

The Grace of the Lord's Rescue

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2026

Preacher: Rev Gareth Regan

[0:00] Let us take a moment to pray. Heavenly Father, as we come before your word today, help us to have ears that can hear you, and eyes that might see you this morning.

We ask this in the name of your Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. We've been working through Isaiah over the last few weeks. Those of you who have been around will have known that and you'll be journeying with us.

You'll also, if you've been around, you'll know that each block seems quite big. This week is no different. I was saying to somebody in Abbotsbury when I was preaching earlier, the person who was reading it, she's like, it's quite long.

And I said, yeah, but aren't we great, gracious and grateful that we didn't stop just at the end of chapter 42, where it was all doom and gloom. Instead, we saw some joy.

Because this reading has a sense of judgment to it, and it has a sense of redemption. It exposes our blindness, it explains our ruin, but also speaks of a far greater world.

[1:25] His redeeming grace that creates a witness to the people. This section that we're going through, Isaiah at the moment, has been journeying through God coming to comfort his people.

And now we see that as the last two chapters have gone past, the people have made some accusations to God, and God has made some accusations about them. And there is the sense of a trial being set up.

Who is right? And we see that trial come together in the verses that we've seen this morning. And often in trials, there are a few different voices.

So it is the same with our reading this morning. And it's quite hard sometimes in the poetic nature of Isaiah to work out, Am I hearing the prophet Isaiah?

Or am I hearing the word of God? Is this God speaking? Is it Isaiah speaking? And so I'm going to take us through, with that being my framework for the sermon.

[2:31] So we're going to look at the bits that God says, and some bits that Isaiah says. I'll make sure that you understand who's speaking from which point of view. The broad overview of that is we have a couple of verses at the beginning, where God speaks and he confronts his people about their spiritual malpractice.

And then through verses 21 into the beginning of 43, the prophet speaks. He talks about the cultural ruin they've exposed.

He shares a corporate confession. He speaks about the sovereign reality of the divine judgment. He heralds the gospel that is coming and introducing the king.

And then we hear back from our God, who talks about a tender, radical, substitutionary grace. A courtroom challenge comes about to the worldly ideologies.

And then there is absolute exclusivity and the call to be a witness to what God has done. So that's where we are. And when I have time, one of the things I like watching is kind of procedural crime stuff.

[3:44] Often from the United States of America, whether it's like NCIS or criminal minds. Those kind of things. If you're those kind of people, you'll know them.

If you're not, I'm sorry. But often the way they work is you can almost put a timer on what happens through the episode. And if you're worried or anxious, you know that with maybe about 18 minutes to go, everything flips on its head and it all comes out right at the end.

Today is no different. We go through the back end of chapter 42 and it all looks really difficult. And then we hit that phrase at the beginning of 43.

But now, but now, there might be or an until or a yes, something happens that is pivotal and changes the momentum. Sometimes, though, it can be a little bit challenging when I'm watching

one of these programs because you suddenly realise you've come upon a part one of two parts. And you enter the part one and you don't get to the good part. And it just all feels bad. And I'm really grateful today that we don't have that story today.

[4:59] Our story is not one where you have to wait till next week. We're going to not, I'm not going to leave you hanging in your sinfulness to wait for redemption for next week. So enjoy the fact that it's not one of those episodes.

We're going to get through it all today. Because everything changes across the course of our, the end of chapter 42 and beginning of chapter 43.

But let's go back to the beginning of chapter 42. Chapter 42 starts with this sense of everything being wrong.

We find God in a sense of confrontation, challenging the hearers of the day and challenging us about our spiritual problems.

But he does it in a really odd way, I think. Hear ye deaf, look ye blind and see. Who is blind but my servant and deaf like the messenger I sent? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me?

[6:06] Blind like the servant of the Lord. And there is a sense of irony in the words that are being spoken here.

The sense of irony comes from the fact that God knows that the people of Israel have all of God's law. They're not short of one word to know what they should do, how they should behave, what they should be up to, what their journey looks like.

They're not short of a word. Yet, they are not doing it. They have the gift of the temple worship. They know where God lives. They understand the covenant and the promises that God has promised them from right back at the beginning of time.

Yet, they cannot see. They're supposed to be a light to all the nations. Instead, they are spiritual kind. Now, we have a choice when we read this.

We can read this and go, well, it's not like me, is it? I'm not that person. But maybe that's the problem. Because I think it's wholly possible in our Christian lives to know scripture.

[7:17] To say, I know everything that's in here. I follow, I've read it, I'm a scholar of it. I can quote you parts of it.

It's possible to attend church every Sunday or every Wednesday or every Sunday and every Wednesday. And maybe some bits in between.

It's possible to speak the Christian language. Whether that in prayer or in passing. To talk about the love of Jesus. To talk about how he has died on the cross and I've been covered by the blood of Christ.

To use all those lovely phrases that we trot out as Christians. It's possible to do all of those things. Yet, any time that we're not in church, we don't see God.

We don't experience him. We don't know him. We don't follow him. On Monday to Saturday, life is far away from the life we purport to have when we're with our Christian friends. The language he used.

[8:27] The way we behave. Where we put our resources. And not at all what they look like when we're with our Christian friends. The spiritual blindness is not ignorance.

It is seeing everything except the Lord. It's saying, I see everything and I'm doing it all on a surface level.

But I'm not seeing God in my life. And so that's the challenge that we are given by God at the beginning of our reading today. Then the prophet picks up.

Verses 21 to 25. The prophet now explains the history of the Israelite people. He shares that Babylon wasn't simply stronger.

You know, it's easy to say, oh, that Babylon was just more powerful. Like that time when any of you play sport. One of the things, doing some cycling.

[9:31] If you go out with a group of people who are cycling and somebody thinks they're on a bad day. Or thinks they might have a bad day. They get their excuses in early. Oh, I haven't fuelled properly.

Oh, I didn't have time to set the gear ratios up properly for this ride. Oh, I haven't recovered from my last ride. I'm just having a bit of a rest day. Get the excuses in early.

Here, Isaiah doesn't give the people the opportunity to get their excuses in early. Doesn't say that it wasn't that you weren't strong enough or anything like this. This is God's plan. Israel wasn't merely

unlucky.

As maybe those people in Norway are saying this morning. That we were unlucky. Their exile wasn't political.

It was theological. Notice the progression. God delighted to give his law. Verse 21. It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.

[10:34] The perfect law. Live the law and you'll be alright. The people became trapped and plundered in verse 22. Verse 24. We notice this sense of being sinners.

Who handed Jacob over to become root? And Israel to the plunderers. Was it not the Lord against whom we have sinned? Isaiah says, We the Israelite people did this because we didn't follow the good and glorious law that was given to us.

For they would not follow his ways. They did not obey his law. No excuses. No blaming Babylon. It didn't say it was because Babylon was so strong.

It was because we didn't have enough information. If only God had written a few more handy commandments. If only we had a few more books more than the Pentateuch.

If only we had a few more good stories like the Exodus. If only we had a few more good characters to look at to understand how to live life like Joseph.

[11:45] He doesn't say any of that. There's no blaming Babylon. There's no blaming circumstances. Just a simple confession. Verse 25 then.

Which I think is quite hard to read. So he poured out on them his burning odor. The violence of war. It enveloped them in flames and yet they did not understand.

It consumed them that they did not take it to heart. There are those of us who may be saying when we read the Old Testament.

Oh I don't like the Old Testament. I don't like the judgment in the Old Testament. I don't like the wrathful God of the Old Testament. I don't like the God who does says this. I cannot believe in a God that would do this.

Because I know. Because I've read my New Testament. And God is love. So that God doesn't do that. So I'm a New Testament person. And I don't even know Gareth why you're talking about Isaiah. Because that's the Old God and we believe in a New God.

[12:45] Because we've got Jesus. I'm really sorry. But that's the wrong way to read this. It's the wrong way to behave.

And I'm going to tell you why it's wrong. And I think most of us who have children know why it's wrong, don't we? We know why it's wrong. Because we've brought up our children and we know how we have to do it. We know that sometimes our children, in spite of being told all the rules and the behaviours and the things to do, they fail to do it.

Last week I got to celebrate my two eldest children being confirmed. Many of you who know my two eldest children will say they're lovely children. They're wonderful children.

They seem like they are godly children. They are living a great life. And I would say to you, you should see my house. Because there are times when I've had to be a judgmental father to them. There's times when I've had to lay out some consequences. That should their behaviour be not what is expected of the household, that they would have to receive some consequences. Now we all know there's times when we level consequences at our children, because in the heat of the moment, and we realise that was very, very silly, wasn't it?

[14:06] Some of us will have been there. You'll remember those times. I know there was a time when I said, if you do not do dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, you will not have the TV for a week.

I thought that would result in children doing as I told them. Because they understand the consequence is really, really painful. No TV for a week.

I thought that'll do it. It did not do it. And do you know what I learned in that moment? That the consequence on my children was bad.

That kind of, we normally, the routine in our house is we'd have tea, and we'd finish tea, and about six o'clock, they would say to me, come and put the TV on before bed. And they could watch whatever they like for a half hour or 40 minutes before they head to bed, just to unwind.

Not for that week they couldn't. No TV. Now that's painful for them. But it's also painful for us as parents, because that was the time when I could go and do stuff.

[15:10] But now I've got children who are watching TV. That means I had to change my behaviour. And I think God is the God that knows that.

So when he levels judgement, it's not just painful for the person he's levelling judgement on. It's painful for him. He understands the pain that he's giving. So this sense of judgement here, isn't God going, well, I'll leave him to it.

Doesn't affect me. He sees his people in pain. He knows he has to come near them. He knows he has to walk with them through the pain of their exile, through the pain of their domination, through Babylon.

And so, if you're sat there today saying, I want to know the God of love, and I don't believe in the God of wrathful judgement, the two have to go together, don't they? For me to have two girls stood before you last week required me to be a difficult parent at times.

For you to be the best that you can be requires you to have a God who holds you to a standard that is higher than the one that you might want to live by. Because we all know, don't we?

[16:19] Without God's standards, we wouldn't be the human beings we are. Because you and I are not good people. You might sometimes try and coin yourself that you're a good person.

You might try and want to be a good person. But we all know that deep down, given free reign, we would live in a way that is not honouring to our fellow human beings, to our world, and to our God. So he has to have that level of judgement. And if I ended my sermon here, you would all be bereft. Because it's not a good ending.

But chapter 42 ends. And then comes the greatest interruption. But now.

But now. The gospel is heard. But now. This is what the Lord says.

[17:19] And we have in that pivot, Isaiah starts and says, but now let me give you some good news. But now let me tell you that it's going to be alright. And we have that pivot.

And in the middle of that, we switch from the prophet speaking to God coming back and speaking. He who created you, Jacob. He who formed you, Israel. God then speaks.

Do not fear. For I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. Everything changes.

Do you notice though, nothing changed with Israel. I don't think we're missing a part of Isaiah here where Israel changed their behaviour. Where Israel did something different.

Where Israel went out and did a load of hard work to gain God's favour. We just see that change.

[18:19] They did not take it hard. But now, this is what the Lord says. Do not fear. For I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. Fear not.

Not because life is easy, but because I have redeemed you. I have paid for your sins. I have done the work that you couldn't possibly do yourself. It has been accomplished.

I have called you by name. Those of you who sit here and think that your life is too insignificant for God, this is a reading for you. I have called you by name.

That isn't a reading just for me, the vicar who stands in front of you all day, that we've been called by name because we then get to do this. You have all been called by name. You are mine.

Perhaps the most intimate sentence in this passage. Before Israel does everything, before repentance has been even described, God declares covenant love.

[19:29] You are mine. Each one of you are God's. God's. Whether you know it or not, he created you to fulfil that relationship with him.

And he doesn't need you to do something to make that happen. Often, when you read other world religions, you will see an expectation to do something for then you to be saved.

But God is a different God. God says, I will redeem you at great cost to me so that you might do things for me and work alongside me for the good of my world.

God. And we see how God pays for. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Siba for your steed, since you are the most precious and honoured in my sight. And because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.

[20:39] God says, do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bring your children from the east and gather them from the west. I will say to the north, give them up, and to the south, do not hold them back.

God says, these other kingdoms, I won't be their God because I'm going to give them up so that I can be your God, so we can gather you all back because I love you.

And we get to see that most clearly in our Christian story because what God will learn and we'll see as we go through Isaiah that the Israel people, they continue to mess up.

This is like, yay, they're all saved, happy ending. We'll get to the next episode of our drama and they'll screw up again and have to be redeemed again because that's the life of the Israel people. And it's the same for us.

But we know Christ. We know the good news of Jesus Christ. And so when you think about what God gave up there, what he's writing about in Isaiah, imagine how much more he gave up for us in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 46] The fact that on the cross, Christ gave his life, went to hell, that we might know freedom and life in all its fullness.

We might know life in eternity. We might be able to say that we can live with our God. And so we see there that God loved you so much that he gave his one and only son for you might know freedom.

That's how much he loved you. Not how much he loved me. And then I hopefully usher you along through my hard work. He loved you. He created you. He wanted you. You are his.

And so then we see the witnessing appear after that. And again, God is speaking through verses 8 to 13.

We see him gather groups of people together. The nations gather. Every idol is invited. And I love this in some of the Old Testament writing where God is so, so keen to say to people, look, I am the only God.

[22 : 51] He says, bring any idol you've got into this conversation. Bring anything you've got. I'm not frightened of anything. I'm not frightened of any argument.

I'm not frightened of any ideology. I'm not frightened of any philosophy. Anything you think is bigger than God, God is not frightened of them. because he knows he has the victory.

Because he says, can any of them explain history? Can any of those things save you? Can any of them predict the future? There is silence.

Because none of those things can do anything. Any time you're saying, well, if I put my trust in, it'll be all right, God says, that thing can't save you because it's got no power. It's only got the power I give it.

And then he tells to his people, and we see, he says, you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servants who have chosen, so that you may know and believe and understand that I am who you are.

[23 : 53] I am. That's one of those phrases whenever you trip across an I am, you go, ah, it's God just saying, I am your God. I am Yahweh.

Notice the order though. Not witness, so I will save you. It doesn't say, go out today, all of you, and tell people about Christ.

Go and do that. And only once you've done it well enough will you earn a place in heaven. Instead he says, I will grant you, through my grace and mercy, a place in heaven by just calling upon my name and being my people.

Because you are mine and I love you. And then what we hope would happen is you say, oh my goodness, I recognise you sent your son to die on the cross for me, your one and only son, you gave him up to a horrible death 2,000 years ago, he went to hell for me.

I probably should do something. I should probably change my life. I should probably be a better person. And I'm going to look to God to make me that person. I'm going to look to him for the strength, the power, and the ability.

[25 : 02] I'm going to look to the Holy Spirit to fill me day by day so that I can do it. Because you have been saved, redeemed, and loved. Then, you are my wise.

Mission always follows grace. Never the other way round. So this whole passage really follows the pattern of the Gospel. Blindness, we cannot save ourselves.

Judgment, sin, does really matter. And if you struggle with that, come and have a conversation with me about what that means. If you struggle with judgment and wrath and stuff like that, come and talk to me about it.

Grace, God acts for us. Mission, the redeemed people become the witnesses. But yet still, the most beautiful sentence is, you are mine.

That is the heart of Christianity. Not merely, I know about God. That's great. Good for you. You know about God. But I think it's more important that he knows you.

[26:03] That he called you, he redeemed you, and he says, you are mine. So just take a moment and think about these three questions.

Where are you still spiritually blind? Where are you in your world, unable or unwilling to see God, to see the Lord, to see his goodness because of familiarity, the church, reading the scriptures, has just become mundane.

You've forgotten your first life. Comfort, it's just nice, it feels cosy, I like my friends. Or self-reliance, let me prove that I am my own God and I can do it myself.

Where are you spiritually blind? Ask yourself the question, have you truly heard God's but mouth for you? Are you still living under guilt and self-justification?

Or have you received the grace that says, fear not, I have redeemed you, you are mine. And if you've worked out question one and question two, question three asks you this, am I living as Christ's witness?

[27:21] Those who belong to him are not merely rescued from judgment, but are sent into the world to testify that there is no saviour besides him.

The Christian faith is not a cruise ship which you get to direct Christ and God into your own way, to complain when the buffet isn't good enough or the entertainment isn't loveless.

I believe the gospel is more like a battleship with lifeboats going out to rescue other people of which each one of us has a task to complete. Where are you in that mission?

If you're sat here today saying I'm good with question one and I'm good with question two but I'm not good with question three, say, how am I this week going to be a witness to the glory of Christ in my life?

How am I going to testify that there is no saviour besides him? Let's just take a moment and offer that to God in prayer.

[28:25] Heavenly Father, we each sit here with our own story, our own way of living our life. Lord, would you help each of us to understand where we are still spiritually blind?

Help us to hear the but now of redemption. Help us to receive that grace that we might know that we are redeemed and that we have been bought for a price and that each of us are in your love and cared for you as we remember those words, you are mine.

And Lord, as we think about that joy and that goodness, how are we going to be a witness to Christ? Would you surprise us by good conversations this week?

Lord, I pray boldly that you might help each of us have a conversation about faith this week. What was somebody we've been praying for? A surprise one in this church.

One with our neighbour across the fence. That help us to have a good conversation about you that might see somebody understand that their God has come to rescue them.

[29:51] We pray this in the name of your Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.