

Isaiah 43:22-44:23

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[0:00] The sermon text for today is Isaiah 43, 22 through 44, 23. At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare, This is the word of the Lord, and the church, in joyful response to his revelation given to us, will together respond, Thanks be to God.

Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob, but you have been weary of me, O Israel. You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings or weighed you with frankincense. You have not bought me sweet cane with money or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins. You have wearied me with your iniquities. I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Put me in remembrance. Let us argue together. Set forth your case that you may be proved right. Your first father sinned, and your mediators transgressed against me.

[1:07] Therefore, I will profane the princes of the sanctuary and deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling. But now hear, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen.

Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb, and will help you. Fear not, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground.

I will pour my spirit upon your offspring and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, I am the Lord's. Another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, the Lord's, and name himself by the name of Israel. Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last.

Besides me, there is no God. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come and what will happen.

[2:17] Fear not, nor be afraid. Have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? There is no rock. I know not any.

All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know that they may be put to shame. Who fashions a God or cast an idol that is profitable for nothing?

Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble. Let them stand forth. They shall be terrified. They shall be put to shame together.

The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry and his strength fails.

He drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man with the beauty of a man to dwell in a house.

[3:22] He cuts down cedars or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man.

He takes a part of it and warms himself. He kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also, he makes a god and worships it. He makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire.

Over the half he eats meat. He roasts it and is satisfied. Also, he warms himself and says, Aha! I am warm. I have seen the fire. And the rest of it he makes it into a god, his idol, and falls down to it

and worships it.

He prays to it and says, Deliver me for you are my god. They know not nor do they discern for he has shut their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot understand. No one considers nor is their knowledge or discernment to say, Half of it I burned in the fire. I also baked bread on its coals and I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination?

[4:25] Shall I fall down before a block of wood? He feeds on ashes. A deluded heart has led him astray and he cannot deliver himself or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?

Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant. I formed you. You are my servant. O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.

I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist. Return to me for I have redeemed you. Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it.

Shout, O depths of the earth. Break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest and every tree in it. For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and will be glorified in Israel.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. Heavenly Father, this is your ancient word.

[5:22] It is timeless. It is relevant today just as it was when Isaiah prophesied. It is life-giving and transformative by your Spirit's power.

So, God, I pray that we would hear what you want to say to us this morning. Change us, Lord, by your Spirit. God, raise the dead to life by your sovereign grace even now as your word is preached.

We pray this in Christ's name and for his glory. Amen. Well, good morning, church. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here at Shoreline, and I'm so glad that you've joined us this morning.

We have Bibles on the back table if you don't already have a Bible. We'd love to give you one of those if you don't have one. It's bookmarked to today's passage. I just want to note for those that have been coming for a while today, we're not going to have verses on the screen.

So, I really want all of you to have God's word in front of you whether it's your phone or an actual, you know, hard copy of the word and follow along as we're going through it this morning.

[6:25] And I want to ask each of you, what are the biggest problems facing you today? You know, we've all got problems. We're humans living in a broken, fallen world.

So, I bet you can list one or two or ten problems this morning. And I just want you to bring those problems to the forefront of your mind. It probably isn't that hard because we're all going through difficult things in life.

And just hold them there. On the forefront of your mind, some of the key main problems that you've got going on. And just hold that thought. Now, today, we are in the fifth sermon in a 14-week series in Isaiah chapters 40 through 55 entitled From Sighing to Singing because that, as we'll see again today, is the effect of God's redeeming love upon the world.

He turns our sorrows, our sighing into joyful singing to the glory of His name. And the title of today's sermon is God's Sure Redemption. God's Sure Redemption.

And the main point is this. If there's one thing, if there's one thing I want you to take home today, this is why I put this at the front of most of my sermons, it's this, that in astonishing grace, God forgives undeserving sinners who turn to Him.

[7:38] That's what I want you to remember today. In astonishing grace, God forgives undeserving sinners who turn to Him. Now, if you recall, last week's passage began with God declaring Israel to be a blind and deaf servant, right?

Though God had revealed His glory to them in the giving of His law, Israel refused to obey Him. She refused to submit to His ways. But, in spite of Israel's sin, God graciously promised redemption, right?

I'm going to redeem you from bondage to Babylon, right? The nation, Babylon was a nation that had conquered Israel and carried them off into exile. And God is promising, I'm going to remain faithful to you.

I love you. You're my chosen, honored, precious, beloved people. But, last week's passage left this glaring problem unresolved. How could God redeem a sinful people?

Right? God is holy, righteous, and just. God cannot dwell with evil. How could He then continue to pour out His love and favor upon Israel when she had rebelled against Him?

[8:46] Now, today's passage, it returns to the problem, the deeper problem of Israel's sin. Israel needs rescue from Babylon to be sure, right? But rescue from Babylon does not rid Israel of the stain of her sin, which God will go on to say in Isaiah 59, verse 2, that that sin causes, what, separation between them and God.

and that is the core problem facing an exiled Jewish people. And that, friends, is the core problem facing each of us today.

Now, do you remember those problems that I asked you to recall to mind? No doubt, like everyone in this room this morning has a host of problems facing them. Perhaps you're facing a failed marriage or marital tension right now.

Perhaps you're facing injustice or mistreatment at work. Perhaps you're facing financial stress. Perhaps you or a loved one are facing serious health concerns.

Matt just mentioned that there's been loss of life this week that some people in this room are connected to. Perhaps you're facing simply a bossy older sibling or maybe younger sibling.

[9:57] And I want to tell you something before we move on. God sees and cares about all of those things and about you. God sees and cares. And we've talked at length in this series in Isaiah about God's love and his faithfulness, about his divine presence and protection through any trial, right, through the water, through the fire.

I am with you, right, how he strengthens and upholds the weak and the weary. God sees, God knows, God cares. And maybe somebody this morning needed to hear that. And, and, God cares about you so much that he wants you to realize that while all of those things and no doubt countless more are real problems facing you today, you actually have a deeper, more fundamental problem. Right? And this deeper problem is so serious that if led unresolved, it will lead not to the death of a relationship or the death of a career, but to eternal spiritual death.

Now that means unending existence under God's just judgment. And Isaiah goes on to have some pretty strong words about that if you read the last chapter of Isaiah. But eternal spiritual death, that is the deeper problem facing all of us today.

But see, God's love is so great that he exposes that problem so it's recognized and then he extends a solution to that problem so it's actually resolved.

[11:26] So here's the first point today, that God exposes Israel's sin. Now in the first three verses of our passage for this morning, verses 22 to 24 of chapter 43, so God is returning to the problem of Israel's sin.

And what is that sin? Well, God says in verse 22, you did not call upon me, O Jacob. You have been weary of me, O Israel.

So apparently Israel has treated, you know, the God who strengthens the weary as if he has actually been causing her weariness. She's growing a bit tired, a bit bored even with God.

Now this doesn't mean that she's abandoned her religious duties. In fact, she's been quite busy at fulfilling them. Now it's not readily apparent at first glance that what God is saying here, but if you've read Isaiah, then when you got to this point in Isaiah, you would make the connection that Israel has in fact gone about bringing the Lord, these animal offerings, these fragrant offerings as required by the Mosaic Law, but she hasn't done it for him.

Now, God is saying here, you have, look at verse 23, verse 23, you have not brought me, that's where the emphasis is, you have not brought me, your sheep, or your burnt offerings.

[12:48] Verse 24, you have not satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. Now if you're unconvinced by this understanding of these verses, I just want you to go back, if you would, turn back to Isaiah chapter 1, verse 11, the very beginning of this book, Isaiah 1, verse 11, God says to them, what to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord?

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. Jump down to verse 13, bring no more vain offerings.

Incense is an abomination to me. This helps us understand what Isaiah is saying now in Isaiah chapter 43. And this is, if you read scripture, this is the consistent accusation of the prophets against Judah and Israel.

Not that they've abandoned their religious activities, but that these activities are merely form without function. Form without function. They scurry about fulfilling all their ceremonial obligations, but they're not doing it in trust and dependence on the Lord.

They're not doing it for His glory and to delight in Him. The purpose of the sacrificial system specifically was freedom and fellowship. Freedom from sin.

[14:09] They would offer these sacrifices in faith that God was forgiving them of their sin. And the purpose was fellowship with the Lord. They would actually get to be with God.

This was not a burden. Freedom and fellowship with the living God, that's not a burden. The people, though, they've instead sought to use the sacrificial system to manipulate God as if He were some cosmic vending machine, like insert bull and get out divine blessing.

No, God has not wearied and burdened Israel. Israel has wearied and burdened God with her vain, worthless religion. Now, perhaps that's a surprise to some of you this morning, that God would call religious activity worthless, burdensome to Him.

And, you know, Jesus has the same accusation to the Jewish religious leaders of His day. In Matthew 15, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29, applying it to the Pharisees, and He says, well, did Isaiah prophesy of you when He said, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me. Yes, it is entirely possible that based on external actions, you appear to be a very devoted Christian, and yet inwardly, your heart is far from the Lord, and God is after the heart.

[15:35] He's after the heart. You may well have attended church all of your life. You might have devoted yourself to reading the Bible even, and to praying regularly. You might have given yourself to serving others into acts of mercy.

Those are good things. But if you've done all that in self-reliance, in an attempt to manipulate God to doing what you want, He says this morning, this is not what I desire.

This is a burden to me. Perhaps God is exposing this morning the wrong motivations of our hearts. A shoreline, we need to regularly check our hearts as we gather in corporate worship, as we participate in community groups, as we engage in relationships with one another.

Are we doing these things in thankful trust and dependence on the Lord? Are we doing these things to glorify Him, to delight in Him? Or are we doing them for selfish reasons, lesser reasons, that we might get some sort of temporary satisfaction, or that we might somehow twist God's arm into releasing blessings upon us?

That's what Israel is doing. God exposes that sin here through the prophet Isaiah. Now this, church, this is the deeper problem that needed solving, right?

[16:57] Deeper than her problem of national bondage and exile is the problem of sin. And the solution comes in the very next portion of the text.

The next thing that we see is that God extends astonishing grace. Now the text turns on a dime when God declares in verse 25, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

So what is God going to do about the deeper problem of Israel's sin? He's going to blot it out, like as if it never even existed. Now notice that God does this.

He says, I do this for my own sake. Now that kind of hits us a little funny at first. This does not mean that He's not doing it for the people's sake, because He clearly is, and He says this explicitly like in last week's text.

What this means is that His forgiveness of their sin originates in His own divine character and glory. It's because God is beautiful and God is glorious and God is good that He moves towards sinners to forgive them.

[18:13] Because it's certainly not because sinners deserve God's forgiveness. Now this becomes especially clear in the next three verses, verses 26 to 28. Just as we're left dazzled by God's forgiveness in verse 25, then we're moved back into another courtroom scene that Isaiah keeps

coming us back to, right, in these texts.

In verses 26 to 28, God calls Israel to come before Him and present to Him the evidence. Does Israel deserve such forgiveness?

That's the question being asked. What's the answer? No, right? Quite the opposite actually. God tells them here that Israel has sinned from the beginning, right?

Your first father sinned, verse 27, your mediators transgressed against me. So all throughout Israel's history, from the beginning and all throughout, Israel has sinned against the Lord.

And so what's the just verdict of that court case? Not forgiveness, judgment, right? Utter destruction is what it says there in verse 28. And that recalls God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, right?

[19:25] Destroying those towns for their wickedness. That's what God is saying is the just penalty here. But now, right?

Another one of those great buts in the Bible, chapter 44, verse 1, their just sentence is punishment, and therefore God is under no obligation, right?

He's under no obligation whatsoever to forgive them, but now he's going to do it anyway. Like, what? Isaiah has given us this prophetic whiplash here, like back and forth and back and forth, and what it serves to underscore is God's astonishing grace.

His astonishing grace. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 44, they show us once again that God remains committed, steadfast, faithful towards his people, right?

He formed them, he made them, he's going to help them. They don't need to fear. These are things we keep coming back to. And then to emphasize the forgiveness of sin and the fellowship that results, God refers to Israel here.

[20:29] Look at verse 2, Jeshurun. Jeshurun. Now that appears in Deuteronomy. That word probably means upright one, and it's also a term of affection. One commentator writes that the formal relationship is still intact, but better than that, God holds them in his heart.

Amen, right? By the overflowing goodness and grace in the heart of God, extended to his people, God forgives their sin and restores their fellowship with him and he makes them righteous.

But the evidence of his astonishing grace doesn't even stop there, does it? Because then in verses 3-5, God promises untold blessing upon both the land and the people.

Now this is a great reversal. In 28, the land and the people were destroyed and captured, but now, by God's grace, fruitful life and abundance springs forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit's outpouring in verse 3, it leads to the offspring of Israel springing up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.

[21:42] Now my family went to Mystic Village yesterday and if you've ever been to the little duck pond there, we were there looking at the ducks and all of a sudden I looked and I'm like, oh look, a willow by a flowing stream.

Like how timely is that? Now if you've ever seen a willow by a flowing stream, what is it? It's tall, it's strong, it's well nourished, it's immovable, it's beautiful, right?

It's a source of protection and life to others. That's what the people of God will be, the Lord promises here, in the life-giving power of the Spirit.

Right? That's what the people of God are, by the power of the Spirit. God is affirming here his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was the promise. Here's one example, Genesis 22, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

The promise still remains. That's what God is saying here. It still remains. But for that promise to come to fulfillment, a change is needed. That change is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people in an act of astonishing grace.

[22:56] And then notice in verse 5, as the Spirit causes the offspring of Israel to spring up, they commit themselves to, they identify themselves with, both the Lord and his people.

This commitment, this identification, it is the joyful and fitting response of the people to God's astonishing grace, rained and showered down upon them. And that's just it.

It is a response to what came first, right? Namely, God's astonishing grace in forgiving their sin. Now the order is so radically important.

The people, remember, the people, based on the evidence, they stood condemned. They could not have earned their way back into right standing with the Lord, but God, out of the astonishing grace and mercy of his heart, chose to forgive their sins.

And we are reminded this morning that self-justification will never save. Self-justification will never save. When the evidence of our lives, this isn't just talking about Israel, it's talking about us, when the evidence of our lives is presented before God, the holy and righteous judge, we all stand condemned.

[24:09] God declares in his word that no one is righteous, no, not one. As they will go on to teach what we were singing earlier, that even our supposedly good deeds are tainted by the sin and the corruption in our hearts.

This is not a popular message today, but life and God's word bears witness to this. Even my good deeds are tainted by my self-centeredness and my selfishness, and therefore, God's just sentence over us is guilty, deserving of death.

And yet, out of astonishing grace, God offers us this morning his forgiveness, not because we deserve it, but out of the glory of his character.

Now, this text leaves something, a puzzle piece still missing that we get to later in Isaiah. The question is, how then, how then, could God extend such astonishing grace and forgiveness of sins and yet uphold his perfect justice, which requires sin to be punished?

And Christians, we know the answer. We know the answer through Christ. Jesus bore upon himself the punishment that rightly belonged to us so that we could receive God's forgiveness and his righteousness.

[25:33] Amen? All have fallen, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but all can be forgiven of that sin and made right with the Lord through faith in Jesus.

This is the astonishing grace of the gospel. And just to make sure terms are clear, what is grace? We were singing all about it this morning. What is grace? It is unmerited favor, undeserved favor, blessing from God to sinful man.

That's what grace is. You can think about it this way, God's riches at Christ's expense. God's riches at Christ's expense. That's what grace is.

And it is poured out, poured out to those who would receive it. So I just want to repeat, self-justification will never save.

Perhaps you're here and your entire life so far has been one big effort to prove your worthiness before God. God is telling you through his word, stop trying.

[26:37] You can't. You can't prove your worthiness before me. Your record will never be perfect, but this is the gospel. It doesn't have to be because Christ's record is perfect, right?

God accepts you as you are. You come to him as you are. If only you would confess your sins before him and confess Jesus as your and the only Lord and Savior of your life, then Christ's record becomes your record.

his righteousness becomes your righteousness. Now, Christians in the room, I want to ask, because I've been asking myself this, why do we keep living as if we can justify ourselves? Even though we've already accepted the fact that we're spiritually bankrupt, right? First beatitude, blessed are the poor in spirit. We've accepted that, right? We've accepted the all-sufficiency of Christ's merit.

So let's stop trying to prove our worthiness. Let's all fire the inner lawyer inside of us, right? It's always trying to justify and say why what I did was right and fire that lawyer inside of you.

[27:48] Own the fact that you are a sinner saved by grace, right? You're now a saint, but we're sinners saved by grace. And we need to regularly acknowledge that before the Lord, regularly confess our sin to him and receive his grace afresh.

We're actually called to do that before others in James. He says to confess your sins to one another, to stop pretending like God's sanctifying work in me is done, like he's reached completion or something.

No, he hasn't. We're still battling that inner man. We still regularly need the grace of the gospel constantly.

So whether for the first time or the one thousandth, let us all acknowledge this morning our complete inadequacy to save ourselves and magnify God's grace. Magnify God's grace by receiving it afresh.

And you know, this kind of self-abandonment, this kind of complete dependence on God for forgiveness and salvation, this receiving of his grace in Christ is exactly the life-giving work that the Spirit does in our hearts, right?

[28:56] When the Spirit was unleashed at Pentecost, this is the thing that he is doing in the world, convicting people of their sin, drawing them to Christ and the cross to receive his grace. He's been doing this for 2,000 years, building his church.

We're part of that, amen? We're evidence of that life-giving work of the Spirit. Now, having exposed Israel's sin and extended this astonishing grace, God then, as proof of his ability to do, you know, these incredible things that he's promised, the third thing is he exclaims his soul divinity.

Now, this is the main thing that God's doing in verses 6-20 of chapter 44. He's exclaiming his soul divinity, right? His utter uniqueness, his exclusivity, his supremacy over all would-be gods and idols. In short, verse 6, besides me, there is no God. Or as he says at the end of verse 8, look at verse 8, is there a God besides me?

There is no rock, I know not any. He is the rock that we can base our lives upon.

[30:04] He is the rock that we can run to for refuge in times of trouble, the immovable foundation on which we're safe. The only one, in fact. The only one.

He is also the only one, as we've seen over and over in Isaiah, who rules over history. He knows the end from the beginning and exiled Israel is here. They're called on to remember and to bear witness to this.

But time and again throughout Israel's history, even though she had witnessed God's promises come to pass, still so often she had resorted to worshiping false gods like the pagan nations around her, right?

And so Isaiah moves once again to demonstrate the folly, the stupidity of idolatry. And he does so in this brilliant and hilarious sort of way. Now, like I mentioned last week, you're actually allowed to laugh.

It was very quiet as Will was reading. You're allowed to laugh even in church because Isaiah, this is like comedic brilliance at its best, right here in Isaiah as he's comically depicting this home god factory.

[31:11] I mean, guys, listen to this here. Verse 12, the ironsmith takes a cutting tool and he works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm.

He becomes hungry and his strength fails. He drinks no water and is faint. I mean, y'all don't understand, making a god is hard work, you know?

Like, I need me a nap before I keep chiseling away at this nose over here. And, you know, while that's going on in the foundry, Isaiah moves us over to the wood shop. He says, the carpenter, down in verse 14 now, cuts down cedars or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak tree and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest.

He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself. He kindles a fire and breaks bread. Also, he makes a god and worships it.

He prays to it and says, deliver me for you are my god. I don't think I need to use any other words to explain how foolish this idol worship is, right?

[32:15] Isaiah's picture is clear and compelling, but there is one thing that I want to make sure is explicit. Those trees, right, that the idol maker cuts down and uses to fashion his god, how did those trees get there?

Anybody? How did they get there? Somebody say it. God, God, the creator who formed the trees, who allowed them to spring forth from the ground by his sovereign providence.

God put them there. Those trees were there by the creative genius and power of the uncreated god of the universe.

How foolish then for the carpenter who should be worshiping the Lord to cut them down and use the wood after, you know, burning it up to make fire and food and whatnot, to then bow down to a god that he made with the wood.

That god has no power to do anything, let alone save the idolater. Right? The idolater is rightly put to shame.

[33:16] Isaiah says that three times in verses 9 through 11 because he's turned to a counterfeit source of hope in salvation. And as we've talked multiple times now in the Servant Series, we must honestly admit that we engage in idolatry all the time today, just in a more veiled and sophisticated or something way.

way. I mean, submarines are awesome, right? We kind of worship them because they're so big and cool and powerful. That steel, you know, that we mix together with other alloys and make this really strong steel for the hull, and we make these awesome valves and machines and put them into interconnected complex systems, and then we watch them go down the river and it's like, look what we did.

Like, where did those materials come from? Where did the human intelligence come from? The ingenuity? Where did that come from? God who formed man, who formed iron that we could extract it from the ground, right?

And then we worship these machines. We do this in modern medicine, don't we? I mean, humans have developed brilliant vaccines to fight disease and sicknesses.

Humans have developed amazing surgical devices that do incredible things that we couldn't do before, and we bow down and worship these things. God gave all of the resources to even bring those things about.

[34:43] Now, it's more likely, though, that rather than worshiping the product itself, like, I don't know if anyone's bowing down to a submarine or to medicine, but we worship the career involved, right?

The satisfaction that we get in success. We work so hard for it to build our reputation, maybe work so hard to develop a reputation. Or maybe it's the financial stability that comes with it, right?

The promised safety and security that we get. Name whatever it is for you today. Yet despite chasing after these things, what do we find?

Like, they can't even protect us from the difficulties and hardships of life, right? Like, our kids will still get sick. Our loved ones will still pass away.

The stock market might crash. Like, we have no ability to change any of that. Less still do they protect us from things like anxiety or depression or dissatisfaction or relational strife.

[35:44] Even less still can they save us from what is ultimately our problem, sin and death. Now, our idol worship is sadly just as foolish as these idol makers here.

Now, in the last three verses of this section, 18 to 20, Isaiah lifts the hood, as it were, so that we can, you know, see inside the car and find out what's really going on. Why would idolaters continue doing what appears so self-evidently foolish?

Now, there's two key phrases here that at first seem contradictory. I want us to see them. Verse 18, he says, they know not, nor do they discern. Why? For he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see in their hearts, so they cannot understand.

Now, verse 20, the end of verse 20, Isaiah says that a deluded heart has led them astray, and he cannot deliver himself. Okay, so the first sentence asserts the reason for the idolater's foolishness is God's own hardening of the heart.

The second asserts the reason for the idolater's foolishness is the idolater's own seduced, deluded heart. So, like, which is it? Is it God or is it the idolater?

[37:09] Paul expounds on this in Romans chapter 1, and he says the answer to the question is yes. Yes. Paul says, So, human choice, right?

Worshiping idols by my choice, by my rebellion against the Lord. Therefore, Paul says, God gave them up in the lust of their heart to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.

In other words, God, in an act of judgment, gave them up to the thing that they had already desired and chosen anyway, right? Namely, a life absent of his presence.

This is what your heart wants most, right? Like, well, here you go. You want a God that cannot save you. You want a God of materials that I created by the word of my power. You want to pretend like your lie is reality.

Well, then, so be it. You know, we've gone through the book Little Pilgrim's Progress with my kids, and there's one scene in it.

[38:23] It's a bear with straws. In the adult version, it's a man with a muckrake, but I like the bear better, and the animals in the Little Pilgrim's Progress. So Christiana and her companions, they're shown this miserable-looking bear, and he's busily raking straw and sticks into a pile.

And the reason he's doing that, we're told, is that the bear believes that one day he's going to find some valuable treasure in this straw and these sticks. And meanwhile, every single day, the king, which is God, he sends one of his messenger angels to offer him a golden crown.

And you have this picture of this golden crown being held above the bear. The bear's got his head down, busily working away, seeking after treasure that he's never going to find. How long will the angel wait for him, asks one of the children.

I cannot tell you, replies the interpreter, who's one of the king's servants. The king is very merciful and very patient, but the bear is so sure that he will find his treasure hidden in the rubbish that I do not know whether he will ever listen to the angel's voice.

Friends, this is why it is so crucial that today, today, today, if you hear God's voice to respond to his gracious call. God is calling you today through his word to leave behind your sinful ways and to receive his astonishing grace in Christ.

[39:52] Forgiveness of sin, salvation, fellowship with God, the life-giving abundance of the spirit can be eternally yours in Christ today. There is no other God.

There is no other savior. Savior. Turn to him today. Now, this brings us to the final section of the text where that call is made explicit.

And the fourth point here is that God excites the world to respond. The section begins, remember these things, O Jacob and Israel, for you are my servant.

I formed you. You are my servant. O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. And in contrast to the idol worshipers who entertain lies, God is calling his people to remember the true realities about which he has been speaking.

Right? How even in their exile, even in spite of their failure, he remains in control. How he remains steadfast towards them. How he's surely going to redeem them and forgive them and pour out blessing upon them.

[41:00] He's calling them to remember these things. Right? The gods are powerless to do any of this. But he alone is God. He is able. Remember. Remember. Remember. God often calls us to remember.

It's all over the scripture. Very common imperative. Why? Because we forget. We're forgetful. Why do we gather week in and week out? To rehearse the old truths.

We need to remember so we forget. I was just speaking to a brother this week about the need for us not necessarily to learn new truths but to take the old truths and recall them to mind and then cause them to actually come to bear in our actual lives.

Remember. But then God drives home the point that he's making in this passage. He repeats what he said in 43:25. He's saying, here's the thing.

I want you to remember most. Verse 22 of 44. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist.

[42:02] Return to me for I have redeemed you. Now clouds in the sky, they appear for a time, right? Then they soon vanish like they were never even there.

Mist, it brings dampness in the air and on the ground. But then the blazing warmth of the sun, right? It evaporates all that water away. It's gone. It disappears. This is what our sins are in the blazing light of God's forgiving, redeeming, astonishing grace.

It's as if they never existed in the first place. Right? Blotted out completely. Scripture says, See, the call here is not for sinners to get their lives in order so that God will accept them.

The call is for sinners to come to God in repentance and faith and find that they have already been forgiven and accepted by Christ. This is the astonishing grace of Jesus.

We did nothing deserving of God's love whatsoever, but he loved us anyway, even while we were sinners and enemies, sending Christ to die on the cross in our place.

[43:36] And now we can come as we are, as we are, to the foot of the cross. And we're met with his forgiveness and his grace and his acceptance. Today, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.

Come as you are acknowledging and confessing your sin, receiving his grace and complete forgiveness of your sin. Today, God can give you his righteousness instead.

Today, abundant life, salvation can be yours in Jesus' name and forevermore. So don't wait. Don't wait.

I would love to come talk to somebody, for someone to come talk to me after the service that's in a place that doesn't know or wants to make a commitment for the first time. Don't go home without doing that, if you've never done that before.

Now, Christians, man, we're getting on in time. We're almost done. This glorious truth means that we ought not wallow in guilt and shame.

[44:48] Like we should not, we cannot, we ought not to wallow in guilt and shame. So when God looks at you, saint, brother, sister in Christ, when God looks at you, based on the merits of Jesus, he sees forgiven, accepted, adopted, redeemed, filled with his spirit.

Like that's what he sees. Now, if you feel shame for your sin, God does not want you to stay there. Now, it's good and necessary to feel rightly ashamed for your own sin.

But this godly sorrow is meant to lead us somewhere. It leads you to repentance in which you turn from that sin and you're met afresh with God's astonishing grace.

So don't remain in a place of shame. God wants you freed from that because he already did away with it in Christ. If you feel like you're stuck, start by going to the Lord in prayer earnestly.

If you feel like you're stuck still, come talk to a brother or sister in Christ who can come alongside you and help you with that. And secondly, for Christians, since we have received this grace, forgiveness of all of our sins, right, undeserved, how ought we then respond to the sins of others against us?

[46:11] How should we respond when other people, be it a fellow brother or sister in Christ or a spouse or a roommate or whoever, another brother or sister in Christ, how ought we respond when they sin against us?

With humility and with forgiveness, right? If my sins have been blotted out like a cloud by the grace of Jesus, then who am I?

Who am I to hold the sin of a brother against him, right? Who am I to develop a grudge against the fellow sister for her offenses against me when I have been forgiven of everything by Christ and didn't deserve it?

Who am I to create division and disunity among the flock of Christ for whom he shed his blood by gossiping about the failures of others? Let the saints of the Lord this morning, who are undeserving sinners, saved by astonishing grace, manifest that gospel grace in all of our relationships.

Can you imagine a church where we were so radically compelled and changed by the gospel of God's grace in Christ that we acted this way towards others, just forgiving people of their sins and acting in humility towards one another, not holding a brother's sin against him, loving one another?

[47:37] And I want to say, I've seen that so often in this place. This isn't something that's not being done. We just battle the old man all the time. We need to be reminded this is how Christians act towards one another because of what God has done for us in Christ.

The final verse in today's passage, it calls on heaven and earth to erupt in praise of God for all he's done. Listen to this. Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it.

Shout, O depths of the earth. Break forth into singing, O mountains, O forests, and every tree in it, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob and will be glorified in Israel.

A couple chapters ago, the nations were urged to sing to the Lord a new song because of the salvation brought about by his righteous servant. Now, all of creation has beckoned to join in that song, right?

Notice how even the trees, the trees formerly cut down and used to form lifeless idols, they erupt in song. That's what they were made for, to give praise to God for what he has done.

[48:46] Now, this is the kind of response that the God of astonishing grace excites in the world. This unceasing, ever-increasing song of praise to the glory of his great name.

And this is what he's doing all the time, right? Turning the sighing and the sorrows of humanity into joyful singing and worship. Saints, this is our song.

This is our song from now into eternity. We have reason to sing in the midst of everything that's going on, the trials and the difficulties of our lives. We have every reason to sing songs of praise to the Lord.

Because in astonishing grace, in astonishing grace, God forgives undeserving sinners like us who turn to him. So may we raise this joyful chorus today with both our lips and our lives, giving all praise, all glory to the only God, the only rock, the only savior, the only redeemer of our souls. Let's go before the Lord in prayer. Heavenly Father, what marvelous grace you have shown us in Christ.

[50:05] God, how do we even respond? How do we respond to you? Will you tell us, Lord? Lord, return. You tell us, offer our lives as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to you.

And so, Lord, we do that this morning. We want to return to you. God, would your great, astonishing grace have its way in the hearts of all of us this morning as individuals?

Would it have its way in the hearts of us as families? Lord, would it have its way in our church as a corporate body? May we manifest this grace in our relationships, responding, imaging the God of grace.

God, as we respond in song, would you be glorified? We pray in Christ's name. Amen.