

RELY UPON THE LORD YOUR GOD

50 This is what Jehovah says, Where is the certificate of divorce by which I sent your mother away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? You were sold because of your iniquities, and because of your transgressions your mother was sent away. ²When I came, why was there no one [to welcome me]? When I called, [why] was there no one to answer? Is my arm so short that it cannot redeem you? Or do I lack the strength to deliver you? Listen. By a [mere] rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn the rivers into a desert; their fish rot due to lack of water and die of thirst. ³I clothe the heavens with black [mourning garments] and make sackcloth their covering.

⁴The Lord Jehovah has given me the speech of one who has been taught, so that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He wakens me every morning; he wakens my ear to listen like a disciple. ⁵The Lord Jehovah has opened my ears; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn back. ⁶I yielded my back to those who beat me and I [yielded] my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not cover my face from mocking and spitting. ⁷Because the Lord Jehovah will help me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint; I know that I will not be put to shame. ⁸The one who vindicates me is near; who, then, can bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! ⁹Look! The Lord Jehovah [is the one who] will help me; who can condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment and become moth-eaten.

¹⁰Who among you fears Jehovah? [Who among you] obeys the voice of his servant? He who walks in darkness, without a ray of light, let him trust in the name of Jehovah and rely upon his God. ¹¹Listen, all of you who kindle fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches: walk by the light of your fires and with the torches you have set ablaze! [But] this is what you shall receive from my hand: you shall lie down in torment. (Isa. 50:1-11)

Introduction

Are there ever times when you feel a sense of defeat in your Christian life? You wonder if you will ever make any progress towards spiritual growth and maturity; you seem to fight a never-ending battle with the same besetting sins.

Are there times when you feel a sense of weariness and weakness in your Christian life? You feel overwhelmed by the burden you are called upon to bear, you feel as though you can't go on.

Are there times when you feel a sense of confusion in your Christian life? You need direction as you stand at a crossroads in your life, or you need light to illumine a dark question or situation.

In verse 10 of Isaiah chapter 50 we are exhorted, "*trust in the name of Jehovah and rely [your] God.*" As a Christian, it is your privilege and your obligation to rely upon the LORD your God, knowing that He is fully able to meet your needs. As we study the

50th chapter of Isaiah, let us consider three reasons why we should rely upon the LORD our God.

I. Rely upon the LORD Your God, because He is Able to Deliver You (Isa. 50:1-3)

In verse 1 the LORD asks His people Israel a series of questions. He begins by asking, *“Where is the certificate of divorce by which I sent your mother away?”* According to Old Testament law, a husband could divorce his wife and give her a certificate of divorce, if he found some cause for taking such action, note Deuteronomy 24:1, *“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house.”* This proved to be a law that was abused by husbands who found it to be a convenient means of disposing of a wife who was no longer pleasing to them, as Jesus points out to the Pharisees of His day (Matt. 19:3-9.) But the LORD has not dealt with Israel in such a frivolous manner. Next the LORD inquires, *“Or to which of my creditors did I sell you?”* Again, under Old Testament law, a father had the authority to sell his son into servitude if he deemed it necessary to do so; note 2 Kings 4:1 as an example of this practice: *“The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, ‘Your servant, my husband, is dead, and you know that he revered Jehovah. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.’”* In this case the sons were in danger of being consigned to servitude because of the family’s debts. But once again, the LORD has not dealt so with Israel. By means of these questions the LORD is responding to Israel’s unexpressed accusation that He has abandoned His people.

In the latter part of verse one the LORD confronts Israel with the truth: *“You were sold because of your iniquities, and because of your transgressions your mother was sent away.”* That is to say, the people of Israel themselves are responsible for their present plight. It is not a matter that the LORD has capriciously abandoned them. Israel’s present state of banishment is not due to the LORD’s unfaithfulness, it is due to Israel’s own unfaithfulness.

In verse two the LORD addresses another series of questions to Israel: *“When I came, why was there no one [to welcome me]? When I called, [why] was there no one to answer?”* As the commentator, E.J. Young says, “The separation of Israel can in no wise be attributed to a lack of loving concern upon God’s part.” The LORD came again and again, by means of His servants the prophets, warning His people and calling them to return, note 2 Chronicles 36:15, *“Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.”*

We often times are prone to make the same false accusation against the LORD, charging that He has unjustly abandoned us and left us to fend for ourselves. Can you identify with this false view of the Christian life? By means of a “divine helicopter” from heaven, Christ has delivered you from the shark-infested waters

of sin; only to drop you down on a wild and foreboding island, informing you that you are on your own: you must try to survive as best you can until He some day comes back for you. What is wrong with this picture of the Christian life? As a Christian, you are not left alone to fend for yourself as best you can; on the contrary, our Lord makes the promise, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you"* (Jn. 14:18.) He fulfills His promise by means of His Holy Spirit: *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive him, because it does not see him, nor does it know him. [But] you know him; because he stays with you and will be in you"* (Jn. 14:16-17.) As a Christian, you are not left to your own resources, note 1 John 4:4, *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* The Apostle John is referring to the Holy Spirit who resides within the Christian as the One who is greater than the devil. Indeed, we are exhorted to rely upon Christ and His divine grace, Jesus declares, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn. 15:5.)

In verse 2b the LORD asks yet another question, *"Is my arm so short that it cannot redeem you? Or do I lack the strength to deliver you?"* The LORD then proceeds to personally supply the answer: *"Listen. By a [mere] rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn the rivers into a desert; their fish rot due to lack of water and die of thirst."* Here is a reference to the LORD's mighty act of parting the waters of the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus out of Egypt, proof that He is both able and willing to take care of His people. He then adds, *"I clothe the heavens with black [mourning garments] and make sackcloth their covering"*—here is a reference to the LORD's sovereign control over the natural realm: He turns the day into night.

In verses 1-3 the LORD assures His people that He has not capriciously abandoned them, nor does He lack the strength to deliver them. Like Old Testament Israel, we are prone to falsely accuse the LORD of forsaking us, when in fact the problem lies in our forsaking the LORD or failing to avail ourselves of the divine resources He makes available to us. A related problem is our expectation of "instant sanctification—instant holiness." But note the biblical teaching that the attainment of spiritual maturity and holiness is a process, indeed, a life-long process: *"let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God"* (2 Cor. 7:1.) *"Perfecting holiness"* indicates a spiritual process, one that is to be conducted in reliance upon the Holy Spirit. Note, also, the exhortation of the Apostle Peter: *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation"* (1 Pet. 2:2.) The advancement of our spiritual life is compared to a baby growing to maturity—again, here is a process that is accomplished and realized over time, not an instantaneous transformation from infancy to full maturity.

Do you feel a sense of defeat in your Christian life? Rely upon the LORD your God—rely upon His grace and His timetable, knowing that *"he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 1:6.)

II. Rely upon the LORD Your God, because He is Able to Uphold You (Isa. 50:4-9)

In verse 6 the Servant of the LORD—our Lord Jesus Christ—describes Himself as willingly submitting to the suffering divinely appointed for Him. Our Lord endured both physical suffering (“*I yielded my back to those who beat me*”) as well as emotional suffering (“*I did not cover my face from mocking and spitting.*”)

Then in verse 7 our Lord reveals to us what enabled Him to undergo such suffering and what enabled Him to endure such trials: “*Because the Lord Jehovah will help me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint; I know that I will not be put to shame.*” Christ put His confidence in God His Father as His Source of help; consequently, He would not be disgraced nor put to shame. That is to say, He would not experience ultimate defeat and despair; on the contrary, He would be raised to glory and honor upon the faithful completion of His ministry. He declares that He would set His face like a flint—with the enabling power and blessing of the Holy Spirit, He would resolutely determine to fulfill the ministry He received from His Father. The New Testament fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in Luke 9:51, “*As the time approached for him to be received up* [received to His Father’s throne via the cross, the resurrection and the ascension], *he resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem.*”

In verses 4-5 the Lord’s Servant—Christ Jesus—describes Himself as being taught by God so that He might carry out a ministry of sustaining us:

The Lord Jehovah has given me the speech of one who has been taught, so that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He wakens me every morning; he wakens my ear to listen like a disciple. ⁵The Lord Jehovah has opened my ears; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn back. (Isa. 50:4-5)

Our Lord submitted Himself to His Father’s will (“*I was not rebellious*”), even though that will entailed the way of suffering (“*I yielded my back to those who beat me.*”) By so doing He found His Father to be faithful to sustain Him, note John 16:32, “*Listen, the hour is coming, in fact it has come, when you shall be scattered, each one to his own home, and shall forsake me. However, I am not forsaken, because the Father is with me.*” Furthermore, He found His Father to be faithful to reward Him: “*he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. ⁹Therefore, God exalted him to the highest position*” (Phil. 2:8-9.)

Based upon His own personal experience, our Lord, the faithful Servant of the LORD who found the LORD faithful to Him, now exhorts us to follow Him through trial into glory: His ministry is one of sustaining us.

On our part, we often times entertain a faulty view of the Christian life. There is a failure to appreciate the fact that trials and suffering are a part of the Christian

life; failing to bear in mind the words of our Lord: *“In the world you have tribulation. But have courage; I have conquered the world”* (Jn. 16:33.) There is, too, a failure to appreciate the fact that the LORD usually leads us **through** trials as opposed to detouring us around them. Paul and Barnabas were compelled to inform the churches of this truth: *“they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²²confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and [teaching] that **through many tribulations** we must enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:21-22.) In connection with this failure, there is a failure to appreciate the LORD’s purpose in subjecting His people to trials:

... now for a little while it is necessary for you to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Do you feel a sense of weariness—even disillusionment—in your Christian life because of the trials you have encountered and have had to endure? Rely upon the LORD your God—rely upon His strength and His good purpose, knowing that He is able to uphold you. Consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul in which he reports Christ’s response to his pleas to be released from his trial and his acceptance of Christ’s will:

... 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 on me. (2 Cor. 12:9)

III. Rely upon the LORD Your God, because He is Able to Counsel You (Isa. 50:10-11)

Verse 10 presents us with this exhortation: *“He who walks in darkness, without a ray of light, let him trust in the name of Jehovah and rely upon his God.”* The LORD our God is the One who supplies us with wisdom and understanding. He invites us, *“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know”* (Jer. 33:3.) As the Apostle James informs us, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (Jam. 1:5.)

Conversely, verse 11 of Isaiah 50 confronts us with the warning:

Listen, all of you who kindle fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches: walk by the light of your fires and with the torches you have set ablaze! But this is what you shall receive from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.

The picture here is of men rejecting the LORD as their source of wisdom and light in favor of pursuing their own wisdom. They will not walk in the light the LORD provides, rather they will provide for themselves their own *“flaming*

torches” to light their way. The LORD exhorts such people to go their own way, if that is what they insist upon doing; but He warns them of what their final end will be: *“this is what you shall receive from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.”* To *“lie down in torment,”* or *“affliction,”* signifies a position of defeat and permanently being given over to the judgment of God.

Often times we neglect to avail ourselves of our heavenly Father’s willingness to impart His wisdom and offer His guidance. Do we seek His counsel, or because of pride or stubbornness or impulsiveness, do we neglect to look to God our heavenly Father, choosing rather to seek our own way? He issues this promise and warning:

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. ⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding ... ¹⁰Many are the woes of the wicked, but Jehovah’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trust in him. (Psl. 32:8-10)

Do we seek and accept the LORD’s counsel with confidence and a willingness to comply with it? Or do we simply go through the formality of seeking His counsel with the intention of going our own way no matter how that way may deviate from the counsel of God? Let us consider the exhortation of the Apostle James:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does ... ²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (Jas. 1:5-8,22-25)

Do you feel a sense of confusion in your Christian life? Rely upon the LORD your God—look to Him, confide in Him, seek His counsel, wait upon Him—knowing that He is able to counsel you.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (Jn. 6:68)

Conclusion

Verse 10 of Isaiah chapter 50 gives us this exhortation: *“He who walks in darkness, without a ray of light, let him trust in the name of Jehovah and rely upon his God.”* As a

Christian, it is your privilege and your obligation to rely upon the LORD your God. This present passage of Scripture supplies us with three reasons why we should do so: 1) the LORD is able to deliver us—He will not abandon us, He will restore us; and He will minister His grace and victory when we are confronted with temptations and spiritual conflicts; 2) the LORD is able to uphold us—He will impart His strength of endurance when we are confronted with trials and hardships; and 3) the LORD is able to counsel us—He will impart His wisdom when we look to Him and wait upon Him in times of decision and dilemma.