

"I Am Faithful . . . You Are Not"
Isaiah 63:7-65:16
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We start our lesson today in verse 7 of chapter 63, so let's do a quick recap of the first part of the chapter. Isaiah looks ahead in the first 6 verses and sees Jesus Christ returning from the Battle of Armageddon that climaxes with the day of the Lord. His garments are stained in the crimson red blood of the people whom He was victorious over. This victory prompts Isaiah to begin to reflect on what God has done, and this is where we arrive in our reading today.

The title of our lesson is "I Am Faithful...You Are Not." Well, that stings! But it **IS** true. God has been faithful with each of us that has chosen to hang in there through this study on Isaiah. For me, I have been blessed by God's faithfulness in finding greater insight into His character and uncovering the numerous testimonies to the infallibility of the Bible based on the prophecies that were stated and have been ultimately fulfilled. For those very reasons, it is appropriate that our reading begins with verses that offer praise to God.

Isaiah 63:7: "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 Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses." I think this is a verse we should each recite every single day — just insert your name where it says "Israel." You might think, "Everyday — seriously? Come on — doesn't that get repetitive?" That's precisely **why** we should do it so often. Satan is hell-bent on disrupting the peace that we have inherited because of our faith in Christ. He wants to put up distractions, pain, suffering — anything to make us forget God's truths and promises laid out in this Scripture.

If our eyes are on our suffering, they can't be on Jesus — and that's exactly what the enemy wants. With his eyes focused on Jesus, Peter could walk on water. However, when he became distracted by the severity of the storm, he sank immediately. Our circumstances can indeed be very painful, but that is why we must commit to saying out loud verses like these. If we say them enough, we're more likely to remember them as a shield against the enemy's lies more readily when the heat is on.

Let's talk about the kindnesses of the LORD. Do you see the Lord as being kind? The Scriptures make it very clear that He *is indeed* kind. He states it plainly in Jeremiah 9:24, "but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises **kindness**, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord." The Lord **delights** in exercising kindness — just meditate on that clear truth for a few moments.

Do **you** believe this? 1 John tells us that God is love - 1 Corinthians 13:4 adds that love is patient, and love is kind. Therefore, if God is love, He must also be patient and kind. Galatians 5:22 reminds us that kindness is the fruit of His Holy Spirit. God's kindness flows from Him because it is who He is. His kindness isn't reserved just for us – check this out in Luke 6:35, "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because **he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.**" That's right – when Jesus said in John 3:16 that God so loved the world – He meant **everyone** – *including* the ungrateful and wicked.

That may seem hard to swallow at times, but we need to remember **we** were all ungrateful and wicked at one point in our lives before He saved us – and maybe after He saved us well. God's intent is that **all** should come to repentance. He backs up that desire by exercising His kindness. Romans 2:4 tells us, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that **God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?**" True acts of kindness take the wind out of the sails of doubt, cynicism, anger, resentment, and all sorts of pain. Why? Because we're so used to the world that Satan runs that is void of kindness. Kindness is a key antidote to an unbelieving world. We must demonstrate it, because people need it. Being kind is a great witness to Jesus Christ, and it should be easier than reciting a Bible verse.

Getting back to verse 7, we also see that God is performing deeds that are worthy to be praised. Not only are they deeds, but they are good deeds. Have you ever truly taken an inventory of the good deeds God has done for you? Your family? Your friends? Your spiritual gifts? How about the air we breathe and the ability to breathe it? I challenge each of you to sit down for just 5-10 minutes and make a list of the things God has done for you. I'm confident, if you let Him, He'll reveal a lot to you. The Scripture then exhorts us to praise Him for these good deeds. This isn't too much to ask, is it? Just a heartfelt 'thank you.' God is deserving of our praise – take a look at the list you create and praise Him for each deed. Finally, we see that He does these good deeds out of not only His kindness but also His compassion.

God's compassion is awe inspiring because it kind of violates the sanctity of the mutual exclusivity of our sinfulness and His holiness. What I mean by this is that God is holy – He is perfect. Conversely, sin is the polar opposite – it is an offense to God. They can't coexist. However, His love for us and desire to save us from our sinful ways is made tangible in His compassion for us. He looks past the sin that is so objectionable to Him and focuses on our souls – He sees the damage sin has done to them, has compassion on this damage, and then offers His Son to come along side us and heal us from this damage. Please take some time to meditate on God's kindness and compassion which motivates Him to do good deeds for you. I'm certain He'll bless you if you do this.

Moving on to verse 8, the people Isaiah is referring to is the remnant Jews from the Great Tribulation – the 144,000. Will they be true to Him? Probably not always – but then again – neither are we. Verse 9 offers another glimpse into God’s character – in all their distress, He too was distressed. God – as Abba Father to His children - is identifying with their suffering. God has stated many times that He sees the suffering of those He loves. Here are just a few verses that demonstrate the truth of God’s loving watch over us:

- **Judges 10:16:** Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the Lord. And he could bear Israel’s misery no longer.
- **Deuteronomy 32:10-12:** In speaking of Israel, “In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him.”
- **1 Peter 5:7:** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Because the Bible makes these claims of God’s loving watch over us – and God cannot lie, they must be true. But what about when we’re in the middle of a trial, and we can’t see or hear Him – we don’t see the tangible evidence of His deliverance? We cry out, “Where are You, God?” I know God loves me. I know He is faithful. I know one day I will be with Him in eternity forever at peace. When I last taught this lesson, I wrote these very words at a time when my family was going through a very difficult time. I shared this in the lecture and then asked the question, “What do we do when there are times like these?”

Verse 9 gives some light to what might be going on – part of the purpose of our trials isn’t so much the promise of deliverance but the promise of His presence and strength to help us withstand the trials. The first segment of this verse isn’t the promise of deliverance – it’s the statement that He is distressed because we are distressed – *He enters into our suffering* and comes along side us. This is what the Apostle Paul meant in **Philippians 3:10**, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

Some of you may recall the story from the Book of Daniel where King Nebuchadnezzar has constructed an image of gold and has ordered the people to worship it – those who won’t will be thrown into a fiery furnace. Daniel’s buddies: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to do this, and when confronted by the King, they make this great statement of their faith in God’s faithfulness in **Daniel 3:17**: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand.” These young Jewish men showed great courage to make such a statement to such a powerful king.

But they didn't stop there. They went onto say in the next verse "But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Verse 18 is the **greater faith**, and it's a faith each of us will be challenged to grow into during our lives. Just getting to the point of Verse 17 faith is a tremendous step. But getting to verse 18 faith is not possible until you've experienced knowing God is with you through your suffering – out of HIS faithfulness. It is HIS faithfulness that begins the process of building up our faith – we cannot do this on our own.

In verses 11-14 we can see the people feeling the heat of being at war with God, and they begin to reflect on those times when God was with Moses and guiding them through the Exodus – trying to remind God of what He used to be for them. In verse 15 they ask Him to **look** down and show the power and compassion He had on them in the days of old and in verse 64:1 they ask Him to **come** down. They keep appealing to His previous acts of protection and deliverance for them as the basis for Him coming to do it again. What is preventing God from honoring their requests? Sin – unconfessed sin. God's ready to forgive us and cleanse us of our sin, but we have to confess it first.

They begin acknowledging God for Who He is in verse 4, "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him." Finally – they get to the real issue in verse 5 – confession of their sin and then ask "How can we be saved?" Oh, how I wish more people would ask this question. How can I be saved?

I'm sure you remember the story where the ruler came to Jesus one day and asked Him what He must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells the ruler to go sell all his possessions and give them to the poor – knowing the man's wealth was more important to him than walking with God. Jesus then makes the proclamation that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into the Kingdom of God. When hearing this, the people asked who then can be saved, and the Lord makes an important statement in **Luke 18:27**, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

What's He saying here? On our own, we are totally and completely unable to obtain salvation – it is impossible. It is ONLY possible with God. This flies in the face of those out there who claim all roads lead to heaven – that we can somehow earn or work our way into heaven. The next verse nukes that notion. **Isaiah 64:6**: All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. Jon Courson says, "In God's sight anything that the flesh produces is as filthy rags – you cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing." It is God's way or the highway. Sadly, it's a highway that is less traveled.

Verse 7 continues the confession that no one calls on His name to lay hold of Him – this is the case because God has hidden His face from them and given them over to their sins. I think it's interesting that God's punishment for people in sin is to give them over to their sin – in chapter 1 of Romans, the Apostle Paul notes 3 times that God gave the sinners over to their sinful desires, shameful lusts, and depraved minds. Their punishment is to lift whatever restraint God has had on them and release them to fall completely and irretrievably into their sin. The activities that once seemed so desirable are now going to be their source of punishment and ultimate death. That, my brothers and sisters, is the **TRUTH** about sin. Sin is its own punishment.

We then get to our memory verse. **Isaiah 64:7-8**, "No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins. Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." This is such a great use of imagery because it demonstrates that, as believers, we are completely under the control of Jesus Christ. I believe this is one of the toughest hurdles because most people are operating under the illusion they can control the circumstances in their lives. A critical steppingstone in our walks with faith is to recognize that Jesus wants to make us into something beautiful and useful. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God's handiwork – created in Christ to do good works – to be useful.

We need to remember that life is a process, and when we surrender ourselves to the Great Creator and Re-Creator, we are, in effect, walking through the rest of life with a sign like the ones you see at a construction site that says, "Caution – Construction in Progress." We're not a finished work. Spiritually, we're all under construction, but this doesn't mean we can't be useful. We take what the potter has taught us in our formation process and encourage others who might be in earlier stages of their formation. As opposed to CalTrans projects which have no end, the good news is Jesus always finishes His projects - us. Philippians 1:6 reminds us that the good work God begins in us will be completed as we step into eternity.

Isaiah 64:10-11: "Your sacred cities have become a wasteland; even Zion is a wasteland, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and glorious temple, where our ancestors praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins." At the time of Isaiah's writing, verses 10 and 11 had not yet happened. 2 Kings 25 tells us that about 100 years after writing this, Babylon came against Jerusalem and completely fulfilled this prophecy. The final verse of chapter 64 asks the questions, "Will you hold yourself back, keep silent, and punish us beyond measure?" The remainder of the book of Isaiah provides the answer.

Most of us probably played the game "Hide and Seek." As a father and a grandfather, this was fun because I enjoyed that point that my children or grandchildren couldn't figure out where I was, so I would go out of my way to help them find me. The smile on their faces when they discovered they found me is one of

my favorite memories. I can't imagine how frustrating or sad it must be for God to not reveal Himself to those He called His own – in the first verse of chapter 65, God is speaking of the Gentiles – we are the ones whom He revealed Himself to us – we did not ask for or seek Him. You can hear His desire to be revealed, "Here am I, here am I!!!!"

Scripture tells us God not only *can* be found, but He *wants* to be found and **reward** those who seek Him.

Deuteronomy 4:29: But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Psalm 9:10: Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalm 119:2: Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart

So, God rewards those who seek Him with all their hearts by never forsaking them, and this makes them blessed.

Isaiah makes yet again another statement of the faithfulness of God in **Isaiah 65:2**, "All day I have held out my hands." But he points out the kind of people the Jews were – obstinate, not walking in good ways, pursuing their own imaginations – disobeying His commandments. The church for too long has held the Jews in judgment for their treatment of God – what a bunch of hypocrites. Who in this room can honestly say they haven't been obstinate with the Lord, or haven't done good things, or pursued their own imaginations and will?? Thankfully, God did not stop holding out His hands to us. Christ crucified is the permanent statement of God's faithfulness – His arms stretched out to prove to us He loves us so much that He's willing to die for us.

In the next several verses, God talks about His response to their sin – there is judgment for sin. They're going to pay for not only their sin but also the sins of their ancestors. That may not seem fair – being accountable for family we didn't even know. The thing is – they had a choice – they could have rejected the ways of their ancestors and returned to the Lord. There are consequences to our choices – today's world doesn't want us to believe this. This is a terrifying deceit that has fallen upon our nation – we are kidding ourselves if we don't think judgment is coming for the things we have done – the eliminating of God from our government buildings and our schools, the legalization of abortion, the growing acceptance of immorality.

I think Billy Graham once said, "If God doesn't judge the United States, He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology." But God is faithful. He is full of grace. In verse 65:8,

He reveals the idea of a remnant – “I won’t destroy them all.” He compares them to a cluster of grapes that have been passed over in a vineyard.

The KJV of verse 9 speaks of a seed that comes out of Jacob and Judah – which could mean Jesus. Otherwise, the descendants mentioned here are likely the 144,000 Jews spared during the Great Tribulation. In verses 11 & 12, the Lord makes it clear that those who do not answer His call or listened when He spoke, there will be destruction. Again – note that He is not just sitting on some high throne waiting for the people to reach up to Him. He is calling – He is speaking. He is doing the initiating of the relationship. He’s making the effort.

As I thought about the conclusion of this lesson, I kept on thinking of the title, “I am faithful...you are not.” The question that came to my mind is, ‘What does God’s faithfulness look like?’ The standard stock Christian-ese answers include quoting Scriptures that speak to His faithfulness, giving Him credit for the good things in our lives, and Jesus dying on a cross for our salvation. None of these are wrong, but they don’t require much thought – they can be regurgitations of what someone else might have said or what they read in a book. What I’m asking you to think about is what does God’s faithfulness look like when the stock answers don’t sustain you. You’re in a trial and there is no sign of deliverance. The heat is on. The waves of grief you’re experiencing are coming at you relentlessly. What does God’s faithfulness look like then?

Normally, if I’m asked to teach a lesson that I have taught before, I like to create a new one as I like to see what God has taught me from 13 years earlier. I did teach provide a lecture on this lesson last time, but I was in a very different place. We were in the early years of a long trial, and I was struggling at that time to say with conviction what the Scriptures were proclaiming to be true. Over the last 13 years, God has graciously provided much restoration from our losses from that trial. Some have been material restorations, but the real treasure He’s bestowed upon us is a stronger faith in Him and His character.

I can confidently proclaim that had we not gone through what we went through – and to an extent – are still going through to this day, we would not have the faith we have. I would not be able to teach about the things God promises with much, if any, conviction had we not personally experienced God’s faithfulness. I would never have learned this or gone to what it would take to learn this on my own – proving I am not faithful.

Comprehending faithfulness from an eternal perspective is no easy task, but I’ve come to the point of realization that it is a vital component of building a Daniel 3:18 kind of faith. It is trusting Him through the pain; through the suffering; through the loss. It is NOT easy, but apparently, it is necessary. But God is indeed faithful. You may be having a hard time seeing that now. Keep pressing in and look over that list you

created of His past examples of faithfulness. They say history repeats itself. He will repeat His faithfulness to you because He loves you. It may look different than the past, but God doesn't change, and neither does His faithfulness. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. If you're still here, He's not finished yet. Amen? Let's stand and sing.