

Provider and Protector

Book of Isaiah
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Bible Text: Isaiah 54:11-17
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The words of that hymn, "O Worship the King," that last verse is a fit introduction to what we're going to be considering in Isaiah 54 in verses 11 through 17, my text, if you'd like to be turning there already. But it describes here in Isaiah 54, just how frail we are, even as the writer of that hymn said, "Frail children of dust and feeble as frail." I don't believe we ever in this life in this flesh will get beyond that. All it takes is for the Lord to strike us with an illness or maybe not even an illness, put us in a frame of mind that would lead to a deep depression, a dark hole in our minds and hearts, unless he kept his hand on us. You say, "Well, why does he do that to his children?" It's to teach us our constant need of him. So we're going to be seeing that in this message, how God is for his children that Provider and that Protector in his mercy and the hymn writer penned it well in the hymn that we just sang, "In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail." Scriptures are replete with warnings of never putting confidence in this flesh for anything. I don't care how cleaned up it is, it isn't. It's like a poison asp ready to strike at any time. But in Thee, our Lord Jesus Christ, and you can see how as we sang it, "Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend." All of those words describe this one in whom we trust and never has any found him to fail. We fail daily but not him.

But you notice and Bob and I were talking about this, how the Lord brings us through trials and afflictions and here in Isaiah 54:11, that's who is addressed here, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." There are times when the Lord will bring you through those and none of us here would ever mark those days on our calendar and say, "I think today is going to be a day of affliction. I think today I'm going to make this a day of tempest." We spend our lives trying to run from such days. We pray against them in our flesh. We say, "Lord, keep us from temptation." So why does the Lord bring us through them? As Bob and I were talking, it's that we might know our need of him, desperate need of him, but also through them to come to see just how merciful he is in not giving us what we deserve. Do you realize that's what mercy is, the difference between mercy and grace? Mercy is God withholding his hand from giving you what you really deserve. Grace is God giving you his favor that you in no way deserve. But in both cases, he proves himself faithful.

So as we read these verses, I pray that that introduction will help prepare the way. Here in Isaiah 54, beginning with verse 11,

11 O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. 12 And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. 13 And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. 14 In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. 15 Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. 16 Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. 17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

We have here what Peter describes in his epistle as exceeding and precious promises and I believe they are made to the church. In the Old Testament, it was not all Israel that was of Israel but there was a seed according to promise and that seed served as a type and picture of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ for which he would come and pay the sin debt and work out a righteousness in his time that would once for all, in that one satisfactory death, pay the debt and through that righteousness be imputed, and what I have read for you here and what you see in my text is a forward-looking to that day and that time.

But we can see just in the reading here the need. It all begins with need. You know, why don't people today trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? They don't see the need. They give lip service to a Jesus, they will give lip service to this word, but if you were to truly analyze their profession, it's not based on need. Many people do what they do for several reasons. One, because someone told them so and that's what's wrong with so-called childhood evangelism today, because men are taught to get children to make a profession at an early age. I don't know a kid that is going to not do what the teacher asks them to do because they want to please the teacher. So if you get them aside in a little Sunday school class and tell them, "Now, what Jesus wants is for you to bow your head right now and say this prayer after me, 'Dear Lord, I'm a sinner.' Go ahead and repeat it." And you've got Johnny repeating these words and then the teacher says, "Now, Johnny, from here forward you're a child of God." What child is not going to believe that teacher? And they spend their lifetime then believing that because of some profession they made as a little kid and trusting the word of that teacher, not wanting to disrespect that teacher, they have blindly condemned themselves even further in what is a false profession. I'm thankful that the Lord never leaves his own in that state of mind. If they are truly the Lord's, he will cause them to see the error. He will cause them in his time truly to be afflicted and to be brought to see what it is to be a sinner and that heart exposed before the Lord and that sinner caused to cry out in truth for mercy. That's what we pray for. We pray for a true work of the Lord.

That's what the Lord was doing here with Israel. There was a lot of profession. They had the temple, they had the sacrifices, they had the priesthood, but it was all mechanical. It was programs. It was self-appointed prophets going forth. So the Lord humbled that nation, took them into captivity and this is all that Isaiah was foreseeing when the Lord would completely decimate, not only the country, but that temple. He caused it to be destroyed and left them in desolation for 70 some years and there were many that, even after the 70 years, their children when they went back into the land, were brought back in and went right back to the same idolatry. But there with those like Daniel or Zechariah or some of these that the Lord raised up in that day when they were truly taught of the Lord and they saw his hand, were afflicted and yet the Lord did not leave them in that affliction but caused their minds and hearts to be turned toward the remedy which is Christ and his death.

Read the book of Lamentations by Jeremiah. He was called the weeping prophet. He wept when others did not weep for themselves. You said, "What made the difference?" Well, it was the Spirit's work in his heart causing him to see his desperate need. You go back and read Lamentations, he took their sin, the sin of that nation as his own just as our Lord did. I often say that if the Lord did not care for my soul, I certainly would not have cared for it. If he had not taken my sin debt to himself and paid it, I would have split hell wide open based upon what I know about myself because if you're like me, and I know your are, we're pretty proud of ourselves. We don't think of ourselves as sinners, we think of ourselves as good. That's our nature and yet nothing could be further from the truth.

So that's why the Lord afflicts and it's not a lesson that you learn one time. He continues to bring affliction, trouble, temptation, into our lives, to constantly teach us our need of him and it's to these that this word is addressed. It's like what the Lord said there in Matthew 11, "Come unto me," who? Not everybody. Some preachers make that a general invitation, "You see, he's saying everybody come." It's not. Read it. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." There are a bunch of people out in this world that still aren't finished laboring. They trust in the work of their hands. They believe they are doing something for the Lord. They are zealous. They are out knocking on doors every night of the week. I've driven by a few congregations on off nights, when I say off nights, it means it's not Wednesday night. Even some places, you can go by and there is something going on every night. They have got their workers out there. These are the worker bees and they really feel like by what they do they are advancing the kingdom. They're still not tired. They have not been brought to see that none of that in any way advances God's kingdom. They think they are doing God a favor. But, I'll tell you, if the Lord ever lays you low, you're going to see that your best works on your best day was nothing but vanity. Altogether vanity is the way the preacher put it in Ecclesiastes. Vanity, vanity.

But he causes us to see that when he afflicts the soul and that's who this word is addressed to, the afflicted, the poor, ones tossed with tempest, is the way it's put there in verse 11 of Isaiah 54. Think of a ship that is driven from her anchors by a storm and carried out into the sea where it is ready to be swallowed up by the waves, absolutely no

control of what's going to happen, take place. That's the picture. I love the Bible for this reason: it's full of pictures. If you don't understand the words, think about the pictures. And in a condition here of not being comforted. Anybody here ever been there? It doesn't seem, no matter how you think or when people say, "Well, just be positive," it's like, "Wow, there is no comfort to be had in this place." The Lord takes it all away and it's amazing how quickly it can be gone. Yesterday you were on top of the world and today, it's like you're in a dark hole and yet it's the Lord who does these things and ordains them, that we would never, ever presume upon his mercies for what we have and that we ever look to him.

Now, as I mentioned, here Isaiah was forward-looking to what would be the condition of the Jews in Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar would come and take them away. These were dark times and yet, as I mentioned to you, I believe it really has to do with what characterizes how God has purposed his church to be in this world. Before our Lord went to the cross, he told his disciples, "In the world you shall have tribulation," and so while we would not necessarily look for trouble or look for tribulation, yet the Lord has purposed it in his time. It's like one preacher said, "Right now you may not be thinking you need this message, but save the recording. Save the cd, because one day you will." It's not a matter of if but when. The Lord is going to deal with us in such a way that we put no confidence in the flesh.

But what does the Lord use here to comfort? As you read on there in verse 11, here's what I want us to see: the exceeding precious promises of our Lord. We see our need of him to be a Protector and Provider, but the rest of this is nothing but precious promises of our Lord. Notice how verse 11, right after the word "not comforted," what does it say? "Behold." I love that word. Behold. The beholds of Scripture. This is to get our attention and notice the very first word and this is the Lord speaking, he says, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires." When the Lord is pleased to comfort, you will be comforted. That's what Bob read for us in 2 Corinthians 1, "Blessed be the God who comforts us with all comforts," whereby we have been comforted.

We're going to run into our brothers and sisters, it might be physically but a lot of times by email in this day and age. People can get a hold of you pretty quickly. A dear sister down in South Texas this morning that I was just getting ready to close out and come and then I see an email pop up. That quickly people are in contact, Facebook today. The Lord causes us as we communicate with different ones over time to know who are his and who aren't and many times my communications with people, you know, no one really seeks out a pastor when things are going good. It's usually when there is a problem, when the phone rings and you get an email, someone is troubled. But, you know, as the Lord brings people across our path, number 1, we can identify with them. One of the very first words that the Lord has taught me is to tell somebody, "I understand. I understand." Why? I'm of the same nature. The trials and afflictions that the Lord has brought you through many times the Lord will use to be a comfort and a help to another. But, you know, it's not your experience or testimony that is going to bring any comfort, it's the Lord speaking a word of comfort. If they are the Lord's, he will. He will.

So that's what I see here. "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires." As you look at the church of the Lord Jesus Christ down through the history of this world, it has always been a church which has been maligned. It has never been in the majority. A lot of people like the idea that churches are spreading all over the world, that's just religion. It's like in the population of national Israel growing after it came out of Egypt, but even the Lord said, "Not all Israel is of Israel." Christ in his parables of the kingdom pointed out that the kingdom would grow and there would be an expansion of the kingdom, but within that kingdom of God's sovereign rule over this world, there is what? Wheat and there are tares and don't tares grow faster than wheat? You sow a little garden and just leave it alone. Sow a seed and leave it alone and what happens? Weeds will come up and just take over that thing. You've got to get out there and cultivate. You have to protect the wheat, the seed, otherwise the tares would take it over.

That's the way this world is and the Lord has purposed it so. You remember there in Matthew 13 when the disciples said, "Well, let us go and tear up the tares. Let's weed this garden." The Lord said, "No, let both grow together lest in going after the tares you pull up some of the wheat." We have no way of knowing. I think we sometimes think we do, "Oh, there is a reprobate if I've ever seen one." We kind of reason that way and the next thing you know the Lord has turned their heart to Christ. Or how many like Judas apparently were the Lord's. He certainly had his colleagues fooled. There wasn't a one of the disciples that knew that he was the son of perdition that the Lord was talking about until his day was manifest. There are a lot of people that come and sit and will say, "Amen," to a Gospel message and do it for some time, sitting under the Gospel, and apparently are the Lord's by their profession and yet when time comes, they go away and they prove themselves to be Judases. That's why we cannot deal with this. But what I want you to see is it's the Lord here that weeds his garden. It's the Lord that deals with sinners as he will. The question is, "Am I the Lord's or not?" There's the question. "How do I respond? How do I deal with the afflictions and trials that he brings into my life? Does it cause me to see my need? Does it cause me to cry unto him and seek his mercy and look to his blood and righteousness alone or am I like all other idolaters running this way and that way looking for a remedy in the flesh?"

When the Lord establishes his church, then it will be established and that's what I see here. "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." I had to do my homework here because I'm not a jeweler, I'm not a precious stone man, and so I as I read over these I thought, "Well, is it worth delving into?" Well, it is. Every word of Scripture is there for a reason and if we don't understand why it is there, how it is they are, we need to do a little study to find out. Here are some things that I found out that I did not know. When he is talking about "laying thy stones with fair colours and thy foundations with sapphires and making thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones," he's talking about laying a foundation here, not in some earthly Jerusalem. I don't believe there has ever been a time or ever will be a time when you could actually walk to Jerusalem, go to Jerusalem and go about the city and see this naturally fulfilled. But certainly when we

consider what the old Jerusalem was, as it lay there in a heap, in rubbish and completely decimated, there is a picture of the fall. That's what we are in Adam, that pristine figure of what Adam was as a man before the fall and what he became as far as spiritually being separated from God the Father, is pictured here in Jerusalem of old having been destroyed, decimated, run over. There was a fall and yet the promise here of its rebuilding and its foundations being laid with sapphires and windows of agates and gates of carbuncles and the borders of pleasant stones. This is a picture of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a picture of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that foundation which God has laid in which no man can lay than that which is laid of which Paul spoke about. Some come and try and build upon it with wood, hay and stubble and the Lord removes that, burns it up. I liken that to false professors that come, you know, you preach to them for a while and they appear to be precious stone but in reality they turn out to be wood, hay and stubble. The Lord sends a fiery trial. Read that in 1 Corinthians 3 sometimes. It's not talking about a final judgment but the Lord with this earthly church will send a fiery trial to burn up wood, hay and stumble.

In all of the years that the Lord has enabled me to preach the Gospel, I'm not talking about preaching back in false religion before the Lord was pleased to teach me, but I'm talking about since it pleased God to reveal Christ in me in preaching, somewhere around 1984. I had already been preaching for a long time but when it pleased God to reveal Christ in me, I have seen an awful lot of people come and go. When I first, as the Lord dealt with me, I first was under the thought and impression that if I'll just stand up and preach the Gospel, that people will want to hear it. They will come flocking. Well, people come flocking but not for the Gospel. They like you, they like your manner, you're friendly, they like other people in the congregation and so for a while they'll sit there and listen. They'll endure until one day they all of a sudden really hear what you're saying and that's like a fiery trial. It will send them flying. They will run away.

But I thank God for that. As difficult as it has been over the years to see acquaintances and ones that have been very close to me turn heel and go another way and today are sitting in churches and I say that loosely, but congregations where the Gospel is not being preached and they are not in the least bit troubled. That tells me they never did hear, else they wouldn't be sitting there. Else they couldn't endure. That's how the Lord takes care of his work. That's how he takes care of his business. But having said that, I know it's still possible for somebody to sit their whole lifetime under the true Gospel message and still be lost and it won't be revealed until the day of judgment when the true fire will test every man's work. By that it means that if they had any confidence in themselves, it will be all burned up and them with it. There is only one work, there is only one foundation on which God is built and that's what's described here by these precious stones.

If you look back in 1 Chronicles 29 and we may not get much further than this but that's all right, we'll come back to this. It's one of the things I like about just preaching through the Scriptures, you can mark with a pencil and come back to it. In 1 Chronicles 29 when David himself, the Lord said he could not, would not build his temple. It was given to Solomon to build it, but he contributed as the Lord enabled him. In 1 Chronicles 29:1, "Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom

alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God." As you think of that picturing the work of Christ, that's what is being typified here, but the Lord would do it. He said, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set," and then, "glistening stones." Again, the Scriptures are so picturesque. Over here in Isaiah 54, they're called "pleasant stones." So clearly to me, this reference that we see here of a foundation being laid with these pleasant stones, the border is being laid, it's a picture of the church of Christ. It's a picture of Christ in his people. That's what the temple represented and why David was so careful and why Scripture is so careful to identify each part is because each part distinguishes something of the character of Christ and his people. That's why I believe we need to slow down sometimes and read prayerfully these words, even if we don't get further than the word "sapphire," figure out how that typifies the Lord Jesus Christ. In that, it becomes precious. When we talk about exceeding precious promises, it's in the detail, that when the Lord shows you all of a sudden you realize, "Wow, this is a comfort. This is a blessing, not for anything in me but for how it portrays the Lord Jesus Christ." It says there, "glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance." That is certainly the picture that we have here in Isaiah. So is it any wonder that this is a type of Christ? It's a type of him who is the church's foundation and every aspect is important.

Now, let's just come back here to Isaiah 54 and just look in the time remaining at these things. Sapphires, now, I'm going to show my ignorance because I told you when I first read that, my family laughs at me because all flowers are hibiscus. If I don't know what it is, it's hibiscus and they'll hee haw, "No, dad, it's not hibiscus. That's a gardenia." Well, it's like I'll drive down the road and I'll say, "That's a jersey heifer." That's the one thing I know about cattle. "No, that's not. It's a black Angus. Can't you tell the difference?" Well, that's the way I am when it comes to these precious stones. Before I really studied this, if you put a sapphire stone in front of me, I wouldn't have known what it was. I probably would have called it an emerald or something, but interestingly, the sapphire is a deep blue stone. Blue in color. Actually, when I looked it up on the internet, I saw some pretty rings, pretty colors, pretty stones. I thought, "Man, that's what that is."

But the thing about it, it was described as a hard stone and, again, that didn't mean anything to me. They all looked hard to me but evidently there is hard and there is soft, but this particular stone is found naturally in sediment which I found interesting, and yet being a hard stone, is resistant to being eroded. That just opened up to me. When it pertains to Christ, how is that foundation? When Christ came and said, "I will build my church," how was he to build his church? He became a man. This was a precious stone, Christ being that precious stone. Blue represents to me that which is from heaven. There is nothing like a blue sky to look out there and to see his glory, so it speaks of his divinity and yet being made lower than the angels, found in the sediment, he humbled himself and became a man. Even in the parable of the precious stone, the priceless treasure that was found, that's Christ. Found in this earth. He was found among men. He was found in a place that no man thought to look. When you think about what it is that we believe

actually about our salvation from a natural mind, it's the most unbelievable thing in the world. It's like one man told me one time, "You mean to tell me you put all your confidence on that Jew that hung there on that cross that day?" That's all he could see. That's all many saw, just a man, and yet I'm thankful that he was a man, but not just any man, a precious stone. When the Lord said, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires," any person that is found in Christ it's because of this one who came, lived, died and rose again.

I love the definition of him being like a hard stone. Isaiah spoke of it. The Lord directed him to speak of a tried stone, a true stone, a precious stone. One that cannot be eroded. Unlike some are saying today that when he took the sin of his people upon himself, that he actually became a sinner. This has been ongoing. There are people deceived by that doctrine. They say that Christ had to be made exactly what we are and so God, when it says he was made sin, made him sinful. I heard a message recently by a supposed great preacher that many follow where he said, "We're not just talking about an imputed sin, but an inherent sin where he was made sinful." That's blasphemous. The sediment in no way in which the sapphire is found, in no way affects the nature of that stone. It is in no way eroded. Christ in coming as a man in no way ceased to be God. When it says he was made flesh, it doesn't mean he ceased to be God. Just as when it says he was made sin, it doesn't mean that he ceased to be sinless, but it was necessary that he become a man and lay down his life and shed his blood. That is the foundation that is described here and those in him identify with him because of his death."

You also see here where we read in verse 12, "And I will make thy windows of agates." Windows are designed to let light in. Is not Christ the light of his people? I had to look up agates as well and I saw some pretty stones and realized that I have been in some areas even like when I was over in Hawaii or up in the state of Washington, areas where there is volcanic rock, that the agates are actual stones that have been beautified through fire and tempered by it. I'm sitting there thinking, "Wow, the windows, the light, that let's in the light, are made with this particular type of stone."

Again, with fair colours. I looked at a few of these, some beautiful colors that were the result of volcanic activity, of fire, a rock. And you think about what our Lord endured, again, in laying this foundation and building this house which is called his church. The beauty of his person as he endured the wrath of his Father on behalf of his people. A tried stone. It was through the fire. He called it that, a baptism of fire which he endured in order to pay the debt for his people.

Then it speaks there of gates of carbuncles. Gates, again, are the freedom to enter in and to come out. They are either closed or they are opened. He opened the way. But, again, looking up the word "carbuncle," it should be no surprise that, again, we see it reflecting our Lord Jesus Christ. A red gemstone. You've got blue and we've got stones tried by fire and now we have a crimson gemstone. In fact, as I read about it, it was interesting what distinguished the red gemstone from others. The commentator, and this is not a Bible commentator, I'm just reading about gems, said that the one thing that distinguishes this gemstone is that it appears to have a natural light to it without reflection. When you look

at it, it's almost as if there is light within it shining out, that's how bright it is. I thought, "Wow, again, a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, the color red representing his shed blood, but the light without reflection, that distinguished brightness and looking upon it that burns from within it." A true picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. Again, a part of his person is described here and that foundation which he has laid in his work and in his death.

And then all the borders. All the borders are of pleasant stones. That word "pleasant," again, the boundaries, that which limits the marks. What I see there is the Lord has a particular people. Now, they are from every tribe, nation and tongue, but where there are borders there are limits. You have property and your line runs to here and then what's over there belongs to somebody else. Here it is describing the borders of his church. I know it's a number that no man can number but it is a number and he knows that number just as I read for you in the Psalm before as we began our worship time. He knows the stars by name. If he knows the stars by name, he knows those that are his and it is for them that he is that Protector. It is for them that he is that Provider. They are the apple of his eye, so much so that Christ said, "All that the Father has given me, I will not lose one."

Now, there is a lot more here and I'm going to have to stop today but when you read on how it is that God purposed to establish his church, when he says there in verse 13, "And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD," he's talking about the children of this church, of this body which is Christ's. It's not everybody's child. There are some that have that false notion and what they call covenant theology and they think if a parent is the Lord's, then that means that their children must of necessity be the Lord's. Not so. But all that are the Lord's are his children. We know that and he will not lose one. They will be taught.

Well, I pray that the Lord will bless that to our hearts and comfort us. If you are the Lord's, there is comfort in knowing who he is and what he has accomplished for sinners such as we are.