

THE SAVIOUR'S THREEFOLD MISSION TO THE DISCOURAGED: REACHING ALL WHO FEEL FORSAKEN, FORGOTTEN

ISAIAH 49:14–50:03

Introduction

God loves the world. He loves every single person in the world, including murderers, abusers, oppressors, liars, thieves, wife-beaters, naggers, complainers, agnostics and atheists. Even when people curse, reject and defy Him, God loves them. No matter how people treat God, He still loves them. He wants to save all people from the terrifying judgment that is coming against all their ungodliness and unrighteousness. Because of His love for the world, God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver the human race from the coming judgment.

This present Scripture proclaims the Saviour's mission to the world. God sent Christ into the world to save and help people: the unbelievers; the discouraged who feel deserted, alienated, forsaken, forgotten; and the weary and heavily burdened; and the whole human race. This is, *The Saviour's Mission to the World: Being Eternally Called to Reach the World for God*, Isaiah 49:1-50:11.

- I. The Saviour's ninefold mission to the unbelievers of the world: reaching everyone for God (vv. 49:1-13).
- II. The Saviour's threefold mission to the discouraged: reaching all who feel forsaken, forgotten (vv. 49:14-50:3).
- III. The Saviour's twofold mission to the weary: reaching out to all who are in bondage to sin and death (vv. 50:4-9).
- IV. The Saviour's specific mission to the whole human race: to warn each person to fear the LORD and obey the Saviour (vv. 50:10-11).

Isaiah 49:14–50:03 The Saviour's Threefold Mission to the Discouraged: Reaching All Who Feel Forsaken, Forgotten

The Saviour was given a specific threefold mission to help the discouraged. In these verses, the prophet Isaiah is picturing a conversation between the LORD and Zion. Zion represents the Jews who were suffering through the Babylonian captivity and those who had been left behind in the devastated land of Judah. Due to the hardship of the captivity and the devastation of their land, the people had become extremely discouraged. They knew an important fact from history: once a nation was conquered and its people deported, they never returned to their homeland. After decades of captivity, the Jews began to feel abandoned by God. They felt as though God had forgotten and forsaken them. Even when they prayed, God seemed far, far away, unconcerned with their suffering. It was as if the LORD did not know about their hardships, for their prayers seemed to go unanswered. God appeared totally out of reach.

But this was the furthest thing from the truth, and God spoke up to share the truth of the situation. What He had to say is one of the strongest declarations of His love ever given to His people or, for that matter, to the human race. Assuring His people of His love and His power, the LORD compared Himself to a loving mother (vv. 15-23), a mighty warrior (vv. 24-26), and a forgiving husband (50:1-3). In comparing Himself to these three people, the LORD was describing His mission to the discouraged. When His people feel forsaken, forgotten, abandoned, and all alone, He reaches out to them in love, seeking to encourage and reassure them.

1. The LORD's mission is to reveal His love to the discouraged (vv. 15-23). His love can be compared to the love of a mother for her nursing child. Could a mother forget to feed and nourish her baby? Could she abandon and have no love for the child? Not likely! But even if she did, God will not forget His people (v. 15), for they are engraved, actually carved and chiselled, on the palms of His hands. This means that God's people are permanently in His hands, under His care, protection and provision. But this is not all: those protected inside Jerusalem's walls are ever before Him. They are always in His sight, and they will stand forever before Him as a memorial. He will always be with His people, looking after them and the Holy City.

For this reason, God will cause the Israelites' descendants to return to the promised land and cause their enemies to flee (vv. 17-21). The descendant's return is guaranteed by the LORD's oath (v. 18). He swears that as surely as He lives they will return. And the returning people will be a spectacular sight (v. 18b), for each returnee will be like a piece of bridal ornament to add sparkle to the nation. Although the land of Judah had been ruined and its population decimated, the influx of returnees will be so great that the land will be too small for them (v. 19). They will actually need more space to live in (v. 20). The number of returnees will be surprising and totally unexpected because so many had died during their captivity and exile (v. 21). Remember that only a few exiles returned to Judah from Babylon when they were released by King Cyrus of Persia. Therefore, this prophecy was not fulfilled in those days. It clearly refers to the coming Messianic Kingdom, the day when Christ will return to establish His kingdom on earth.

When Christ returns to establish God's kingdom on earth, He will arouse the nations to release and return His people to the promised land (vv. 22-23). The nations will even help transport the returning captives (14:2; 43:6; 60:9). Moreover, all the rulers of the nations will subject themselves to Jerusalem because the LORD will make it the capital of His government. When Zion becomes the seat of worldwide government, the rulers of the earth will look after and care for the Holy City just as a foster father or a nursing mother would. They will even bow down with their faces to the ground to honour and worship Christ.

In that day, God will prove two great truths: that He alone is the LORD and that those who hope in Him will never be disappointed or ashamed. By keeping their eyes on

the future, God's people could conquer their discouragement. Holding fast to God's promises, they could know that they were neither forsaken nor forgotten. They were etched on God's hands, ever before His face. They were under His continued care, protection, and provision.

2. The LORD's mission is to reveal His power to deliver His people (vv. 24-26). Note that His power is compared to the strength of a mighty warrior. Who can take plunder or rescue captives from a *mighty warrior*? No one! No one except the LORD, that is. The discouraged can rest assured of three wonderful promises:

=> The LORD will save His people from their enemies and free them from their captors (v. 25). No matter who opposes or attacks them, God Himself will take up the fight. As surely as He is God, He will rescue His people from their adversaries and their oppression.

=> The LORD will cause the oppressors of His people to turn against one another (v. 26). The statement that they will eat or feed on their own flesh is a picture of internal strife, conflict and civil war.

=> The LORD will prove the most basic truth in all the universe (v. 26) — that He is the LORD, the Saviour and Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob (Israel).

3. The LORD's mission is to pay the ransom price necessary to redeem His people. He will liberate them from their captivity (ch. 50:1-3). Note that God's redemption is compared to the love of a forgiving husband. Although the Israelites were guilty of serious sin, the LORD had not divorced or sold them to creditors, as so many men did their wives in that day. When men divorced or sold their wives, they gave them a certificate of divorce, but Israel had no evidence to prove that God had divorced her. There was no certificate, nothing in the history of Israel to suggest that God had ever severed connections with His people. They were sent away from their homeland and sold into captivity because of their sins, not because God had divorced them. To the contrary, the LORD had continually reached out to be reconciled with His people. But when He appealed to them to return to Him, few responded in repentance. Most of the people continued in their sinful, adulterous ways, refusing to repent and turn back to the LORD.

Nevertheless, the LORD always had the power to redeem His people, the power to rescue and deliver them from their captors (vv. 2-3). His power had been proven in the past when He dried up the Red Sea (Exo 14:1-31) and the Jordan River (Josh 3:14-17). And it was proven when He darkened the sky in the plagues of Egypt (Exo 20:21). The Israelites' discouragement was due to their own sin, not to the LORD's forsaking or forgetting them. They were in captivity and feeling abandoned because they had chosen to walk in the wicked ways of the world. Nevertheless, the LORD's mission was to reach the discouraged.

Today the LORD still reaches out to those who are disheartened. He reaches out in love to be reconciled with all who feel forsaken or forgotten, deserted or alienated, lonely or friendless, isolated or homeless, outcast or rejected, destitute or unloved.

Mat 9:2 *Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."*

Mat 10:28-33 *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."*

Mat 20:28 *"Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Luke 4:18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."*

Psa 73:2-3, 17 *But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked....Till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.*

Psa 73:21-26, 28 *When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you....But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.*

Isa 41:10, 13 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand....For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.*

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." ■*