

Catching a Break from God

☆ **Worth remembering** (v.7)

☆ **Nurturing worth** (vv.8,9)

In the name of Jesus, the Christ of Christmas, dearly redeemed family of God:

Long ago and not far away a young woman was deeply depressed. The harder she tried, the worse things got. “I just can’t seem to catch a break,” she confided. She was suffering from forgetful adulthood. Her parents carefully raised her in the fear of the Lord to trust in Jesus as her Savior, but she was living contrary God’s Word. Somehow life had lost its sparkle and everything she touched wilted.

Here is a classic Old Testament text sweet with Christmas cheer. But gripping these verses before and after is God’s crushing description of what to expect if you try to break away from Christmas and live without God. Just before: **“I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”** (63:6 NIV) Right after: **“Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.”** (63:10 NIV) **Catching a Break from God** is meant for blessing, but rebellion shatters hearts and homes. Surely this is...

☆ **Worth remembering** (v.7)

Too much of America is **Catching a Break away from God**. Separation of church and state was healthy, but now many insist on separation of church *from* state. Stripping morality from civic discourse only results in discord. God’s Word stands: **“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD...”** (Psalm 33:12 NIV) We don’t have to guess what happens to nations trying to break away from God. American history recalls that before every bloody conflict there was gross immorality. What happened to Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union when atheists killed the Christians? On the other hand, look at God’s blessings on Communist China when Christians are allowed more freedom to worship God. When they worship, they pray for their country and the ability to be better workers and more productive citizens just as we do. Take off the blinders. God’s blessings are **Worth remembering**.

But whether we’re talking Gentile **“nations”** (63:6) or God’s chosen nation of Israel (63:10), public and private rebellion against God only kills the rebel. Even if your parents were the meanest ever, or your pastor never practiced what he preached, the Bible they taught still stands even if they don’t. Paul asked the Romans in his God-inspired letter: **“What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.’”** (Romans 3:3f NIV)

Sometimes reading the ancient prophets feels like stumbling across a frozen lake. The blinding snow leaves you so tired you just want to lie down and fall asleep, but then you’ll freeze to death. Just when all seems lost, you start up the bank to a homesteader’s cabin. And there where spring has begun to warm the earth, a tulip is poking her pretty petals into the bright sunlight.

Across the frozen world God’s Good News keeps shining this Christmas as Isaiah breaks forth. Literally, **“I will remember the lovingkindness of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to everything which the LORD has poured out upon us – the multitude of blessings for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and according to the multitude of His lovingkindness.”**

That young woman needed to remember and turn away from sin to live in the light of God’s lovingkindness and tender mercy. There is no life without God. King Herod coveting fame, fortune, power, killed not just the baby boys in Bethlehem. Paranoid Herod executed his favorite wife and her sons for fear they would usurp his throne. And where do we find Herod in our Gospel Lesson? Dead!

Meanwhile, stepfather Joseph obeys the Word of the Lord, coming and going from Egypt, as God's Word in human flesh and blood grows from Infant to Toddler going home to Nazareth. God's kindness surely is **Worth remembering**. God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) when we finally run out of excuses. Thank God for those hard times when you "can't catch a break." God is saving us from the fires of hell and giving us the opposite of what we deserve. **Catching a Break from God** is really God...

☆ **Nurturing worth (vv.8,9)**

Can you hear God's longing in the second verse of our text? *"Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me."* The Israelites rebelled forty years in the desert, then obsessed with idolatry throughout the centuries. By Isaiah's time the kingdom was divided, the Assyrians were marching through all the fortified cities, Israel was decimated by drought and disease. And the people kept blaming God as they were better off worshiping the Baals. Isn't that being *"false"* to God?

Without thinking too hard, quite a few of us can describe our first car. In fact, the worse shape it was in, the better you remember. Ours was a '74 Chevy Malibu with a 350 V-8 that could run forever as long as the plugs and carburetor were clean. Remember carburetors? Expecting our first child, we drove our rusted two-door over two mountain ranges all the way from Wisconsin to Oregon. Changing the oil in my grandfather's shop, I looked up and saw the underside of the floor pads. We were about to get wet feet from a rusted out bottom. No problem. Sheet metal screwed and sealed with silicon caulk – it was all we had and worked just fine – until I hit a rock up in the mountains and totaled out the car.

God sees our rusted out lives. He knows that rock you were taught to straddle in driver's training is about ½" too tall to miss your transmission case and new muffler system. Before you're there God can see the smoke pouring out from the punctured oil pan, you pulling over so your pregnant wife can get out, the semi-truck driver running with his fire extinguisher – afraid you're about to burn.

We keep **Nurturing** worthless things that are passing away. But our kindhearted God is **Nurturing** eternal **worth**. In mercy God sees us not as we are in our sinful nature, but as He can make us by His declaration. *"He said, 'Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me'; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."*

"The Angel of His Presence" was none other than Jesus Christ, centuries before He was born of the virgin Mary. Many times in the history of God's Old Testament people this uncreated Angel would appear. He took part in Creation, created the angels to serve God's elect, carried out God's will and controlled the destiny of nations for the welfare of His people. He has the authority to forgive, to judge and to punish sins, to overpower Satan. This Angel of the LORD is God, the promised Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. With long, strong arms He keeps **Nurturing worth** by His Word and sacraments.

*One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there were one set of footprints. This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints. So I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?" The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand, is when I carried you."*¹

"He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." Not a Baby anymore, from the cradle to the cross, Christ-crucified has risen and ascended. The Christ of Christmas is God's love breaking forth for us – **Worth remembering, Nurturing worth**. Christians, remember and rejoice! Amen.

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חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה אֶזְכֹּר תְהִלַּת יְהוָה כְּעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר-גָּמְלָנוּ יְהוָה
וְרַב-טוֹב לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-גָּמְלָם כְּרַחֲמָיו וְכָרַב חֲסִדָּיו:

(Isaiah 63:7 BHS MORPH)

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"The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand, is when I carried you." ²

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