

“How Are You Carried Along?”—Isaiah 63:7-9

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “How Are You Carried Along?”, is Isaiah 63:7-9 → *I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that He has granted them according to His compassion, according to the abundance of His steadfast love. For He said, “Surely they are My people, children who will not deal falsely.” And He became their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

A writing which has become the favorite of many people is entitled “Footprints in the Sand,” written by Mary Stevenson. It reads:

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, is when I carried you."

Oh that it would be so easy! Many people could interpret this reading with great expectations. Since the Lord is "carrying them" they should immediately feel relief in the midst of pain; immediate comfort in the midst of sorrow; be free of worry in the midst of crisis; have a feeling of complete confidence in the midst of fear; immediately experience complete deliverance from the affects of sin in our daily lives.

Yet, the reading goes much deeper than our problems. It expresses the concept that God carries us as He goes along with us through the struggles in our lives! It is meant to turn our faith focus toward our Lord's gracious work in our lives so that we give thanks and praise Him daily in all circumstances!

In verse 7 of our text Isaiah prayed to the LORD, recounting His *steadfast love* and praising Him. He did so as he considered all the blessings which God

had bestowed upon Israel *according to . . . His . . . great goodness . . . compassion and the abundance of His steadfast love*. When we consider how we have been “carried along” by the LORD as He has acted in our lives we are also moved to give Him thanks and praise as well as tell others *all that the LORD has granted us!* **Thanks and praise comes in consideration of God’s gracious work in our lives at all times.**

In the context Isaiah was referring specifically to God’s choosing them as His people when He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Verse 9 reminds us of how the LORD grieved because of their 400 plus years in slavery—*in all their affliction He was afflicted*—and decided to do something about it. So He sent Moses to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Notice the description of His presence as *He lifted them up and carried them* on their journey. It is spoken of many times in connection with God’s caring for His people with descriptions like the much-loved picture of eagles’ wings in Exodus 19:4 where God said: *You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself*. Or the intimate father-son relationship as described in Deuteronomy 1:31 → *The LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place* (i.e. the borders of the Promised Land).

Notice part of “carrying them along” their journey was the protection which they experience in a very real way! We may think of the manna and quail which God miraculously provided for His people during the forty years of desert wandering. Verse 9 of our text also tells us that *the angel of His presence saved them*. In Exodus 23:20-21 God told His people: *Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for My Name is in him.*

Can you hear echoes of God’s instructions to His people during Jesus’ earthly ministry? *This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; **listen to Him***. (cf. Matthew 17:5) Many times God used the angel of His presence to “carry” His people along through their earthly pilgrimage and struggles. This “angel of the LORD” was very likely Jesus in His pre-incarnate state! **God’s salvation is always bound up in the Person & Work of Jesus!** For those in the Old Testament they were saved by faith in the Savior promised. The people of Jesus’ day were saved by faith in the Savior Who was fulfilling those promises. We are saved by faith in the Savior Who has fulfilled all those promises!

Notice the intimate relationship described in verse 8 of our text: *For He*

said, “Surely they are **My people, children** who will not deal falsely.” And He became their Savior. The reason we can break out in verbal praise to God is because of His special choice upon us in bringing us into a close relationship with Himself as **His children**. Such a relationship was the cause of Isaiah’s praise to God!

As the apostle Paul considered God’s choosing such an undeserving sinner as himself upon whom to shower *His . . . great goodness . . . compassion and the abundance of His steadfast love* in Jesus, he broke out in verbal praise and described God’s wonderful grace in Ephesians 1:3-6 → *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us **in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption **through Jesus Christ**, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us **in the Beloved**.*

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ we find **every area of our lives** being affected by God! Thus we can find reason for praise in every situation. This includes the comfortable times as well as those times when we are struggling with sorrow, pain, anguish, spiritual battles of all kinds and even God’s disciplining hand upon us, keeping us safe and close to Him as He

carries us along through life!

As God has been faithful in providing for us and carrying us through all the events of the past, He will continue to do so today as well! Think about the struggles you are facing right now. Do you wonder where God is in the midst of your suffering? Do you worry about your circumstances? Romans 15:4 says *whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*. Much of Israel's history was meant as God's "action lessons" as they were living out His molding process. That's why these events from the past are referred to over and over again by both the LORD and His people.

So it would be feasible in faith to stop and consider how God has carried you through so much in the past and find consolation that He will continue to carry you in the present. When this realization of faith is verbalized you can say, "If I made it through that struggle, this is a piece of cake." Then pray: "Lord, grant me boldness to face my situation. Be with me and carry me through by Your Holy Spirit's power. Amen."

How are you carried along in life? By your own endeavors or by the power of God's presence in all your endeavors? As you come to God's Word, to the Lord's Supper and experience the help and guidance of other Christians in

that Word, you realize God's presence is working among us, that **HE is carrying you along by grace!** His promises are not simply words that you try to remember in order to get through the moment. Rather they are His words, backed up by the working of His Presence in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ for you! In a sense, you get to experience His "footprints in the sand" every time we gather together around His proclaimed Word in worship and receive His forgiveness in the Lord's Supper because these are the ways He has chosen to continue carrying us to eternal life! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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