

Isaiah 63:7-9

Has the glow of Christmas worn off for you? Have you started to pack it away until next year? That's exactly what it has been like for many who celebrated Christmas. Like us they have seen the glow of the Christ child in the manger and now it's time to get back to the real world and life. Back to the grind and hard work. Where there always seems to be only more work ahead and that you have to get to the right person to be able to get your job done. It all has to fall into just the right place for anything to happen correctly.

Today I'm going to tell you that Christmas isn't over. Therefore, I Will Tell of God's Kindness for your own encouragement and for the encouragement of others. As I do let's use Isaiah 63:7-9. **⁷I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. ⁸He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”; and so he became their Savior. ⁹In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.**

Isaiah spoke those words to the Old Testament believers. God had done many kind deeds for these people. He had delivered them from impossible circumstances in the past. It hadn't been with the bright lights of angels but with his own presence. In his love and mercy he redeemed them, he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Those deeds included how God brought the people to safety under Moses.

Moses as the spokesman of God knew that he couldn't lead the mass of people by his own power. They would be going to a place where they needed special protection. Moses didn't just want an angel or some other being to guard them in the desert. He realized that they needed more firepower. They needed the presence of God. And God answered those prayers of Moses. God did what only he could do—he led and delivered his people. Only he could do that.

There are certain things—impossible things that God only can do in a certain type of way. The redemption of man is one of them. This is very clearly repeated throughout the Bible. Psalm 49:7-8 says, No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—but then he goes on to say - but God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. (Ps 49:15) So Jesus said in Mark 10:45, “the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Redemption has to be accomplished by God alone because it is such an awesome and impossible feat for any mere man to accomplish. To redeem means to buy back. You and I are born with a debt that we owe to God - a debt of perfection. If this debt is not paid, we then owe Him a

penalty of death and hell. Imagine then, the debt that is owed God just in the lifetime of one person. Assuming that we each sin - just with our thoughts - ten times a day - and we live to be seventy years old - ten times 365 is 3,650 sins per year. Take that times 70 and you have a very modest underestimate of 255,550 sins in a lifetime. Multiply that times the billions of people who have lived and died throughout the ages, and who in the world could pay for that? On top of this, think about who would be able to fight against a world full of powerful demons and sinful people? Who could resist such temptations and survive the very wrath of God Himself? This would take more than the life of a man or an angel - it would take the life and death of God Himself. God would have to come to earth and do it Himself - by His own Presence.

And that's what he did. "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons...So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:4-5,7).

There was motivation for God to do such a thing. Look at verse 8, **Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me; and so he became their Savior.** There were a couple things that really confused me. First of all, God says, "surely they are sons who won't be false to me." "Being false" to someone is used in reference to a covenant - keeping your side of the covenant. Did God really think in choosing believers means that they would remain faithful to him? The translation then says that on this basis - "SO" - he became their Savior. The translation makes it sound like he saved them because he thought they would keep their side of the covenant.

This implies that God didn't know the future. It implies that God would be angry with himself for having scarified so much for people who aren't as faithful as he wanted them to be. That scares me, because when I look at my response - I see a person who often doesn't respond in the way God would like. I am not as faithful to God with my prayers, my offerings, and my tongue, as He wants me to be. It makes me wonder, "is God upset that He sent Jesus for me?" It's kind of like someone who spends a lot of money on a present in order to have you use it, but then if you don't use it as often as he thinks you should he complains that he ever gave you the present in the first place and threatens to take it back if you don't say thank you for it every day. This kind of a translation turns the whole life of Christ - that whole birth - and turns it into an obligation on me.

Unfortunately, that's the way some people look at Jesus. Like a child who blurted out, "I hate Jesus." When the adult asked him why, he said, "because he makes me do things I don't want to." How did he get such an impression of Jesus? Because his parents always said to him, "Jesus died for you, so you should pray. If you want Jesus to love you, you better be nicer to your sister." God's love for him became conditional - on how we responded. It turns Jesus into a ball and chain. Instead of a Savior, He becomes a manipulative gift giver. If that's what Jesus and church is to you - you've got the wrong God and the wrong religion in your heart.

The truth of the matter is that this translation stinks. God did not record the “so.” God didn’t redeem His people BECAUSE He thought they would be faithful to Him. But it is as Isaiah says, I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us - yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. . . . In his love and mercy he redeemed them. This text is clear. The people would praise God for his kindnesses, for his faithful loves. This kind of love is not dependent on the agreement of the other party - but on the very core values of the giver.

The same is true about compassion. God feels compassion from his inner being and not from something we do. From his deepest depths. God’s compassion is constant and sincere. We turn our compassion off because of cold-heartedness or selfishness. But God expects his people to be faithful to him, but even though we don’t it still didn’t stop him from being faithful to us.

In other words - God didn’t send Jesus to get His pound of flesh out of you. He gave Jesus in the manger because He loves you and wants to see you in heaven. He gave Jesus to live and die for you - to pay your ransom - to make you holy and righteous. God became man because He felt compassion on us - because He is a God of endless faithfulness that endures forever. He doesn’t love us because we respond to Him - He loves us because He is a God of love and mercy.

When you see God remain faithful to you in spite of your sin, what else can you do but sing “Away in a Manger” or “What Child is This” or the many other Christmas hymns? This is something that God does put in our hands and mouths - the responsibility of telling others about our compassionate God.

The sad point is that many Christians are not faithful to this simple task. They don’t want to open their mouths and proclaim God. They don’t want to sing at Christmastime. They don’t want come to church and worship him. Instead, they would rather complain to people about how cold it is, how their joints are acting up, how the stock market is plunging, or how the gas prices are going up. When we enter the manger, all we manage to do is complain about how cold it is, how smelly it is, and how we need to add new windows and add some carpeting to the manger floor. We complain about how much work it will be to prepare for this Child to come home - and imagine that the celebration of Christmas all revolves around the wallpaper and crib - the shopping and the visiting. When it comes time to sing, we only sing the songs we like with fervor - but the new and unfamiliar ones - we’ll just mumble those. Which begs the question - why are you singing them in the first place then? If that’s all that Jesus and Christmas is to you - an obligation - then don’t even bother celebrating.

In spite of our failure to fulfill this simple task - to tell of Christmas - the fact still remains, God became man. His Presence is still here with us in the Word. God still comes to us in the Lord's Supper. God still has covered you with His blood - not because we are faithful - but because he is faithful. God still loves you - not because we sing so loud or know our Bible passages just right - but because Jesus lived and died for you. No matter whether you are a little faithful or a lot faithful - you are all loved by God in Christ. No matter whether you've had a terrible Christmas or a Merry Christmas, you can always look at that Manger and see God's love for you all around - unchanged. No matter how much you cry to God and complain, He still cares for you, wants to listen to you, and does His best to help you in a way that will encourage you to grow.

So many people are complaining - even in America - about their finances, their health, the weather, their children. Even during a time that's supposed to be festive many are depressed! The sad thing is that all the while they don't realize that they have a Manager in the Manger who loves them very much and can take care of all their needs. As the New Year approaches and we consider the compassion and kindness of Christ - I pray then that out of thankfulness for his love you will make it your resolution to follow in the footsteps of this prayer of Isaiah. Perhaps this Manager in the Manger will encourage you to get out of the crib - quit crying about how this is wrong or that is wrong - and take a good hard look at what is right. We've got a compassionate God who became man. We've got a Savior. We've got a God of love and mercy who is faithful to His promise in Christ of salvation through faith in Him. In the New Year, instead of complaining along with so many others in the world, remember to dwell on the Presence of the Lord - on the message of Christmas. The message of Christmas is that we have a compassionate and kind LORD. God has told us about his kindness for our encouragement. Amen.