

A MOTHER'S LOVE - ISAIAH 49:14-16

MOTHER'S DAY, 2006

The jagged mountain range that stretches east to west along the 39th parallel separating North from South Korea is called Heartbreak Ridge. It got its name from the many battles that were fought there during the Korean War.

Billy Kim recalls one of those especially intense battles. Darkness had set in, but the night skies were lit with flares. The North Koreans were firmly dug into their position giving them a distinct advantage over the advancing Allied troops. Suddenly, a scream of pain penetrated the exploding sounds of grenades and bullets. An American soldier had been hit and was crying out for someone to rescue him.

But nobody moved. The Americans were so close to the North Korean lines that an attempted rescue would be equivalent to committing suicide. So the soldiers had to endure, crouched down in their foxholes, listening to the moans and cries of their wounded comrade.

Billy noticed one young soldier in a foxhole to the side who seemed to be acting very strangely. While crouching down in his foxhole, he periodically would lift his arm up. Billy noticed the arm being raised into the light given off by the flares. Several times this happened.

Then, all of a sudden, without warning, the young soldier in the adjoining foxhole, bolted out into the field of battle. With shells exploding all around him, he slithered and crawled following the screams of his downed companion. Then, struggling and grunting, he dragged that wounded soldier back into the

safety of the foxhole. Shells continued to burst all around him. But neither he nor his wounded fellow-soldier was hit by a North Korean bullet.

In the security of the foxhole, the wounded GI was given emergency medical treatment to slow down his bleeding, and he was able to stay alive until the heat of the battle was over and he could be taken to get professional medical help.

After the battle was over, the Sergeant asked this young soldier what prompted him to risk his life like that to save his comrade in arms. Why would he take such a terrible risk? “It really wasn't a risk at all”, the young soldier replied. “I just had to keep checking my watch until I knew that it was safe. You see, Sarge, there's 12 hours difference between our time here and my home back in Kansas. And my mom promised me that she would be praying for me every morning at 9:00. I knew that if I went out to help him at 9:00, my mother would be praying for me, and I would be safe.”

Few people realize the confidence and security that godly mothers bring into their lives. Sadly, the greatest realization of these blessings often comes after that mother's influence is gone. But what a blessing it is to have a godly mother - what a strength, especially in times of darkness and trial.

The nation of Israel was going through some extremely difficult times when Isaiah wrote his prophecy. The mighty Assyrians were dominating them militarily. The northern 10 tribes had already been conquered and many of them shipped off into exile. Judah had been spared only by a miraculous

intervention by God. But there remained great depression economically. There was a dark cloud of gloom and doom hovering over the land as the people waited for their turn to be conquered and exiled as the prophets were predicting.

It was in the midst of this setting that Isaiah writes these words recorded in Isaiah 49:14-16.

“But Zion said, ‘the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget you, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”

I would direct your attention to 3 truths that are seen in these 3 brief verses from the Prophet Isaiah - 3 TRUTHS THAT BRING LIGHT IN DARK TIMES:

1. THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN WE FEEL FORSAKEN - IS. 49:14

"But Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."

Zion is one of the names for Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. It was on the top of Mount Zion that the temple mount which formed the center of the city of Jerusalem was built. So in saying "Zion said", Isaiah is indicating that this was the predominant thought of the people who lived in Jerusalem - from the King whose palace was in sight of the Temple right on down through his nobles to the common, grass-roots majority. The people felt that the Lord had forsaken them, that the Lord had forgotten all about them.

Now there are times when everyone feels forsaken, all alone. These times

are generally the most difficult times. These are the times when life's situations seem to be against us. These are the times when the finances are especially tight - perhaps we have lost our job and are unemployed. These are the times when our health fails us. These are the times when life has not gone as we planned. Every person at times feels forsaken, all alone. Even godly people feel that God has forgotten all about them.

*Job felt that God had forsaken him –

Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. You have bound me--and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me. God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me. God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked. All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; (Job 16:7-12)

*David felt that God had forgotten all about him - "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? Ps. 13:1

*Elijah felt all alone and deserted - "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" 1 Kings 19:10;14

*Now it is important for us to see as we look back upon the situations of Job and David and Elijah that their feelings did not accurately portray reality.

Just because they felt forsaken or forgotten or alone didn't mean that they were forsaken or forgotten or alone. But they certainly felt that way. And those feelings were very real and intense. Here were people of great character and courage. Job is lifted up by James as the epitome of patience, David was the one who walked out in courage to face the giant Goliath, Elijah is presented by James as a supreme example of faith and prayer. But each of these individuals had times in their lives when their feelings of despair overshadowed them.

Now if such great examples of godliness had such times in their lives, we shouldn't be surprised when we feel forsaken or forgotten or alone as well. And these times will come in our lives when the circumstances of life appear to be against us. When, like Job, our health is failing; or when, like David, the armies of Saul are hunting us down; or when, like Elijah, we are exhausted and hungry and weak - we can expect to battle these destructive feelings in our lives.

2. But let's move on now to a very important second truth that we see from this passage. **DURING THESE TIMES, PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT WE HAVE ARE A MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION** - Especially a mother's love and compassion can bring great strength to her family during these difficult times. **READ IS. 49:15**

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?"

This is a rhetorical question, of course. The assumed answer is no. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she

has borne? Of course not. God has placed within the nature of a mother a natural concern for her child so that she can not forget that child. A mother has a natural compassion for this child she has delivered. Remembering this simple fact helps to bring strength to us in times of trouble and trial. Even during the times when life appears to be the darkest, even during the times when we feel forsaken and forgotten and all alone, there are those who still care for us, those who are concerned for us. And among those who are concerned, usually our mothers are at the top of the list.

History is filled with illustrations demonstrating the lasting power of a mother's love and support. Reuben is such an example. Reuben was a sharp child with a brilliant mind. His mother was a godly woman, diligently training him in the ways of the Lord. But when Reuben came to the end of his teenage years, the lure of the world seemed to be too strong for him. He informed his mother one day that he was going to leave home and join his godless friends in making a name for himself in the world. Reuben's mother agreed that she could not stop him from leaving. And then, having reassured him of her love for him she said these words to Reuben as he was leaving the house, "My son, just remember this. When you come to the darkest hour of all, and everything seems lost, if you will honestly call on God, He will not fail you. I will be praying to that end."

Out into the darkness of the world Reuben went. And it was exciting for a while. But just like the prodigal son, Reuben's life spiraled down lower and lower, until finally in a hotel room some 400 miles from his home, he decided

to end his life by committing suicide. But just before he committed the final act, according to his own testimony, Reuben remembered the words of his mother. When the hour was the darkest in his life, he remembered his mother's love and concern and prayers for him. Instead of committing suicide, Reuben fell to his knees in that hotel room and cried out, "O God of my mother, if there even is such a being, I want light. And if you will give it to me, I will follow it." God met Reuben that night, and his life was changed.

The first thing he did was go back and tell his mother. He found her in her garden. Much to his astonishment, she was not surprised at his coming or at his message. She, of course, was filled with joy. But she also told Reuben that in her daily prayers for him, she had found a great peace several days ago, so that she knew he was going to be all right.

Reuben then went to Yale where he graduated from college and then he went to Seminary where he prepared for the ministry, and then he even studied at some of the prestigious theological schools in Germany. And Reuben Archer Torrey became one of the great evangelists in our nation's history, leading thousands to the Lord. R.A. Torrey helped to start the Moody Bible Institute as its first dean. He pastored the great Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles later in his life. He wrote numerous devotional and theological books. R.A. Torrey stood as a pillar for the truth of God's word in a day when the storm of liberal modernism was sweeping so many away from the truth of God. But R.A. Torrey was only able to stand because, when the darkest hour of his life was upon him, he had the confidence and assurance of a godly

mother whom he knew was praying for him and standing with him.

3. But there is a 3rd truth that is important for us to see from this passage. Yes, there will be times when every person will feel forsaken and forgotten. And it is during these times that the personal relationship of a godly mother can give to us special strength. But for all of their blessing to us, mothers are only human too. And one day, we will lose our mothers. Perhaps you have lost your mother. Perhaps your mother has passed on to glory. What happens then when we lose our mothers? Well, Isaiah concludes this paragraph by saying that **EVEN IF ALL EARTHLY RELATIONSHIPS FAIL, GOD WILL NEVER FORSAKE US - IS. 49:15b, 16.** "Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me."

Here we have an interesting ancient custom referred to. We know from the law that God set up a year of Jubilee every 50th year so that all Jewish people who had become slaves for one reason or another would be set free again. It didn't matter if they had become bankrupt or lost their land or suffered great personal tragedy and had to sell their land or even themselves into slavery in order to pay off their debts, there was the possibility of a fresh start, a new beginning every year of Jubilee. But the law also made provision for a person who desired to stay with his owner as a bond-slave. Perhaps the slave found that his life with his owner was better than he had experienced before, and he preferred not to be free, but to remain a bond-slave. In this case, under the law, the slave could choose not to be free, but to remain an indentured servant. And

the Apostle Paul picks up on this part of the law as a picture of our choice to let Jesus Christ be the master in our lives, to be His bond-slave.

To seal this decision, the bond-slave would allow his ear to be pierced with an awl. This would be a visible symbol of the choice that he had made.

So

then, everyone would know that the person with the pierced ear was a slave by choice.

But this symbol only signified the person being a bond-slave. It didn't identify whose servant he had chosen to be. So there was a further custom that developed - this was not found in the law as such, but we know of it from Extra-Biblical sources. The slave then had the name of his owner of choice, written or tattooed into the palm of his hand. The symbolism is clear isn't it? What the slave was saying is that he had chosen to give these hands in service to the person who was written on them.

Now amazingly, God picks up on this custom and says through his prophet Isaiah, "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands". Now what is most amazing about the symbolism that God uses here is the fact that the slave had his hands tattooed, not the owner. So God in using this custom as an example is actually putting himself into the position of the servant, the slave here. He is committing himself to care for the needs of his people as a servant would.

Now we would be remiss if we didn't also complete the picture - for God only writes the names of those who are his own on his hands. He writes on his

hands the names of those who have already written God's name on their hands, those who have committed their lives to becoming a follower and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. A few chapters earlier, we have the same symbolism used in the reversed manner.

READ Isaiah 44:5: "One will say, I belong to the Lord; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's', and will take the name of Israel."

So to use this single passage out of Isaiah 49 to try to prove that God really is our servant would be taking it out of context. The first time Isaiah uses this reference speaks to our being servants of God in Isaiah 44. But to those who have committed themselves to the Lord, to those who have placed themselves voluntarily as bond-slaves to God, they have the confidence that God will never leave them nor forsake them. God commits himself to his own as a faithful servant, to watch over and care for them. Even though all other human relationships might fail, God will never forget, nor will he ever forsake. Our walls - in context speaking of the walls of Zion, the walls of Jerusalem - are ever before him. God's people are continually before his eyes. Their names have been engraved upon his hands.

Now these 3 truths that Isaiah brings out are essential if one is to have stability during difficult times.

*We need to realize that feeling forsaken or forgotten at times is not abnormal, but it is a perfectly natural human behavior. We are not weird or strange or unspiritual if we have such feelings. Even the godliest examples in

the Bible had such feelings.

*But we must also remember that feelings are not always an accurate barometer of reality. Sometimes our feelings can mislead us. And such is the case when we feel forsaken or forgotten. For there are some human relationships that God has created that will not naturally forsake us. Such is normally the love of a mother. A mother will remember her child throughout her life. How thankful we are for our mothers who bring such security and assurance into our lives.

*And even if our mother must leave us for some reason, we must remember that there is even a more secure love that we have - and that is God's love. For God is eternal - he never dies. God is omnipresent - he is always with us. And God has written the names of his own, as it were, on the palms of his hands. He will never forsake, he will never forget, he has committed himself even as a faithful bond-slave would to support and strengthen and help his people.

When the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the grave and appeared to his disciples with his resurrected body, his body had fully recovered from the gruesome ordeal of his crucifixion as we would expect. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to his followers as the Lord of life, the victorious champion over death and the grave. But it is most interesting to me that there was one seeming imperfection in the Savior's resurrected body. There were still scars from his crucifixion in his hands and side. We know this to be the case for Jesus invited doubting Thomas to place his fingers in the nail prints in his hands to prove that

He was indeed the risen Savior. Now the fact that Christ's resurrected body maintained the nail prints of the cross would at first appear to be very abnormal. For the normal pattern would be for a resurrected body to have absolute perfection. We, for instance, would never expect that a Christian who is mutilated in some way here on this earth would carry those limitations throughout eternity in his resurrected body. We expect that soldiers who lose limbs in war, workers who lose hands to factory machines, people who are ill who lose feet to infections will have all of those earthly imperfections restored in their resurrected bodies. But such was not the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. His hands still had the nail prints even in his resurrected body. It is as if this symbolism that God spoke of through his prophet Isaiah is going to be maintained even throughout eternity. For in his resurrected body, the Lord Jesus Christ still has his sacrificial love for his people engraved on the palms of his hands. Such is the magnitude of God's love for us.