

## **God is Even Better Than Your Mom**

**Isaiah 49:8-26**

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[The Sanctuary children act out a play portraying several stories from the Bible in which humans reject and/or disobey God and yet he pursues them in love.]

Peter thanks everyone and explains that the play was written by our very own Stephen Hahn and was based on the “gospel in chairs” that you can find in a variety of places on the Internet and which Brad Jersak presented at our conference last summer.

The big idea is that even though we think God turns away, we are actually the ones that turn away . . . and God always turns to us. We’re the ones that have turned away and God constantly pursues.

Mother’s Day, and that play, made me think of a remarkable text in the remarkable book of Isaiah in which God says through Isaiah, “You think I’ve turned away, but I never turn away . . . I’m like your Mom, only better.”

In Isaiah 49, The Lord is talking to His Servant, and at times it appears to be Israel, but is revealed to be an individual, whom we now know is Jesus.

Isaiah is an utterly amazing book that will scare the poop out of you, and then, set you free . . .

- Over and over Isaiah prophesies the destruction of all things—Jerusalem and the entire world.
- And over and over he prophesies the incredible truth that God will make all things new, through His servant—who is the Messiah—and, in some amazing way, His people—that is Jerusalem, who is us.

In places, Isaiah talks as if this is already accomplished and the whole earth is already filled with the glory of God, but at the time of the prophesy—whether you date it in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC as some do, or the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC as others do—Jerusalem (also called Zion) is incredibly corrupt.

- In fact, God calls her a “whore.”

- She is corrupt and is, or has been, assaulted by all sorts of enemies including Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and her own family—the northern kingdom of Israel.

Zion has every reason to think that God has turned His back on her...

And you may think you have every reason to think that God has turned His back on you . . . including the fact that deep in your heart you realize that you have turned your back on Him.

Isaiah 49:13-15

*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion (racham—a variation of rechem, which means “womb”). For the Lord has comforted his people and has a womb of compassion for his afflicted. But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.”*

That is, “*The Lord has turned his back on me.*”

And now listen to the Lord’s response:

Verses 15-16

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.*

The Lord says, “*Your walls, Jerusalem, are continually before me.*”

If that’s true . . . then the Lord never turns His back on Jerusalem.

And if she thinks He has, it must be *she* that has turned her back on Him.

The Lord says, “*Behold... look at the palms of my hands...*

*“I have engraved you in the palm of my hands...”*

The word translated “engraved,” means “inscribed,” like law chiseled into stone.

Or “cut,” like a nail driven into flesh. “Look I’m continually outside your gates, with you engraved in the palms of my hands.”

Does God have hands?

Once in worship, my wife had a vision of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. They were facing each other, joined at the hands, by a nail, driven through their palms.

Verse 15

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold... my hands.”*

Crazy . . . huh?

But for right now, focus on this amazing statement in verse 15.

When reaching for the supreme example of Love, The Lord says,

*“Can a mom forget her nursing baby?*

*Some might... but I’m even better than your mom.”*

I think we all know that a mother's love is exceptional, even categorically different from all other types of love. A mom, especially a Jewish mom, thinks her baby is the best baby in the whole world simply due to the fact that he or she exists and, by the way, that's how we know Jesus was Jewish. He thought His mother was a virgin and she thought her son was the Son of God. [Laughter as all realize Peter is joking.]

But seriously, at birth, a mom already knows her baby, and something about her baby, that the rest of us don't fully know. My son Jonathan is a very handsome and intelligent young man, but when he was first born, he looked like a booger. My wife had gone through a day of horrific, and painful, labor. I told myself, "This is the last baby you will ever have. There is no way she'll want to have another."

By the time he was born I was traumatized, and Jon looked like a bloody booger. They held him up, and Susan cried out, "He's beautiful and I want another one!" It was really the strangest experience for me.

It took me a little while to connect, but Susan already knew that this baby is a miracle. Susan knew, "*I will love you forever, I will like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be.*" Susan knew and she couldn't turn away.

Now, she would get very angry and even hide her face from Jonathan at times; I mean she'd ground him and send him to his room—but her heart was always broken and facing the door to Jon's room—always "facing his walls".

When she punished the kids she always bore the pain of the discipline. As if that punished little child were bone of her bones and flesh of her flesh—her baby. From the start she knew no matter what this baby does, it will always be a miracle and worth everything, including my life . . . for it *is* my life, thought my wife.

You may remember that Jimmy Carter had a brother named Billy  
[Image of Billy and Jimmy]

- Jimmy is known for being a philanthropist and president of the United States.
- Billy is known for owning a gas station, promoting Billy Beer and urinating on a runway in full view of dignitaries and the international press corps.

On Inauguration Day, as Jimmy was preparing to take the oath of office, questioned his mother Lillian.

- "Are you proud of your son?" the reporter asked.
- In all sincerity Lillian Carter asked, "Which one?" She was proud of both.

On Friday, my son Coleman graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Colorado with a degree in Geology, but I don't think Susan's opinion of Coleman changed one bit from the day he got busted for smoking pot, and we wondered if he'd graduate from high school. If anything, her love for him, burned brighter that day

than last Friday. He may have felt her love as wrath, but it was Love—Love that wouldn't turn away.

I remember a pastor friend telling me about a woman in his church in Argentina. Every day she would visit her son in prison, bringing warm biscuits and a hot meal because he didn't like the food served in the prison. He was there because he had murdered his mother's parents—his grandparents—in a desperate attempt to get money to buy drugs . . . And she couldn't turn away . . . And God says, "Even if these forget, I will not forget you..."

Several years ago, Susan came home from work visibly shaken. She told me that driving home she came upon a terrible accident—a man had been thrown from his car and his dead body was lying in the street. People were yelling and impatient drivers were honking their horns trying to get around the wreck, when Susan saw a woman jump from her car. She ran to the body, and standing over the man's body, she began to scream, "He was somebody's baby. He was somebody's baby."

Perhaps all Christian ethics could be summed up in that one statement:

"He is God's Baby."

"She is God's Baby."

"You are God's Baby."

A baby is a person with no resume . . .

A baby is a Spirit without much dust . . . a breath without much clay.

A baby is a soul without much accumulated flesh . . .

In the language of George Herbert Mead, a baby is an "I" without much "me."

I didn't create "I." I exist now. And I observe "me."

BUT I can't observe "I," for as soon as I observe "I," I have become "me."

I am not simply an object in this world. I am . . . a miracle.

I remember riding the school bus in the late 60s staring at my tennis shoes on the corrugated metal floor of the bus as we passed the old cottonwood tree on Ridge Road in Littleton.

I remember thinking, "*I am*" and "*I don't know what I will be, but I want to always remember that I am, now.*"

See? That "I" is still "I," even though I have accumulated and manufactured a very different "me."

Well, my mom knew that "I" from before the day that "I" was born and before I began to go to work on manufacturing "me," then trying to fix "me," getting all insecure about "me," trying to justify "me," redeem "me," and trying to save "me."

A few weeks ago, my friend Bob Hudson led me through a meditation exercise . . .

I simply sat in a chair and tried not to think about stuff and me, but simply “be.” When I would begin analyzing, judging or worrying I was to say something like, “Have mercy” (in my head—like a prayer) and then try to picture my thoughts placed in a boat floating down a stream. Actually, what I pictured was a roller coaster.

When it was over Bob asked, “So what do you think?” and I said, “I feel HAPPY... for I realize that I am not ‘me.’ Me is fine... but I am not me.”

Me was the roller coaster that I had been riding, but I could float above that roller coaster and know I could commune with the unchanging Love of God. When the contemplative prayer was over, I dropped back down into the roller coaster—I was riding the very same roller coaster, but now I was laughing. That was several weeks ago.

Last week, we had just returned from our trip to Chile and so I hadn’t been working on the church or on “me.” Tuesday morning I returned to work and was filled with fear. I came to my wife and said, “Please pray for me. I want you to help me ask Jesus a question.” I prayed, “Jesus, why am I so afraid . . .?” After a time, Susan said... I think I just heard the Lord say, “Stop... stop trying to fix yourself... I love you just the way you are.”

Now, if I believe that, does that mean that “me”—my self will never change? NO!

- It means that God’s Love is not dependent on me changing myself.
- But any real change in me is dependent on the knowledge of God’s unchanging Love . . . for me—“I” and “me.” God made up His mind about me from the foundation of the world.
  - So, does it mean that my self will never change? NO! Actually, it means just the opposite.<sup>1</sup>

A reporter once asked the world champion diver Gregg Louganis how he coped with the stress of an international diving competition. He replied that he climbs to the board, takes a deep breath, and thinks, “Even if I blow this dive, my mother will still love me.”

It’s interesting that, at that point, of all the people in the world, Gregg Louganis is least likely to blow the dive . . . not when he thinks, “If I blow it she may *not* love me. She may change;” but when he thinks, “No matter what, she *will* love me. Mom won’t

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<sup>1</sup> With each of my wonderful kids, I remember a time—around two or three—when they began to consciously try to fix themselves in fear. It was like each took fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and began to use it to try and make themselves in my image . . . but they only covered the image.  
- Before that time they’d fix things about themselves . . . but not themselves.  
- They believed what I believed about them: they were a priceless and eternal miracle.

change. She loves me just the way I am.” It’s also interesting to note that Gregg Louganis was adopted.

So, if you’re sad that you can’t be a mom . . . maybe you can be a mom . . .  
Or maybe you already *are* a mom.

Jesus said, *“The one who does the will of my Father in Heaven is my mother.”*  
So, I think your best shot at doing the will of God, is to get up every morning, take a deep breath and think, “Even if I blow this life... God will still love me...”  
God is like your Mom... only better.

You know, I actually feel rather ambivalent about Mother’s Day.  
It’s not a biblical holiday. It’s a Hallmark holiday.

If you like it, that’s fine, but I know of many women that don’t—they hate it:

- Some because they have a terrible mother.
- Some because they feel like a terrible mother.
- Some because they want to be mothers, but they’re barren or feel barren.
- All because they can’t fix themselves and make themselves a perfectly good mother.

The truth is that all mothers, at some point, forget . . . and even turn away . . .  
That’s why the Lord says, *“Even if these forget, I will not forget . . . you.”*

[Image of a mother conversing with her daughter while baking something. The mother says, “Am I a good mother Susan?” The daughter replies, “My name’s Amy.”]

Angie Dancer sent that to me after our staff Bible study.

You know Jerusalem was a bad mother...

Isaiah 1:21 *“How the faithful city has become a whore...”*

Isaiah 3, The Lord reveals that she cares more for fine clothes and ornaments than the poor and needy, whom He refers to as children.

So, you get the picture: the Lord is talking to a woman, who’s having a hard time being a mother, and He says, *“I won’t forget. I won’t turn away...from you.”*

Jerusalem was a bad mother . . . or maybe not even a mother, but barren . . . or bereaved . . . and she blames the Lord Check this out:

Isaiah 26:17-18

*“Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord; we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind.”*

Picture that: Isn't that a lovely text for Mother's Day? I love the Bible!  
"We labored and only gave birth to wind..."—passed wind, just wind.  
I don't know about you moms, but that's how I feel . . . most of the time.

Verse 18

*"We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth..."*

Jerusalem is called to give birth to "deliverance" . . . for all humanity.  
"Deliverance" is the Hebrew word, *yeshua*. It's also translated "salvation" . . .  
And *yeshua* is also a name that should sound rather familiar.  
In English it's pronounced "Jesus." We labored, and we accomplished no Jesus.

Isaiah 33:11 the Lord says,

*"You conceive chaff; you give birth to stubble."*

And, I suppose that's true . . . when you try to fix yourself . . . or when you try to fix your kids or neighbors . . . with some new bit of knowledge you picked up at some seminar—doesn't it feel like you just gave birth to chaff or stubble, but not life?

You, yourself, conceive chaff and give birth to stubble.  
You, yourself, give birth to imitation life, but not real Life.  
You, yourself, give birth to the false *yeshuah*, but not the real *yeshuah*.  
You, yourself, give birth to fake fruit, but not real Love, Joy, Peace, Patience,  
Goodness and Faith . . . and the Will of God.  
You, yourself, cannot impregnate yourself—no matter how hard you try!  
And that's another reason some folks hate Mother's Day.

Isaiah 33:11

*"You conceive chaff; you give birth to stubble."  
"Your breath is a fire that will consume you,"* says the Lord.

What a bizarre thing to say: "*Your breath, (ruach) will consume your stubble...*" as if you're very spirit will consume your flesh, your "I" will just burn up your "me," and you'll be set free.

Whatever the case, we "*conceive chaff and give birth to stubble*"

All of this is true, and all of us are like a lousy mother, but this must also be true . . .  
It's our text:

Isaiah 49: 14-16

*But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the*

*son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, LOOK, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.*

Verse 17

*“Your builders, (Literally: “children” ben in Hebrew.), make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste go out from you.*

Jerome, who first translated the Bible into Latin in the 5<sup>th</sup> century translates it this way, *“Your children, who destroyed you hasten to build you.”*

Verse 18

*“Lift up your eyes around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, declares the Lord, (He’s swearing!), you shall put them ALL on as an ornament; you shall bind them on as a bride does.”*

*“You will be dressed in good looking children,”* says the Lord.

Verse 19 & 20

*“Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land—surely now you will be too narrow (small) for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children of your bereavement...”*

What a phrase! *“The children of your bereavement.”*

You know right after Jerusalem cries out, *“We’ve given birth to wind (ruach in Hebrew, also translated ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’)”* God says, *“Your dead will live... the earth will give birth to the dead”* *“You, who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!”* Amazing, as if your chaff will be consumed, and you will be a Holy Fire!

AMAZING! Chew on that later, but look at Verse 20 *“The children of your bereavement, (Literally: The children of your childlessness, your barrenness, you bereavement), these children will yet say in your ears...”*

Are you listening to this . . . all you women who thought you were barren?

And those of you, who have lost children?

And those of you, who have aborted children?

And those of you, with children who now despise you?

And those of you, who feel like you have labored, but only for wind?

And all you pastors, and counselors, and care givers, and small group leaders who feel like you’ve loved... and only lost love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faith on those who never said thanks or seemed to even notice?

Are you listening to this Bride of Christ, called to preach gospel to the world?



*"The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears, 'The place is too small, for me; make room for me to dwell in.'"*

"We need a much bigger house Mom!"

Verse 21

*"Then you will say in your heart: 'Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?'"*

You will say, "Where have all these wonderful children come from?"

So... Are you getting this amazing picture, Bride of Christ?

There is so much here, but at least get this:

You are Jerusalem

And the Lord says, "I love you."

But you say, "You've forsaken me. You've turned away."

But God Says, "LOOK, BEHOLD..."

Everything has been arranged that you would Look and see

- I am right outside your gate...
- Your walls are continually before me...
- You have turned away, but I never turn away...
- I am even speaking your deepest fear on your behalf, *"My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?"*
- AND Look! Look! Look! *"I have engraved you in the palms of my hands."* *"See my hands; and put your fingers in my side"* and believe.

Hopefully, you remember that Jesus was crucified just outside the city walls.

- And I bet they nailed Him to the cross, so He was facing those walls, so that all the city could see.

- And hopefully, you remember that we are the City, who is a Bride and He is the Promised Seed.

- Rev. 13:8 says He is slain from the foundation of the world.

- He has never turned away, but we have turned away

... And our gates have been shut.

SO . . .

What does it mean?

#1 You need to Look and behold your Lord.

• You need to Look and see His Word to you, in flesh, facing your walls.

• You need to see what He is saying:

*"I'll love you forever. I'll like you for always. As long as I'm living my baby you'll be."*

*"Even if you take my life... I've already given you my life."*

*"Even if you turn away... I will always be facing the closed door of your heart."*

#2 You need to look, for if you don't behold Love, you will not be able to love.

- You cannot be a good mother, until you allow God to mother you.
- You cannot love unconditionally, until you believe that you are unconditionally loved.
- You cannot give birth to life, until you allow life to impregnate you.
- You cannot do one good thing, until the One who is Good, does you.

Now, I'm sorry if that sounds crass, but that's where babies come from.

- That's where Love Joy Peace Patience Kindness Goodness Gentleness Faith and Self-control come from.

- That's where fruit comes from.

- That's where the Life of *Yeshua*, in this world, comes from.

- That's where the new and eternal you comes from.

*Not* from seizing control but surrendering control to the unconditional, unchanging, relentless and eternal Love, that is your Lord.

Love is a Fire that will burn away your false self but reveal your true self and set it free. Hopefully you take time each day, to behold God's love for you *whether* you're the president of the United States or his little brother who pees on public runways; He loves you, and the knowledge of His unconditional Love sets you free.

The Lord is Love.

Malachi 3:6 says, "*I the Lord do not change.*"<sup>2</sup>

Of course, Love is unconditional. God is Love. All conditions are based upon Him.

Every day, behold what manner of Love, the Lord is . . . and has for you . . .

Then open the gate, and let Him in; pray and invite Him in to every moment.

That's where babies come from. That's where *Life* comes from.

You need to look and you will look, for the Lord is not only hanging on a tree outside your city walls, He has found His way into your heart and He is giving you a new desire. He's giving you the desire to look and never turn away.<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah 7:14 "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive...*"

What does that mean? That means the seed got in before the virgin ever opened the gates or any man ever opened the gates. "*The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call his name Immanuel—'God with us.'*"

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<sup>2</sup> The Lord is Love and real Love is the Lord.

Love is unconditional for God is unconditional, but upon Him rests all conditions....

You cannot make God love you, any more than you can make God.

You cannot make God love you, but God is making you with Love.

You cannot change God, but the unchanging God is changing you.

<sup>3</sup> The Fire surrounds the city and glows on an altar in its heart (Zech. 2:5).

For years, I've been wonderfully haunted by something Walter Wangerin wrote. This is a greatly abbreviated version, but hopefully you'll get the picture. It's called an *Advent Monologue*, and I'll end with this.

I love a child. But she is afraid of me. I want to help this child, so terribly in need of help...

She is lonely all the day long. She sits in a chair with her back to the door, her knees tucked tight against her breasts, her arms around these, her head down... She's hiding... I love the child. But she is afraid of me.

Then how can I come to her, to feed and to heal her by my love? Knock on the door? Enter the common way? No. She holds her breath at a gentle tap, pretending that she is not home... And should I break down the door? Or should I show my face at the window? Oh, what terrors I'd cause then. These have happened before. She's suffered the rapings of kindless men, and therefore she hangs her head...

I am none of these, to be sure. But if I came the way that they have come, she would not know me different. She would not receive my love, but might likely die of a failed heart. I've called from the hall. I've sung her name through cracks in the plaster. But I have a bright trumpet of a voice, and she covers her ears and weeps. She thinks each word an accusation.

I could, of course, ignore the doors and walls and windows, simply appearing before her as I am. I have that capability. But she hasn't the strength to see it and would die. She is, you see, her own deepest hiding place, and fear and death are the truest doors against me.

Then what is left? How can I come to my beloved? Where's the entrance that will not frighten nor kill her? By what door can love arrive after all, truly to nurture her, to take the loneliness away, to make her beautiful, as lovely as my moon at night, my sun come morning?

I know what I will do. I'll make the woman herself my door—and by her body enter in her life. Ah, I like that. I like that. However could she be afraid of her own flesh, of something lowly underneath her ribs? I'll be the baby waking in her womb.

Hush: she'll have the time, this way, to know my coming first before I come. Hush: time to get ready, to touch her tummy, touching the promise alone, as it were. When she hangs her head, she shall be looking at me, thinking of me, loving me while I gather in the deepest place of her being. It is an excellent plan! Hush.

And then, when I come, my voice shall be so dear to her.  
It shall call the tenderness out of her soul and loveliness into her face.  
And when I take milk at her breast, she'll sigh and sing another song, a sweet  
*Magnificat*, for she shall feel important then . . . !

Then what of her loneliness?

Gone. Gone in the bond between us, though I shall not have yet said a word.  
And for my sake she shall wash her face, for she shall have a reason then.  
And the sins that she suffered, the hurts at the hands of men, shall be  
transfigured by my being: I make good come out of evil; I am the good come  
out of evil. I am her Lord, who loves this woman.

And for a while I'll let her mother me. But then I'll grow. And I will take my  
trumpet voice again, which once would kill her. And I'll take her, too, into my  
arms. And out of that little room, that filthy tenement, I'll bear my mother, my  
child, alive forever. I love a child. But she will not fear me for long . . . now.

Look! Look, it is almost happening. I am doing a new thing—and don't you  
perceive it? I am coming among you, a baby. And my name shall be  
Emmanuel.

Well, it's Mother's Day, and all you mothers . . . you already know His voice.

It rises in you whenever you feel love for your child.

It's Mother's Day and anyone that loves is the mother of Jesus

And anyone that longs for love, knows His voice.

And now look [Peter looks to the cross and then the communion table]:

He is facing you outside your city gates.

The Glory of His relentless and furious Mercy terrifies the children of Adam.

It terrifies us because we cannot change it, but it will change us...

It terrifies us . . . But you know Him . . . Open your gates and let Him in.

### **Communion**

He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you; take and eat."

And He took the cup saying, "This is the covenant (it's a marriage covenant). This is  
the covenant in my blood . . . drink of it all of you."

Look! I know you're afraid. I know you feel ashamed and unworthy, but look and  
pray. Now pray with me:

Thank you, my Lord, that you love me just as I am.

Thank you, that I cannot make you love me any more than you do right now.

And thank you that I cannot make you love me any less than you do  
right now.

Thank you for looking at me, the way a nursing mother looks at her child.

Thank you, that you always face my walls, and have engraved me on the  
palms of your hands.

You are my Lord, and by your grace, I open the gates and let you in.

Tear off a piece of the bread. Dip it in the cup, and open the gates of the city.

**Benediction**

So, by way of benediction, Happy Mother's Day! I really think the entire Gospel can be summed up in my being able to say that to you. If this is a Hallmark holiday, I can only say that to some of you, and the rest of you feel somewhat nervous and confused, and maybe you don't know how to *make* yourself a mother. But the Gospel really is this—I can say Happy Mother's Day to all of you because *you* are Jerusalem. Humanity is like Jerusalem—God's Bride. This world thinks—we think—that in order to get things done, what I have to do is go to this tree (Peter points to the cross), I have to take knowledge from this tree; I have to consume, apply it to my life and build things with it, but what I build is just chaff and it will burn up. But the Gospel is that I need to go to this tree, see the Goodness of God, the Love of God, the Life of God for me, and receive His Love for me, and then I give birth to that in this world.

In Jesus' name believe the Gospel Bride of Christ, and give birth to His Love, wherever you go in His name, Amen.

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