

## SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

## ISAIAH 49:9-26 (selected verses) FREED !! WHY SO DEJECTED ??

*Say to the prisoners, "Go forth," [and say] to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves!" They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst; neither heat nor sun shall strike them. For He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them.*

*Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted.*

*But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me."*

*Can a woman forget her nursing child and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. Your walls are continually before Me.*

*Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples. They shall bring your sons in their arms and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. All flesh shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob!"*

Is it hard to imagine? --- A school's team, underdogs by far, have just won the big game, the championship game! Rejoicing all around! But one of the players, Johnny, isn't very happy. Everyone else is ecstatic. But not Johnny. He can't get past thinking about himself. He had a bad game. He is dejected. Out of place, isn't it, on such a jubilant occasion? How to comfort Johnny? Point him away from himself. Point him to the glory at hand, for his team and him, for his school and him, for the hometown fans and him, for his family and all his supporters and him. They had just won!

Our text is similar to that scenario. This section of Isaiah's prophecy speaks of the Lord's Servant, Jesus, the Son of God Himself. The Father had especially chosen Him, chosen Him from the beginning and before, to be the One to bring back the Lord's wayward, captive, and desperate people. Isaiah is speaking in terms of their (Judah's) earthly captivity to Babylon. But he is, in the ultimate picture, speaking of sinners' captivity to sin, death, Satan and hell. The Servant would come on a special mission, and at times seeming to labor in vain, but the Father would see Him through to victory—whether honored in the world's eyes or not. *"In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped you!" (49:8).* The Servant, in victory, is given the joy and honor of announcing Victory! to God's captive, helpless people. As the letter to the Hebrews says, *"For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God!" (Hebrews 12:2).*

Our text says, *Say to the prisoners, "Go forth," [and say] to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves!"* The prisoners—the picture is not just of those locked in captivity, or in a dungeon, but "bound" with ropes or fetters—just as brother Simeon was bound before the eyes of his nine brothers and kept captive in Egypt. To the prisoners, the Special Servant with victory says, *Go Forth!* What a happy picture. Think about calves released from the stall, chickens released from the henhouse, and prisoners set free from their bonds! Freedom and Joy! *Say to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves!"* To those who not only have been in darkness for themselves, but who have been kept hidden away from the view and presence of loved ones and others, *Show yourselves.* Let them see you, that you are out, that you are fine, that you are free. Joy all around!

*They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights.* Describing the freed ones as a flock of sheep or other livestock, they are no longer limited as to where they can go, no longer need they be wary of danger. They feed right along the roadside and no one harms them, on the open treeless hills, with no need for cover for security. *They shall neither hunger nor thirst; neither heat nor sun shall strike them.* How oppressive hunger and thirst are! But no more! Food and drink abound! Not even the oppressive heat of the desert floor with its bewildering mirages, not even the pounding of the desert sun shall afflict them! Refreshing peace and Joy! *For He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them.* The harsh days are over! God's people have a merciful leader guiding them, not a gruff warden or cruel taskmaster. He is merciful—compassionate, filled with concern for each and every member of His flock, attentive to their hurts and needs, ready to rescue and help in every situation. Merciful. Much like father Jacob said, when sending his nine sons back to Egypt to retrieve Simeon bound in prison, to buy more food sorely needed, taking young Benjamin in their company to satisfy the ruler of the land. Jacob said, *May God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin (Genesis 43:14).* Mercy. It's kindness, understanding, compassion. This Shepherd and Servant who has released God's imprisoned flock will guide them in mercy to springs of water. Fresh water, "new" water, flowing water! Not just standing water from a pool with no inlet or outlet. In mercy, what a change of circumstances for the captives!

That is your situation and mine! Bound with the ropes and chains of sin and shame, held under the sinister maneuvering manner of the devil warden, sealed away from the presence of God, you--sinner that you are—are now free, well nourished, safe and secure, under the mercy and compassion of your Savior Jesus! Your iniquity is pardoned, your warfare is accomplished, for the Lord has given you—instead of punishment—double blessing for your sins! All is yours in Jesus, your Shepherd and Savior, your crucified and risen Brother! He leads you to the refreshing waters of life in His name. Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need fear no evil. For your merciful, loving Shepherd and Savior is with you. Through Him you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever! (Psalm 23). This year's Easter Joy, which is but four weeks old today, gives you a whole new take on life! Freed for heaven and guided in the Lord's almighty Love!

No wonder the text says, *Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted.* How much more of a highlight or headline-news can the situation be?! *“Comfort, comfort, ye My people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1)!*

But, like despondent Johnny who wouldn't look at his, and his team's victory--the championship—but rather looked only at his own dismal performance, and was unhappy. So also those rescued, the freed prisoners, the safe and secure flock, the redeemed and forgiven people of God, the believers—including you and me—are apt only to look at narrow seemingly unhappy aspects of our situation, ignoring the big picture. *But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.”* Isn't that you? Rescued by the Special Servant but feeling sorry for yourself, because circumstances don't particularly favor you, though they are really for your best? Why dejected? Because **you** didn't have a hand in the solution of your problem, but it came as a gift of your compassionate God? Sad and filled with self-pity, because you don't have the talents that others have, because you don't have the money that others have, because you don't have the health that others have, because you have more work than the others have, because you have more responsibility than the others have, because you can't play as much as the others do, because nobody cares about you, nobody appreciates you, because you have let down your family and your God with sin, because you can't fix the sins and the mess you're in? Did you just forget the great victory that the loving and compassionate Lord has brought to you? Are you so focused on the narrow here and now, that you don't see the glory that is really yours, the glory to come? And you don't see the Father's, and the Savior's, and the Spirit's forgiving, rescuing love for you?

The Lord and Savior says to you, *Can a woman forget her nursing child and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. Your walls are continually before Me.* Look at the facts, and look at the Lord! You are ever in His presence, your circumstance is ever in the palm of His great hand. Like a faithful watchman of a city, He is carefully keeping you in His sights at all times. A mother on earth may be in a bind where she forgets her own nursing child—as difficult to imagine as that may be. Yet the Lord says, I will not forget You! Like a pastor and a congregation who after many years part ways, they remain in each other's thoughts. Like spouses separated when one has to go off to war for months on end, they remember each other daily. Like a mother or father whose wayward child has gone his or her own way, they never forget. It is like that and more than that when the LORD says, I will never forget you! He always keeps you in His heart! All the things that push you into feeling sorry for yourself are gone in Him! Rejoice and go forward facing each day with security and contentment. Your Father holds you. Your Shepherd cares for you. Your Counselor leads you.

Like a mother, deprived of her children by those who have been harsh to her, who is amazed to see those same oppressors with a change of heart bringing her children back to her arms, so the Lord GOD says—and the **Lord GOD**, mind you, not just anybody--*Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples. They shall bring your sons in their arms and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.* All those things that make you sad and dejected, are known and fixed by God. He sent His Son for you. Keep going forward with joy, with Easter joy! Don't let Easter's confidence wither on the vine and die. It's real, it's for you, every day. Even death itself is defeated in Christ. The mansions of heaven await!

*All flesh shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob!* Those that despise you and despise your Lord, those that ruin your day, those that seek to bring you down--they shall all bend to your Master and your Savior, who has set you free, whether they want to or not. Your Redeemer Himself paid the tremendous price for you. The Mighty One against whom none can stand, or whom none can defy is on your side. The God of Jacob Who promised Jacob's grandfather Abraham that from their seed all the families of the earth would be blessed—**THAT LORD AND SAVIOR SHALL NOT FORGET YOU.** there is no lie in Him. He loves you. Rejoice in your life in Him every day. You are free for Him and for heaven!

So be it! Amen!

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