

God's Forbearance

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William Cowper wrote that song back in the late 1700s. The name looks like it should be pronounced Cowper but it's Cooper. He was a man who lived not too far from John Newton in England and was also a man who suffered his lifetime with depression, in fact, back in the day all they would do was band a towel around a person's head and try to keep them comfortable and they often spent their days in a dark room and such was the lot that William Cowper endured. I'm not sure how it would be diagnosed today by men but he was one that the Lord had taught and in those moments of depression, he would sit down and reflect upon his one hope and that you can tell through this song was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and so these words that the Lord enabled him to pen out of his times of darkness and depression are such a blessing for us to be able to sing today and I trust find comfort in because certainly those words are true of our hope before the Lord.

I'd like to have you look with me in Isaiah 54 and I know we went over some of these verses the last time but I want to start with the first 4 and read down to verse 10 and talk to you about God's forbearance. I will confess right from the beginning that this is a subject far greater than myself as is any subject that I would open up here in God's word to even stand here and open my mouth and endeavor to speak of the glories of Christ, is a subject far greater than myself or yourself. But as the Lord directs, I pray that he would grant us ears to hear and hearts to receive. I have struggled back and forth with how to preach this in simplicity and obviously in truth so much so that all the notes that I put together and have tried to weigh and look at again and again, I have decided to leave at home and wrote down 4 or 5 thoughts here on humbled, that I feel the Lord will direct and help me to just take this word and speak to your heart this morning.

Isaiah 54, beginning with verse 4,

4 Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. 5 For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. 6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. 7 For

a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. 9 For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. 10 For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.

I think you can see why I have been directed to entitle this message "God's Forbearance." Whenever you think of the word "forbearance," think of a debt owed. I know with my kids, we have been kind of hand in hand with them getting through school, student loans, debts, and there are different types of loans that you can get for your kids to help them get through their education experience and sometimes you have to be careful as to what kind of debt you're incurring; there are some options. I find it interesting that for us there were two options: one was called a forbearance debt and another was called a deferment debt. I kind of like the deferment debt which says that no matter how long that debt is owed, it does not accrue interest during the time that you have the debt and then at a certain point if the debt is not paid, then it starts accruing interest. That allows the kids to get through school before they start getting those bills. The forbearance debt says you agree to pay so much each time as time goes along and if something happens that you can't pay it, there will be penalties and fees and interest on top of what you owe. In other words, the lender will be forbearing for that time that you can't pay. The loan won't default but there will be interest and fees added.

You say, "Why are you talking about all this?" Well, we have a debt before a holy God and the debt that we have before a holy God required God's forbearance. It required God to be forbearing until such time as it should be paid and yet God in being forbearing was not just looking the other way and that's why I took the time to read for you from Romans 3 just a few minutes ago because if you go back there, hold your finger here in Isaiah 54, we'll be back, but in Romans 3, this word is used. There were some who may have criticized how God dealt with his people in the Old Testament saying, "Well, they had a debt." Certainly this was Satan's accusation before the Lord with regard to Job, "The only reason he worships you and serves you is because you put a hedge around him." God was forbearing to Job. Satan would accuse the brethren because for him God was just looking the other way. But God is not arbitrary in how he deals with his people. It is true as we read here in Romans 3:25, that he was forbearing with the sins of those of the Old Testament, forbearing with their debt. This word that is used here where it says "through the forbearance of God," is a word which means "to hold back from requiring of that person what is due for a time, for a season, until such time as God would determine that it should be paid."

You'll notice in verse 25, God was forbearing up to the time when Christ paid the debt but once the debt is paid, there is no more need for forbearance because the debt has been paid. The debt goes away once it is paid, and it was paid in full when Christ died.

Verse 24 says that, "Being justified freely." So if you're the Lord's and Christ has paid your debt, you have been justified freely. No penalties or fees incurred in addition to what Christ paid. He paid it in full freely, but notice when, where and how, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." There are some today that say it doesn't matter when, let's just talk about how. No, you can't separate the two. When was your sin debt paid if you're the Lord's? When was mine paid? Well, it's when Christ paid the redemption. Redemption means a ransom has been paid so through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus and it says, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation." A propitiation means a satisfaction. It means a reconciliation and certainly if Christ has paid the sinner's debt, there remains nothing but righteousness to account to their name because the debt has been paid.

Now, you notice when I read it, I paused after "propitiation" because I believe there is a distinction, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation," that relates back to verse 24, "Being justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation." You say, "What part does faith play?" Well, the rest of this applies to what follows, "through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness." By faith in his blood or in his death which only the Spirit can grant a sinner whom Christ has redeemed to look to Christ, you declare his righteousness. That's what faith does. It doesn't justify itself, it declares Christ's righteousness and declares God righteous in how he justifies sinners. Faith is a confession, it's a declaration, it's a setting forth of who God is and what Christ accomplished.

And declares his righteousness, it says, "for the remission of sins that are past." That word "remission" means, literally you could put "overlooking," the passing over of those sins. Christ's death declares now God to be righteous in how all those years he passed over, looked over, was forbearing as it says there, "through the forbearance of God." He was forbearing with their sin. It wasn't that he was looking the other way, but it was he was looking to this time when Christ would pay the debt. It's like, again, coming back to student loans, you set up an agreement when you take out those loans that once the student is done with school, then interest will begin to accrue if that debt is not paid, but until then, there is an overlooking of it. There is a passing by. Now, the bad part about it in human terms is if you don't do anything about it in the meantime, once that clock starts ticking, you've got some debt to pay.

But what we find with regard to Christ is it was always God's purpose and that from eternity, that when Christ would come and he would pay the debt, all of these sins of those of the Old Testament that were his and all of the sins of those since the cross would be paid in one place at one time and satisfied and that's why verse 26 says, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness." There is nobody that will be ever able to accuse God of having saved sinners in an unjust way because Christ's death declares him to be just and it says there, "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Did Abraham believe in Jesus? Absolutely. Christ said, "He saw my day and rejoiced." Did Moses? Absolutely. Moses said, "The Lord will raise up another prophet like unto himself. Hear him." Did Job? Absolutely. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that day shall stand." Did Rahab? Absolutely. That scarlet cord told her of one that would come and pay the

debt. I don't believe we give the Lord the glory due his name for what he was pleased to reveal to these as they looked forward to this day. David and all of them, but God was forbearing with their sin until such time as Christ should come and pay the debt.

If you look back in Psalm 32, this is certainly what David declared and Paul, writing to the Romans, declared the same thing. But, again, before the cross and I'm saying all this by way of introduction in order to come back here to Isaiah 54 and show you the outworking of this, but this will be a help, I hope. In Psalm 32, here's David's testimony. Here is that faith which declares his righteousness to be just and justified when David says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Atonement means a covering. Sin could not be put away until Christ came and put it away but there was a forgiveness and that word here could be easily the word "forbearing." There was a forbearing, not putting to David's account his sin, in that sense, forgiven, just like, again, student loans and debts. There is a forgiveness of what is owed for a time. And it is covered, that legally, because there is legal documentation that declares it, but that's the way it was for David. "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity." He didn't put it to his account, withheld his hand, "and in whose spirit there is no guile." How could David have that hope unless it was that he, by the Spirit of God, saw that Christ would come and pay that debt one day? And so it is with how the Lord has dealt with his people. There is that forbearing until such time as Christ should pay the debt.

Now, coming back to Isaiah 54, I believe this is what the Lord, by his Spirit through Isaiah, was using to comfort his people and that's the first point that I'd have you to see here in verse 4. There is a comfort, a real comfort in how God has ordained the salvation of his people. If it's in my hands, I have reason to fear every day of my life. If there is something that I have to work out to make this thing right, then I ought to fear and I believe that's why many live in fear. That's why they live in doubt. That's why they run to and fro trying to soothe a guilty conscience because they have not been given eyes to look to Christ.

But here in verse 4 of Isaiah 54, we see the comfort of God's forbearance. "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more." Now, there is a twofold application as we read down through these: how it applied to Israel of old and how it applies to sinners that God has purposed to save. Israel of old as they look back on their history, it was full of shame: times of being taken away into captivity, the 10 northern tribes had been taken away about 700 BC and pretty much went into extinction. The Lord wiped them out and then the two tribes of the South, Judah and Benjamin, the Lord took into captivity in Babylon, a couple of hundred years later, around 500-526 before Christ so what kind of situations it for you, and that was about the time that Isaiah was prophesying, somewhere in between that period of time around 600 years before Christ would come. 600 years. Our nation is not even that old. And yet God was working all the while. He was doing his purpose not only in bringing them into judgment and causing to perish those who even though they bore the name of Israel were not his true Israel, and yet always preserving a remnant: the Daniels, the Isaiahs, the Jeremiahs, who were one among many; the John the Baptist's

and his day. I hope we never despise the day of small things. Don't be spending your time looking around to our world and wondering that so many perish. It's God's right to leave men and women to themselves to perish. He is just in doing so. I believe like for myself, the thing that causes me to marvel over and over again is why me? Why should I even be thought to be among this number? This remnant? This hue? And yet if you are and yet if I am, he is the word of comfort. It's not for anything in you or anything in me. Don't get cocky. Don't think yourself better in any way. No, it's because God has purposed another end for you and for me. That's too whom he speaks here when he says, "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed." None will be ashamed who are brought to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and to rest in his finished work as a needy sinner. It's one thirsty, drawn to the water of life. It's one hungry, drawn to the bread of life. "Fear not."

Our Lord did not speak these words to anybody but he did to his own. He told them over and over again, "Fear not, I am with you. Fear not, I am your God. Fear not, I am your Redeemer. Fear not, I am your representative before a holy God." You know, if we're the Lord's and we come to that river of death to cross it and it may be that the Lord might take us out without reflection and we're just gone like that or whether he gives us some time to lay in our own bed and consider eternity, consider what it is to face a holy God, unless you're the Lord's, you have no comfort. You will have no comfort. I have had some want me to come by the bedside of a dying person and try to give them some hope. I can't. That's not my responsibility. If the Lord does not speak peace to a sinner's heart, it will be wrong for me to speak peace, but I can certainly point them to Christ. I can certainly say to them, "Look to the Lord Jesus Christ alone whose blood and righteousness alone has saved his people."

"Thou shalt not be ashamed." There are going to be many people who will stand before God one day in judgment who are going to be ashamed, find shameful their works, what they put their trust in. But none will be ashamed whom Christ has bought, whom Christ has redeemed, and certainly they have no need to fear. The Lord in his death has put all that shame behind. We go back and think of things that we become shamed over because we consider our lot and how it is we were in our ignorance and darkness, but so satisfactory is the death of Christ, so satisfactory is Christ's representation for his people, that he says here, "thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood anymore." That's a comfort and in that we see another word for forbearance could be kindness, even as was mentioned a little later in this chapter, everlasting kindness in verse 8.

But comfort has to be based upon something and that is the second point I'd have you see in verse 5. All of this is based on the faithfulness of the one who is forbearing; the faithfulness of the one who redeems; the faithfulness of the one who saves. He says, "For thy Maker is thine husband." Not everybody can say that. There is a whole multitude of people of whom it will be said, "Thy Maker is thy Judge," and he will certainly judge them as their Creator. That's what someone said to me one time, "What right does God have to send people to hell?" Well, he's the Judge. He's the Creator. Scripture says, "He has made some vessels of wrath to his honor and who art thou, O man, to contest," is what it says in Romans 9. But notice here in verse 5, "For thy Maker is thine husband."

That's a double blessing. Not only did he make me physically, created me, caused me to be in this world, but now he has married himself to me. Husband in the sense of being espoused to his Son.

"The LORD of hosts is his name," and notice how he's been espoused, through redemption, "and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." Yes, he's the God of the whole earth. You say, "How so?" Well, he's not the God of the Jews only but of the Gentile, even as we read in Romans 3. God's people are being called out from every tribe, nation and tongue, that Christ has redeemed unto himself, satisfied that holiness and righteousness and married, not just paid the debt, but married that one. Who does that remind you of? Boaz. He not only legally took care of every matter that pertained unto Ruth, but he took her to wife and married her. Now, you think about it, this was an Israelite who married a Moabitess. You see, in that culture that would taint Boaz's reputation, the fact that he would take a wife from Moab. But do you know what? He loved her and considered her his own and drew her to himself, paid her debt, and she bore his name. In fact, the Lord purposed that she would give birth to one of the line of Solomon and of our Lord, the line of Christ. Such is God in his mercy. Such is God in his kindness. Don't you know that through that, Ruth was caused to not remember the reproach of her widowhood anymore. Naomi, not remember the reproach of her widowhood anymore. There was a kinsman Redeemer. I don't know if that strikes home to your heart, but it sure does mine because I know God could have just as well left me to myself, but he didn't. It pleased him to give me to his Son and to literally espouse such a one as I through his redemption, and not just me but sinners from every tribe, nation and tongue that he has purposed so to do. So it's a based upon his faithfulness, based upon who he is.

So it's a comfort. We see that comfort is based upon his faithfulness but, thirdly, in verses 6 and 7, we have the remembrance of just who God is and his forbearing when he says, "For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit." Before the Lord draws a sinner to himself, one whom Christ has redeemed, he causes that one to see their need. He causes that one to see their lostness. You just don't wake up and say "I'm the Lord's." Christ said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." There is a laboring and heavy ladenness when the Spirit begins to do his work. I was telling our Bible class how the Lord began to deal in my heart after I was in Africa as a missionary, arrested my heart and for 3 1/2 months laid me low, wouldn't give me any help. I had to be brought to the point of saying that if he would send me to hell, he would be just in doing so, and yet he did not abandon me.

I can identify and I hope you can, where it says, "For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit." One has never been found has never been lost. There is a bleating of the sheep toward the Savior. There is the cry of the needy sinner and that's what we see in verse 6 is the...we remember this. We remember just the kindness and forbearance of the Lord in not casting us off when you hear the word "forsaken and grieved in spirit." That's our perception. If we are the Lord's, we are never forsaken, but there are times when he will cause us to feel as if heaven is as brass, as if he has hidden his face, and that to draw us unto himself.

When it says there in verse 6, "when thou wast refused," it wasn't refused by God. God has never refused any that he has purposed to save, but when thou wast refused by any earthly help, by men, you are as one cast out there. No one can help you. No one knows what to do with you. The Lord says in verse 7, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee," in other words, withheld my hand. I think of Song of Solomon when she fell asleep and he rattled the latchet on the door and then withdrew and when she awoke and realized he had withdrawn, she ran after him, not wanting him to be gone, not wanting to be separated from his presence. There are times when the Lord will seemingly take his hand off of us and cause us to feel the depths of our own need. Is he being mean in doing that? No. It's like with our children sometimes to make a point, silence is often the better part of wisdom than speaking. You walk around silent for too long, those that know you are going to begin to ask, "What's wrong?" They are brought to address you, to seek you, and certainly the Lord has ways of drawing his own to himself.

But notice in verse 7 he never abandons. Regardless of what you're facing or going through and you feel like, "God has left me out here to dry up," he says "with great mercies will I gather thee." Now this, again, is his people before the cross. He is talking about when in Christ he would gather them and verse 8 clearly says it, "with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer." This is all going to be made right, even though you think of Israel, it seemed like they were abandoned those 70 years that they were in captivity but, no, God had his hand on his people. He would bring them back again, rebuild that temple and set the stage for his Son to come, live and die and rise again for his people.

But he says it's just in a moment, "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment." We can say that is true of all of us if we are the Lord's, that from the beginning of creation on until the cross, we were under that condemnation. That wrath was due us. His wrath was due us and yet God did not pour out his wrath on those he purposed to save. It was but for a moment, verse 8. It seems like thousands of years would be a long time but with God, 1,000 years is a day and a day is 1,000 years. It was but for a moment and then Christ came and paid the debt.

So that's the fourth thing that we see here is the fulfillment of his forbearance. When was it fulfilled? Well, verse 8, "I will have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer." When was sin put away? At the cross. When were sinners justified? When Christ paid the debt. He was delivered for our offenses. He was raised for our justification. So we have the clear accomplishment of that in Christ as we have seen.

But the final point I would have you see in verse 9 is the sureness of God's forbearance, the sureness of his work of salvation, the accomplishment of it. We need not fear that if Christ paid the debt that somehow we're going to do something that's going to cause us to fall out of his grace and thereby be lost. There are many people that believe you can do that, that's why they have invitations at the end of every meeting to come forward and dedicate, rededicate. You never know when you did something that might cause God now

to be angry with you and so you'd better come back down front and make it right. That's works religion that has sinners constantly running.

But look here in verses 9 and 10, "This is as the waters of Noah." If you need an example of God's forgiveness, forbearance, here it is, "for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." There were many that perished in the days of Noah but not one perished that God purposed to save. You say, "There were only 8 in the ark." That's exactly right. There was a lot of room in that ark but there weren't any vacancies. Everyone was in there that God purposed and so sure am I of this because of whom God is.

Verse 10 says, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed." You talk about a mountain and we keep talking about Mount Everest, we talk about Mount Kilimanjaro, we talk about these mountains that have been around forever, Mount St. Helens, and it's hard to fathom that one day all of those will be gone, but the Lord says the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, "but my kindness shall never depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee." That's not for everybody. That covenant of mercy, that covenant of peace that God made with his Son, a covenant is like a will to determine the heirs. You put the names of those who are to be heirs in that will. That covenant of peace was established between God the Father and his Son and Christ so satisfied it in his righteous life and death that there remains nothing but mercy, nothing but grace, for those that are his. Such is the faithful God of Scripture. Such is the faithful Redeemer who is Christ and if you are his, I know that you rejoice in him.