

A young Texas teenager grew up with great privileges. If he wanted a new bike, his parents bought him a bike. If he wanted to have friends over for a party his parents arranged it and threw him a party. If he wanted something, anything, he was almost sure to get it. His parents seemed to show they cared for him by buying him anything he wanted, letting him do anything he wanted, and basically having no rules for him. That was the argument his lawyer made for why he shouldn't be sent to prison for driving drunk and killing four people. The claim is he suffers from affluenza. His extremely privileged life meant he can't be held accountable for his actions.

The courts will have to decide his punishment. Both he and his parents will have to live knowing they claimed his privileged lifestyle with no rules and anything goes is why he shouldn't be punished. But that's the world we live in. It's a world where anything goes. There are no rules. No one can impose rules or limitations on me except me. The way people show they care is by letting me do whatever I want.

When people have less rules and limitations it actually makes them wonder, other than myself, who cares for me? Is anyone else looking out for me and my welfare? And what does that look like when someone cares for me? In the first lesson, Isaiah the prophet reminds us during this Christmas season that...

**The Lord shows kindness to us
Compassionately feeling what we feel
Graciously delivering us**

Everywhere they looked there was the enemy. Living in enemy territory it was difficult to avoid. It wasn't always that way. They had a homeland but it had been sometime since they lived there. Now they were slaves in enemy territory. They were still a nation, but few sympathized with their situation. Few cared. Isaiah spoke for them. In fact he was writing these words years before the Israelites experienced this captivity in Babylon. In order for Isaiah to write this God had to know.

God knew what their problems would be in the future. He knew their backs would be against the wall. He knew they would become sick of living among their enemies, far from home, away from their temple. He knew they would lose the will to continue. So he instructed Isaiah to write about their past to help them with their future. By looking at the compassion God had shown them in the past they would see that he really did care about them, even in this foreign land. **"I will tell of the kindness of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses."** God knew before it ever happened to them. God would feel this along with them.

Remembering their history also showed the many times they rejected God. He felt it each and every time. He knew personally what rejection by those you care for most felt like. Yet each time he came after them. He cared too much to leave them. God felt that if he came after them things would be different. **"Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me."** The Lord felt compassion each time, calling them back, inviting them to know his kindness again. And some did. Some were not false to him. This was only the work of God.

Right now you face troubles you haven't shared with anyone else. It might be a personal battle with an addiction you don't talk about. It might be an independence that pushes people away so that you can't get hurt. But in trying to remain distant you hurt the ones who do care about you. It might be such self centeredness that you can't see the ones around you hurting. Children who feel parents don't notice them. Adults who wander through life surrounded by people but very much alone. And if God hasn't immediately intervened or stopped whatever difficulties you might be facing you figure it confirms he doesn't care.

Do we ever see God's compassion? Do we deserve God's compassion? We have seen it, but we don't deserve it. God calls us his children yet we have lived our lives in sin. He knows that. We face distresses. He knows that. Isaiah said, **"In all their distresses he too was distressed."** God feels what we feel. He knows exactly what we're going through. Not just because he's God but because he's lived it too. God sent his Son at Christmas to live here among us. That was his compassion. Jesus came to experience what we experience, a lifetime of difficulty. He felt everything except sin. He had no sin and therefore his life and death meant more than ours ever could. The baby of Christmas felt the pain and hardship ending in the pain of the cross. The Lord was showing his kindness to us.

Having a Savior who knows what we're going through is great. He can sympathize with us. He felt it too. We can be confident that when we cry out God knows exactly what it is and where it hurts. But that's no guarantee he'll take it away. Being compassionate and feeling what we feel doesn't mean everything bad will immediately stop. God works through those difficulties. He grows our faith. He uses hardships to continue to show his compassion. In good times and bad we know his compassion and kindness.

A hero knows what it will take to get through an experience. They have felt what others have felt. But ultimately a hero needs to rise above and help others overcome. They need to be able to deliver. God knows what we know, and he has felt what we have felt. That's his compassion. But just having someone else experience pain and suffering isn't what we need. We need a God to graciously deliver us. That we have in Jesus.

The Israelites had promises they'd come out of captivity. But that was someday. Who would carry them out of exile and back home again? Their history showed God making himself known, in the cloud, in the fire, in the thunder and lightning, in the voice echoing from heaven. A few special times the Glory of the Lord or the Angel of the Lord appeared. Isaiah said, **"The angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them."** This angel would be strong enough to do what human beings couldn't do. He would redeem them. In his grace he would come at just the right time and deliver them. This was God. That Glory or Angel of the Lord was the second person of the Trinity before he became incarnate, or in the flesh. Isaiah spoke of Jesus.

If you've been asking when you can expect relief and how, it's time to hear from Isaiah and put it together with the message of Christmas. We wonder who will rescue us. We wonder who could ever rise up and lead us out of this forsaken place to a place where there won't be any more problems or difficulties. We often don't feel God's personal touch and care. It doesn't come quick enough for us so we get upset. But Christmas is God's reminder of the redemption he has planned and already accomplished.

Christ Jesus came at Christmas to be human like us. He rose above and lived a perfect life. By coming here and living perfectly without sin his perfect life was a perfect payment. He redeemed us by his death on the cross where the payment was made. By his death he completed the payment, delivering us from our sins. No sin left out. No guilt left unpaid for. All this Jesus came as a baby for, to live, to die, and to rise again.

God owns you and me because he bought us with his own Son. He delivered us by his grace. We are his, but it's not a bad thing. His ownership and his authority over us are good. It means he loves us. The creator of the universe cares for us and showers us with his grace. He will always do what's best because he knows what's best for us. He's more than a friend offering a shoulder to cry on or a mother carrying her child to protect it. **"In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the day of old."** Lifted and carried. In the arms of the Lord nothing can strike you, nothing can harm you, nothing can rip you away from him. He cares for you. He has graciously delivered you and me from sin, death, and hell to heaven and eternal glory.

Some people say this affluenza is just being spoiled. Giving a teenager everything they want is no way to show you care or are kind as a parent or anything else. But let's be clear. The Lord shows kindness to you. He never spoils you. He compassionately feels what you feel so that he can assure you and comfort you through your suffering. He graciously delivers you from all sin and death. Let's remember that the love and kindness of the Lord is seen in the coming of his Son at Christmas.