

There is a redeemer

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[0 : 00] I invite you to turn back again to Isaiah chapter 43. Several years ago, I was working at a church in Jackson, Mississippi.

And on Wednesday nights, we would go through various series on different topics. And one time, we announced that the next series would be on the topic of anxiety and fear.

And the first Wednesday that we began that series, the attendance to our Wednesday night services somewhere between doubled and tripled. And I don't know what single message to draw from that is.

Maybe it's that our society is so desperate for a word about fear and anxiety that they would even go to church to find some resolution to it. It's about Israelites and the fear that they dealt with at one particular moment in their history, in one particular season.

And what God does is not only tell them not to fear, but he gives them a tool to kill their fears with. And that's what I want to talk about tonight is I think in this passage, we see this principle that God doesn't just tell us not to fear.

[1 : 49] He teaches us how to kill our fears with a word. And the first thing I'll say about that is I'm making an assumption here, which is that our fears can be killed with a word.

And what I don't want to do and what this passage doesn't do if you read it closely is this passage does not trivialize fear. It doesn't say that the problem with your fears is that you have silly fears that you just need to ignore.

And one way that we know this is because. Verse one, the first two words, did you see what they were? It says, but now. So this is words spoken in a context.

And the context is the people of God are going through one of the worst seasons in all of the Old Testament. This may be the lowest point in the Old Testament where this is a nation.

It's really two nations, Israel and Judah. In the past 200 years, Israel has been virtually wiped off the face of the earth. They were conquered by this vicious nation called the Assyrians.

[2 : 55] And then maybe 150 years later, Judah, another nation of God's people, is conquered by the Babylonians. And the place where the temple of God was, where people would go and worship God, that city was brought to its knees.

It was destroyed. The temple of God, where people would go worship God, was destroyed. The last king of Judah was taken outside of the city walls. And he had to watch his own son be executed. And that was a way, from the perspective of the Babylonians, of completely destroying any hope that God's people had for a future.

So these are people who are not fearing for no reason. They have reason to be unhappy with the situation that they're in. They're people who live in exile, who have no hope. If you look just before the passage that we read, in chapter 43, one way that Isaiah describes how hopeless their situation was, was in verse 22.

He says, This is a people who have been plundered and looted. All of them are trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder with no one to rescue them.

[4 : 06] They have been made loot with no one to say, send them back. Isaiah is saying, there's not even a person among these people who has the hope to say, send them back.

And if you were to ask God's people in this season, if you were to ask them, what is your problem? What do you need fixed about your situation? What they would not say is, our problem is that we're afraid.

Our problem is fear. What they would say is, our problem is the objects of our fear. We're afraid because there are things in our world to be afraid of. We are a conquered people. We are living in exile.

We have no hope for a future. We have good reason to be afraid. And we can all in our lives point to fears that we have that, on our best moments, we would say are not legitimate.

When a child, one of my children, come to me in the middle of the night and they say, I'm scared of the monsters. One way that I can handle that, one way that I do handle it, is I convince them how silly that fear is.

[5 : 06] I convince them that there are no such thing as monsters. And to even fear them would be a foolish thing to do. But then there are fears that adults can have. I'm worried about what happens if I'm late to that meeting tomorrow.

And if you think about it, and if you really think about it, you might convince yourself, well, actually, if I'm late tomorrow, nothing's going to happen. And I can remember how many times my dad used to tell me, he used to reassure me by giving me this thought experiment.

He would say, Hunter, what's the worst thing that could happen? You know, this thing that you keep talking about, how afraid you are, being late to school tomorrow, what's the worst thing that could come of it? And if I really thought about it, not much could happen.

But there are some fears in all of our lives that give us good reason to be afraid. It could be fears that we have about future suffering, perhaps that we know are coming.

It could be suffering that we're in the midst of right now. It could be mistakes that we know that we've made in the past. And we fear how those mistakes will play themselves out in the future.

[6 : 09] We fear that we've made, we've messed up in such a way that we cannot fix our situation. All human beings in their best moments have times where we realize the gravity of death.

And that can give us a sense of fear. And if you think about it, the fear that the Israelites have is a combination of all those things. Because they're worried about death.

They're worried about suffering. And what makes it even more painful is they know that the situation that they're in is their own making. So if you look at the very last verse before the passage that we just read in chapter 43, God has this really terrible message for them.

Verse 24. Verse 24 says, Who handed Jacob over to become loot and Israel to the plunderers? Who did this awful thing to the Israelites?

Was it not the Lord against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways. They did not obey his law. So he, God, poured on them his burning anger, the violence of war.

[7 : 18] It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand. It consumed them, but they did not take it to heart. One of the most terrible anxieties that a person can probably go through is to know that part of the reason that you're suffering is something that you had to do with.

It was actually a mistake that you made. So these people have reason to fear, and they're facing the worst kind of fear a person could face. And in a fear like that, the answer can't be merely something like breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Those things can have short-term help. But the kind of fear Israel is working with, dealing with, is something that needs something stronger than just forgetting about it.

And the assumption of my premise tonight is that what a fear like this needs, what our deepest fears in life needs, is a word.

Something that we can speak to those fears, that can actually, we can face those fears and how grave they actually are. But we can put those fears to death. And if you notice, when you read Isaiah, and when you read all of Scripture, actually, I spent time trying to actually figure out if this is true, and it is true.

[8 : 39] Every single time in Scripture that God tells His people, do not fear, He never just says, do not fear. He always gives them a reason not to fear.

And even if you just look in the book of Isaiah, God tells His people, or Isaiah, God through Isaiah tells His people, 14 times, either do not fear or do not be afraid. And every single time, He attaches to it a reason not to fear.

And what that must mean is, the only way for us to conquer our deepest fears is not just by telling ourselves not to fear. But it's by finding a word that we can bring to our fears that can quiet them. And I think this is important to hear, because so often we can carry around a fact like this, a fact that we know that Christians should not fear.

And you can walk in a place like this, and you can say, I know that because I'm a Christian, I'm not supposed to fear. But if that's the only thing that we remember, what we end up doing is, we feel guilty for the fear that we have, and we never actually think about the resolution that the Gospel

offers to it.

[9 : 50] So perhaps the worst thing that we can do is only remember that Christians are called not to fear. Christians are called not to fear, and to not fear because we have a reason not to fear.

God teaches us to kill our fears with a word. And the word is, redemption. And you see this in verse 2.

Excuse me, at the end of verse 1. This is what God tells his people. At a given point in time, in a certain circumstance. He says, do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

God says, take that word. He says, do not fear, I have redeemed you. And he says, take that word, I have redeemed you. And Mr. Sladek here could tell you, I have redeemed you in Hebrew is just one word.

Take that word, I have redeemed you. And use that as the tool, as the means that I have given you to put to death the fears that you have about your situation, the situation that you're in.

[10 : 59] Use this single fact that God has redeemed you to kill your fears. And there's a lot of reasons why that's actually really hard to do. One of the reasons is, if you don't actually think about what that word redeemed is, that tool that God has given you becomes blunted.

And part of the problem is that in our society today, we use the word redeemed in a lot of different contexts. We love movies that are about redemption. Usually, when we talk about movies that are about redemption, it's usually the story of a man or a woman who has made mistakes in their past. But somewhere along the lines in their life, they figure out how to do better in life. And what we say is that it's a story of redemption. They've figured out how to redeem their past.

Or, you know, you're at a job. It can be much more simple than that. You're at a job. You have a bad day. And the next day, you do better. And the boss comes in and says, good job, son.

You redeemed yourself. What all those kinds of redemption have in common is, it assumes that the bad things in your life are things that you can fix.

[12 : 06] And what the Bible is saying, and what the Israelites would have said about their situation is, there are some situations that you can find yourself in. There are some realities about this world that you can accept.

And if you accept them, you realize you cannot redeem yourself. You know, for the most obvious example being death. No matter how much you want to avoid death, you cannot, of your own will, avoid that.

There's no amount of work you can put into it. Even if you try to be, even if you try it to help, be the healthiest person you can, you cannot redeem yourself from death. When God says, I have redeemed you, when he says it in the Old Testament, when he says it here in verse 1, it has a specific meaning.

And you have to know that meaning before you can realize why that would even matter, why that would be an encouragement to someone. Redemption in the Old Testament, generally speaking, has this idea that a person can be bought back.

So, for instance, in Leviticus, one of the laws gives an example of a man who becomes impoverished. And he becomes so impoverished, the way that he tries to sustain himself is he sells his own life into slavery.

[13 : 19] And the Jewish laws were such that one of his family members can come along, and he can pay a price to set his family member free.

It's called the redemption price. And he's called the redeemer, the one that redeems. And the very same idea is being pointed to here in this passage. And you know it because when you look at verses 3 and 4, this is what God says.

He says, excuse me, in verse 3. He says, I have redeemed you. And in verse 3 he says, For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

And then this is how he explains himself. He says, I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. And then halfway down the next verse he says, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.

So what God is doing is he's saying, the way that I am going to tell you that you don't need to fear is by telling you what's about to happen to you, which is that I have redeemed you. And what God is saying is, he's saying, you are so precious to me.

[14 : 37] You, my children, are so precious to me that I am willing to give Egypt and Cush and Seba in exchange for your life to free you from the situation that you have found yourselves in.

And there's a historical truth to this because in 539 B.C., the Persians come into power. And one of the first things that the Persians do is they allow all the Israelites, all the people of Judah, to go back home and to rebuild their temple and to worship God again.

That's the moment where they find redemption. And around the same period in history, the Persians also conquer Cush and Seba in Egypt, which is, these places are another way of talking about basically all of known Africa in the time period.

So the Persians come into power and they set the Israelites free and they also conquer modern Africa, excuse me, what was known of Africa at the time.

And one of the themes in the book of Isaiah that comes up over and over again in lots of different ways is God keeps trying to show his people that the circumstances that they find themselves in in this world are not just by chance and they can't be explained merely by military power or by geopolitical power.

[15:59] Cyrus, who helped the Persians rise to power, and if you go read Isaiah chapter 45, one of the things that God says is, he's not just there by chance.

He is my servant and he's doing what I want for you, to save you, to redeem you. And do you see how this kills fear? How this one word, I have redeemed you, kills fear for the Israelites?

Because it helps them see that the God of the universe has come down and he has guaranteed, you know, in their own language through this idea of redemption. He says, you are so precious to me that I have purchased you back and I've given you some of the most rich, I've given some of the most rich nations in the world in exchange for you.

That's how precious you are to me. And this is the kind of idea that if you actually let it sit inside your mind, if you're an Israelite in 550 BC, you allow this to sit inside your mind and you follow the idea to its natural conclusion, which this passage does.

Why would God redeem a people? Why would anyone ever redeem someone? And, you know, if you're a Hebrew and you redeem your brother from slavery, maybe you do it out of a sense of obligation.

[17:18] Maybe you do it because you're wealthy and if you didn't redeem your brother, you'd be frowned on in your society. But that's not the reason that God gives for why he redeemed his people.

What does he say? He says, I redeemed, you are, verse four, you are precious and honored in my sight and because I love you.

That's why I redeemed you. And what I love about this is this idea of God's love and this idea of redemption, they interpret one another. So you could say, what does it mean that God redeemed us?

Why does he redeem us? It's because he loves us. And then if you ever were to doubt God's love if you were an Israelite, you would say, well, how do I know that God loves me? Well, you look back at the redemption.

He was willing to give Seba in Africa, all these places he said, I was more precious than these nations. And what an Israelite was called to do is to look at their fears in that present moment and put those fears to death, not because those fears weren't legitimate, but because God had offered them a hope that was greater than their fears.

[18:27] Now, it can be a cheap trick for a minister preaching through the Old Testament to look at a word like redemption and say, you see, we're all redeemed.

And part of the cheapness of that trick is that this is talking about a specific moment in history. But there's two reasons why this has something to say to us. And one of them is passages like this that talk about a God who would redeem Israel.

They're telling us about who God is. God never changes. And the God of 2,500 years ago is the same God today so that we can look at a passage like Isaiah 43 and we can say, what I know about my God is that it is in his character to look at a situation, to look at a people who have gone so far away from him and as far away as they can get, he can still redeem them and he can still bring them back to himself.

And he can still look at someone who goes as far away as they can, a prodigal son and a prodigal nation, and God can still say, they are precious in my eyes and I will do whatever it takes to bring them back to myself.

That's one reason why we can look at a passage like this. But another one is, moments like this in the history of God's people prepared God's people to see Jesus.

[19 : 53] And this is when my imagination begins to run wild and I admit that I'm speculating here. But I imagine those, you know, I imagine the disciples after Jesus had ascended into heaven and they're sitting around a campfire at nighttime.

They're having dinner together. And they're trying to think, how can we communicate what Jesus has done for us to our Jewish brothers and sisters?

How can we explain to them that Jesus Christ has died for their sins? And you imagine them going, thinking in their minds, going Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, going through all of the Old Testament and saying, how does this, how was this all along preparing us to see who Jesus was?

And then they get to a passage like Isaiah 43. And this had to have been one of the most obvious passages for them because the story of God's people in this moment in time is in so many ways the story of the gospel.

It's a preview of the gospel because in it you have a people who have gone as far as they can from God, who have no hope and who are looking around in fear.

[21 : 08] And then Jesus, excuse me, and then God steps in. Jesus steps in and he offers a way out. He offers them a redemption. It's even the same word.

The New Testament over and over again describes what Jesus did as redemption. Jesus goes to the cross and he redeems his people from their sins. Just like God redeemed the Israelites from the consequences of what they had to go through.

It's like the whole story of Jesus Christ and his redemption is everything that happens in Isaiah 43 but greater. fear. And because of that we can look at a passage like this and we can say when God tells us not to fear he even gives us a word to apply to our fears to kill them.

And it's the same word it's redemption. And what we have to realize is that when God gives us a word to kill our fears he hasn't just changed our psychology.

He hasn't just said you need to think more positively. What he has done is he's changed our objective situation. He's saying I'm telling you not to fear not just because I want you to be more positive but because your objective situation has changed.

[22 : 31] you were hopeless. You were living in your sins and you had no hope and the fears the fears that you dealt with in life the same fears that everyone deals with in life about death and what comes after these were things that you had no answer to and so you were right to fear.

And then God says I have given you an answer which is that you have been redeemed and that you are precious to me in your sight in my sight. So God teaches us to kill our fears with a word and that word is redemption but in some ways that's the easy part isn't it?

Just recognizing what is true especially if you're already a Christian it's easy to say I know that God calls me not to fear because he has redeemed me but then the next challenge is and the challenge of every day of our lives is how do you take that truth?

How do you take that one word that God gives us and make it a habit? Make it a habit of applying the gospel applying redemption to our lives so that every day we're putting our fears to death.

Because isn't it true that you can worship you and you can say I know God calls me not to fear I know he's redeemed me and yet even as you're sitting in this pew you could be thinking about what tomorrow might bring that stressful meeting that you know you're going to have all kinds of anxieties things that keep us awake at night things that we can't sleep and we don't know how to get over it and what we have to do is we have to become midnight theologians people who when we wake up in the middle of the night and we find that we have anxieties that we don't know how to deal with we have to begin the process of saying if I really am redeemed as the gospel tells me that I am what does what does my redemption have to say to this fear because my conviction is and I hope this is your conviction as well that there is no fear in our lives there's literally no fear in our lives that we can face that redemption doesn't touch if we're in Christ and part of the challenge is realizing sometimes I think we fear and we don't even stop to think that the gospel might have something to say to this fear and part of our challenge is to think of all the fears that we face and say what does the gospel have to say to this just to give one example of a new challenge that part of our society is facing there's a

[25 : 05] New York University psychologist named Jonathan Haidt and he he studies a lot of teenage development and he wrote in an American journal called The Atlantic last year an article that he called The Dangerous Experiment The Dangerous Experiment on Teen Girls The Dangerous Experiment on Teen Girls and what his article was about was as a psychologist he's

noticed that when you study teen girls and their experiences of depression over the past 15 years teenage girls are reporting about a 66% increase in self-identified depression sorry let me put that a little bit more clearly if you compare a teenage girl 15 years ago to a teenage girl in 2021 there's 66% more likely in 2021 to report having had a depressive episode in the past month and Haidt's argument this psychologist is that the only reason that we can give to explain this and the only reason we can give to explain why this is happening not just in America but in UK and in all western countries is the rise of social media and so his argument is our young women are facing depression at a scale they've never faced before because they're using social media more than they ever have before and you know maybe part of the solution is to think about how much we actually use social media but there is there is an issue there of something that's happening to the teenage girls among us our daughters and our granddaughters and the people that we know and love where because they're using social media more and more they're having their sense of identity challenged every single day where they're looking at pictures of beautiful people online beautiful peers who are using technology to make themselves look more beautiful and then they look at themselves and they might say

I am nowhere near as pretty as that I am worthless and that kind of fear when it begins to settle into a young mind that I am I am not beautiful I am not I'm not precious that fear can expand into a person's life I am not lovable and you can begin to look to answers for that fear in all sorts of places and my question tonight is is it not possible that even in something like that that has come around so recently can we not look at a problem like that and say even there the gospel has something to say to that fear that we can teach our young women that the word redemption says something about who they are and about their identity and hope maybe maybe if we can if we can tell them in a thousand different ways that God looks at them and he says that they are precious so precious that he has died for them that he has sent his son to die for them on the cross maybe when they look at those images on the internet they're not thrown so off kilter because they have this anchor in their soul that says

I need not fear whether I am beautiful or not because my God has told me that I'm precious now that's not my fear that's that's a fear of someone else but all of us have the responsibility to look into our lives and say what am I fearing that I haven't even put a name on and say what does the gospel have to say to this what does the fact that God has redeemed me have to say to this and one of one of the takeaways from an example like I just gave where you talk about a teenage girl and the hope that you know we can teach our daughters and teach our friends that these are truths is that the redemption that's talked about in a passage like Isaiah 43 is not merely individualistic God talks to the nation of Israel and he talks to the nation of Jacob and yes he talks about bringing sons and daughters individually from the far sides of the world back together but this is a redemption that if we really understand it we understand it's a redemption that we all share now the sins that I have been redeemed from and the sins that you have been redeemed from may not be the same but we can look at each other and say we were in the same spot and we needed we needed hope and we needed something to kill our fears and the same God died for both of us and killed our fears and that gives us a reason to celebrate together

I'll give one more caveat with this and then I'll close with a with a brief story the caveat is this anytime we talk about things like fear grief it can be easy to hear that God tells us not to fear and that we should just be happy all the time and that we should never do something like grieve that we are not people who should ever admit to suffering or to sorrow but if you were to if you think about the Israelites the day they received this message or the day they realized this message was about them what was the difference between the day before they heard this message and the day after they heard this message the difference wasn't their physical situation they were still as oppressed the day before they heard this prophecy as the day after they heard this prophecy but the difference was they finally knew there was a hope and what God does sometimes is he comes to us in the moments when we are the most grieved and when we have the most reason to objectively have fears and he doesn't say just ignore what's going on around you what he does is he says as grave as you realize that these fears are know that even here

I have provided an answer and I haven't been in Becli very often but just before I came into the service I realized I read all those plaques that are just by the entrance and the one right in the corner to I think it was John Simm I believe talked about how he died on the Sabbath and at the bottom one of the passages that it quotes about his death is well now I've just challenged myself

I've embarrassed myself it's either I think it's 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 either 1 or 2 Thessalonians chapter 4 but it's the passage where Paul says do not grieve as we as Christians do not grieve as those who are without hope and I don't think he was saying don't grieve but he's saying our grief looks different our grief is the kind of grief that even though it is sad and it recognizes that this world is immensely not as it should be we have hope and we have something to look forward to and that allows us to live when we are in the pit and I'll finish with a story which may seem trivial to you but I've thought about a lot over the years

[32 : 17] I had a friend come visit me once when I was in Washington D.C. and I lived in a small one bedroom flat where the kitchen was right next to the shower and so I was cooking breakfast and my friend was in the shower right next to me in a manner of speaking and I could hear him talking to himself and he began talking to himself very loudly and when he came out of the shower I said just so you know I heard you talking to yourself in the shower but I couldn't make out what he was saying so I asked what he was doing because if you're going to talk at least sing right and he said he said every morning when I wake up and I take a shower I repeat the whole gospel to myself so that every morning I hear the gospel and that may seem trivial to you but let me tell you if that's what it takes that's what it takes all of us need to be reminded that the fears that we experience in this life have an answer and we need to tell ourselves the gospel as often as we can let's pray heavenly father we praise you that you have not left us without hope and you've not just told us to change our minds but you've actually changed our objective situation you have redeemed us from the pit and even when we walk through darkness we know that you're with us and we pray that as we look to tomorrow and the fears that are trivial and the fears that are real and that hurt us would you give us hope in your gospel not in ourselves but in what you can do for us and what you have done for us in Jesus Christ and we ask this in his name amen if you would join me our final hymn this evening is there is a redeemer let's stand this evening please hear me this evening oh you have a hard to do with calling you

I saw I