

Devotion 26:

Our Father Redeems Us

Isaiah 1—66

Martin Luther once wrote, “Our God does only two works: He kills His own in order to bring them back to life.” (*What Luther Says*, “God”) As I finish reading Isaiah, I have an image in my head of a loving father who has just spanked his disobedient child. The child is in tears but the father is cradling the young one in his arms as he gently rocks him in a rocking chair. Although the father’s discipline caused the tears, he is also reassuring his offspring of his overarching love for the child. Hence, parents have been educated over the past century to follow spankings with hugs. I believe this image captures the essence of our heavenly Father in the book of Isaiah.

Theologians have noted that the 66 books of Isaiah can be seen as somewhat of a mini-Bible. The first 39 chapters recount Israel’s disobedience whereas the last 27 chapters emphasize our Father’s saving and redeeming work. Interestingly, check out a concordance and you will see that the word “*Redeemer*” occurs more frequently in Isaiah than any other book of the Bible. The thought behind the word implies that some intervening or substitutionary action effects a release from an undesirable condition such as slavery or death.

A parenting class that I once taught claimed that the best parenting style was “high control; high support.” Interestingly, the worst style was “high control; no support.” By these simplistic definitions, our Father is an outstanding parent. He is not merely dictatorial without love, nor is He a pushover without discipline. Two common misperceptions of our Father are “kind grandfather” and “moral crusader.” The kind grandfather views Him as soft and one who will basically give us what we want when we want it. Some might see this kind of parenting as neglectful. The moral crusader image is one of God’s hating more than anything our visible sins. This approach seems to have parents caring more about the image shown to others than any internal substance in the child. Whereas earthly parents following the flesh might lean in one of these directions, Isaiah shows us that our Father is zealous for control and for support, both for the sake of His children and for His name’s sake:

“See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. 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.” 48:10-11

“Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” 30:18

“...the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.” 30:26b

I believe the key in our Father's parenting is His being compassionate and gracious, abounding in love. Certainly He used the Assyrians to spank Israel repeatedly for disobedience. But He followed that up with hugs:

“For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones...I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save...Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” 49:13b, 25b, 26b

Although the two parenting prongs of control and support run parallel throughout Isaiah, the book ends with a strong word of support: *“For the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.”* (52:9b) It is noteworthy that much of Isaiah is prophetic. Our Father told His children that they were going to be taken captive and then be redeemed by Him. It is as if a teenager were hearing the sentencing of his grounding, and the forecast of an upcoming event he would be free to attend. Some parenting programs these days would call our Father “firm and fair.”

The Hebrew for the word “redeemer” refers to an obligated family protector such as a father or husband. The most succinct passage that summarizes the 66 chapters, I believe, is 54:5-8:

“For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,’ says your God. ‘For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,’ says the Lord your Redeemer.”

Fittingly, John the Baptist's father Zechariah, moved by the Holy Spirit, prophesied:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God...”
Lk. 1:68-69, 76-78b

Praise God that we are not still under wrath. Praise God that He redeems!