

**Calvary Baptist Church**  
**2015 WINTER CSI ▪ Small Group Studies**

Session Two – Getting Unstuck: Evaluating & Embracing Alternatives Tuesday & Wednesday, February 17 & 18
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**Divine Amnesia**  
**Isaiah 43:25**

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put humpty back together again.” This was the situation Israel was in during the time that these words were spoken. The people of God fell off the wall and now they were dealing with the broken pieces of exile; the broken pieces of disappointment; the broken pieces of despair. Life was difficult for the people, and it was all because of their own sin. Sin was the cause of it all. The people of God decided to try to live life independent of God. More and more they drifted from the intimate communion that God desired to have with them. This was their sin. Fundamentally, sin is the attempt to live life independent of God.

Sin was at the bottom of where they were in life. We don’t like to admit it, but at the bottom of some of our problems is sin. This is not the case all the time. But in some instances, disobedience to God’s word and will have put us in some spots where we thought we’d never be. It got started in the garden, when our first parents decided to cross a line. Since that time, in the words of the Temptations, the world has been a “ball of confusion.” We don’t want to admit it, and most people are not even conscious of the fact that at the heart of many societal ills is sin. At the heart of our issues is not a lack of education. It’s not a lack of money. It’s not simply that we don’t have the right politicians in place. It’s a sin issue. Many of our problems in the world will not be solved until we recognize that at the center is this thing called sin. As crucial as education, financial prosperity, political power, and military security might be, they can’t solve the human dilemma. In humanity, there is this insatiable desire to either be God or

live life independent of God. That is sin. And that can't be manicured, that needs a metamorphosis.

At the bottom of Israel's present predicament was their own sin. That was the center of the scenario. God is getting at the heart of the matter. God does not just deal with the broken pieces; God is into dealing with the fall off the wall in the first place. Jesus deals more with salvation and the change of the heart than he does with ethics. Good ethics are born of a transformed heart. God gets at the core of being, not just being itself. The rotten core is what needs to be dealt with. If there is some old, rotting food in your garbage container in the kitchen, you can just keep spraying air freshener. You have to get rid of the garbage. Humanity's effort to improve the human plight is, in many cases, nothing more than spraying air freshener. The air freshener can only mask funk for so long. At some point the garbage has to be dealt with. In Isaiah 43:25 God is dealing with the garbage itself and not just the odor.

Israel now knew that their issue was sin. They were aware of it. They now recognized that they got themselves into the hell they were in. They could not blame anyone else for where they were. It was on them. Along with knowing that comes the concomitant guilt. Realizing that it was their sin which landed them where they were, it most assuredly led to an internal feeling of worthlessness. God's antidote for this disease of guilt is God's forgiveness as declared in this single verse. Israel needed more than counseling. They need God's forgiveness. Israel needed more than a seminar on positive thinking; they needed God's forgiveness. God had a new tomorrow for them. It had been declared. They had already been told to forget the former things, because God was doing a new thing. But they could not embrace the new things if the old guilt was clinging to them like a relentless parasite. (You can't embrace "the not yet" until you first embrace God's forgiveness.)

This inimitable verse is packed with gospel truth for people who need to move, but can't because of guilt. Located in this verse is the INTERRUPTION OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS. From a literary perspective this verse is out of place. It rises unexpectedly. It messes up the thematic flow of this section of chapter 43. It creates a cognitive dissonance. The Lord, through the prophet, was listing the charges against God's people. He says "your prayer life has been weak. You haven't called on me. You pray only when you have time. You spend very little time in your secret closet." He brings up another charge: "you have not wearied yourselves for me." He says, in other words, "Your devotional life is weak. You don't really seek me with your whole heart. You may read a verse a day to keep the devil away, but you don't really seek my face. You are not pursuing me or chasing after me. Maybe you've been in relationship with me for too long, and you are taking me for granted. Maybe I've gotten old to you." He then brings them up on another charge: "you worship life has weakened." He says "you don't worship like you use to. You rush to get out of church. You come through church on your way somewhere else, just so you can say you went. Your praise level is not the same." Listen to the Lord's language: "you have not lavished me with the fat of your sacrifices." "When you come to worship you don't bring your best praise or your best offering. You pay everything else off and everyone else off but you give more your leftovers."

The Lord then makes a frightening statement: "you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses." Their sins had made God tired. They kept doing the same things over and over. And Jehovah declares, in very human language, that their sins had just worn him out. I wonder do my sins wear God out. I wonder do you wear God out with your sins. I wonder have I burdened God with my ways. Don't take the language literally, it is just metaphorical language, but it gets at something. It gets at the impact my sins have on God. God is a person, and God is moved by my sins. Sin hurts God's heart. Sin burdens God's heart.

After listing all of that, you would expect the line to continue that trend of thought. After saying all of that, you would think that the conclusion would be tragic. In order to make sense, you would think that the next verse 25 would read “I, even I, am He that will destroy thee, and burden myself no longer with care about thee.” Wouldn’t that make sense? Wouldn’t make sense that God would be through with them?

But suddenly, out of nowhere, there is a literary and theological interruption. There is this talk about forgiveness and redemption. Where sin did abound, grace does much more abound. Forgiveness is always disruptive and interruptive. It shows up to interrupt the normal flow of things. The prodigal son had come home after wasting his father’s money. He had come home smelling bad and looking a mess. On the way home, this son had rehearsed his speech. He would tell his father that he was no longer worthy to be called the father’s son. He simply wanted to be a servant. When he finally reaches the father, he starts going through his speech. I would imagine that he could not even look at his father in the face. As he is telling his father that he is not worthy to be a son anymore, the father interrupts the speech and says, in essence, “shut up boy. I have enough servants. I need a son.” And then he says to his servant “go get me a robe, a ring, and some shoes. And while you’re at it, put some ribs on the grill, we are about to turn up!” The father didn’t even give the son the chance to finish his speech. The father did not even give the son a chance to repent. The speech of repentance was interrupted by the flood of forgiveness.

The grace of the verse is not just in its content, but in its placement. **The sustaining power of divine love is greater than the gravitating force of divine wrath!** It’s not always the content of forgiveness which is crucial. It’s the timing. God places it right where we need it to be. I would imagine that Israel’s collective spirit was becoming more disheartened as they heard the description of their sins. It can wear you out when you are reminded of who you

are. Have you ever been reminded of your foolishness? Just when you thought you were over the past, something will come along and remind you of you, and it can wear you out. At that point, God shines the light on v. 25. V.24 can depress you. But just when it is about to, God will whisper a verse 25. Paul Tillich has a sermon entitled “You Are Accepted.” In that sermon, Tillich says that there are times when the Spirit of God speaks to your heart and reminds you that God has accepted you. Tillich goes on to say that the Spirit always says that right on time. God’s interruptive forgiveness is right on time.

The amazing thing about this interruption is that it is God who interrupts God. God is the one who had been talking about how bad Israel is. Now this same God interrupts His own speech in order to talk about his forgiveness. God is blessing them as he is scolding them. When my younger brother and I would go to the supermarket with my mother as boys, it was always traumatic. The store would be crowded. Momma’s nerves would be on edge. We would be running around. She would be snatching us. And then she would go to fussin’: “I can’t take ya’ll nowhere... you don’t know how to behave...you act like you have no sense...wait till I get home...” At the same that she is fussing, she is putting my favorite cereal in the cart. At the same time she’s fussing she is putting my favorite flavor of Kool-Aid in the cart...She is interrupting the scolding with some blessings. God does that! As God is correcting you; as God is scolding you, God is putting your favorite cereal in the cart! God interrupts God!

Israel needed forgiveness. Packed into his verse is the interruption of forgiveness. Packed into this verse is the MOTIVATION OF FORGIVENESS. “I, even I...” The “I” is stressed because it is God who is extending this forgiveness. In the original language, the “I” is repeated. God is trying to say something to his people. It’s not just what they are getting, it’s about the one from whom they are getting it. The stress is on God. “I, even I.” “I, EVEN I.” The one against whom they had sinned, was forgiving them. The one who had the right to hold a grudge

is forgiving them. The one who alone can forgive is forgiving them. The one who acts in absolute freedom is forgiving them. The Lord is trying to get them to focus on God. Their focus had been on what they had done. He redirects the focus by saying “I, even I.”

The Lord is saying to them that the one who matters is forgiving them. Other surrounding nations may have their opinions about Israel. Other people may have their beliefs or disbeliefs about Israel’s condition. People can think and say whatever they want to about you, but if the one that matters extends forgiveness to you, that’s all that really matters. When it was discovered that it was during Joe Paterno’s tenure as coach of Penn State University’s football team, that assistant coach Jerry Sandusky had committed heinous acts of child-molestation, the NCAA stripped Paterno of his 112 football victories. Recently, the NCAA voted to restore the victories back to Paterno’s record, thus making him the winningest coach in major college football history. They voted to restore Paterno back to where he was in terms of stature. This act by the NCAA has been criticized by different people in the sports world. Sports writers and commentators alike have “weighed in” with their opinions, saying Paterno’s legacy does not deserve this kind of restoration. But no matter what all of these writers and commentators think, the only party who could affect restoration was the NCAA. The only party that could posthumously bring Paterno back to where he was, is the NCAA. God is saying no matter what opinions people have about you, you have to rest your assurance on who really matters. God is the only who can restore you to where you ought to be. Of course all of us pay attention to what people think and say. And we all want a certain level of approval from people. But you have to learn how to live your life in the opinion of the One who really matters. God says “I, even I.” Others can have opinions, but God is the only one who can extend fundamental forgiveness that restores you back to full relationship with God.

“I, even I.” The motivation that causes God to forgive the people is found in God. God is God’s reason. There is nothing about the people which motivates God. God has already laid out the charges against the people. There is nothing about their character which motivates God. God’s character is enough for God. God’s inherent mercy is what motivates God. God does not need a cause outside of God to find a reason to extend forgiveness. I’m glad God does not look at me to try to find a reason to bless me. God wouldn’t find much. God stays within the precincts of God’s own nature in order to find a reason to bless, forgive, and restore. God can’t help but to interrupt himself with this forgiveness talk because it’s just in God’s nature. You can’t help but to be who you are. A movie came out several months ago called the “Equalizer.” In this film, Denzel Washington plays a normal everyday working man who used to be a special agent who was trained to kill. He did his best to get away from that life, until someone whom he cared about was almost beaten to death. Denzel goes on a rampage to avenge that assault. Someone asked him why he was resuming some of his old ways, he said “you can’t help but to be who you are!” God finds God’s motivation in God and therefore God can’t help but to forgive.

The reason God forgives on the ground of himself is because everything necessary to forgive you and I of sins, God handled. The only way God can forgive sin is if the requirement is met. The requirement is that there be some kind of payment for that sin. If God were to forgive sin without any satisfaction to God’s justice, or any vindication of God’s law, God’s doing so would violate God’s own character and compromise the foundation of God’s own moral government. Everything necessary to handle the sin problem God took care of himself. Whatever it necessary to forgive you, God did!

He says “I, even I.” It’s almost as though God is boasting about forgiving his people. It’s as though God is happy about forgiving Israel. Some forgiveness is reluctant forgiveness. This is

forgiveness that God is so excited about that he is bragging about it loudly. It is not just God's prerogative to forgive, it is God's delight to forgive. It's not just God prerogative to bless, it's God's delight to bless!

Israel is in need of what is packed into this single verse. Packed into it is the interruption of forgiveness; the motivation of forgiveness, and DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS. What does God declare to God's people who stand in the need of forgiveness? The Lord is doing two things: he is blotting out their transgressions, and he is remembering them no more. "I am he who blots out your transgressions...." The meaning of this verb "blot" is crucial. In ancient accounting books a debt was entered. When that debt was paid, the one who was owed would literally erase the record of that debt from off the page. Israel's sins had been entered into the debt book. There was a record of what they had done. No one made it up. They weren't lying on Israel. What they did against God had been recorded. But the Lord himself, the one who was owed, took the eraser of his mercy and blotted out the record of the debt. It's been erased so thoroughly that if anyone were to try to find it in the book, they wouldn't be able to. You can send an e-mail to trash; but it really isn't gone until you clean out the trash. God has done that!

The tense of the verb is important. He does not say "I am he who blotted out your transgressions..." Israel had many sins of the past which landed them where they were. But God speaks in the present tense. Their sins of the past are no longer a reality. God is dealing with present stuff. God is dealing with present mess. Their past mess is not even on God's radar. God is a present tense God. God's forgiveness is always in the present tense because his "mercies are new every morning!"

"I am he who blots out...And remembers them no more." Not only does not God erase the offense, but he does not carry the offense around in his head and heart. We say we forgive people but we "can" their offenses. Our fore parents use to can fruits and vegetables. The late



Connie Melton, wonderful soul of this church, use to give me preserves that she had canned some time ago. The canning process would keep the fruits and vegetables from spoiling so that they would be right for consumption whenever you were in the mood for them. We do that with people's offenses. We can them so that they won't go bad. The last thing you want is for someone's mistakes to go bad. So you can them to keep them ready for your consumption.

But the Lord says "...and remember them no more...." The only time, metaphorically speaking, that God forgets is when it comes to our sins. "...remember them no more" means God will not allow our offenses to dictate how God treats us. God is good at remembering. God remembers God's covenant. Gen. 8:1 "but God remembered Noah...and the water receded..." Gen. 19: 29: "God destroyed the cities of the plain. But remembered Abraham, and rescued Lot from destruction....." God remembers our work in kingdom. Heb. 6:10 says "for God is not unfaithful to forget your labor love, in that you have ministered to the saints..." God has a great memory. God does not remember our sins out of choice, not out of deficiency.

God gets amnesia when it comes to your sins. Right now that's a blessing. After while that will be a blessing. When we stand before the judgment bar, the enemy will be there to accuse us. The Lord will look at him and say "I don't recall that..." This fact should not cause us to sin more, but it should cause us to praise him and love him that much more.