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Sermon Notes

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Why Does God Put Up With Us? For His Glory and Our Benefit!

Isaiah 48:1-22

God's commitment to save His people from their sins and to bring them into His heavenly glory is infinitely great... unshakable... undimmed by the passage of time and the greatness of our sins...

Nothing in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below can sever God's commitment to save us... to save us finally, to save us totally, to save us eternally

Paul put it in the clearest terms at the end of Romans 8:

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God goes even beyond this in Hebrews 6 and explains to us the certainty of His commitment in the language of a Covenant Oath:

Hebrews 6:13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself

Hebrews 6:17-19 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Now the question that looms before any thoughtful person here is, "Why are you doing this?" Imagine someone who risks everything they hold dear to deliver you from some grave danger. Imagine, for example, that you are being held by some terrorists in some compound in Afghanistan. One of your legs is broken and you have a fever. You're getting weaker by the day. Imagine an older Afghan farmer and his wife slipping into your

room at night, picking you up (though they can barely carry you) and somehow getting you past the four men guarding the house. Imagine he puts you in his donkey cart under a load of wheat. As the sun is coming up he manages to slip through the roadblocks set up by the terrorists and to begin to carry you to safety. After an hour of walking, he feeds you, cares for your injuries and your sickness, gives you water to drink, and puts you back under the wheat to continue the journey. You look at his face and he is clearly terrified – he is risking his life, his family, his home, his reputation in the community, everything he values, to rescue you and carry you hours down the road to safety.

The risk to him increases as your escape becomes known in the town you left. As more and more of the terrorist group come hurrying toward you on the road, and as the farmer somehow manages to talk his way out of every encounter and continue to carry you to safety, the question burns more and more in your mind: **WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? WHY ARE YOU WILLING TO PUT UP WITH SO MUCH, TO RISK SO MUCH, TO INVEST SO MUCH OF EVERYTHING YOU VALUE TO SAVE MY LIFE?**

Is it because he loves Americans so much? You wonder? Is it because he is hoping for a reward? Is it because someone once saved his life and he wants to pay it back? Is it because he's done some terrible thing in the past and he's trying to atone for his sins? Is it because he hates the terrorists so much that he wants to oppose them in any way he can? **WHY?** What is his **MOTIVE** for saving you?

Dear friends, that scenario is **NOTHING** compared with what Almighty God has done, is doing, and will do to save you completely from your sins. He invested the blood of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He poured out His infinite wrath on His Son on the cross to save you from your sins. He put up with all your rebellion before you were converted, and He has put up with innumerable offenses and slights and insults and acts of defiance and fits of selfishness and irritability and complaining and questions of him – words of blasphemy, words of unkindness, moments of stunning unbelief... and He has a **LONG WAY YET TO GO** to bring you finally into heaven.

His holy heart is grieved by every sin you've ever committed, are committing, or will commit. And yet, He is saving you and will not stop working until you are glorious in heaven. **WHY?**

The Bible gives so many reasons, but there is one reason in scripture that stands above all the others. You may think that that one reason is that He **LOVES** you... and it is certainly true that He loves you. The Bible definitely puts

His desire to pour blessing on you and make you happy as His second greatest reason...

But Isaiah 48 points to the greatest reason of all... the reason why God put up with all of Israel's stubborn defiance, and why He puts up with all of yours:

Isaiah 48:9-11 For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. ¹⁰ See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

IN other words, the reason why God has not cut us off in His wrath, but instead poured out His wrath on Jesus, the reason why God has put up with all our smoldering sins, the reason why God is so wisely gracious and patient with us even now, after all this time is this: FOR HIS OWN NAME'S SAKE! FOR THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY!!

God's commitment to save you is a subset of His commitment to glorify Himself... to put Himself on display... to allow the radiance of His love, wisdom, power, kindness, patience, justice, and grace shine forth from the cross of Christ... and from the glories of the New Heavens and New Earth

I. The Sovereign God Predicts and Works History to Win His Stubborn People (vs. 1-8)

A. Listen, O Hypocritical "Israel" (vs. 1-2)

Isaiah 48:1-2 Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the LORD and invoke the God of Israel-- but not in truth or righteousness-- ² you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and rely on the God of Israel-- the LORD Almighty is his name:

1. God calls on a very stubborn, hard-hearted people to LISTEN TO HIM
2. But they are a HARD-HEARTED and SPIRITUALLY DEAF people!

Isaiah 48:4 For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze.

Isaiah 48:8 You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.

3. So God is calling on the descendants of Israel to listen and learn what He wants to say to them
4. These are of the physical lineage of Jacob, the house of Israel, the line of Judah... it even speaks literally of the “waters” of Judah... referring to his seed as their physical ancestor
5. Beyond this, they seem to be religious: they take oaths in the name of the God of Israel and invoke him in prayer... They call themselves members of the Holy City—of Zion—the city where God put His name to dwell...
6. BUT NOT IN TRUTH OR RIGHTEOUSNESS!!
7. They are spiritual hypocrites... these are the ones God is trying to reach... speaking to blocks of stone as if He can bring them to life!

B. God Has Predicted the Future and Brought it to Pass (vs. 3)

Isaiah 48:3 I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.

1. God ALONE can do this! He makes know the end from the beginning... and He alone has sovereign power to ACT... to make His predictions COME TRUE
2. This is an amazing track record
 - a. Foretelling the coming flood through Noah: Genesis 6
 - b. Foretelling the multiplication of Abraham’s descendants and their bondage for four hundred years in Egypt... also the Exodus back to the Promised Land in Genesis 15
 - c. Foretelling the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine in Egypt through Joseph
 - d. Foretelling many things through Moses... including their rebellion and exile
 - e. NOW... through Isaiah... foretelling so many details about the nations, their rise and fall, the coming of Cyrus, the destruction of Babylon
3. God ALONE can predict the future; and He has done so again and again

C. God Does this to Win His Stubborn People (vs. 4-8)

Isaiah 48:3-5 I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. ⁴ For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was

bronze. ⁵ Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, 'My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'

1. They refuse to listen to God... even though He does these incredibly amazing things!
2. So God puts His words on record decades, even centuries in advance, so that the people can't boast that the idols did them! How pathetic is that!!
3. So God calls on them to listen, acknowledge His greatness, and repent!!

*Isaiah 48:6-8 You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? **"From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. ⁷ They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.'** ⁸ You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.*

God specifically refers to NEW THINGS... FROM NOW ON He's going to tell them... hidden things... unknown to them

We're about to go from a glorious section in Isaiah to an even more glorious one

Isaiah 40-48 is a section that focuses primarily on the crushing of idols and the restoration of the Jews to the Promised Land under Cyrus the Great

But Isaiah 49-55 will introduce an awesome display of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, whose death and resurrection will redeem Israel (and the sinners of the world) from the wrath and curse of God

Hidden Things! Unknown to them!! The Suffering and the Glory of the Christ is soon to be revealed

God says it ahead of time because He knows how stubborn Israel is and how unwilling to yield and to believe

II. The Patient God Refines His People for His Glory and Our Benefit (vs. 9-11)

A. God Puts Up With His People for His Own Sake (vs. 9)

Isaiah 48:9 For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off.

1. This is the MAIN IDEA of this sermon, indeed of the whole Bible and the universe itself: the most significant thing in the universe is GOD... and God knows that

2. God does everything for His name's sake, for the praise of His glory
3. Jonathan Edwards wrote a classic treatise, "The End for Which God Created the World"... "The End" = the main motivation, the reason why
4. But we must go beyond merely God's delight in His own glory... He had that just perfectly before He made anything at all
5. He created man in His own image to KNOW Him, to ESTEEM Him, to SEE His glory and savor it and delight in it... that we would be HAPPY IN HIM
6. That's what "For my own name's sake" means: God's "name" is His REPUTATION among people...

"Our Father in heaven... HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME!"

That is, may the people on earth revere you, honor you, love you, cherish you, delight in you, fear you, serve you

7. God DELAYED HIS WRATH for His own name's sake; for the sake of His praise... He was astonishingly patient with Israel in their stubbornness and willful sin; He is VERY SLOW TO ANGER
8. Why? So that God's patience might be on display... but more than that
9. God had a better way to display His wrath against His chosen people than to merely wipe them from the face of the earth... ***"SO AS NOT TO CUT YOU OFF"*** = so I don't exterminate you, slaughter you, wipe you from the face of the earth
10. God chose to put up with the noxious sins of His chosen people and bear with it and endure it FOR CENTURIES, because He was determining a better way to display His wrath and His justice: by slaughtering His Son instead of them!

Romans 3:25-26 *God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

B. God Refines His People for their Benefit (vs. 9-10)

Isaiah 48:9-10 *For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. ¹⁰ See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*

1. Instead of wiping them out as they deserved, God decided to REDEEM THEM and TRANSFORM THEM

2. He delayed His wrath, deported them in exile to Babylon, and refined them in the furnace of affliction
3. The smelter's fire of affliction purified them... **THOUGH NOT AS SILVER**
4. If God had maintained the standard of perfection a silversmith would have looked for, they would all have been killed

Psalm 12:6 And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

5. God overlooked their sins, even in restoring them to the Promised Land
6. It wasn't as though the 42,000 Jews that went back under Cyrus were sinless
7. God refined them with amazing patience and wisdom, but not to their perfection or their destruction
8. He did all this for the praise of His glory, so as not to cut them off... but to have a remnant chosen from among them who would eventually spend eternity with God in heaven... perfectly pure through the work of Christ

C. God's Ultimate Purpose in Their Salvation: His Own Glory (vs. 11)

Isaiah 48:11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

1. God says again, in repetition, what His priority structure is
2. Ultimately, God saves us for His own sake... but also **FOR OUR ETERNAL JOY**
3. If He failed to refine Israel OR if He overlooked their wickedness OR if He wiped them out entirely, in every other case He would be **DEFAMED**... the God who was not able to save His people
4. Finally, He shows His overwhelming zeal for His own glory... He won't share His glory with **IDOLS**... He won't share His glory with any created being. **BUT HE WILL SHARE IT WITH JESUS! Christ is equal to God!!!!**

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

III. The Eternal God Will Bring Cyrus to Achieve His Purpose (vs. 12-16)

A. God is the "I Am!", the Eternal, the Creator, the Ruler (vs. 12-13)

Isaiah 48:12-13 "Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. ¹³ My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and

my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together.

1. This is the second time God has called Himself the first and the last... He was there at the beginning of history, and He will be there at the end... and every moment in between
2. BTW: Jesus says the same thing about Himself to John on the Island of Patmos:

Revelation 1:17-18 Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!

3. God's own right hand laid the foundation of the universe... There is nothing He cannot do!
4. He rules actively over the stars in the cosmos... they all respond to His sovereign word; when He summons them, they all stand up!
5. This teaches again the doctrine of God's active direct government of the universe... there is not an instant in which the universe, even the distant stars, do not rely on God's power to continue to exist

B. God Alone Foretold Cyrus and Will Bring Him to Succeed (vs. 14-16)

1. God has been very plain about what is going to happen to end the Babylonian exile... He made it plain over a century before it happened!!
2. God will summon Cyrus as His "chosen ally"... a coworker for His glory, to destroy the Babylonians
3. God will summon him and make certain that he succeeds
4. Furthermore, God did not speak this off in a corner, silently and mysteriously—but proclaimed it openly through Isaiah the prophet and made it plain

IV. The Loving God Will Send Another to Redeem His People (vs. 16-22)

A. The Mysterious "Sent One" Speaks (vs. 16)

Isaiah 48:16 ... And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit.

1. This small assertion at the end of verse 16 is amazing and mysterious, though
2. Who is speaking here? Who is the "Sent One"? It could be Isaiah the prophet, in which case he is saying that God sent him to speak by the Spirit

3. But very soon (Isaiah 49) the Servant of the Lord will speak directly to us... and that Servant is none other than Jesus Christ; from Isaiah 49:1-6, the Servant of the Lord speaks for himself—and that Servant is none other than Christ
4. So though we cannot be dogmatic, this could be the voice of our Savior speaking of how the Sovereign Lord, His heavenly Father, would send Him to be our Redeemer

B. If Only God's People Had Obeyed His Word! (vs. 17-19)

Isaiah 48:17-19 This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me."

1. God speaks so yearningly over His people here, saying IF ONLY!!!
2. He is the Lord who has spoken clear words of truth and light and purity
3. God's word is indeed perfect... He has taught His people what is best for us, He has directed us in the way we should go... IN HIS HOLY LAW

Psalms 19:7-11 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. ¹¹ By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

4. God's word had been so clear, so perfect, so helpful and strong... laying out a path of righteousness which He yearned for them to follow... BUT THEY WERE SO STUBBORN
5. God laments here the wayward ways of Israel and all the warnings He had given them over the centuries were coming to nothing
6. Remember that God speaks to Israel through Isaiah over a century BEFORE the final exile to Babylon... but He says "If only you had listened to me... your peace would have been like a RIVER, your righteousness like the waves of the sea and your descendants like the numberless grains of sand on the seashores... your name would never be cut off!!

7. How tragic and sad!

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

8. How miserable are our lives because we don't simply obey God's perfect word

C. God the Redeemer Leads His People to Flee Babylon (vs. 17, 20-22)

Isaiah 48:17 This is what the LORD says-- YOUR REDEEMER, the Holy One of Israel

Isaiah 48:20-22 Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob." ²¹ They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out. ²² "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

1. God predicts the final deliverance of His people from their exile in Babylon... Babylon will be destroyed, but they will be able to flee for their lives
2. As we saw last week, Babylon is not only a literal city, built across the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia, conquered by Cyrus the Great... it was that. But it is also the symbol of the wicked corruption of the world system... with its alluring enticements and its spiritual dangers
3. Not only is this, therefore, a joyful prediction of the final deliverance God's people would have from Babylon, but also a timeless warning to Christians in every generation to FLEE BABYLON'S CORRUPTIONS:

Jeremiah 51:44-45 I will punish Bel in Babylon and make him spew out what he has swallowed. The nations will no longer stream to him. And the wall of Babylon will fall. ⁴⁵ "Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD.

Revelation 18:4-5 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; ⁵ for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

4. The chapter ends with this clear assertion: **There is NO PEACE for the wicked...** so while we can celebrate by faith in advance for the fall of Babylon, we need to be certain we don't share in her doom by taking part in her spiritual adulteries

V. Applications

A. Delight with God in His Own Glory Above All Things

1. Understand the significance of what God is saying here... FOR MY OWN SAKE I SAVE YOU FROM YOUR SINS!!
2. God sent Jesus into the world to die on the cross for sinners... He did this out of love for us, yes... but above all things, for His own sake
3. We must ask God to give us His priority structure and love for and live for and delight in His glory above all things
4. When we get to heaven, we will spend eternity praising Him for His glory in the salvation of a great multitude from every nation on earth... "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord!!"

B. So FLEE to Christ!

1. There is no other Savior from the wrath to come
2. God patiently defers His wrath; He doesn't bring it right away. But Judgment Day is most certainly coming, and Christ is the only escape
3. Trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your souls

C. Understand the Future of this Babylon We're Living In

1. Come out from the corruption of this world's system
2. Do not live for the merchandise and the pleasures and the food and the drink and fun and the hobbies and the money and the power
3. Live a separate life... COME OUT FROM HER AND BE SEPARATE
4. Don't make God jealous by living for the world

James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

D. Ask God to Soften Your Heart

1. Israel is described as stubborn, with a forehead of bronze and a neck of iron... stubborn, rebellious, defiant
2. God has given us His amazing word! He has told us so beautifully what life to live, what path to follow

Isaiah 48:17-19 This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me."

3. Are you feeding daily on God's word, pleading with Him to lead you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake? Do you see how God promises to give you a life of peace and fruitfulness if you do?
4. Do you rise every morning and feed your soul on His word?
5. And what you read, do you live it out?

E. Realize How Patiently God is Putting Up with Your Daily Sinfulness

1. God continually looks to Christ and covers your sinful words, sinful actions, sinful heart motives day after day... SMOLDER
2. He does this for His own name's sake so as not to cut you off
3. Confess your sins regularly and thank Him for how amazingly patient He is in dealing with you

F. Saturate Your Mind with God's Perfect Word... HIS WAYS ARE BEST!!

Isaiah 48:17-18 This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea."

G. Look Forward to the Day When Babylon At Last is Gone... and You are Set Free with Joy!!