

ISAIAH 49

JEHOVAH'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE – PART I

Glorious things had been spoken in the previous chapters, concerning the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon. But when these prophecies were accomplished, some might think that it looked much greater and brighter in the prophecy than in the performance; for the return of only about 40,000 impoverished Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem was not an event that sufficiently corresponded with the height and grandeur of the expressions used in the prophecy. Therefore, Isaiah now comes to show that the prophecy had much further intentions; for it was to have its full accomplishment in a redemption that would as greatly out-perform the words of the prophecy, as the return from Babylon seemed to fall short of them – and this was the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ!

The opening words of this chapter are the utterances of the Messiah Himself, the Servant of Jehovah. Let us examine a few of the qualifications of the Lord's ideal servant, which – by His grace – we may become by imitating our Savior. And the first of these is a *holy motherhood*! “The Lord hath called me from the womb” (verse 1). The greatest and best of men have confessed their indebtedness to their Godly mothers; and not a few have enshrined, in their character and their life, the inspirations which permeated their mothers' natures from early girlhood. Many an obscure woman has ruled the world, through the child in whom her noblest virtues have been reproduced in masculine deeds and words – such as Rachel in Joseph, Jochebed in Moses, Hannah in Samuel, Elizabeth in John the Baptizer, Monica in Augustine, or the mothers of countless preachers and missionaries in their illustrious sons. Mary of Nazareth has attained a fame which could not be won in any other way – namely, through her Son. In the human side of His wondrous nature, it seems that we can trace the Virgin Mother's holy influence on His life – her delicate and quick sympathy, her keen appreciation of true beauty, and her reverent and accurate knowledge of the Scriptures. To make a man who will become His ideal servant, God begins with his mother. How necessary, then, that our young girls should be carefully trained to noble thoughts and pure actions, which shall be manifested later in their lives in the strongest and fairest characters! Few of us realize the immense importance that is attached to the education of our dear children – but especially our little girls. Those who bear the children make our times. She who rocks the cradle rules the world. If the mothers and daughters of our society are won for Christ, then surely they will play a part in raising our next generation to be subjugated to His Gospel!

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Isaiah speaks of the Lord appointing Jesus, the Messiah, to His office as Mediator; and assurance is given of the success of His work of redemption – verses 1-12
- ❖ Encouragement is hereby given to God's afflicted people – verses 13-23
- ❖ Their release from Babylon would be a picture of these blessings – verses 24-26



A second qualification for an ideal servant of the Lord is *incisive speech*. “He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword” (verse 2). Despite the fact that many use their mouths to serve the devil, the tongue of man still has the potential to be an unimaginable influence for good! The tongue is God’s chosen organ for announcing and establishing His Kingdom over the whole earth. Jesus entered His earthly ministry by preaching; and He bade His disciples to go into all the world, and preach His gospel to every creature. And even if we are not an ordained minister, we may still speak to all those who are around us of the great things that the Savior has done for our souls!

Another characteristic for an ideal servant of the Lord is *seclusion*. “In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me” (verse 2). We must all go into the shadow sometimes. But fear not! It is the shadow of God’s hand! There are lessons that can only be learned there, and nowhere else. He has not flung you away as a worthless thing. He is only keeping you hidden away until the moment comes when He can send you upon some errand in which He will be glorified.

Furthermore, the ideal servant of God must be *free from rust* – as “a polished shaft” (verse 2). In archery, a rusted arrow-point will fail to penetrate; it will glance away from the target. A sword or spear that is corroded by rust will not pierce the enemy’s helmet or shield. And rust is best removed by sandpaper or the file. Similarly, we must be kept bright and clean; there must be no rust on our hearts, resulting from inconsistency or permitted sin. To keep us from thus deteriorating is God’s perpetual aim; and for this purpose, He employs the grind of daily life as the sandpaper and file to guard against whatever would blunt the edge or diminish the effect of our work.

But alas! The work of God’s ideal servant is often *plagued by apparent failure!* This heartbreak seems inevitable, even to His most gifted and useful servants. For example, after the great day at Mount Carmel, Elijah threw himself down under a juniper tree and asked that he might die. What can one weak man do against the overwhelming odds of evil in each generation? Thankfully, though, to the Lord’s servant, there is *an assurance of ultimate success!* When Jesus died, failure seemed to be written across His life’s work. But that very cross which seemed to be His supreme disgrace and dethronement became the stepping-stone to His universal dominion! Thus it may be with some who are reading these words. You are passing through times of barrenness, disappointment, and suffering. But let us remember that the Lord is faithful! (verse 7) He will not allow one word to fail, one seed to be lost, one effort to prove useless, or one life to be wasted. By the labors of His servants, the liberation of blind and enslaved souls shall most assuredly be effected! (continued in Part 2)

ISAIAH 49 JEHOVAH'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE – PART 2

This chapter is filled with assurances to the Lord's people concerning their return from Babylonian exile. Many of them were reluctant to leave the familiar scenes of their captivity; they dreaded the dangers and hardships of the journey back home; and they questioned whether the great empire of their captors would ever let them go. Therefore, Jehovah's voice takes on a tone of unusual tenderness; He speaks as only He can. Let us listen to His successive assurances of comfort and compassion; "for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have compassion upon his afflicted."

The Lord leads His people with a shepherd's care! Jehovah is the Shepherd of His people, and "we are the sheep of his pasture." This is the theme that underlies these tender assurances: "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them" (verse 10). What comfort is here! He knows the feeling of our infirmities; He will not overwork us. He will go before us and lead us, but He will suit His pace to ours. The longest day's march shall be adjusted to our capacities, and the severest strain shall not overtax our powers. However rough and difficult your path may be, always remember that you are being led by Him Who has mercy upon you.

The Lord will make obstacles serve His purposes. "I will make all my mountains a way" (verse 11). A study of the geography of Palestine will impress us with the strong barricade of mountains with which God fenced in His people's Promised Land on its southern frontier. Its steep ridges are entirely inaccessible. Similarly, the mountains of Switzerland have sheltered liberty, and those of Afghanistan have made conquest difficult. And there were great mountains between the captive Jews in Babylon and their homeland; yet God does not say that He would remove them, but that they would become a pathway – contributing to the ease and speed of the returning people. We all have mountains in our lives; there are people and things that threaten to hinder our progress in our spiritual life. We think that if these things were only removed, we might live purer, tenderer, and holier lives; and often, we pray for their removal! But these things have been put into our lives as the means to the very graces and virtues for which we have been praying for so long! Let us go back and submit ourselves to Jesus. Let us pray for grace to be a partaker in His patience. When we meet our trials in Him, the mountains that stand between us and our Promised Land shall become our roadway to it.

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God's love is stronger even than that of motherhood! (verse 15) "The love of women" was David's high-water mark of love; and of a woman's love, none is so pure and unselfish and full of patient pity as a mother's! It is in the ecstasy of motherhood that the greatest love of a woman's heart is revealed. Bending over a laughing baby, and returning its kisses; soothing the suffering and wakeful child with calming words and lullabies; giving up nights and days without a murmur or regret; prepared to surrender sleep, food, and even life itself for the little child – that is the love of motherhood. And that love follows us throughout life, although it is very often unreciprocated. Such love is the Lord's! Indeed, a mother's love is a ray from His own tender heart. And if a mother's love is only the ray, what must *His* heart be? We may fall into situations that cause even our dearest loved ones to disown us, but He will not forget us. The fires of love on all human altars may burn to cold white ashes, but His love will always remain the same as it was when we first knew Him!



God treasures the thought of His own children. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," He says (verse 16). Not merely the name of Zion, but *Zion herself* – this is engraved upon the Divine hand! Yes, child of God, your photograph is where He must always behold you – namely, upon His hands and upon His heart. You are never – not even for a moment – out of His thought or hidden from His eye. In fact, you are not merely photographed upon Jesus' hand, but actually engraved there! The graving tool was the spear and the nails of His cross. Glass will not give up the words that are inscribed upon it with a diamond, nor will the onyx-stone let go of its inscriptions; but sooner might they do so, than the hands of Christ!

God's love is strong enough to carry out its purposes. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" (verse 24) Such was the question of despondency asked by the Israelites in Babylonian bondage. But Jehovah had well-calculated His resources! Only let His hand be uplifted, and His people would be restored and brought back to their land – even by the decrees of heathen kings and queens! Do not consider the difficulties of your deliverance, nor brood over your past failures and mighty foes. Look away from these to Jesus! He will become your Mr. Great-heart and your Champion; He will support your cause and carry it through; He will show Himself strong on your behalf. "Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children!"

Lord Jesus, thank You for being the tender Shepherd of Your people, Whom You lead with love and mercy through the rough and difficult pathways of life! Amen.