

## The Sure Mercies of David

Isaiah 55, Acts 13:32–37

Last week we looked at the text “But God raised Him from the dead.” We focused on the fact that the resurrection of Christ was positively miraculous. No one else in the history of the human race has ever risen from the dead, never to die again. And because he lives, we too shall live also (John 14:19)! As Paul would later write, if Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is vain, and we are still in our sins. Here is what sets the biblical religion apart from heathenism, and from all the other religions of the world: Jesus Christ is alive!

The apostle Paul is speaking to a largely-Jewish audience: “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen!” As such, they would have been familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures—the law, the prophets and the Psalms. As Paul zeroed in on the resurrection of God’s Messiah, Jesus, he wanted to prove that his bodily resurrection was part of the central message of the Hebrew Bible. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he cites Psalm 2, Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16 to show that the Messiah of Israel is alive. Christians do not revere the memory of a dead leader but of the living Christ, the one who came to earth, died for us and rose again. Amen!

Last week we looked at the first quotation, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” The coming Messiah was to be God’s Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords before whom every knee should bow. The resurrection of Christ from the dead was proof that he was indeed “the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made,” Israel’s rightful King, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father.

Now Paul cites a second text, Isaiah 55. As we read in our Old Testament text, this chapter begins with the words “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.” God speaks to his covenant people. He gets their attention with an exclamation, “Ho!” (omitted in the ESV but preserved in the KJV, NKJV and NASB). Sometimes God’s saints need to be aroused out of a spiritual slumber: “Listen up, everybody, this is an important announcement, give this your full attention.” And what does he say? He invites his people to come to him for everything they need: water, wine, milk, bread.

This past year has witnessed rising inflation. We don’t need to read the news to know that. As we go to the grocery store it is evident that our money does not buy as much as it did before. Prices are rising, wages are static. Will we be able to continue to buy food and the necessities of life? Listen to our text: God promises to

meet our needs. He says, “I know that you need food—water, wine, milk, bread. I am not going to let you down. Come to me. I will sustain you. I will meet your needs both in this life and in the next—in time and in eternity. I will supply all you needs according to my riches in glory.” Our greatest need is spiritual—we need our sins forgiven, we need right standing with a holy God. There is no way we could ever purchase that—the price is utterly beyond reach—but our Savior has purchased that with his own precious blood. He who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?<sup>1</sup> So he says, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” The price has been paid by the life-blood of God’s dear Son. In Christ our soul can delight itself in abundance. There is no need to worry, our Father is in control, and he is going to take care of everything. He makes a wonderful promise: “I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.” This is the part of Isaiah 55 that the apostle Paul cites before the members of the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. They are the covenant people. They are in covenant with the living God. God is not going to give up on his covenant; in fact, he is going to strengthen it. His reputation is on the line, he is going to give his people the sure mercies of David. Let us consider this amazing phrase: “the sure mercies of David.” What are they? To whom do they belong? Do you have them? How can you know? First,

### **1. What are they?**

The word for “mercies” is **רַחֲמֵי**. This is a precious word which indicates *faithfulness, covenant loyalty, kindness, grace*. It is translated *mercy* or *mercies* in the KJV: “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever” (Ps. 89:1; ESV “steadfast love”; NASB “lovingkindness”). I’m going to suggest to you that the basic meaning of **רַחֲמֵי** is *covenant loyalty*. This is the loyalty that our Father God has for us, and the loyalty he requires of us, his people. We, of course—fallible, sinful men and women—fall short of the **רַחֲמֵי** that God requires of his people. We are not always merciful, not always faithful; sometimes we are positively selfish and disloyal. But the reason I emphasize covenant loyalty is because this is what we show to God and his people by virtue of the relationship we have to him by faith. God has entered into a relationship with us. We who were strangers to the covenant of promise have now been brought near to him by his mercy and grace. He purchased us with his precious blood. He says to us in the Lord’s supper, “This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you for the remission of sins.”<sup>2</sup> We are no longer strangers but *family*, members of the household of God!

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:32

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 26:26

These are the mercies of David, that is, the mercies promised to David, belonging to David by virtue of the covenant. David was a great man, a great leader, a great king. But these mercies did not originate with David, they were *given* to David. They originated with God. What are “the sure mercies of David”? They are the sum of all the blessings of the Davidic covenant. The covenants of the Old Testament were given to individuals—to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to David. And then in Jeremiah 31:31 God promises, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” This new covenant is fulfilled in Christ, who tells his people, “this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

The covenant made with David was that of the fruit of his loins God would raise up a king who would rule over his people forever. That king is our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. If he had been buried in a tomb, never to rise, then he would not be able to rule forever. But he arose, and lives forever! He ever lives to make intercession for us!

It is a great mercy to his people that God has given us Christ. David’s physical seed—even the best of them: Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah—fell short of the mark. Israel prospered during their reigns, but they were fallible, sinful men. But the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s faithful servant. He has done all things well. As his people look to him, we will prosper. He is our prophet, priest and king. As our prophet he declares to us the word of God. As our priest he offered himself to God. As our king he faithfully rules over us. He will infallibly lead us to heaven. He will lose none of those the Father has given him. His people will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Not one will be lost. Through Christ we are given the sure mercies of David. The root of the word “sure” is the word *amen*.<sup>3</sup> *Amen* to us means *so be it*; it is so because God has confirmed it. David said, “he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and *sure*” (2 Sam. 23:5). If you are in Christ, the sure mercies of David are yours. What a comfort this is in an uncertain world! But let’s dig a little deeper on this point: specifically,

## **2. To whom do they belong?**

All of the verbs in Isaiah 55:1–3 are plural: “come,” “buy,” “eat,” “spend,” “hearken,” “incline,” “hear.” The pronouns too are plural—you can see this in the King James Version—“your labor,” “your soul” (not *thy* labor, *thy* soul). The verbs and pronouns are plural. Thee point is that the promise of the sure mercies of David are given to the covenant people in *community*, not in isolation. Let’s tease this out a bit. These promises—“the sure mercies of David”—are given to the church. The Jews as a people rejected Christ. They said, “We will not have this

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<sup>3</sup> אָמֵן הַנֶּאֱמָרִים, *made firm, sure, lasting*; niph'al of אָמַן

man to rule over us. Away with him! Let him be crucified. His blood be on us and on our children.” This was a definitive rejection of Christ. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. They wanted to honor the Father without honoring the Son—something that Jesus declared was impossible. “The Father ... has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:22–23). By failing to honor the Son, the Jews dishonored the Father and cut themselves off from the covenant. The kingdom was taken away from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43)—the holy nation, the peculiar people. The blessings of the covenant are received by faith. Those who are without faith are cut off by their unbelief. “Because of unbelief they were broken off” (Rom. 11:20).

The blessings of the covenant—the sure mercies of David—were taken away from unbelieving Israel and given to the nation bringing forth the fruits thereof—the church of Jesus Christ, which he purchased with his own blood. But remember, the verbs and pronouns in Isaiah 55:1–3 are plural. These promises are given to the church in community, not to individuals in isolation.

There are a lot of people who consider themselves Christians but want nothing to do with the church. At a memorial service last month I reconnected with a man I had not seen for forty years. When he got up to give a tribute to my late cousin I recognized him immediately. We grew up in the same church. Some years after I left to pastor a church in Ohio, this man also left my home church. He attended another church for a time but eventually dropped out and hasn’t attended anywhere for years. He believes his understanding of the Bible is more perfect than that of any church. So he reads his Bible and prays in isolation, having nothing to do with the church.

Brothers and sisters, as we all know, the church is not perfect. It is composed of fallible men and women who are in the process of sanctification, but we are not there yet. We can say with Paul, “now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”<sup>4</sup> Or with the apostle John, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”<sup>5</sup> This church—and every other church on earth—is not perfect, but the glorified Christ, through his Spirit, is perfecting us. He is sanctifying and cleansing his church “with the washing of water by the word,

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 13:12

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 3:2–3

that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26–27).

Oh, my hearer, do you want the sure mercies of David—the blessings of the covenant purchased by the Savior’s blood? Then live in fellowship with the church of Jesus Christ, his covenant people. The sure mercies of David are for the people of Christ in covenant with his church. Thirdly, I ask you the question

### **3. Do you have them?**

Are the sure mercies of David yours? We’ve already hinted at the answer: the sure mercies of David are the blessings of the new covenant given to God’s people in community, in fellowship with his church. But these blessings are received by faith. Are you trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

The complex of words translated *believe, faith, trust, faithful* are related.<sup>6</sup> Though they are different words in English, they are all from the same root in the original Greek. Thus, the person who believes has faith and trust, and is faithful. He is saved “by grace ... through faith ... unto good works” (Eph. 2:8–10). He believes in God, he has faith and trust in God, and he is faithful to God. Faithfulness is the fruit of a living faith. Faith without works is dead. God himself is faithful, and by his grace he is able to make us stand.<sup>7</sup>

As a congregation we profess the one true faith: “I believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ” (Nicene Creed). When we make our public profession of faith we are asked, “Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord?” We publicly give answer to that question. “Yes, I acknowledge him as my sovereign Lord.” If you have done this, you were added to the church by faith. Your responsibility now is to walk by faith, live by faith, continue in the faith, nurture your faith, profess your faith, and be faithful unto death. If you are truly trusting in Jesus Christ for your salvation—if you have a living faith, not a dead faith—then through Christ you are the possessor of the sure mercies of David—the blessings of the new covenant. When you come to the Lord’s table you hear his words of reassurance, “this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins,” and you can know that they are for you. You are the possessor of the sure mercies of David by faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lastly,

### **4. How can you know?**

There are several ways. “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16–17). As we attend to the means of grace—the word, the sacraments, and prayer—our faith is increased and strengthened. We read and hear the promises of Scripture and we say, “Yes, Lord. Thank you for that. Thank you,

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<sup>6</sup> πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστός—I believe, faith, faithful

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 14:4

Jesus. That is for me. You put that in your word for me. You knew that I needed that just now.” The Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you belong to Christ.

The apostle John writes, “This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may *know* that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:11–13). As we continue to profess faith in Jesus Christ with the people of God, the Spirit of God assures us that we are the possessors of the sure mercies of David.

And as we walk by faith in community with the people of God, we are reminded that we are strangers and pilgrims here on earth. Though we reside here during our earthly life, our citizenship is in heaven. Our longing is to go there to be with our Savior, worshipping him in communion with the saints in glory. Our life on earth is preparation for life with him forever in glory.

When we get ready to go on a trip we try to think about everything we might need. We draw up a “be sure to take” list and we add to it items whenever they pop into our mind. Maybe it’s a trip we have been looking forward to for a long time; we think of it a lot in anticipation. Some people will pack their suitcases over the course of days, others pack at the last minute. As we pack, we will check things off on our list. When we are finally ready to go, and the bags are in the car, we might wonder, *did I remember everything, is there anything I missed?* If it’s an international trip we might think, *did I remember my passport, my visa?* What about credit cards and cash for tips?

We ought to put similar care into getting ready to go to heaven. We belong to Christ. He has revealed himself to us by his word and Spirit. He has convinced us that we are sinners, that we have no hope of eternal life save in him. He has given us the knowledge of Christ. He has enabled us to look to Jesus. He has brought us into community with his people. Now, Lord’s day by Lord’s day, week by week, he teaches us more and more about our blessings in Christ. And Lord’s day by Lord’s day, week by week, we confess our common faith with his people. The sure mercies of David—the  $\text{דָּוִד׳ס־חַסְדִּים}$ —are the covenant mercies of David, perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God’s will for us is that, as we ourselves have received mercy, so we should likewise show mercy to others. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7). How the church is thankful to God for the sure mercies of David, with which we have been blessed in Christ!

Here, then, are the blessings of our covenant bond in Christ.

Recently I read a very moving story written by Sophia Lee, a Korean American writing in *World*, the Christian newsmagazine. It is entitled “Family Bonds: The Things That Unite Us in Life and Death.” I read this story to some young men who had dinner with us the other night. Lee writes,

My parents and my husband David's parents met for the first time this August, 16 months after our Zoom wedding (thanks, pandemic). We were curious—and just a little nervous—about their first meeting: They have nothing in common!

My parents are Korean immigrant missionaries who minister to the Chinese people. David's parents are white, retired business owners in North Dakota who spend winters in Florida. What would they talk about? Will they understand each other? Will they get along?

My parents only understood about half of what David's parents were saying, but they politely nodded along, beaming because they were so thrilled to meet them. Two different worlds collided, spun around in a babble of foreign languages and wild gesticulations and confused laughter, then quietly merged into one family.

Their last night together, after dinner, David and I were washing dishes in the kitchen when we heard singing. We peered out, our hands still dripping with sudsy water, and watched our parents sing a classic hymn together: "He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!" They had huge smiles on their faces. And so did we.

That's the bond of marriage, which locks two separate families together into one clan. That's the power of the Christian faith, which binds together children of God from opposite parts of the world under one heritage that transcends flesh and blood. My heart bloomed so full, it filled my lungs and sprang out of my eyes in joyful tears.

A month later, on Sept. 18, 2021, a truck smashed into my mother-in-law while she was on a walk with my father-in-law, missing him just by a couple of inches. She cracked her head on the windshield and instantly went brain-dead. David received a call that morning. It took him a while to understand his father's words because he was bawling so hard.

We booked the next available flight from Los Angeles to Bismarck. The doctors pronounced her dead while we were midair. We arrived at David's childhood house at midnight, where David's father greeted us with bloodshot eyes. He clung to us, and we to him, and we all wept. Then we sat in silence, frozen in shock and denial, trying to wrestle with grief. Nobody slept that night.

My parents flew to Bismarck with heavy hearts and wet eyes to attend the memorial service and funeral. They stood out immediately, the only Asian faces in a crowd of Midwesterners. My mother-in-law wasn't just my husband's mother anymore—she was family, and so too were her 97-year-old father, her brothers and their wives, her cousins and second cousins. "Thank you for coming," one brother told my parents, as they hugged goodbye on their last night. My mother reminded him, in surprisingly perfect English, "We're all one family now."

Family. Three days before my mother-in-law died, I had argued with David's brother over politics. Now we were planning meals together to feed the waves of family, relatives, and friends streaming in and out of the house. It all seems so

stupid now, the things we allow to irritate and divide us. The morning before my mother-in-law died, she had emailed David, “Just love one another.”

She did not know it then, but that was her last blessing to us: Just love.<sup>8</sup>

As I read this story I thought, here is an example of covenant love. Here is a couple getting on an airplane and traveling many miles to North Dakota to attend the funeral of a woman they had met only one time, but “We’re all one family now.” What made the difference? Covenant. The sure mercies of David are the blessings of the covenant.

Our Lord Jesus came, the minister of the new covenant, which he sealed with his own blood. We who once were strangers, alienated from him because of our sins, have now been brought near by the blood of Christ. He took our sins upon him when he went to the cross, and gave us his perfect righteousness. “Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress; amidst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.” Because of the work of Christ, we who were far off, with no claim on God or his mercy, have been brought near. We are now related to the living God through faith in his Son. He is our Father in heaven. We are his beloved children. We are now related by covenant to all those who confess Christ, no matter what their nationality, language or place of residence. If you love the Lord Jesus, then you are the brother or sister of everyone else who loves the Lord Jesus. You may be from different cultures. You may have different opinions on secondary matters. But you agree on one thing: Jesus Christ is Lord—the second Person of the Holy Trinity who came to earth, was made in the likeness of men and went to the cross to purchase our salvation with his own blood. God so loved the world that he sent his Son to save a people for himself and bring them to God. He has redeemed us to God by his blood. Such love! Those who belong to Christ are my brothers and sisters. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> *World*, 10-23-21, p. 38