

June 23, 2024: “Make the past your power-up”

Isaiah 49:14–16 (EHV) *But Zion said, “The Lord has abandoned me. The Lord has forgotten me.”*¹⁵ *Can a woman forget her nursing child and not show mercy to the son from her womb? Even if these women could forget, I will never forget you.*¹⁶ *Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are never out of my sight.*

It occurred to me after I saw the movie, that I don’t think Super Mario games or the movie would be successful today if someone had just came up with the idea in 2024. The plot is a plumber saving a princess by jumping a lot. And are plumbers really *that* into monarchies? And it’s to save her from a giant turtle trying to marry her. And Mario has mushroom power ups but isn’t like the first rule of parenting telling kids, don’t just eat some rando mushrooms? I guess there wasn’t a lot of competition in the 80s, but who could viably pitch such an idea today? But last summer the movie made well over a billion dollars. I think it works because of nostalgia, because people think fondly on games of the past from childhood. So my point is that Mario would be nothing today without that past history. The past is Mario’s real power-up, and that the past is so powerful I think is something we should think about today since it’s so easy to focus on the present or the future because that’s where the problems and uncertainties in our lives are. But today I want you to know not only how Mario’s power-up was in the past, but also how Isaiah’s was, and how you have current power-ups there too.

So let’s figure out how first with Isaiah. So at this time, we’re well after the Israelites have been in the Promised Land, after King David, after the kingdom divided, were when the time when people are being invaded and getting closer to going off into captivity in Babylon. In a lot of the prophets, these invasions and captivities are portrayed as a result of people falling away from God but also it’s a challenge that even those faithful to God would face conquest and captivity and by people who were no more righteous. It’s not like the conquerors are going to ask if you were a pretty good person before they attack, burn down your stuff, and take you away.

So with that in mind, it’s understandable that Isaiah notes Zion or God’s people saying, “The Lord has abandoned me. The Lord has forgotten me.” They saw a bunch of terrifying problems right around them as I mentioned and made a rational conclusion that God left them and forgot about them. And that’s kind of like us. I’m not going to list off anything here in your life because I don’t know what you got going on. You know the problems you wished God whooshed away this week or month or intervened so the

problem never came up. But lots of things happen to us and they bug us. And when we think about the problems that keep coming and might come up in the future, it’s not a big jump to be like, “Umm... God, remember me?” Often it doesn’t matter to us the many promises in the Bible or the ways God has helped us in the past; we focus on the present, and act like, come on, God, get on top of this problem here. In our sinfulness, we quickly let lost in the problems of today and sadly we often let them create a rift between us and God when we act like he’s forgotten us, doesn’t love us, and well, maybe we are going to not love him as much in return then, right? That’s our attitude at times.

But while the world is falling down around them, Isaiah points to the power-up from the past when the Lord says, “Can a woman forget her nursing child and not show mercy to the son from her womb?” With this mothering language, it’s helpful not so much to think of your mother today (if still living) but in the distant past, even though we physically can’t remember, because the language here is connected to birth and infancy. And though the text acknowledges some human relationships won’t live up to this, God’s idealized point is that the powerful relationship between mother and child is right there at birth and infancy, before even you could remember or speak or do anything to deserve motherly love. The past birthing, mothering, and relationship is the basis for all sorts of love in the relationship as it continued.

So in Isaiah’s time God wasn’t going to rescue and be with his followers called Zion here because they did something right in the present, rather because he remembered something in the past, stuff like creation and the covenant promises, especially pointing to our Savior Jesus through that line of people.

And that’s how our relationship with God works today too. When you have a mess of problems or doubts or feel burdened by sin or whatever, the past is your power-up too. It’s counterintuitive but in the best way possible. It’s not that past events in the Bible are meaningful *in spite of* being in the past or that baptism is meaningful *in spite of* being in our past. It’s a positive that these things are in the past! It’s just like birthing and mothering—that past relationship overpowers the present with love. The present and future seem shift in our lives with doubts but the past is a done deal. That’s the thing with the mothering language—you can’t even really fit any works or contribution on our part into the equation. After all, mom did all the work. God’s love for you has a basis in the past, first with creation. But even with

sin, God worked history to send Jesus to save. He died on the cross not only in general but also with you in mind, to remove your sins. He rose not only to conquer death generally but so you have a Savior from death. God gave you rebirth in baptism, often happening in infancy, giving you faith. And he with his Spirit works to keep you in that faith today in the Gospel. All this unfolding was in the past, but that's good because his love and concern for you was a prior relationship that now influences how God cares and loves you today, even giving you heaven itself someday. That's solid, and it's nothing we've earned, just as we don't earn birth.

One time I remember a conversation of older mothers once talking about how they still kind of think of their adult children in terms of their early childhood. I wonder if that's the sort of thing going in in the lesson today, as it shows the incredible, mothering power of that prior relationship God created with us. It's a power-up we can draw from and find comfort in whatever we face in the meantime. So no, the Lord hasn't ever forgotten you, whatever you go through. I hope God's relationship with you, started in the past, empowers you with that love each and every day until you're home in heaven by that same love. Amen.

Prayer: Dear God, whatever we face each day, help us draw comfort from the prior relationship you have created with us in the past. Amen.