known and let me know that it wasn't just a trite statement for him and as I reflected upon him, I thought, "You know, it's a good answer." When anything that we have we consider that we have, it's better than we deserve and certainly that's mercy.

That's what we see here, this lovingkindness that, notice, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD." You see, that's the problem today, everybody is talking about their supposed lovingkindness. There is nothing in us that is loving or kind. We're rebels by nature. It's just covered. You see somebody smiling today and patting you on the back and flattering you, down inside they probably know that if they really told you to your face what they thought you'd probably start a fight so they kind of flatter you and talk about the weather and how nice you look. It might be they're jealous, who knows.

But that's man's nature but here with reference to God, we see his lovingkindness that is exalted and the praises of the Lord according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us. I

don't care whether it's your health or temporal blessings, it is bestowed. That word "bestowed" means "given as a gift." It's not earned.

"And the great goodness toward the house of Israel." But more importantly, not just speaking here of temporal blessings, how is it that God has been pleased to manifest his lovingkindness to sinners such as we are? If you look over in Titus 3 it parallels this particular verse and let's just see what it says here in Titus 3:2, "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men." You stop and think about that: why? Because we're no better than anybody. Why would we have anything evil to say of somebody else knowing the evil of our own heart? That's what verse 3 declares. "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." In other words, that's our nature. There is no "us and them" here. Anytime you read these descriptions in Scripture, if the Lord has dealt in your heart in lovingkindness and mercy, you acknowledge readily that such is my case, that I am of that nature.

But look at verse 4. I love the "buts" of Scripture, one small three letter word, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." So the end here is eternal life, but go back from there: how does one enter into that eternal life? Well, verse 6, through that grace "that was abundantly shed on us through Jesus Christ," notice, "our Savior." It took a saving act of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what was the foundation of that saving act? Well, it was that kindness and love of God, our Savior, toward sinners such as we are. But not by works of righteousness which we have done but what? According to his mercy he saved us. And it speaks there of "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The Spirit's work in a sinner is just evidence of Christ having paid that sinner's debt and thereby causing that one to be made an heir according to the hope of eternal life.

So that's the goodness of God. That's the revelation of God's goodness. That's true throughout all of Scripture. I'm not of those who divide up the Bible and say, "Well, the Old Testament was one thing and the New Testament another." We're reading the Old Testament here. We're reading in Isaiah 63:7, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord," and it speaks there of his mercy. Same Spirit that was in Isaiah was in Paul in writing to Titus. One faith, one hope, one Gospel, one Lord. No distinction and so that is what is revealed of God.

Now, coming back to Isaiah 63, we see two aspects of this lovingkindness, of God's goodness. One is the goodness that is from God where it describes there "according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us." So that's the source of all goodness, the source. Every good and perfect gift is from above so we see that and specifically not toward everybody. It says there in verse 7, "and the great goodness toward the house of Israel." Even there it's difficult to describe the depths of God's mercy and goodness and grace.

Here it's described as "the great goodness toward the house of Israel." Who is the house of Israel? Well, representatively it was that people that he had chosen unto himself and would preserve for Christ's sake.

You ask, "Why on earth did God ever preserve such a rebellious nation as Israel?" To bring his Son through that nation. He would come into this world and identify with the chief of sinners. It should not surprise us when men fall. If you get surprised when others fall, it makes me question what you see of yourself. I have a little grandson and as excited and energetic as he is running, you know that sooner or later he's going to fall flat on his face. That's what we do. Then they get back up and go again. We fall because we are fallen creatures and if God has set his love upon us, bestowed, you see this goodness is from God, then he has done it in spite of who we are. He's done it in spite of, without condition, to us being or somehow pleasing him. He does it because he is good. That's that goodness that is from God and so we bless him for those mercies that we enjoy that have been bestowed on us, his true Israel.

But secondly here, you notice that it is a goodness that is in God. You can't read this without seeing it. "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD." It's not just what he bestows but it's who he is and if we ever wonder how it is that God could ever be merciful and gracious to a sinner such as we are, think about who he is. This lovingkindness and this goodness is in him and therefore he bestows it upon his people.

There at the end of verse 7 it says, "according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses." His in the sense of this is his nature; this is his character, so to be loving and to be kind and gracious and merciful unto whom he will. There is the part that men take exception with. But if it's his and it's in his nature, is he not just? Can he not do with his own what he will? That's the message that we have here.

But the second part of this message that I want you to consider where I want us to finish and dwell upon is just how. How does God? So we know that he is kind. He is good toward sinners that he himself has chosen, but how does he manifest that kindness and goodness? And I would say, first of all, that it is unconditional. It is unconditional. This is an area where the Lord has to teach us because even now we still think somehow God's love is conditional. Maybe it's because of how we were raised. Maybe it's because of how we raised our children. Do you realize we preach God's love being unconditional but we're the most conditional people even with regard to our children or those around us. "If you do this, then I'm going to reward you." That's how we raise our kids. "But if you disobey, look out." We take it away. So a child is raised really under a confused message. On the one hand we bring them to sit and listen to the Gospel when we speak of God and his unconditional love toward his children and yet when we get them home, we're like a works preacher. We're reprimanding them when they do something bad and rewarding them when they do something good. It's just like Pavlov's dog getting them to do the right thing and bark when they're supposed to, but that doesn't change the nature. We still need God to intervene in his grace and his mercy.

But the thing about God that we see here is that this is an unconditional grace, unconditional lovingkindness, unconditional mercy. Look at it in verse 8, "For he said, Surely they are my people." Surely. In other words, that regardless of their rebellion, regardless of those times when I've had to turn my face against them, yet they are my people. You know, whom the Lord loves he chastens and that's how I see this as in verse 10 when it describes their rebellion and vexing his Holy Spirit; he was turned to be their enemy and he fought against them. That's his chastening. That's what David spoke of in Psalm 23, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." What's a rod and a staff for but to correct a sheep? "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the one I love."

Yet he makes this clear forceful statement in verse 8, "Surely they are my people." Nothing is going to dissuade God and cause him to cast them off, those that he has purposed from eternity shall be his people. That's a blessed truth right here in my own heart as the Lord has taught me, that he would consider me in that way as being his. They are children of his covenant, that covenant that he made with his Son even before they were born and purposed to save them for Christ's sake. God is not daily looking down to see how you're behaving and, "Well, today you're doing a pretty good job so I think I'll show you some favor. But oh no, you've disobeyed, so now I've got to withdraw that favor." God is not reacting to what we do. He has from eternity purposed to save us in his Son, given us to his Son. Christ has paid that sin debt. There is not an ounce of wrath in God's chastening of his children. It's all based upon love and mercy and grace. Whom he loves he chastens. So this is what we see here.

Now, when it says there in verse 8, "children that will not lie." Well, we're liars by nature so you say, "What does that mean?" Well, as the Lord deals tenderly and graciously in the heart of one of his own and draws them to himself, they cannot give the glory and the honor to somebody else. They will not lie in attributing any glory to themselves for obedience. They will not lie in giving honor to themselves or to any other. The honor and the glory belongs unto the Lord alone and that's how he deals with them based upon that covenant.

If you look in Acts 3, until the Lord is pleased to reveal himself in the heart of a sinner, that's what they do. They believe a lie. They follow after a lie. But when it pleases God to reveal Christ in you, then he draws you to himself in truth. The opposite of a lie is the truth. And we see that our acceptance with God is wholly based upon his lovingkindness and mercy and grace in Christ Jesus. That's how he manifests this lovingkindness.

Here in Acts 3 and you can see this was Peter's sermon, in verse 22, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you." Now, notice little words but there in verse 22, a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you or for you, on your behalf. You see, this is the unconditional love of God that he would raise up one to be the substitute of his people to come and accomplish that righteousness. He doesn't set it aside, but to do this on their behalf.

In verse 23, "And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Any that make any other type of profession other than Christ and him alone are objects of God's wrath. It means that he has left them to themselves and they will perish.

Verse 24, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." So first he spoke of Moses in verse 22, that's the law, and then he speaks here of Samuel and all those that follow after. All of them have likewise foretold of these days. Of whose days? Well, read on, verse 25, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you." There it is. Every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. "In turning away every one of you from his iniquities." How did he turn everyone away from his iniquities? Well, he took the iniquity away. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Lifted it up. Put it upon himself. And if he has taken it away, that means there remains nothing but mercy; there remains nothing but lovingkindness and grace to show to his people.

So we see here, again coming back to Isaiah 63, this is an unconditional love. Secondly, it's a love that undergirds every attribute of God. You can see in verse 9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them," and notice, "in his love and in his pity he redeemed the." So how, again answering the question, how is it that God shows mercy? Well, it undergirds every attribute of his working in salvation. It undergirds their redemption. "He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." So we see here that it's in his love and mercy that he acts.

If you go over to Romans 8, better yet let's look in Ephesians 1. I think this is a clear verse to underscore this point here. Ephesians 1, again in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame." Now here's the part where I want us to consider how the mercy and kindness and grace of God undergirds everything that he does in this matter of saving his people. Most people read verse 4 as if there's a period where it says, "we should be holy and without blame before him in love," period. Then they go on and read as if there's a new thought, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." You've had people like myself that have said if God has chosen those that he will save and he has already predestinated those he will save, where is the love? That's the kind of reasoning. When they reason that way, it's because they hate God. That right there shows they hate God, that they will not have him to choose his bride, choose whom he will join himself to. Can you imagine doing that with you in life? "Why did you choose that particular woman to be your wife? Why didn't you choose the others?" We don't reason that way with men. In love that one was chosen.

Here is how we need to read it. Notice there is no period. Read it this way: that we should be holy and without blame before him in love having predestinated us unto the adoption

of children by Jesus Christ. That's how it needs to be read. In fact, the Scripture divisions, the verses, were put in by editors. That ought to be all one verse: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, "To the praise and glory of his grace wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

So we see this mercy, how it is shown, how it undergirds everything, who God is in his saving, but the final point I'd have you to look at coming back to Isaiah 63, again answering this question: how does God show mercy? He shows it unconditionally; it is the very essence of his character to do so. Yet, thirdly, I'd have you see here it is always through a mediator. Notice in verse 9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." When you see "the angel of his presence saved them," we know no mortal angel can save, not in the sense of saving of the soul or eternally saving a sinner. The problem is perhaps with the word "angel." It simply means "the messenger." The messenger of his presence. That's none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is that messenger. He is that angel of whom God spoke to Moses.

If you look over in Exodus 23:20 and I wish we had another hour to look at this, but time is fleeting, but take a look at this in Exodus 23:20. Wherever you see the Lord sending this angel before and here I believe it is put correctly, they have capitalized it and that's the way it ought to be over here in Isaiah 63, the Angel, capital Angel, capital Messenger of his presence. But here he says, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared." Do you see that? That's none other than Christ. That's Christ in his preincarnate, before he became a man, presence among the people there in the Old Testament.

Look in Exodus 23:21, "Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him." There is no mortal angel, there is no created being that could ever grant forgiveness of sins or in whose presence and whose person God has put his name but the Lord Jesus Christ. He is that one. He is God with us and it is his voice that sinners are to hear.

"Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not." How do you provoke him? Well, in not bowing to him. In not seeing him as God's Savior. But when Christ walked on this earth and that voice was heard from heaven that said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," that means that all of God's favor is in him.

And that's what it is as you come back here to Isaiah 63:9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted," does that not remind you of Isaiah 53? He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. "And the angel of his presence saved them." In Christ all of the Godhead dwelt bodily. All that God has purposed to do for the salvation of his people in his kindness and in his love was to be accomplished through this Messenger, the Messenger of the covenant. "In his love and in his pity," it says in verse 9, "he redeemed them." You can't leave any part out of that when you consider God's lovingkindness.

That's why I come back to how I started. This is not just a touchy-feely, feel good about God, God feels good about me. It's like that hymn someone wrote, you know, walking through the garden and feeling his presence in the flowers and the dew and all that stuff. That is not how God has manifested his lovingkindness. And I would say this to you on days that are dark where you don't even feel his presence. I supposed if I asked for raising of hands you'd have to say that is our common lot. Many days we get up and we don't feel saved. Well, thankfully salvation is not a feeling. It's based upon the truth that God is a merciful God and a gracious God and in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has been afflicted with our affliction and God's presence is in him. God was in that sacrifice. He never took his eyes off his Son and he loved his Son to the end, still loves his Son. He never ceased loving his Son even with the sin of his people being put upon him. He loved him for being that sacrifice and in his love and in his pity, it says he redeemed them. That's how those two go together. Those whom he loves, he redeems.

So it's not a loving God that sends sinners to hell, it's a righteous God. A loving God saves sinners and he saves every one upon whom he has set his love. You can mark that down, and if you're an object of his love, that love brought the Lord Jesus Christ to pay the greatest debt for your sin and to redeem you.

Then it says in verse 9, you see, as great as the redemption is, look at the rest, "and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." We kind of read the story of Israel as if they were different than any of us and in your self-righteousness you say, "How could God put up with them?" Well, it says there that he bare them. You can read it another way, "he bare with them," just like he bares with any of his own and doesn't cast us into hell. The only reason he doesn't is because Christ has paid that debt and he is faithful and just to forgive for Christ's sake and I'm thankful it's that way.