So Loved

❖ Opening remarks.
  ➢ How do statements like this make you feel?
    ▪ You are unloved.
    ▪ You are unlovable.
    ▪ You are unwanted.
    ▪ You are worthless.
  ➢ That is tough enough to hear or think at any time, but as we prepare into the season of Lent, as we examine ourselves, we may begin to believe these statements to be true.

❖ A window into the past.
  ➢ Israel’s struggle with this.
    ▪ Israel had gotten itself into trouble.
    ▪ God had sent them into exile because of their sins against Him.
    ▪ They had been in Babylon and scattered abroad, without a home for nearly 7 decades.
    ▪ Israel had begun to believe that they were forgotten and unloved.
      • They had begun to believe the lie.
      • “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; the Lord has forgotten me.’” Vs. 14
  ➢ Believing the lie.
    ▪ Of course, this is exactly what the enemy wanted them to believe.
      • He wanted them to forget that God had always looked after them and sought after them.
      • If they forgot that, they would not return to the Lord their God.
    ▪ It was easy to come to this conclusion even though it was Israel that had forsaken her God and not God who had forsaken her.
  ➢ A reminder of God’s faithfulness.
    ▪ God, through the prophet Isaiah, reminded the people of Israel who He is.
    ▪ As is typical, there are hints of the exodus throughout Isaiah’s remarks.
      • It is a reminder to Israel of what God had done for them in the past and how He had been faithful to them.
      • However, it is also written in a future tense to have them consider that God is up to something good again in the future.
        ❧ He will bring them out of bondage once again.
          ▶ This is not just a reference to them being returned from the exile.
          ▶ It is a statement on God’s redemptive work to remove them from the bondage of sin.
    ▪ God also uses a powerful metaphor to remind Israel that He never forgets them.
      • He asks them if it is possible for a mother to forget her child that requires her attention around the clock.
      • The rhetorical answer would be “no.”
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- But we also know from watching the news that it is possible for a mother to forget about or not care for her child.
- God also knows that it is possible for it to happen and states so in verse 15 with the reminder that He is not like that.
  ♦ “Though she may forget, I will never forget you!”
  ♦ God is sovereign and never changes.
  ♦ Therefore, He never forgets.
- God tells His people that He not only forgets, but that He has engraved their name into the palm of His hands.

❖ God keeps His promises.

➢ We know, if we read through the Old Testament, that God does keep His promise and return Israel from exile.
  ▪ However, does this mean anything to us, and what of the future tense.

➢ The promise was to lead true Israelites out of bondage, to show them how they are so loved.
  ▪ “When He ascended on high He made captivity itself a captive” Ephesian 4:8 (NRSV)
  ▪ Paul is talking about Jesus’ ascension in this passage.

➢ The promise God makes about His love being unfailing is fulfilled in the life and mission of Jesus.
  ▪ Again, from the Apostle Paul, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8 (NIV)
  ▪ Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13

➢ How can we ever fail to recognize that we are loved?
  ▪ It is through our own doing, our own unfaithfulness to the Living Lord, that we can ever come to believe that He does not love us.

➢ Remember Isaiah 49:16a?
  ▪ “See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”
  ▪ God’s love is permanent.
  ▪ Engraving is designed to endure.
  ▪ Consider how permanently God has shown His love to you and engraved your name into His hands.
  ▪ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” John 20:25

❖ Conclusion
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- We can sometimes ridicule Thomas for his disbelief but is our feeling that God has forsaken us or forgotten us or stopped loving us any less disbelief.
  - God says He has engraved our names upon the palms of His hands.
  - Is there anything more permanent than the nail scars in His hands?

- Brothers and Sisters, God loves you more than you can even imagine.
  - Do not let anyone convince you to believe the lie that you are unloved and unworthy.
  - Do not look back on your life in fear of the law, but in grateful praise of grace.
  - Jesus is not only the author and perfecter of our faith, but He is also the epitome of God’s love for us.

- Remember, children of God, you are SO LOVED and nothing can remove your name from His hands.

- Closing Prayer.
  - Father, it is easy to believe the lie that we are not loved, that we are abandoned and forgotten. Thank You for the love You showed us through the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for the permanent marks of love placed on Your hands to remind us that You never forget us or forsake us, and that Your love is forever and for always in Jesus’ name. Amen.