

## Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Isaiah 43:18-25

Through the prophet God says that even the jackals and owls will be able to recognize His love and goodness to His people, yet “You have not called on Me O Jacob...nor have you honored Me...” It sounds like God’s people can be pretty stupid, or maybe they are just rebellious. In other words maybe they knowingly fail to honor or praise God.

God continues in verse 24, “You have burdened Me with your sins, you have wearied Me with your offences.” God’s people in the Old Testament, especially in the time of the prophets, assumed that God was their God because He had to be. They felt no gratitude or obligation to Him. To them sacrifices were not a loving response to God, but a means to make sure that God performed His miracles. In fact they actually worshiped other gods when they believed that it would suit their purposes better. If you read the rest of the chapter, you will see an interesting development as God challenges them to sit down and argue out with Him why this circumstance has come about. In verse 25 God basically says, “Maybe I’ve missed something here—remind Me!” It’s hard to believe that His people could be so obstinate isn’t it?

Are we also guilty of the same sort of rebellion? Does God pursue us with His love when we act as though He isn’t worth our time? If we are honest, maybe we aren’t so different. Have you ever consciously decided not to pray or not to go to worship because something else was too important, or there just wasn’t enough time in your day? Do you forget to read His Word, or just not get around to it? Do you pray for deliverance constantly, but rarely praise His name?

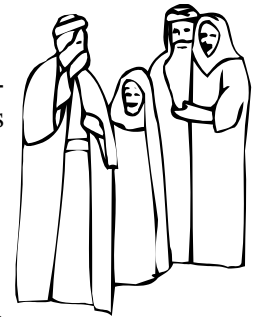
Praise God that Jesus has brought us good news which erases our failings. He died so that we can live in spite of our sin. He died so that our lives can change and we can become more like Him each day!



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1. How do verses 18-20 describe God’s actions for the children of Israel in their desert wanderings to the promised land? How do these verses describe God’s action to His people in captivity?
2. How do vs. 22-24 describe the response of Israel to God’s actions? How do these words describe our response to God’s actions?
3. According to vs. 25 how does God respond to our actions and inactions?
4. What does it mean for God to “blot out” our transgressions? Can you think of similar word pictures?
5. In what sense is God forgetful? (vs. 25)
6. Sometimes we get tired of the same old routines. What promise does God make in vs. 19? What “new things” is God doing in your life?



***Studying God’s Word is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!***

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

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2 Corinthians 1:18-24

Contrary to our sometimes misconceptions of early churches, they were not without their problems. The Corinthian church was a real headache for Paul. It must have been very difficult for him as a shepherd to have to communicate via letters. Most of us realize how much more effective it is to meet face to face over a difficulty. But that was often impossible in Paul's time.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul had sent some pretty stiff correction and direction. Some members had taken offence and determined to make sure that Paul lost his position of respect in the church. Their reasons were selfish and defensive.

As in many churches today, there were those in Corinth who just didn't trust their overseer. Some had accused Paul of saying one thing but meaning another. How easy it is for us to be taken in by those who choose to "read between the lines" even when there isn't anything there. So, Paul begins by defending his motives, just as he had every right to do as one falsely accused. He was not being neglectful when he had to change his plans for an important visit. He was not guilty of waffling back and forth in his love for the church or in his teaching and instruction.

Churches today suffer from the same malady as did Corinth—they are filled with sinners. Yes, you and me. We can benefit from the Corinthian experience in a very simple way, and it doesn't have anything to do with excommunicating a defiant sinner or how communion should be rightly celebrated. It does, however, relate to another teaching that Paul shared in his first letter to the church at Corinth. In chapter 13 of that letter (you might want to go back and read it again as a refresher), Paul talked about true love.

How often we in the church neglect the command from Christ that we love first and argue later. Many Christians act more loving at the office than they do in the congregation! Paul knew, and we need to be often reminded, that when we deal with one another in love we will show patience, find out the truth from the source, and try to help out instead of break up. That is the way of Christ because of the love of Christ!

Get to know Paul the teacher and apostle better in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

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2 Corinthians 1:18-24

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-17. What had been Paul's plan? How had his plans changed? How had Paul's opponents used this change of plans against him?
2. Is our God a fickle "yes" or "no" God? How do we know? (vs. 20)
3. God not only said "yes" to the world, but also said "yes" to you. How has God said "yes" to each of us individually? (vs. 21-22)

### For Family Reflection

4. Can you think of some products that have a "seal" (vs. 22) of approval or a seal of ownership? When did God put His "seal" on you? How did He mark you? (For a song that celebrates this message see All God's People Sing, CPH, #269.)
5. What does it mean for you that "God is faithful"? (vs. 18) How have you experienced God's faithfulness?
6. Some would suggest that all religion is "maybe" and that we can believe whatever we want. How does this lesson address that attitude? What mission message do we have for the world?