

December 29, 2013  
Christmas 1

*"Measuring the Kindness of the Lord with an Overflowing Cup"*

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### **ISAIAH 63:7-9**

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*I will tell of the kindnesses 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. <sup>8</sup> He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior. <sup>9</sup> In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

I am holding in my hand a measuring cup. How would you measure your life this past year? How has the health been? Half full, three quarters, full to the brim, almost empty? How are the finances? Do you see a full cup with bills paid and money put into savings? Or maybe the unexpected bills leave your cup only quarter full as the year comes to an end. Let's measure you relationships with other people, your marriage, your family, old friends and new friends. Are we right there up to the top, has little changed, or has it been a rough year and your cup looks almost empty?

Now let's take this cup and measure the kindness of the Lord using the words we just read from Isaiah. First we will measure the Lord's faithfulness to us, then his salvation, and then his compassion. As we do this we do not see a cup that is half empty or even half full, but always overflowing, 365 days a year, 24/7. As we face a new year let's keep in mind that this cup of the Lord's kindness will overflow this coming year just as it overflowed this past year.

#### **Measure faithfulness**

Isaiah says, "I will tell of the kindness of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all that the Lord has done for us--yes, the many good things he had done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses." The Hebrew word for "kindness" is the wonderful word "chesed." It is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament to show us how faithful and loyal the Lord has been to us. This word is translated as "mercy" in the King James Version, and "steadfast love" in the NIV. It has the meaning of loyalty and faithfulness.

We come across this word "chesed" in Psalm 23 where it says, "Goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives." Notice the emphasis on loyalty with the words "all the days of our lives." It is also found in Lamentations 3 where it says that the Lord's mercies are new to us every morning, great is his faithfulness. Or then there is Psalm 103 that says that the Lord is compassionate and gracious abounding in love. The emphasis is again on the loyalty and faithfulness of the Lord.

This word is also used to describe loyalty and faithfulness among people. ." Jonathan asked King David to show kindness and loyalty (chesed) to his family if he died. Jonathan

died and David kept his word. Rahab the harlot asked the spies to show kindness to her family when God's people conquered the land. Marines express their loyalty to each other with "Semper Fi" which stands for "Semper Fideles" (Always Faithful). They will not leave another Marine stranded on the field of battle.

Have you ever noticed that some people are not very faithful in the way they do their work? They may cut corners and cost the company lots of money. They may engage in backbiting and gossip. You have seen or heard of the bumper sticker that says, "The more I work with people, the more I want to be home with my dog." People let us down. Dogs are always there to greet us at the door and even give their lives for us if necessary. Even in families, people will not be faithful to their marriage partner, to their parents and to their brothers and sisters.

It is easy to think of people who are not faithful, but what about your life and mine. As we close another year of life on this earth we can look back and see where we were not faithful. We had opportunities to show love and kindness to people in our families and we hurt them instead. We got back at people in school or at our work by not being as nice to them as we could have been. Where we fall short of God's glory the most is in our relationship to God. We missed golden opportunities to pray or to grow in the Word as the Lord wants for our lives. We opened ourselves up to sin. Every sin we commit whether it be things we do or fail to do, cries out and underscores that we are not faithful.

In Isaiah 40 it says "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is like the flower of the field." Flowers wither and dry up and decay. The word for "glory" is that same word "chesed" translated as "kindness" or "mercy" or "steadfast love." My loyalty and yours is not what God expected of us. That is why we end another year on this earth confessing, "I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good."

In contrast to all the unfaithfulness we see around us, and also inside of us, we look up to the Lord and hear Isaiah say, "I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all that he has done for us, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel." Measure the kindness of the Lord by reading again the words from our second lesson in Galatians 4, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son." We see this loyalty and faithfulness in Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. He was faithful to all that was asked of him. He faithfully fulfilled all that was necessary to save us. Romans 8 says that nothing in all creation will separate us from this love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord. 2 Thessalonians 3 says, "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."

### **Measure salvation**

We have measured the faithfulness of the Lord. Now let's measure the salvation he has prepared for us. If we do this we will see a cup not half empty or half full, but always running over. "He said, 'Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me', and so he became their Savior." The Lord saved his people. He preserved for himself a people a people who were not false to him, even though the majority of people turned their hearts against the Lord.

There was so much bad stuff happening when Isaiah wrote these words. Here is how Isaiah described the situation. "I have reared children and brought them up but they have rebelled against me... They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel." The same Lord offered hope for these people in the salvation he provided for them just as he offers hope for us. "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

How can you ever begin to find a cup large enough to measure the salvation the Lord has provided for you? Time marches on and life changes, yet the forgiveness we have in the blood of Jesus remains constantly the same. We gather around in worship and we look up to the cross of Jesus. We see his blood pouring from the cross for our sins and we hear him say, "It is finished!" We come to Holy Communion and actually receive physically with our lips and mouth the very body and blood the Lord. Our God saves us by taking spiritually dead people and bringing them to life in Christ. Jesus is the true vine. We are the beautiful branches that are saved by being attached to him. That also means the year 2014 will be another year to bring forth fruit out of love to the vine.

Maybe 2104 will be the year Jesus returns in glory. Then we will all gather around the throne of the Lamb and sing a beautiful song that John heard in the Revelation. "And they cried out in a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" Even now one of our greatest joys in life is to gather with our fellow believers and give glory to our God for this cup of salvation that overflows to us each day.

### **Measure the compassion**

We can't put our measuring cup away without also using these words of Isaiah to measure the compassion of our God. "In all their distress, he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." The word for distress has the thought of being in a very tight place. Certain troubles of life can squeeze you so tightly it takes your breath away and creates a panicky feeling inside. It says of our Lord, "In their distress, he too was distressed." The Lord knows your pain. He is distressed when you are distressed. "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Nobody knows but Jesus." Psalm 139 says, "The Lord knows my sitting down and my standing up, he is thoroughly acquainted with all my ways."

The Lord lifts us up and carries us. After God's people came out of Egypt and passed through the waters of the Red Sea, the Lord said, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself." The Lord heard the cries of God's people in Egypt. How many times as the Lord lifted you and carried you on eagles wings this past year? How many times will he carry you in the years to come? Isaiah chapter 40 ends with these words, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not be faint." How true are these words when we look at this past year: "In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

Once again we face a new year with the measuring cup of God's kindness not just full, but

always overflowing. Your cup is full of the loyalty, salvation and compassion of the Lord. These are the blessings you have enjoyed this past year. They will not change in 2014! Amen.