

REMEMBER THE LORD'S GREAT FAITHFULNESS

26⁸Yes, O Jehovah, we wait for you [to come] by way of your judgments; because your name, your memorial name, is the desire of our soul. ⁹My soul yearns for you in the night; indeed, my spirit within me seeks you diligently; for when your judgments come upon the earth the people of the world learn righteousness. ¹⁰But if grace is shown to the wicked, they [still] will not learn righteousness; [even] in a land [characterized by] uprightness he will continue to do evil and will not regard the majesty of Jehovah. ¹¹Jehovah, your hand is lifted up [against them], but they do not see it—but they shall see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; indeed, fire will consume your adversaries.

¹²Jehovah, you will ordain peace for us, for you have produced all our works for us. ¹³O Jehovah, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us; but by you alone will we remember your name. ¹⁴[They are] dead, they shall not live; [they are] deceased, they shall not rise. Therefore, you have punished them and destroyed them, and you wiped out all memory of them. ¹⁵You have enlarged the nation, O Jehovah, you have enlarged the nation! You have gained glory for yourself! You have extended all the borders of the land! ¹⁶Jehovah, they came to you in their distress; they could only whisper a prayer [when] your discipline was upon them. ¹⁷Like a pregnant woman who is about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so have we been in your presence, O Jehovah. ¹⁸We were pregnant, we writhed in pain, [but] we gave birth to [nothing but] wind—we have not brought salvation to the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen [before us]. ¹⁹Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise. Wake up and shout for joy, you who lie in the dust, for your dew is like the dew of the morning, and the earth shall give birth to the dead. (Isa. 26:8-19)

Introduction

Do you ever observe the world around you, become appalled by the wrongdoing and evil that you see, and pray for the LORD to administer His justice? But as you pray you become aware of the fact that you, too, are a sinner; hence, there comes a sense of anxiety: “How can I face God’s absolute justice myself?”

Do you find yourself struggling with what the Bible calls the “sins that so easily entangle us,” “favorite sins” that closely cling to us and are so hard to tear from our lives? You make a resolution that never again will you indulge in such conduct or entertain such thoughts. But once again you find yourself grappling with that same old sin, and losing the battle; a sense of defeat threatens to engulf your spirit and swallow you up.

Do you ever sit back and evaluate the impact you as an individual Christian, or the church of Christ as a whole, is having upon our community and society? You see little change in the lives of those around you, you see few souls coming to Christ, and you feel a sense of spiritual powerlessness and impotence.

As Christians, we are sometimes prone to feel an acute sense of anxiety, or defeat, or spiritual powerlessness. Isaiah expresses each of these emotions in this present passage of Scripture. But let us be sure to remember the LORD's great faithfulness, especially at those times when we keenly feel a sense of anxiety, defeat, or spiritual powerlessness.

I. Remember the LORD's Great Faithfulness, ...When You Feel a Sense of Anxiety (Isa. 26:8-12)

Speaking on behalf of the whole body of Christ, Isaiah testifies, *"O Jehovah, we wait for you [to come] by way of your judgments"* (vs. 8a.) The Hebrew term translated *"judgments"* (שִׁפּוֹט) is here used in the sense of God's acts of justice; the people of God wait for their righteous Lord to enact His judgments upon the earth. This statement is similar to the prayer found in Revelation 6:9-10,

*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.
10They called out in a loud voice, How long, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, before you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? (Rev. 6:9-10)*

Isaiah goes on to explain the reason for this longing to see God exerting Himself with works of righteous judgment, *"because your name, your memorial name, is the desire of our soul"* (vs. 8b.) The Christian's desire is for the LORD—for His presence, His fellowship, His salvation, and for His name be glorified. The Christian's desire is for the LORD to come and work on behalf of His people and for His name's sake. This, indeed, is one of the first petitions of the prayer our Lord has taught us to pray: *"This is how you ought to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. 10May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:9-10.)

That for which Isaiah prays—as he expresses the heart and desire of all God's people—is for the LORD to manifest His justice on the earth: *"My soul yearns for you in the night; indeed, my spirit within me seeks you diligently; for when your judgments come upon the earth the people of the world learn righteousness"* (vs. 9.) When the LORD does visit the earth with acts of righteous judgment and justice, *"the people of the world learn righteousness."* This does not necessarily mean that men become righteous by means of personal repentance and conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ. But they are confronted with God's righteousness, and are made to reverence Him for His divine righteousness, acknowledging that He, indeed, is the God of justice and righteousness. Note Isaiah 5:15-16, when the LORD judges a nation for its sins, *"The common man will be brought low and the man of importance will be humbled and the eyes of the arrogant will be humbled. 16But Jehovah of hosts will be exalted by his judgment, and God—the Holy One—will be sanctified by [his act of] righteousness."* The conquest of the sinful nation is an

act of God's justice (Isa. 5:15), and this act of justice brings honor to God's name (Isa. 5:16); it causes Him to be sanctified—i.e.; it identifies Him as righteous and sets Him apart as righteous.

Verse 10 of Isaiah 26 laments the fact that wicked men must be confronted with God's righteous judgments, because they will not respond to God's mercy. *"If grace is shown to the wicked, they [still] will not learn righteousness."* The natural inclination of the sinner is to abuse or scorn the grace (the Hebrew word, חַסֵּד, means "favor," "kindness," or "mercy") of the LORD, not recognizing that it is intended to be a stimulus to move him to repentance. *"[Even] in a land [characterized by] uprightness he will continue to do evil."* Even a change of environment will not produce a change of heart in the unconverted. Place the sinner in the midst of the kingdom of God and he will still continue to be a sinner and act like one; nothing short of conversion can transform his behavior. *"[He] will not regard the majesty of Jehovah."* The sinner will not recognize and appreciate the loveliness and glory of the LORD's righteousness, so as to worship and adore Him for it. On the contrary, he will find the holiness of the LORD to be to him a fearsome and repelling thing, because it is diametrically opposed to his sinful nature, note John 3:20, *"Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed."*

Isaiah now goes on to declare, *"Jehovah, your hand is lifted up [against them,] ... indeed, fire will consume your adversaries"* (vs. 11.) Isaiah is made to see that the LORD is poised and ready to administer His justice: His hand is lifted up and ready to strike; and when He does act, *"fire will consume [his] adversaries."* Becoming acutely aware of that approaching day of judgment, and that even now the LORD's righteous judgment is suspended over the world, Isaiah—no doubt feeling a sense of anxiety, knowing that he, too, is a sinner—gains personal assurance from the LORD's grace and faithfulness: *"Jehovah, you will ordain peace for us, for you have produced all our works for us"* (vs.12.) Isaiah expresses the assurance that the LORD will *"ordain peace for us"*—i.e.; even as the LORD pronounces final condemnation upon the world of unrepentant mankind, those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice accomplished upon the cross of Calvary shall find the LORD ministering His divine peace to us. This assurance does not find its origin in the Christian's own works or character, but rather in the fact that the LORD has *"produced all our works for us"*—i.e.; the LORD Himself has provided and accomplished all that we need to obtain peace and fellowship with Himself, note Ephesians 2:8-10,

... it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8-10)

As a Christian, when you feel an acute sense of anxiety caused by the awareness of your own sinfulness and the impending judgment of God, remember the LORD's great faithfulness:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Rom. 8:1)

[God] will also confirm you to the end, [so that you may be] blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:8-9)

II. Remember the LORD's Great Faithfulness, ...When You Feel a Sense of Defeat (Isa. 26:13-15)

Isaiah, and every Christian, acknowledges that the LORD is our God, and makes the confession, "*O Jehovah our God*" (vs. 13a.) We rejoice that we belong to Him and we recognize Him as the rightful Lord of our lives; we gladly acknowledge the truth expressed in 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20, "*You do not belong to yourself; ²⁰you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body.*"

But there also comes the regretful admission, "*other lords besides you have ruled over us*" (vs. 13b.) On a political level, here is a reference to the nation's subjugation by foreign powers as a judgment for their sins—the people who had been called to dwell in the LORD's Promised Land and have the LORD their God as their King, often times in their history found themselves subject to foreign, pagan powers. But on a deeper, spiritual level, here is a reference to the nation's awful submission to sin and idolatry when they should have been in submission to the LORD their God. Jeremiah 2:11-15 combine these two themes of religious idolatry (vs. 11-13) and foreign subjugation as a consequence of the sins of God's people (vs. 14-15):

Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. ¹²Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror, declares Jehovah. ¹³My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. ¹⁴Is Israel a servant, a slave by birth? Why then has he become plunder? ¹⁵Lions have roared; they have growled at him. They have made his land desolate; his towns are burned and deserted. (Jer. 2:11-15)

What Isaiah is expressing here is basically the same sentiment and acknowledgement of indwelling sin as is expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:15-19,21-23,

I do not understand what I do; for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature—for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing ... ²¹So I find this principle at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²In my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another principle at work in the members of my body, waging war against the principle of my mind and making me a prisoner to the principle of sin at work within my members. (Rom. 7:15-19,21-23)

Isaiah expresses his sense of regret and defeat, but he does not stop there, he looks to the LORD's great faithfulness for assurance: "*but by you alone will we remember your name*" (vs. 13c.) The Hebrew verb, זָכַר, often rendered "to confess," also has the meaning, "to bring to remembrance;" this latter meaning is preferable in this passage. The point being made is that the LORD, in His covenant faithfulness and merciful love, brings us back to Himself and graciously receives us back again, consider Ezekiel 36:24-29a,

... I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. ²⁵And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness, and from all your idols. ²⁶Furthermore, I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances and do them. ²⁸And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹And I will save you from all your uncleanness. (Ezek. 36:24-29a)

Isaiah rests in the fact that the victory belongs to the LORD: "[those other lords] *are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise. Therefore, you have punished them and destroyed them, and you wiped out all memory of them*" (vs. 14.) Neither the devil nor all his legions possess divine power; consequently, they cannot withstand the LORD. Isaiah rejoices in anticipation of the day when the LORD will rid us of the enemies that war against our soul, exercise His perfect rule over us, and grant us the full measure of His blessing: "*You have enlarged the nation, O Jehovah, you have enlarged the nation! You have gained glory for yourself! You have extended all the borders of the land!*" (vs. 15)—verse 15 is expressing this truth in Old Testament terms.

As a Christian, when you feel an acute sense of defeat, caused by the strong remnants of sin still present and operating in our lives, remember the LORD's great faithfulness:

*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
25Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:24-25)*

*But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1
Cor. 15:57)*

*Of this I am sure, namely, that he who began a good work in you will carry it
out to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)*

III. Remember the LORD's Great Faithfulness, ...When You Feel a Sense of Powerlessness (Isa. 26:16-19)

In verse 17 Isaiah portrays himself—and the church—as a pregnant woman drawing near to the time of her delivery: *"Like a pregnant woman who is about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so have we been in your presence, O Jehovah."* But, regretfully, no child is delivered: *"We were pregnant, we writhed in pain, [but] we gave birth to [nothing but] wind"* (vs. 18a.) There has been the pain and labor involved in childbirth, but there has been no fruit!

Now, dropping the imagery and speaking in straightforward language, Isaiah admits, *"We have not brought salvation to the earth."* That is to say, we have failed to bring the kingdom of heaven to the earth, causing it to supplant the kingdom of darkness. *"Neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen [before us.]"* We have not conquered the world for Christ, we have not seen the world converted to Christ.

At this point the LORD Himself speaks, proclaiming to us the assurance of resurrection life: *"Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise. Wake up and shout for joy, you who lie in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of the morning, and the earth shall give birth to the dead"* (vs. 19.) Although we ourselves are spiritually powerless and unable to advance the kingdom of God, the LORD assures us that He will exert His divine, omnipotent power on our behalf in order to accomplish His good purpose, on our behalf and on behalf of His kingdom.

As a Christian, whenever we feel an acute sense of spiritual powerlessness, let us remember the LORD's great faithfulness:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. (2 Cor. 1:8-10)

Conclusion

There are times in our Christian life when we may acutely feel a sense of anxiety, or defeat, or spiritual powerlessness. On such occasions, indeed, at all times, let us remember the LORD's great faithfulness: 1) His assurance of peace in times of anxiety: *"I know the plans I have for you, declares Jehovah, plans to give you prosperity and not harm, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jer. 29:11); 2) His assurance of victory despite times of defeat: *"Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. However, we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (1 Jn. 3:2); and 3) the assurance of the LORD's resurrection power to offset our own spiritual powerlessness: *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest upon me"* (2 Cor. 12:9.)