

Isaiah Chapter 43

God Is Great, God Is Good

No one has an easy journey through this life, no matter how it may look to outsiders. Everyone has something that is painful, difficult, or overwhelming to deal with. It may be chronic pain, financial difficulties, an addiction, a wayward child, the death of a close loved one, illness, a handicapped or disabled child, dealing with the aftermath of their own childhood abuse, living with an alcoholic or drug addicted spouse, watching a loved one slowly disappear to Alzheimer's Disease. It may be a job situation that feels nearly impossible to deal with. It may be living in poverty or with a mental or emotional illness, or needing to care for a seriously ill relative. In some cases, it is some combination of all those things. Whatever the challenge may be there are times when every individual feels they are walking through a dark, rocky valley strewn with pitfalls, or that they are about to be overwhelmed with problems. They feel they are in the blackest of night with no hint of dawn.

It is at those times when many of God's children turn to Isaiah chapters 40-45 for comfort. Today we will focus on chapter 43, which opens with beautiful words that

the redeemed cherish and often cling to. While originally written to bring comfort to the Jews in Babylonian captivity, the promises are timeless because they focus on the character of God, His love, His mercy, and most of all His sovereignty. In other words, God is always in charge and He always does what is best for His children.

There is, however, a catch as to whether or not these promises will work for you. That catch is that these words are directed to those who have a personal relationship with the Lord God of Heaven, and with His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the week during the year when many people are thinking about Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, or at least they are recognizing that today is Palm Sunday and next week is Easter. They may be focusing on new clothes and egg hunts, rather than on the real meaning of the celebration. Let us put the meaning in brief terms and we would be glad to elaborate on it later with any of you that have questions.

God created human beings to have a relationship with Him, and for a while they did walk and talk with God and followed all His directives. Then Satan came along and cast doubts in their minds and tempted them. The people, Adam and Eve, gave

in to those temptations and disobeyed the word of God. By that action they brought sin and spiritual death on the human race. Ever since then no one has naturally put God first in their lives and given Him the honor and worship He deserves. Every one of us have disobeyed His commandments. Now you may think you have never murdered anyone or stolen anything, and you certainly have never committed adultery. OK maybe you tell a “*white lie*” occasionally, but you think that’s no big deal. You live a “good” life and donate money to various charities; you make other positive contributions to the community. So you may not think of yourself as a “*sinner*.” Yet, if the Lord Jesus Christ is not the most important Person in your life and if you do not give all your worship to God, then you have sinned by breaking the first and second of the Ten Commandments. Sinners need a Savior, because “*the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ*” (Romans 6:23). That is what the crucifixion and resurrection are all about.

Sin must be punished and that punishment is spiritual death, permanent separation from the presence of God. But God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a sinless life on our behalf and then died on the cross to take the punishment we deserve for our sins. But because God is God, He could not stay dead. Once the penalty was served, Jesus broke forth from the chains of death. He came back to

life, walked and talked and even ate with His disciples and other people, then returned to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father. Today Christ Jesus is most definitely alive, both in heaven and in the hearts of those who have received Him as Savior. In order to have the Lord Jesus as your own personal Savior you must acknowledge you need a Savior, believe in the depths of your heart that Jesus is God and that He paid your penalty by dying on the cross, and that He lives today. Ask Him to be Lord of your life, and then these promises in Isaiah and elsewhere in Scripture are words you can rely on. Romans 10, verses 9 through 11 state it better than I can:

Romans 10:9-11, NAS

9 If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;

10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed."

If you recall from last week, Isaiah chapter 42 closed with a description of the

consequences of Israel's disobedience toward God. As we begin Chapter 43, we jump forward 200 years to where Judah's exile was pictured as drawing to a close (40:2), for the Lord was raising up a leader, **Cyrus of Persia**, who would release them (41:2-4, 25). God would also raise up His Servant, **the Messiah**, who would one day release them from the power of sin and death (42:1-17). God urged Israel not to fear (43:1-7) for their situation would provide the opportunity for God to show the world that He is truly the only God (43:8-13). He would restore them from Babylon, bringing them back home in a new "*Exodus*" (43:14-28). God had also, if you remember, brought His people out of captivity in Egypt almost 1,000 years earlier. Therefore God said again that **they were not to fear** (43:1-5). Isaiah is directing his comments in these verses primarily to Israel's return from Babylon around 536 B.C.

But there is also a broader meaning here that all Israel will be re-gathered from the four corners of the earth when Jesus returns to rule in peace over the whole world. So with that background let's now take a look at the opening verses of Isaiah 43.

Isaiah 43:1-7, NAS

1 But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed

you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!

2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you.

3 "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place.

4 "Since you are precious in My sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.

5 "Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and gather you from the west.

6 "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth,

7 Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

Once again God tells them, *"Do not fear."* Remember that we said God never tells

us to blindly stop being afraid. He always tells us why we do not have to fear. In verse 1 God tells His children they do not have to fear because He has redeemed them. Jacob (also called Israel) need have no fear in her captivity in Babylon because God had created and formed her and had redeemed her from bondage in Egypt. “Redeemed” can be translated, “to buy out of slavery.” This reminds the Jews that God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. Isaiah refers to this Exodus specifically in verse 16 of this chapter. He is giving the people hope that even though they may be in captivity in Babylon, as they had been in captivity in Egypt, God will restore them back to their homeland, just as He had originally led them to that land from Egypt. Here he is talking about a new “exodus” in which God would bring the people back to their homeland from Babylon.

But God gives two more reasons in verse 1 why the people do not have to be afraid. “*I have called you by name.*” To be called by name points up Israel’s special relationship with the Lord as His covenant people. We could ask, “Who gave you your name?” Most of you would answer, “my parents.” And why did they give you your name? Why not the doctor, or the midwife, or the mayor of the city? Your parents chose your name and gave it to you because of a special relationship

between you and them. This is similar to a shepherd calling his sheep by name in his personal care for them. So God also calls His own children by name. He goes on in this verse to add the fact that, “*you are Mine.*” So calling the people by name and redeeming them are both indications that this people belong to the Lord God of Heaven.

If you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, He has also redeemed you. He has bought you out of the slavery of sin. Christ, in John 10, told us that, “*I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me*” (John 10:14). God knows and calls you by name when you have a relationship with His Son and you belong to Him.

God spells out the details of His relationship with His people in verse 1 in order to give a foundation to the statements in verse 2. So when floods and fires of trials and tribulations overtake you, the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior and your Redeemer will be with you and will protect you. Jump to verse 4, “*you are precious,*” “*I love you,*” --words of a parent to a beloved child who is going through horrible troubles. In these chapters we get a small piece of the picture of our fantastic, marvelous, magnificent, powerful, loving, just God. And in the first

five verses of Isaiah 43 we are assured that all of those qualities intervene on behalf of God's children, His people.

But then in verses 5 through 7 Isaiah jumps ahead, as he so frequently does, to the end times. Not only will God two hundred years hence bring His people back from captivity in Babylon, in the end times He will bring back His people from the four corners of the earth. He will restore them to their Promised Land and they will finally possess it.

The unique relationship between God and Israel is emphasized by the picture of a human ransom (verses 3, 4, 14). Great nations have fallen in the past and will fall again in the future to make way for Israel.¹ Here God promises Israel blessing and restoration because of His love for them. The basis for these promises of companionship and deliverance through suffering and trial was not because of anything the Jews had done to deserve such treatment, but rather it was because of the undeserved favor and grace that God gave them and His commitment to be a

¹ Carson, D.A. 1994. *New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition*. Rev. ed of: *The New Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed. Edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970 (4th Ed.) InterVarsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove IL, USA.

Father to His covenant people. As a reward for releasing captive Israel from Babylon, God gave Cyrus of Persia the country of Egypt and a portion of Ethiopia. A remnant, a small number of the scattered Israelites would return to Jerusalem from Exile in Babylon. But there is also a reference here to the end times when all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, will be re-gathered from every geographical direction back to Israel.

The theme of “*Israel God’s servant*” is continued in Isaiah 43 and 44 with an emphasis on *God the Redeemer of Israel* (Isaiah 43:1-7, 14; 44:6, 22-24). The word translated “*redeem*” or “***Redeemer***” is the Hebrew word for “*a kinsman redeemer*,” a near relative who could free family members and their property from bondage by paying their debts for them (Leviticus 25:23-28 and the book of Ruth). God gave Egypt, Ethiopia (Cush), and Seba to **Cyrus** as a ransom payment to redeem Israel from Babylon because Israel was so precious to Him (Isaiah 43:3). Through Isaiah God made clear that He would treat Israel as members of His own family. And God would later give His own Son as a ransom for lost sinners (Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6).

Isaiah 43:8-13, NAS

8 Bring out the people who are blind, even though they have eyes, and the deaf, even though they have ears.

9 All the nations have gathered together in order that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can declare this and proclaim to us the former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, or let them hear and say, "It is true."

10 "You are My witnesses," declares the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am He. Before me there was no God formed, and there will be none after me.

11 "I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides me.

12 "It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, and there was no strange god among you; so you are My witnesses," declares the LORD, "And I am God.

13 "Even from eternity I am He; and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"

Remember in chapter 42 the analogy of presenting one's case in a courtroom?

Where God asked the false gods to present evidence? Well, here we are back in a courtroom. God now calls the nations to present their witnesses in defense of their false gods: *Prove, if you can, that these false gods can hear you or come to your aid.* And of course they cannot. Next God turns to the Israelites and says, “*You who are called by My name and who are my servants, you are My witnesses.*” God’s servants are always to be ready to give an answer and testify as to the work and the reality of their Lord:

1 Peter 3:15, NAS

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

And what were God’s witnesses to testify about? They are to testify to His deity. In the next few verses He reminds them. Let’s just excerpt the statements about who God is and read them together:

10 . . . understand that I am He. Before me there was no God formed, and there will be none after me.

11 "I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides me.

12 I am God.

13 "Even from eternity I am He; and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"

14 . . . the LORD your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,

15 "I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."

16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way through the sea and a path through the mighty waters,

25 "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

-- Isaiah 43:10-16, 25, NAS

With a God like that, how can they lose? These witnesses have experienced God's work in their lives; they have seen His power through creation and through His dealings with them in many situations including the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of nations. Because of this firsthand knowledge they can speak with conviction about the nature and work of God. Matthew Henry put it this way:

God's people are witnesses for him, and can attest, upon their own knowledge and experience, concerning the power of his grace, the

sweetness of his comforts, the tenderness of his providence, and the truth of his promise. They will be forward [bold] to witness for him that he is gracious and that no word of his has fallen to the ground.²

Note especially verse 11: *"I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides me."* God delights in being the Savior of His people. So also Christians who have experienced deliverance from their sin and who have felt the power of the Holy Spirit guiding their lives and transforming their character can witness with conviction as to the work of Christ in their lives.

Isaiah 43:14-19, NAS

14 Thus says the LORD your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, "For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and will bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, into the ships in which they rejoice.

15 "I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."

16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way through the sea and a path through the mighty waters,

17 Who brings forth the chariot and the horse, the army and the mighty man

² From Matthew Henry's Commentary.

(they will lie down together and not rise again; they have been quenched and extinguished like a wick):

18 "Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past.

19 "Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.

20 "The beasts of the field will glorify me; the jackals and the ostriches; because I have given waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people.

21 "The people whom I formed for myself, will declare My praise.

So now this great, glorious, powerful, savior God makes some promises to His people. Remember, God is One who never breaks His promises. Just in case you need to be reminded of that fact, here are some passages to consider:

1 Kings 8:56, NAS

"Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant."

Psalm 111:7, NLT

All He does is just and good, and all His commandments are trustworthy.

Ezekiel 12:25, NKJ

"For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord GOD."

Luke 21:33, NAS

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

And what is God promising to His people in Isaiah 43? For one thing, He is promising without fail to deliver them from Babylon and to bring them back to their homeland. God assures His people that He will break the power of their oppressors and that their captors will themselves become fugitives.

Then He also promises to do "something new." With that phrase Isaiah once again makes a shift to the end times. God tells the people not to spend all their time

thinking about the things God has done for them in the past, no matter how extraordinary and wonderful those things were. He tells them to anticipate the even more wonderful things God will do for them in the future. Other passages in the prophets indicate what those new things are:

Jeremiah 16:14-15, NAS

14 "Therefore behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,'

15 but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.' For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.

Isaiah 65:17, NAS

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind."

So we see that in the end times, God will re-gather the Jews from the four corners of the earth to which they have been scattered. He will restore them in the

Promised Land, keeping the promise He made long ago to the patriarchs. This will occur during the Millennium, after Christ has returned to earth to rule for a thousand years. Then beyond that God is going to make everything in the universe new, and all His children will live in the new Heaven and the new earth forever.

Revelation 21:1-5a, NAS

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them,

4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

In Isaiah 43:21 we read that when all this is done God's people will declare His

praise. And how could they do anything less? When you meditate on the character and person of God, when you recall all the things He has done and consider what He has promised yet to do, how can you not burst out in praise, giving Him glory and honor? Yet is that what the Jews in the time of Isaiah did? Let's move on.

Isaiah 43:22-28, NAS

22 "Yet you have not called on me, O Jacob; but you have become weary of me, O Israel.

23 "You have not brought to me the sheep of your burnt offerings; nor have you honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you with incense.

24 "You have bought me no sweet cane with money, neither have you filled me with the fat of your sacrifices; rather you have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities.

25 "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

26 "Put me in remembrance; let us argue our case together, state your cause, that you may be proved right.

27 "Your first forefather sinned, and your spokesmen have transgressed

against me.

28 "So I will pollute the princes of the sanctuary; and I will consign Jacob to the ban, and Israel to revilement.

How sad. After hearing how glorious God is and how He has and will deliver the Jews from their enemies, we read in these verses their actual reaction. They did not give the praise and worship that we have said were due to the God that has just been described and testified to. No, what did they do?

In verse 22 we see that first they forsook praying to God. *"You have not called on Me, O Jacob."* Jacob, as you recall, refers to the descendants of Jacob, to the nation. The man Jacob had been known for his praying. He had even wrestled with God one night and felt the touch of God on his body as a result. Yet, his descendants no longer took time to talk to their Creator and Redeemer. Further, they had become weary of God and of worship. Today one might say they had become "tired of religion." After all, why bother getting up on Sunday morning and meeting with God's people to worship? They had quit bringing Him the sacrifices that had been outlined by Moses. They no longer brought their burnt offerings, nor did they make the other offerings they were supposed to.

One reason they had stopped bringing their sacrifices and offerings was because it cost them too much. Matthew Henry puts it this way:

They grudged the expense of their devotion . . . They were for a cheap religion; and in those acts of devotion that were costly they desired to be excused So little sense had they of the greatness of God and their obligations to him that they could not find in their hearts to part with a lamb out of their flock for his honour, though he called for it and would graciously have accepted it. Sweet cane, or calamus, was used for the holy oil, incense, and perfume; but they were not willing to be at the charge of that . . . what sacrifices they did offer they did not honour God with them, and so they were, in effect, as no sacrifices (v. 23): “Neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.” Some of them offered their sacrifices to false gods; others, who offered them to the true God, were either careless in the manner of offering them or hypocritical in their intentions, so that they might be truly said not to honour God with them, but rather to dishonour him.³

³ Ibid

Think there's anyone like that today in the church? Anyone that feels they can't spend time meeting with God's people? Or they can't afford to witness about Christ because maybe their friends would think they were a "religious nut"? Do we offer our prayers to God as a sweet offering? Or are we too busy to have a regular devotional time every day? Are we indifferent to all God's mercies and blessings, and too busy to offer Him gratitude and praise?

Getting back to Isaiah, according to verse 24, what had they given God? Disobedience. They kept on sinning; they wearied God with their offenses. Matthew Henry goes on to say,

*"The master had not tired the servants with his commands, but they had tired him with their disobedience. Those are wicked servants indeed that behave so ill to so good a Master. God is tender of our comfort, but we are careless of his honour."*⁴

And so because of that disobedience, the Jews had wound up in captivity in Babylon. God had used a foreign invader to get the attention of His children. Now

⁴ Ibid

they were going through deep waters and feeling overwhelmed by fiery trials. Yet God still loved His children and so He reminds them that He is the One who wipes out their transgressions, their sins. He says He will no longer remember those sins. Why? Because He is God: He is sovereign, just, loving, gracious, and full of mercy.

These people were precious in His sight and they saddened Him and disappointed Him, but He still considered them precious and He still loved them. He loved them so much that He eventually sent Jesus Christ as the Messiah to take the penalty on the cross, not only for their sins, but also for ours. When Jesus walked on this earth He often spoke of His heavenly Father:

John 14:11, NAS

"Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves."

That knowledge of who God is and the knowledge that He was one with His heavenly Father, is what empowered Christ through the events of what we now call Holy Week; it is what got Him through the ordeal of the Cross. Yes, we celebrate

today, Palm Sunday, as Christ's victorious presentation as King and Messiah when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with the crowds yelling, "Hosanna to the son of David!" But on the following days He endured betrayal, beatings, shame, and unbearable pain. Join us each morning this week as we consider the things that Christ went through because, as God's Son, the Redeemer, He loved us and wanted to open the way for us to have a relationship with Him that would one day culminate in Heaven.