

SERMON: A MOTHER'S TATTOO

ISAIAH 49:15-16

(15) Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (16) Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

Introduction

During the Babylonian exile, Israel felt that they had sinned so grievously that God had forgotten them. They believed that God had “kicked them to the curb” or had “thrown them under the bus.” In this passage, God’s uses picturesque figures of speech to give assurance that in spite of the discipline He has administered, He had not forgotten Israel or the Holy City, Jerusalem.

In the first figure of speech God compares His love to Israel to the love of a mother for her nursing child. Could a mother forget her nursing child? Highly unlikely! In the unlikely event she did forget her child, God would not forget His people. As dedicated as human mothers are, God is even more dedicated.

A mother’s love extends indefinitely beyond her child’s infancy. Some say it extends from the womb to the tomb.

This is revealed in verse sixteen of our text where we see the phrase, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” This is the second figure of speech used to assure Israel of God’s love. Please allow me to explain. When a son left home for war or on a dangerously long trip, his mother would long for some token to remind her of her absent child. She would take a knife and carve her son’s name on the palm of her right hand. Thus, engraving a tattoo. She would infuse the incision with dye. When the incision healed, the scar tissue would be more easily seen because of the dye. Now she had a permanent reminder of her son. Since the palm of the hand is one of the parts of the body that we see most frequently, each time she looked at this little token, she would think of her son.

God's people are engraved, actually carved, chiseled, and tattooed on the palm of His hands. Of course, God does not have physical hands; He is speaking metaphorically. This means we are permanently on His mind, under His care, and in His protection. Think about it: God compares Himself to a loving mother. The Bible emphasized the fatherhood of God, but there is also a "motherhood" side to God's nature that we must not forget. Tertullian put it this way: "God is our Father, but He has a mother's heart." Let's exegete this text as we honor all mothers on this Mother's Day.

Exposition

1. God and Mothers Are Natural Nurturers.

(A Mother Can Feed Her Baby From Her Own Body.)

(The Crying Instinct Alerts The Mother Of A Need.)

(We Can Cry to God and Be Assured of A Helpful Response.)

2. God and Mothers Have Their Children Constantly On Their Minds.

3. God and Mothers Have a Lovely Legal Loop Hole.

(They Can Have Tattoos Of Their Children On The Palms.)

(Mothers Have an Exception to Leviticus 19:28.)

4. God and Mothers Always Have a Picture of the Ideal.

(God Had a Picture of When the Walls around Jerusalem Would be Restored.)

5. There Is No Love Like God's Love-But a Mother's Love Is The Next Best Thing.

Closing Thoughts

The high priest bore the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders and over his heart (Exodus 28:6-9), and engraved on jewels, but God has engraved His children's on "both" of His palms- not just His right palm. God's is saying He will never abandon us, even though we may abandon Him. His love for us is more mindful than even the love of a tender nursing

mother. God is love (1st John4:8-10). Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

Related Scripture

Isaiah 66:13

Theological Notes

1. The ancient Jews were very cautious about images and statues because they did not want to violate the second commandment. The second commandment said “do not make anything and worship it.” The operative phrase is “worship it.” They were not to make idol gods and they were not to have any object to represent YAHWEH. God is too great for a single symbol to represent Him. There was, of course, theophany, such as the burning bush, but God initiated that. In many cases the Jews “may” have been too cautious and art suffered when compared to Christian architecture and the great music of the Western Tradition. Also, they were cautious because the pagans had tattoos of their false gods visibly displayed on their bodies. The mothers found an acceptable exemption to Leviticus 19:28. Their sons were not dead at the time and they tattooed the letters of their sons’ names-not the images of their sons. Leave it to mothers; they will figure out a way to make good things happen.

2. Satan will try to corrupt anything that is good. There were times when a mother would become very distraught wondering about the fate of her absent son. In her panic, she would go to a fortune teller and have her palm read. She was hoping that by looking at the tattoo of her son the fortune teller would ascertain additional insight about his well-being and about his whereabouts. According to some historians and theologians, this is how palm reading began.

**Copyright © 2021 by James C. Ward
All Rights Reserved**