

Ben Libby

Sermon

May 9th, Fifth Sunday after Easter

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from Isaiah, Chapter 54, beginning at verse 13:

**For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I am gathering you. <sup>8</sup> In a flood of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but in everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD. <sup>9</sup> To me this is like the time of the waters of Noah. As I swore that the waters of Noah will never again cover the earth, so I am swearing that I will not be angry at you, and I will not rebuke you. <sup>10</sup> For even if the mountains are removed, and the hills are overthrown, my mercy will not be removed from you, and my covenant of peace will not be overthrown, says the LORD, who is showing you mercy. <sup>11</sup> Watch me, you afflicted woman, storm-tossed and not comforted, I will set your precious stones in black mortar and lay down sapphires as your foundation. <sup>12</sup> I will decorate your parapets with rubies, your gates with sparkling stones, and your city boundaries with precious gems. <sup>13</sup> All your children will be taught by the LORD, and the peace and prosperity of your children will be great.**

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

When was the last time that you moved? It was about 5 years ago that my family and I were preparing to move here. What are the feelings which moving produces? I remember feeling overwhelmed thinking about moving everything. What method would we use to do so? How were we going to accomplish this?

We move for a variety of reasons. New jobs, new schools, we downsize or upgrade. Moving, while necessary, is not enjoyable. It's stressful. There's the physical act of boxing everything up. Then you actually have to transfer it from your place to the vehicle to the new place. Then there's the stress of the uncertainty of it all. Moving isn't easy, it's hard, but it's something that needs to be done.

But it can actually be helpful. It makes you ask the question, "Is this particular item worth the effort of moving? Do we really need this?" It makes prioritize what's worth moving. Usually when you move, there are many different trips to the dumpster. I remember making about 4 or 5 the last time we moved. If you're going to take the effort to move something, well it better be worth it.

In our sermon text this morning, the flood of Noah is referenced. Imagine that move! Not only was Noah trying to prepare for a move that would take a long time, but it was also a move into a brand-new world. Not only did he have to prepare for the long journey for him and his family, but for all living creatures themselves! It took him most likely decades to build the ark. But the LORD told him how to do it. He did so believing that the love and mercy of the LORD would save him and all of life on the earth.

Many things can and need to be moved on this earth. But there remains only one thing that can never be moved, the Love of the LORD. It's easier to move mountains than it is to remove the love that your LORD has for you. It can never be budged. It remains forever. It is through Jesus Christ that this love remains so steadfast. We move and change. His love never does! We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

Isaiah 53 is the chapter about the suffering servant. It gets a lot of attention, and deservedly so. It

describes how the Servant of the LORD, (who we know by faith to be Jesus Christ) would suffer and die in our place. Our sermon text comes the very next chapter of Isaiah. It's still talking about the same person. It really is a continuation of what that suffering would produce.

**For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I am gathering you. <sup>8</sup> In a flood of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but in everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD.**

In our text, even though it follows the suffering servant song, the message is to the people. How do we explain the abandonment that the LORD is saying He did to them? Much of Isaiah's writings is written to future generations, to the people who would experience the exile into captivity. Isaiah sees this picture, even though it had not happened yet, in a prophetic perspective of completion, like it had already happened.

That "abandonment" would be well deserved. The people had gone after other gods. He defeated their enemies. Yet, they continued to go after others. Eventually, the Babylonians would come down, besiege Jerusalem, destroy it, and carry off most of the inhabitants. That move was a painful one, not knowing whether they would return to the promised land, and knowing it was on account of their sin.

Even though these verses are not stated directly to the servant, we see by faith that are. **I abandoned you... I hid my face from you for a moment** What does that make us think of? The words of Jesus on the cross, **Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mat 27:46 NKJ)** It is true, we may feel abandoned at times. But we never are. We may feel like we are being punished by God on account of our multitude of sins. But we never are. We should be. This brief moment of abandonment and this flood of anger should be our reality and our eternity. But it's not. Jesus took that on Himself.

The love of our God is unmovable. But it moved once. It moved away from Jesus when He was on the cross. That was what it took to redeem us from our sins. It's true, there can be a time when someone riles against God to the point where they harden their heart against Him, like Pharaoh did. But all people have the opportunity for no anger or abandonment from God. He is always there, whether you want to acknowledge it or not. **For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1Ti 2:3-4 NKJ)**

It is Mother's Day today. It is a day when we as children try to express our appreciation to our beloved mothers who loved us and raised us. But we often do a poor job on this day. Afterall, how can flowers, jewelry, or a dinner express that? A mother's loving comfort for a child is special. Isaiah talks about it. **As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you; (Isa 66:13 NKJ)**

This is how your God feels about you! When Isaiah says in our text that God **will have compassion on you** The Hebrew root word for "compassion" is translated "womb". It is the same love Jesus expressed as He traveled into Jerusalem. **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Mat 23:37 NKJ)**

We, the children of God, have disobeyed and done things contrary to what He commanded of us. He wants to constantly gather and comfort us. But we were unwilling. Yet, as unfaithful as we are, He is not. **If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (2Ti 2:13 NKJ)** The way that this is possible is because of what Jesus did. Because God hid His Holy face from Him, abandoned Him on the cross, we will never have to deal with any of that! God moved His love for His Son away, and it is transferred to you instead! It moved that one and only time, and now it is ours forever!

<sup>9</sup> **To me this is like the time of the waters of Noah. As I swore that the waters of Noah will never again cover the earth, so I am swearing that I will not be angry at you, and I will not rebuke you.** <sup>10</sup> **For even if the mountains are removed, and the hills are overthrown, my mercy will not be removed from you, and my covenant of peace will not be overthrown, says the LORD, who is showing you mercy.**

What an uncertain time for Noah and his family the flood must have been. The world had gotten so sinful, that the only responsible thing for the LORD to do was to send a worldwide catastrophic flood. But God remembered His promise to mankind, that He would save them from sin. So, God chose Noah to save the world. **By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Heb 11:7 NKJ)**

When God sent the flood, it changed the world. It was changed to the point where we don't really know what it was like prior to it. God literally moved mountains, and created new ones, when He saved the world through the flood and through Noah.

God tells us here that He was reminded of that period. What Isaiah was talking about was similar. After the flood happened, God made a covenant with the world. This covenant, or promise, was unique. **"Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."** <sup>12</sup> **And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 "I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. (Gen 9:11-13 NKJ)**

Just like when God promised never again to destroy the world by flood, so too has He reassured mankind that they too would not feel His wrath. But

the world continues to test that covenant and that steadfastness. When Jesus died on the cross, the sins of the whole world were washed away. Yet many continue to spit in the face of that grace and forgiveness. For instance, take the sign of that covenant, the rainbow. What was originally given as a sign of God's mercy and peace is now seen a sign of sinful pride. That is what sin does, it takes something great that God has given as a blessing; possessions, health, words, sexuality, and it twists them into something that disobeys the commands of the LORD God.

And so have you. Everyone one of us has also spit in the face of God's mercy and grace. We know what God has said, and we continue to not keep up our end of the bargain. We fail time and time again. We decide that we want to do what we want to do, instead of what God has commanded us to do. We want something, and we take it, no matter what the Law is. The only reason there isn't a flood 2.0 is because of how long suffering and merciful God is.

But despite how sinful you and I are, God remains unmoved. We are sinful. God is faithful. We are rebellious. God is merciful. Why? All this only makes sense by faith. By faith we see that Jesus went to the cross because He loved us. He's the reason why we aren't destroyed. He's the reason why God's **mercy will not be removed from you, and my covenant of peace will not be overthrown, says the LORD, who is showing you mercy.**

Not only are we not destroyed despite our sin, but we are also actively comforted by Him as well! Hard to believe? Well, just watch! <sup>11</sup> **Watch me, you afflicted woman, storm-tossed and not comforted, I will set your precious stones in black mortar and lay down sapphires as your foundation.** <sup>12</sup> **I will decorate your parapets with rubies, your gates with sparkling stones, and your city boundaries with precious gems.** <sup>13</sup> **All your children will be taught by the LORD, and the peace and prosperity of your children will be great.**

Who is this woman? It is the new Israel, the Church. Indeed, she is afflicted, storm-tossed, not comforted. At least, this is how it seems. But it's not the case!

All painful and terrible things that happen to us seem to be simply painful and terrible in the moment. We sometimes ask the question, "Why is this happening to me? Did I do something to earn God's wrath?" But as we have seen from the previous verses, that's never the case! The only person who was ever punished for sin is Jesus.

Yes, certain people sin and there are painful consequences for those sins. A man robs a bank, and that man spends the rest of his earthly days in jail. But there are also people who seem to have seemingly random bad things happen to them. The employee of that same bank catches a stray bullet and dies suddenly. What did that person ever do to deserve that?

Well, nothing. Except sin their whole life. That lifetime of sin is not the reason they died, rather it isn't the reason they lived. Jesus paid for all that sin. Bad things will continue to happen in this sinful and sin cursed earth. But that unmovable love of God sustains us all!

Where will that unmovable love move us to? Well, it will move our hearts to do good deeds out of thanks for that love. But it will also ultimately move us to a new heaven and a new earth. Just like the flood remade the earth, so also will the fires of judgment day remake the world once again. Just watch! **Watch me, you afflicted woman**

Here Isaiah talks about laying down the foundations of the afflicted woman with sapphires, rubies, sparkling stones, and precious gems. What does that remind us of? **And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. (Rev 21:10-11 NKJ)**

The afflicted woman, the Church, received jewelry for her Mother's Day! It is unlike anything that this earth contains! Yes, things seem to be bad now. Death is a constant threat. Poverty and disease run rampant. It seems like sin is running the show. But it's not! Perhaps Paul had our text in mind when He wrote: **For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39 NKJ)**

Moving, as necessary as it is, can be a quite stressful process. But it's a good reminder. It helps us see what is good to hold on to and what is good to get ride of. It reminds us that no matter what roots we put down, there's some where else we need to get to.

We will all move one day out of this vale of tears to a heavenly rest. What is the final promise of this text? **All your children will be taught by the LORD, and the peace and prosperity of your children will be great.** This again is talking about the church. Right now, it seems like prosperity isn't a word that we would use to describe ourselves. But it is! We should all be wiped away right now on account of our sin. But we are not! We remain. Why? Because our LORD remains faithful. **but in everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD.**

Our LORD had redeemed us through our Lord Jesus. Truly, it is easier to move mountains than it is to remove the love your Lord has for you! We have been given peace and prosperity instead of receiving the abandonment and punishment we deserved! Yes, it may seem at times like we are **afflicted, storm-tossed and not comforted**. But just watch! Watch what the LORD will do! He will take you out of this world and home to Him in heaven. The immovable Love of the LORD will move our hearts, and it will move us into paradise eternally. All praise and thanks be to the LORD and His Immoveable love! AMEN!!!