

Isaiah 43:1-21

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 43, verses 1-7, but on to 1-21. I wonder what passages you give to people and you read! when they're suffering, when they're in trouble. The last pastoral visit that I did with David Barnes, we went to see someone, someone who was suffering, and the passage that we read to that person was Isaiah 43.

It's often a passage that I tune to and read with people who are going through the mill. It's one of those mountain peaks of the Bible. It's an incredible passage, isn't it, of comfort and strength and encouragement in the midst of all sorts of challenges and difficulties that you and I go through in life.

And in many ways the passage speaks for itself. But I want to try and mind the depths of it today as we think about the context. As we read through a passage like this, I hope that we will see that there is never any need for fear for those who God calls his own. There's never any need to fear for those who God calls his own. And we're going to think about that by picking up a word that God uses here in verse 1. Can you see it? I am the fear not, for I have redeemed you. We're going to think about redemption as it's spelled out in Isaiah chapter 43. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. You do not need to be afraid because I have rescued you already. I purchased you for a price. I redeemed you.

And so we'll think about three things. We'll think about the object of that redemption. We'll think about the commitment of that redemption. And then lastly the consequence of that redemption. So we can see that there's never any need to fear for those whom God has called.

So firstly the object of redemption. Look at verse 1. But now that says, the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.

[2 : 25] Now I think the question that you've got to deal with right away is, who is the you? Who is the you that God is referring to here? Who is the you that God has redeemed?

And we would say right away that this verse tells us, the you is referring to those whom God has created. Those whom God has formed. Those who are named here as Jacob or Israel.

That is, He's referring to the people of God. And we saw in chapter 40 that God has promised to rescue Israel out of exile in Babylon. Well we might think that, is what God is saying here, that He's going to redeem them, He's going to just bring them back from that foreign land.

And I think that it's bigger than that. I think we're clued into the fact that it's bigger by the very first word in chapter 43, but. That is, but now.

You don't have anything to fear because I've redeemed you. It almost seems to indicate that just prior to this, Israel, Isaiah has given evidence for why they might think that they need to fear.

[3 : 36] Why they do need to be afraid. And sure enough, if you just look back to the end of chapter 42, you'll see that that is the case. So look at verses 18 to 20. Hear you deaf, look you blind, that you may see.

Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger or my son? Who is blind as my dedicated one? As blind as the servant of the Lord. He sees many things, but he does not observe them. His ears are open, but he does not hear. And God's people, at the end of Isaiah chapter 42, at the start of 43, have got a big problem. They've got problems which they need to be rescued from. Which is that they are spiritually dense and senseless. And God has called Israel to be his messenger to the world.

To be his servant. They have the capacity, don't they? They have the capacity to hear and to see. But he says, you are deaf and you are blind.

[4 : 36] So the reason we saw last week, where God has to send a new servant. An individual servant, who we've discovered is Jesus. Because this servant, the servant that God had wanted of the people of Israel, they have failed completely.

They have failed completely to do what he wanted them to do. Israel have become like their idols, Isaiah says. They have become deaf and blind. And that's the threat, all the way through the book of Isaiah.

That the Israelites are becoming like their idols. Greg Beal, in his book on Idolry, says. We become like what we worship. We become what we worship.

He says, we end up resembling what we revere. Either for ruin or for restoration. And the Israelites, as they worshipped idols.

That they had begun to revere. And it had become their ruin. And they had become completely insensitive to their condition. I don't know if you've heard of Dr. Paul Brand.

[5 : 43] Dr. Paul Brand was a medical missionary in India. And he did some amazing work amongst the leper communities in that country in the 1950s. Lepercy, of course, it's a terrible disease.

And it creates in its victims a lack of sensitivity. And lepers have an inability to feel pain. And Brand would look at lepers working during the day.

Lepers would be working with shovels. And in some of those shovels, he would notice that there was a nail sticking out on the handle. And it would cause the hands of the operators to start bleeding.

But of course, they didn't have sense of feeling. So they had no sense of them being injured. They would just continue to dig with blood pouring down their hands.

What puzzled Brand is that when they came back to work the next day, those parts of their extremities, their fingers and their toes, would actually be missing. And for years, it was believed that leprosy literally kind of attacked at the bones of the fingers and the toes.

[6 : 51] But Brand discovered that it wasn't actually leprosy itself. But rather, while the lepers were sleeping in their open dormitories, rats would come in. And literally eat the wounded fingers of the lepers.

And because there was no tactile feedback whatsoever, they never felt it. So they woke up on the rats at a feast in the mud huts of India. I think that's probably the grossest illustration that I've ever given in 13 years.

But Isaiah is reminding Israel, you need rescue. Because Israel's idolatry had rendered her completely insensitive to their spiritualness of sin.

They were like the lepers. They didn't know they were bleeding. They didn't know the rats were eating their fingers. They'd become deaf. They'd become blind. And they were oblivious for the situation. That even when God would bring serious judgment upon them, they still didn't get it.

So look at chapter 42, verse 25. So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the night of his battle. It set him on fire all around, but he did not understand. It burned him up, but he didn't take it apart.

[8 : 01] And the Israelites were not going to get it on their own. They were too dense, so God has to redeem them. And that is what he does. He steps in. And he rescues them. From themselves.

Because unless he is going to rescue them, he's not going to have a people for himself. Of course, that has always been the case. You mustn't make the mistake this morning of looking down your nose at the Israelites thinking, well, we know much better.

The fact is, the object of God's redemption, God's rescue, has always been those who could never rescue themselves. They could never rescue themselves, but they need rescue.

From idolatry. God has never redeemed anyone outside the category of idolatry. Because there is no one outside that category of idolatry.

John Payton was a Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides in the South Pacific in the late 1800s. It was a magnificent autobiography. It was not a missionary call to the faint-hearted.

[9 : 11] The natives were cannibals. They were cannibals who would occasionally eat the flesh of their defeated foes. They practiced infanticide. And widow sacrifice. They sacrificed widows because they thought if they killed the widow of the deceased man, those women would go to save their husbands in the next world.

And despite the obvious risks, John and Margaret Payton learned the language of the people. And they set up homes there.

And they set up a number of orphanages and schools and a couple of churches. And within 15 years of their arrival, the whole island professed faith in Jesus Christ. And after their very first communion service that he held with new converts, he wrote this.

He said, The moment I put the bread and the wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of cannibalism, now stretched out to receive the emblems and seal of the Redeemer's love, I had a foretaste of the glory that well nigh broke my heart to pieces.

I shall never taste a deeper bliss until I gaze on the glorified face of Jesus himself. How does God gather people?

[10:27] How does God gather people that he can call his own? Who belong to him? He redeems cannibals. That's how he does it. He redeems the spiritually deaf and the spiritually blind.

That's how he does it. He redeems people like you and like me. That's how he gets himself people. Because you and I are hopeless cases too.

We may not be cannibals. No one's ever told me that they are. But spiritually we are in exactly the same place. We are deaf and blind.

We've run after idols. And we've become like our idols. Thinking these things can give me what I look for. I've got a friend in London who I met with not long ago.

And he has deliberately decided to stay in London with his family in a small little house. Because he believes that it's right. And it's God's calling on his life for him to stay in central London.

[11:29] And that part of that church has kingdom significance. But he said every now and then my wife and I will go online and we'll look at property in South Wales.

And we say to ourselves look what we could buy for the money we're paying rent for. And then they realise that's temptation isn't it? It's not that there's anything wrong with living in South Wales.

But they recognise that for them that could become an idol. That for them that could be something more significant to them than God's call on their lives.

And every single one of us has an idol like that. Or several which can render us spiritually deaf. But something or someone becomes more important to us than God.

And so we cease to hear. And we cherish our own God. And we become deaf and blind so that we will never come to God unless he would first redeem us.

[12:39] But praise God that is what he does. So the object of redemption here that God is speaking of is those who are spiritually deaf and blind. But what is God's commitment secondly?

Look at God's commitment verses 2 and 3. When you pass through the waters I will be with you. And through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you. And when you walk through the rivers they shall not be burned.

And the flame will not consume you. For I am the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel. Your Saviour. I gave Cush. I gave Egypt as a ransom. Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

The Lord says I have redeemed you. Because you belong to me. I guarantee you God says there are no circumstances that will derail you. I can and I will take you through anything.

Some commentators think that this is a promise to the Israelites of their return from exile in Babylon. But Alec Matea, one of the commentators, makes the point that the language here points to hardship being experienced from their captors on the way to captivity.

[13:41] Rather than on the way back. And that helps us. Because the New Testament speaks about us being in exile in this world as God's people are.

So there is a definite promise to you. It has as well this morning. That in these verses there is a promise to us that God says I will be with you. You are part of my people. I will be with you on every conceivable kind of trial.

That you will ever face. So he gives the extreme example of raging waters on the one hand and blazing fire on the other. And God commits himself to go with us through all those circumstances. But notice God does not say I will remove you from those troubles, does he? And those trials. God doesn't say you will never experience deep waters.

You will never experience the fire. No, the promise is he will preserve us in the middle of it. Hear that promise this morning. Amen. God says no matter what trial or trouble you go through.

[14:42] I am committed to you. And I will be with you in it. There will be trials. You will stand at the graveside of love. You will get the diagnosis from the doctor.

But God says I will be with you. I wonder what you would identify as your biggest trial in your life right now. I wonder what struggle it would be.

For the Christian, God has staked his reputation on seeing you through it. On carrying me through the torrents. On protecting you through the flames.

And specifically what he is promising in you. Is he will preserve your faith and your trust in him.

Ultimately physical death will come to you and I. It will come to every single one of us.

And then Jesus Christ comes back. But first God has committed that he will guard our hearts. So that we will never lose. Never lose the love of the one who has redeemed us.

[15 : 46] That is his commitment. And you say how do I know that's true? How do I know that that's just not kind of religious talk? How do I know that he will keep that kind of promise?

Well look at the guarantee he gives in verse 3. Can you see verse 3? For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I gave Egypt as your ransom. Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

God says this promise that I make to you is ground in my very character. I am the Lord your God.

That's the name he introduced himself. All the way back in Exodus. In chapter 3 of Exodus.

Where he says I am Yahweh. I am your God. I am your God. Not in the sense that he is. That God is our God. But because. And that he belongs to us.

But in the sense he is our God. Because he's pledged himself to us. He has given himself to us.

And he's pledged to be our God in every situation.

[16 : 43] In every circumstance of life. The R.A.F. When they flew in World War II. And they flew in formations.

And if they saw an enemy plane coming behind them. To attack. The plane that was behind the front plane would say. I've got your six. I've got your six.

Basically I've got your back. I've got your six. I'm behind you. Don't worry about it. I'll take him out.

I've got your six. And God says to us.

I've got your six. And I've got your two. And I've got your nine. And I've got your four. I've got you covered.

I've got your back. I've got your six. I'm watching over you. Why? Why? Because I have come and I'm to be your God. And you will be my people.

[17 : 40] And I will be your God. And then he gives them an illustration. Of what that had meant to them in the past. So in verse three. He says. I gave Egypt as your ransom. Cushion, cedar in exchange for you.

Because you are precious. In my eyes. And honoured. And I love you. I gave men in return for you. Peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not. For I am with you. The ESV says.

Isn't it? I give Egypt. Doesn't it? I give Egypt. But actually that isn't right. It's a past tense he's speaking to.

He's referring. To how God has redeemed Israel. At the expense of Egypt. In the Exodus. Do you remember? Judgment came in the Exodus. And it meant salvation for Israel.

But it meant death for Egypt. Because redemption always involves a price. It involves a ransom price. And the price for Israel's redemption was Egypt.

[18 : 42] That's the level of God's commitment. To Israel. Because you are precious. Because you are honoured in my sight. God says. Because I love you. Because I love you. Literally. I would give humanity in your place.

I would give the rest of mankind in your place. God says. I've already given up Egypt in your place. I would give all peoples if I had to redeem you. To rescue.

To save you. Now the truth is of course. That redemption that the Israelites needed. That the new Hebridean cannibals needed. That you and I need. That spiritual redemption from blindness and deafness.

Would come not by the exchange of men. Not the middle of verse 4. Not by the exchange of men. Not of any man.

But only one man. Only one man who was qualified to stand in our place. And to redeem us from sin. So let me read to you from Romans chapter 3.

[19 : 48] Where it says. Now the righteousness of God has been manifest. Has been shown. And apart from the law. Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God. Through Jesus Christ.

For all who believe. For there is no distinction. For all have sinned. And fallen short. Of the glory of God. And are justified by His grace.

As a gift through the redemption. That is in Christ Jesus. Do you see what Paul says? He says all have sinned. All are spiritually deaf.

And blind. None of us are exempt from the diagnosis. But he says. All who have been made right with God. By His grace. Are made right in only one way.

There is one mediator. Between God. And Christ Jesus. Between God and man. The man. Christ Jesus. There is only one way to be made right with God.

[20 : 48] And that is through redemption. And that came how? By Jesus Christ. But as Jesus hung on the cross. And died. This mind blowing. Earth shattering.

Exchange takes place. That in Jesus. Death. He took our curse. He took our curse. In His death. So that we might receive His blessing.

In His death. Jesus became sin. With our sin. So that we might become righteous. With His righteousness. And that is the great exchange. Where we would receive.

What is His. And He takes what is ours. And you see. Why that is such good news. Because you and I deserve condemnation. Isaiah says. We are all spiritually deaf.

And blind. We all become like the idols we worship. Because Jesus came into this world. To stand in your place. To exchange places. He bore the wrath of hell.

[21 : 47] So that all who trust in Him. Would enjoy the blessing of heaven. And when you take this in. God says to Israel. And now He says to us. You are precious.

You see that? Verse 4. Because you are honoured in my sight. Because I love you. He says I will give humanity in your place. And now He says to His church.

Because you are precious. Because you are honoured in my sight. Because I love you. I have given my most precious one. I have given my most dearly beloved.

Already in your place. My son. That is the commitment of God. To our redemption. But lastly. We see these opening seven verses.

The consequences of the redemption. Look at verses 5. Verse 7. He says. Do not be afraid. Fear not. For I am with you. I will bring your offspring.

[22 : 48] Your children. From the east. And from the west. I will gather you. I will say up to the north. Give me up. And to the south.

Do not withhold. Bring my sons. From afar. And my daughters. From the ends of the earth. Come everyone. Everyone is called by my name.

Whom I created for my glory. Whom I formed and made. And God repeats the command. Do you see that again? Fear not. He says. Because I am with you.

Don't be afraid. I am always with you. He says. And then he points beyond. This immediate homecoming parade. From exile to Babylon. He describes the greater homecoming.

He describes those. Who will be brought home. From the four corners of the earth. And they will be his sons. And his daughters. And they will be everyone. Who is called by the name of the Lord.

[23 : 43] And God is asking you this morning. Not to be afraid. Not only because he is. Unfailingly with us. But because. As we see in this final chapter of history.

God is going to bring us. Out of exile into this world. Into a perfect new world. To a new heavens and a new earth. And Jesus picks up this language.

Doesn't he? Matthew 24. 31. And he says. The son of man. Referring to himself. Will send his angels. With a loud trumpet call. And they will gather his elect. From the four winds. From one end of the heavens.

To the other. And because of our redemption. We are assured. That one day. God is going to bring you home. And I want to close. By focusing on the last part.

Of verse 7. Can you see that? Look how those. Who are called by God's name. Are described. He says. Everyone who is called. By my name.

[24 : 40] Whom I created. For my glory. Whom I formed and made. So what is the consequence. Of this redemption. Once you have been rescued.

By God. You and I. Finally grasp. Why we were put on this earth. Why were you created. And we finally get it.

That God created us. For his own glory. Why were you made. What is your chief end. Your chief end. Is to glorify God. And to enjoy him forever.

That raises the question. Doesn't it. How do you glorify God? How do you magnify God? When you magnify something. You can magnify it in two ways.

You can magnify it like a microscope. You know a little microscope. Or you can magnify it like a telescope. In the microscope. What do you do? You put something that is. Infinitesimally small.

[25 : 42] Under the microscope. And suddenly it becomes. A monster. Doesn't it? It becomes huge. With a telescope. What you do. Is that you make something. Unimaginably great.

Look like what it really is. So you know the Hubble telescope. Hubble Space Telescope. It is revealed. Doesn't it? Pinprick galaxies in the sky.

For the billion star giants. Which they are. Well there's no prizes for guessing. Isn't it? What are we to be?

Are we to be a microscope? Or are we to be a telescope? God is calling you to magnify. And honor him. And to glorify him. Like a telescope. We are to live.

In such a way. That we're not afraid. But that we trust him. In all circumstances. And we obey his commands. Because they are so good for us. And we are to live.

[26 : 40] In such a way. That makes God. Look more like. The great. And glorious. And beautiful. And infinite being. That he really is.

That in the night sky. Of this world. God appears. Doesn't he? To most people. If not all. Like a pinprick of light. In the heavens. And God is reminding you.

That God. He created it. You. He created us. To make God. Look like he really is. In all his beauty. And all his majesty.

And some of you. Might have a big question. With this. In fact. I'm going to ask you. This question. Because you think. If God has created us. For his own glory. God sounds like. One of the most. Egotistical.

Arrogant. Self-centered. Beings. In the universe. Any time. That you or I. Come across somebody. Who is. Egotistical. Or arrogant.

[27 : 38] And self-centered. You are not impressed. By that kind of person. And so. Why would God. Be any different to that? Why is God. Obsessed. With his own glory?

And the reason. God is different. Is because. God needs nothing. And God. Has no deficiency. God does not. Lack anything. The reason.

You and I. Come across. As egotistical. And arrogant. Is because. We push ourselves. Forward. We want to build. Ourselves up. We want to fish. For compliments. From other people.

We want to try to. Overcome those feelings. We have. Insecurity. And weakness. And inferiority. And we need. People's affirmation. God. But God isn't like that.

Isaiah. All the way through. Keeps hammering home. That God is totally. God is totally. Sufficient. He lacks nothing. Everything he needs.

[28 : 38] He has. So why has he created us. For his own glory? It cannot be. Because he needs us. God does not.

Need you. This is how John Piper. Answers the question. He says. God is most. Glorified. In us. When we are.

Most satisfied. In him. What he means. Is that. God. Is the source. Of our ultimate joy. He is beauty. With a capital B. He is the only one. In whom you and I. Can find. Our true satisfaction. That if God sought to glorify.

Anything other than himself. As the ultimate. As our greatest satisfaction. And joy. He would be implying. That there is something. Or there is someone. More valuable than himself.

[29 : 32] And there is not. He would be leading us. To things that would never satisfy. In fact. God himself. Would be committing. Idolatry. God. But because he is God.

Because he is the one. True God. There is no one. There is nothing. There is nothing. More valuable. Or more precious. Or more beautiful. Than he is. And so God.

Has to lead us. To himself. He knows. That you and I. Created. In the image of God. Will only find satisfaction. As you find.

And discover. And magnify. His glory. It means. That there is. Nothing. More loving. For God. To do. Than to create.

You and me. For his own glory. God gets. The most glory. From us. When we find. Most satisfaction. In him. It's why.

[30 : 34] The greatest tragedy. In Eden. This morning. Is what? What is the greatest tragedy. In Eden. This morning. Is it. That people are going to hell. No it's not.

It's the people. Who were created. In the image of God. To know God. To glorify God. And to enjoy God. I'm not doing that.

I've given you the illustration before. Is it the ugly duckling? The ugly duckling. He goes around life. Doesn't he? And. He lives life. As a duckling. But. But he's not a duckling. Is he?

He's a swan. And it's as he becomes a swan. He lives. As he's meant to do. And you are a human being. Created in the image of God. To know God. And to glorify him.

And you live as an earthly. And you foolishly think. That you will get satisfaction that way. You'll do well in your results. You'll get the boyfriend. Or the husband.

[31 : 33] Or the wife you want. You'll get the ideal home. And it will not satisfy. What's the consequence of our redemption?

The consequence of our redemption. Is our eyes are finally opened. And our ears are unblocked. And so we get this. This is what the Lord says.

He said. He who created you. O Jacob. He who formed you. O Israel. Fear not. Fear not.

For I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. And you are mine. And they are words.

Aren't they? They are words for the suffering. Of this world. They are words for Leslie Barnes. This morning. On the anniversary of David's death. They are words for you.

[32 : 35] And they are words for me. Let's pray. Let's pray.