

## **Behold Our God**

### ***Four Truths to Lean on When Following God is Hard***

**December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Text - Isaiah 26:12-21**

**Scripture Reading - Isaiah 26:12-21**

God never said that following Him would be easy.

- **John 16:33 (ESV)**  
<sup>33</sup> ...In (this) world you will have tribulation...
- **Acts 14:22 (ESV)**  
<sup>22</sup> ...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.
- **Luke 9:23 (ESV)**  
<sup>23</sup> ...“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.
- **Luke 14:33 (ESV)**  
<sup>33</sup> ...(if) any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.
- **John 15:18-19 (ESV)**  
<sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
- **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**  
<sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Following God has never been easy for His people.

- It wasn't easy for Noah, it wasn't easy for Abraham, it wasn't easy for Moses, it wasn't easy for David, it wasn't easy for Isaiah, wasn't easy for Paul, and won't be easy for us.

This is one of the things that strikes me every time I read the Pilgrim's Progress, and it's one of the things that strikes me every time I talk to someone who is seriously trying to follow the Lord.

God knew that following Him wasn't going to be easy, and that's why He gave us chapters in the Bible like Isaiah 26.

**In today's passage, God gives us four truths to lean on when following God is hard.**

1) God has ordained peace for us

a. **Isaiah 26:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup>O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for you have indeed done for us all our works.

- i. “ordained” – to prearrange unalterably
- ii. “us” – those who believe in, love, trust, and follow the Lord

b. This isn't the first promise of peace in this section.

i. **Isaiah 26:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup>You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

ii. **Isaiah 26:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup>The path of the righteous is level; *you make level* the way of the righteous.

iii. **Isaiah 27:2-5 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup>In that day, “A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! <sup>3</sup>I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; <sup>4</sup>I have no wrath....<sup>5</sup>...let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me.”

c. How do we know God has ordained peace for us?

i. **Isaiah 26:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup>O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for you have indeed done for us all our works.

ii. In other words, we know what God *will do* for us in the future because of what He's *already done* for us in the past.

iii. 1300 years before Isaiah, God made this amazing, *unconditional* promise to his forefather Abraham...

1. **Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup>...I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

d. A huge part of the future peace that God has ordained for us is our resurrection from the dead.

i. **Isaiah 26:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup>Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

e. When following God is hard it helps to remember that God has ordained (*unalterably prearranged*) eternal peace for us.

2) There is no lord like our Lord (truth to lean on when following God is hard)

a. **Isaiah 26:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup>O Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone we bring to remembrance.

b. Though it wasn't God's desire, Israel had had many other lords.

i. God has always desired to be the Lord of His people.

1. God desired to be the Lord of His people in Adam and Eve's day but they rejected His Lordship...

2. Noah's day, Moses' day, the Judges' day, the Kings' day, Isaiah and the Prophets' day

ii. Because God's people rejected His Lordship, God gave them over to many other lords instead: the Egyptians, Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans, just to name a few.

iii. God does the same with us today. God desires to be the Lord of our lives, but if we choose to reject His Lordship He gives us over to many other lords instead: the love of money, the desire for stuff, the search for the perfect relationship, the search for the perfect retirement, our kids, our past times, our careers, anxiety, bitterness, envy, and addiction, just to name a few.

- c. These other lords are no comparison to God.
- i. **Isaiah 26:14-15 (ESV)**  
<sup>14</sup>They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them. (DON'T LAST) <sup>15</sup> But you have increased the nation, O Lord, you have increased the nation; you are glorified; you have enlarged all the borders of the land. (UNLIKE GOD – THEY DO NO GOOD)
  - ii. **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV) - Don't last**  
<sup>19</sup>“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
  - iii. **Romans 6:20-21 (ESV) - Do no good**  
<sup>20</sup> For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?* For the end of those things is death.
- d. When God is calling us to leave your other lords and follow Him, it helps to remember there is no lord like our Lord.

3) God disciplines us for our good (to lean on when following God is hard)

- a. **Isaiah 26:16-18 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup> O Lord, in distress they sought you; they poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them.  
<sup>17</sup> Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord; <sup>18</sup> we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.

- b. God disciplines us because He loves us.
  - i. **Hebrews 12:6 (NIV)**  
<sup>6</sup>...the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."
  - ii. **Revelation 3:19 (NIV)**  
<sup>19</sup>Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline...
  - iii. God loved Israel, and so He disciplined them.
  - iv. God loves us, and so He disciplines us as well.
  
- c. God's discipline is painful.
  - i. **Hebrews 12:11 (NIV)**  
<sup>11</sup>No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.
  - ii. This couldn't be more clear than in Isaiah 26.
  
- d. God disciplines us for our good.
  - i. **Hebrews 12:11 (NIV)**  
<sup>11</sup>No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.
  - ii. **Revelation 3:19 (NIV)**  
<sup>19</sup>Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.
  - iii. **Isaiah 27:7-9 (ESV)**  
<sup>7</sup>Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them? Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain? <sup>8</sup>Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them; he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east wind. <sup>9</sup>Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin...
  
- e. Lamentations 3 and discipline qualifier.
  
- f. When God's hard but loving hand of discipline is upon us, it helps to remember that God disciplines us for our good.

4) God will one day settle all accounts (truth to lean on when following God is hard)

a. **Isaiah 26:20-21 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup>Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. <sup>21</sup>For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.

- b. I don't typically derive much comfort from passages like these and have often wondered whether they ought to be a comfort at all to the New Covenant Christian.
- c. But I suspect that if I were an African American Christian living in Mississippi in the 1960's I might feel differently.
- i. *The Help* - Following God was hard!
- d. Paul found comfort in the fact that God would one day settle all accounts and He passed that comfort on to the church in Rome.
- i. **Romans 12:14-21 (NIV)**  
<sup>14</sup>*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.* <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. <sup>17</sup>*Do not repay anyone evil for evil.* Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup>*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.* <sup>20</sup>On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- e. Piper's comment on Romans 12 at the Peacemaker's Conference

- f. When you're being persecuted for Jesus' sake, trying to love an unrepentant sinner who has hurt you, or feeling overwhelmed by the wickedness all around you, it helps to remember that God will one day settle all accounts.

Four truths to lean on when following God is hard

- God has ordained peace for us
- There is no lord like our Lord
- God disciplines us for our good
- God will one day settle all accounts