

Coach House Church BEACONS

DOES ANYBODY LOVE ME?

22ND SEPTEMBER 2020

Heavens, raise the roof! Earth, wake the dead! Mountains, send up cheers! God has comforted his people. He has tenderly nursed his beaten-up, beaten-down people. But Zion said, "I don't get it. God has left me. My Master has forgotten I even exist. Can a mother forget the infant at her breast, walk away from the baby she bore? But even if mothers forget, I'd never forget you—never. Look, I've written your names on the backs of my hands.

Does anyone love me? All of us are prone, at some time or another, to ask this question, especially when trouble comes. We begin to wonder whether anybody cares for us at all. We even complain that God himself has forgotten us.

But this text teaches us three things: first, God does discipline his people in love; second, when we are disciplined, we may tend to become depressed and despondent; and third, our God will never forget us.

Lets take a brief look at each of these points..

God's Discipline

Throughout the Bible we find examples of God disciplining his people. In Deuteronomy 8:2-5 we read:

Keep and live out the entire commandment that I'm commanding you today so that you'll live and prosper and enter and own the land that God promised to your ancestors. Remember every road that God led you on for those forty years in the wilderness, pushing you to your limits, testing you so that he would know what you were made of, whether you would keep his commandments or not. He put you through hard times. He made you go hungry. Then he fed you with manna, something neither you nor your parents knew anything about, so you would learn that men and women don't live by bread only; we live by every word that comes

from God's mouth. Your clothes didn't wear out and your feet didn't blister those forty years. You learned deep in your heart that God disciplines you in the same ways a father disciplines his child."

When God disciplines us, we typically begin to murmur and complain. Examples of this can be found throughout the book of Exodus. Right after their deliverance, Israel saw the Egyptian army pursuing them. Immediately they began to complain, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt?" When they could not find water in the wilderness, "the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (15:24). When they ran out of food, they complained: "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! . . . You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (16:3). And later, when they again had no water, they grumbled against Moses, saying, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" (17:3).

Of course, all this was discipline. God was testing his people in order to prove what was in their hearts and humbling them to teach them to rely on him. But, notice, when God tests our faith by discipline, correction, or rebuke, we usually respond by grumbling against him. The classic New Testament passage on divine discipline is Hebrews 12:7-11:

"God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God's training so we can truly live? While we were children, our parents did what seemed best to them. But God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best. At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God."

God disciplines us that we may become godly. So we should consider it a privilege and blessing to receive his discipline. In Christ, God has chosen us before the creation of the world to make us holy and blameless in his sight. Without holiness, no one can see God or have fellowship with him; therefore, God must make us holy now.

We may suffer in this fallen, imperfect world and experience opposition but there is a new world coming. Our sufferings are meant to achieve something for us, as

the apostle Paul clearly understood: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17);

Our Depression

When God disciplines us we often fail to think biblically. We should rejoice because it is the proof that God cares for us. Instead, we become depressed and despondent. The exiles in Babylon began to experience severe depression and doubted God's covenant love. They thought they were seeing a failure of the Davidic covenant in which God promised that a son of David would sit on the throne of David forever. After all, there was no throne, no Judah, no Israel, and they, the people of the covenant, were exiles. Feeling forgotten and forsaken, they expressed their fears and doubts: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me'" (v. 14).

Zion was experiencing discipline because of its own evil wanderings and covenant unfaithfulness. But, as a result of this discipline, it was becoming despondent and irrational. Its words imply that the immutable God could change, lie, and be unjust, and that he was unfaithful to his covenant and no longer loved Zion.

But God disciplined Zion because he loved it. Let us illustrate it this way: When a vine-dresser prunes a vine, it is a painful experience for the vine. But this pruning is designed, not to destroy the vine, but to make it more productive and useful. A surgeon will cut a suffering patient, not to kill him, but to heal him. For the patient to say, "The doctor has forgotten me and forsaken me," is ill-founded. In the same way, a father disciplines his child, not to harm him, but to bless him and guide him into the way of righteousness and eternal life.

God's Defence

In answer to his people's complaint, God defends himself in verses 15 and 16: an a mother forget the infant at her breast, walk away from the baby she bore? But even if mothers forget, I'd never forget you—never. Look, I've written your names on the backs of my hands"

One of the best of human love is a mother's love for her child, who is totally dependent on her. If a mother forgets her young baby, they will die, but for a mother to forget the baby at her breast is not natural. Even so, this proposition is not universally true. There are mothers who forget their children because they are too poor or too sick to care for them. Sometimes mothers die, and their children are left as orphans. Other mothers may abandon their children or throw them in the streets.

The truth is, mothers may forget their totally dependent children. But God argues, "I will not forget you!" Our God is not poor, sick, weak, or sinful; he is the transcendent, infinite, personal God. Additionally, Christ, who died once on behalf of us and lives forevermore, tells us, "Because I live, you will live also." We are united to Christ like branches to the vine. How, then, can he forget us?

Yes, we may wander and sin, and God will discipline us when we do. But he will never forget us or abandon us. He will restore us, heal us, and speak comforting words to us. The Bible says we are his portion, his inheritance, his bride, and the apple of his eye. He loves us with an everlasting love and died in our place for our eternal salvation. How could he possibly forget us?

So stop fearing, doubting, and complaining. Rejoice! God is comforting his people. Even heaven and earth are asked to join in this great celebration. Rejoice that he remembers you personally. Rejoice also that he does not remember your sins.

But if you have never believed in Jesus Christ, you have valid reason to worry and be despondent. Your future is extremely gloomy, for your eternal destiny is separation from the presence of God. But, praise God, you are alive right now, able to think and hear the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to look to Christ today! Believe in him, trust in him, rest in him, hope in him, and obey him. Then you too can be assured that God remembers you and has written your name on his palms. Then you will have a bright future as you look forward to seeing him face to face and living with him forever.



JAMIE BAKER



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn