

A Precious People

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[0 : 00] These words, because you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you. I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

Fear not, for I am with you. Isaiah has quite a vivid picture for us here, especially verse 2 when he speaks about passing through the waters, through the rivers, through the fire and the flame.

And we sang in Psalm 66 and verse 12 reminds us of a very similar picture there too. In verse 12 it says, you let us be oppressed, we went through flood and fire.

But then there are these words after that, but yet you brought us to a place which met our hearts desire. It's a beautiful verse reminding us, yes, there are difficulties and challenges, but that yes, there is a place for God's people.

And last week we were looking at John chapter 8 where we saw what a precious saviour we have in Christ Jesus. As he met with the woman who had been caught in adultery and how he dealt with her in such a gracious way, such a gentle way.

[1 : 16] not condoning the sin, but showing such wonderful compassion. We saw what a precious saviour we have. And this evening I want us to think of the other side of that.

How does God see us and how we are seen as a precious people? That's what we read in verse 4. The Bible has a great theme running all the way through it, that theme of redemption, of God coming to save his people.

And we see it in so many different ways as we look through scripture. And one of the ways you see it is as you look back to the Old Testament, there's a time when you see God making promises to his people, especially you think of Abraham and the covenant promise with him.

And you see all these promises that God has made with his people, but you find that a time came when God scattered his people. And it speaks about them being scattered to north, south, east and west.

And then you see in the New Testament, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks about his people eventually being gathered back in. And he describes it in that way, of being gathered in from north, south, east and west.

[2 : 43] And you think of these two periods, when God has gathered his people on the day when God is going to come and bring his people back. What happens in the interim? What happens in the now?

Now, we are reminded that God doesn't just leave us and abandon us to grope around in the darkness. That he has somehow just let us go away and gone away himself from us and left us to get on.

And then he's going to come back and see how we've got on. He doesn't do that. He doesn't leave his people. He doesn't cast us away with no thought towards us.

Instead, what we see as you read through the scriptures is how precious his people are to him at all times. That he never breaks his promise to us as his people.

And to every generation, that is true, that God doesn't leave us. And when you read here in Isaiah and you read in chapter 42, the verses we read from verse 18, it's got the heading there, if you've got the ESV, Israel's failure to hear and see.

[3 : 50] Israel is God's people. And their failure to hear and see is what we read in these verses. In verse 20, he sees many things but does not observe them.

His ears are open but he does not hear. And because of this, there's consequences. In verse 25, so he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle.

It set him on fire all around. But he did not understand. There's consequences. If we're not listening, if we're not hearing and seeing what God is saying and what God is doing, even under punishment, the people would not listen.

And so you come into chapter 43 and perhaps you're expecting a great announcement of God's wrath and God's judgment on his people.

But what do you read? You read of the grace of God. Our sins deserve to be punished, just like we saw with that woman last week.

[5 : 03] But how often as we think even of our own sin, we have to keep reminding ourselves we're not to sin, but that when we do, we have an advocate.

One who is able to free us from our sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ. And how we remind ourselves that we are precious to him.

And all that he has done for us. And what we see in these verses, we want to see three things in particular from chapter 43, verse 1 to 7.

As it speaks about the people of God here, we want to see it as a people who are precious to God. A people who have the presence of God.

And a people who know the provision of God. These three things. A people who are precious to God. A people who know the presence of God. And a people who experience the provision of God.

[6 : 07] I want to start then with a people who are precious to God. And he begins this chapter by reminding the people of just why they are so precious to him.

And it takes them to the past. He brings them back to the past. God has his people. And God gives them a status.

They are his. They are his children. And the way he describes it here in verse 1. As he's speaking to them. Just as he has in these verses in chapter 42 as well.

He speaks about two names. He who created you, O Jacob. And who formed you, O Israel.

There's two names for us there. And they are two names that remind us of just how precious God's people are to him. And when you go back to Genesis chapter 32.

[7 : 12] You read a few verses there that remind us of the meaning behind these two names. And it was at the time when Jacob wrestled with God.

And it says in verse 27. He said to him. The Lord said to Jacob. What is your name? And he said, Jacob. Then he said, your name shall no longer be called Jacob.

But Israel. For you have striven with God and with men. And have prevailed. And it was God showing Jacob and all of God's people then.

That they were a people precious to God. This was not just the creation of a place. Israel.

O Jacob and O Israel. It was the creation of not a land. But a people. A people precious to God.

[8 : 16] And he formed them. He created them. And he goes on to say in verse 1. Fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name.

You are mine. What a wonderful statement. And that's not the statement you'd expect. Given what's come in chapter 42. When he poured out his heat.

Of his anger. And the might of battle upon them. There is this burning up. And yet he's saying. Don't be afraid. I have redeemed you.

I have saved you. I have called you by name. You are mine. And this is what we continue to see throughout scripture as well.

God making his people into what he wants them to be. And that applies to yourself and myself as well. How God is at work in us. And it is God who transforms us.

[9 : 11] You read of it in Peter. 1 Peter chapter 2 says. Once you were not a people. But now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy. But now you have received mercy.

And that's almost what we have here as well. Yes they were the people of God. Israel and Jacob. They were God's people.

And yet they weren't listening. They were turning away. They were becoming not a people as it were. But God has reminded them. You are my people. And that is what God does.

With his people. He brings us from darkness to light. Because his people are precious to him. And so he's reminding them here of their status.

Sometimes we forget our past. Sometimes we would wish we would forget our past altogether in some ways. Some of it. But sometimes it's our past that reminds us of how wonderful a redeemer we have.

[10 : 19] And that's certainly true here for Israel. For God's people. He's reminding them of a past. Of what he has brought them through in so many ways.

And he's reminding them you are a precious people. You are my people. I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. He will not abandon his own.

It's a wonderful reminder to us. It's like the illustration of the sheep that we see so often through scripture. That's scattered in all different directions.

But the good shepherd, he brings his people to himself. Because they are precious. And as they are precious to him, he also reminds them here that he will be with them.

That the presence of God will be with them at all times. And that's this vivid picture we have in verse 2. At the end of chapter 42, he's speaking about this fire that's set all round.

[11:27] That's consuming them. It's burning them up. And yet in verse 2, he says, When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.

And the flame shall not consume you. His presence is promised to his people. Psalm 66, again, which we were singing.

Verse 12, it says, You let us be oppressed. God let us go through. As it goes on to go through flood and fire, as the psalm speaks of there.

You let us go through. But as you are going through, he is with us. It's not if we will go through these situations that he will be with us.

It's when you go through. And you will go through these experiences, he's saying. When you pass through the waters and through the rivers.

[12:35] When you walk through the fire and the flame. I will be with you. There is that wonderful promise. And when you think of so many passages in the scriptures, you see where this is true for God's people.

And perhaps you know it in your own experience as well. You've had that assurance as you've gone through difficulties that the Lord has been with you. Perhaps the most well-known experience of God's people in this kind of fiery situation is when you look at the book of Daniel.

And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. When they were before King Nebuchadnezzar. Who was demanding that they bow before him as a God.

That they turn away from their God. But what do they say to him? Daniel chapter 3 verse 16. O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If this be so, when they're being threatened with being thrown into the fire. Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. And he will deliver us out of your hand, O King.

[13:54] There is this faith. But is God only good if he takes us out of trouble? Well they answer as well to say that in verse 18.

But if not, be it known, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. We will not do it.

God, they say, will be with us. But even if not, we are not going to turn away from you. But we have this assurance in this passage and in so many others of God's presence with us.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.

And the flame shall not consume you. God is with us. And we have this same God who is with us always.

[14:58] Because we are precious to him. There was a little boy who was once looking forward to a birthday party of a friend.

And he was really looking forward to this day. So excited for this day. But when the day came, there was a snow blizzard outside.

The place was white. And the boy's father wasn't very keen on letting his son out. It wasn't only a short distance to go.

And the boy was pleading, just let me go. Let me go. I'll get there. I'll be fine. And the father eventually said, okay, I'll let you go.

And the boy was almost surprised that he was letting him out. And letting him out by himself. He threw on his jacket and bonnet and scarf and made his way out.

[16:00] Short distance, but it took him about 15 minutes to walk to the house where the party was. And just as he was reaching the door to go in, he glanced behind him.

And he saw this figure just disappearing back into the blizzard. And he realized it wasn't a surprise that his father had just let him go and not caring for him.

But that his father, unknown initially, had been there behind him every step of the way to make sure that he got to the house safely. And that's the kind of image that we have here as well.

That there are these experiences that we may go through, but that the Lord is always with us. That great psalm we sing so often, Psalm 23.

Even when you go through the valley of the shadow of death. Fear not, for I am with you. And we are afraid. We are afraid of so much.

[17 : 05] And yet God is saying here in verse 1, as we go into all these situations, Fear not. Don't be afraid. I will be with you.

So we have the nature of being precious to God. We have the promise of his presence with us. But then we ask ourselves, well, where does this all come from?

Well, it all comes from the promise of God's provision to his people. How is God able to provide for all of our needs?

Well, he gives us the answer in verse 3. For I am the Lord, your God. The Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

I am the Lord, your God. I am your Saviour. There is nothing that will stand between God and his people.

[18 : 03] And the redemption of his people. You think of Egypt here as he speaks in verse 3. I give Egypt as you ransom Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

All these nations that had power. That had authority. That were to be feared. Well, God is saying, don't fear them. They will not defeat you.

And there is this reminder that he is going to bring his people. In verse 5, fear not. Again, that reminder, I am with you. I will bring your offspring from the east.

And from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, give up. And to the south, do not withhold. Bring my sons from afar. And my daughters from the end of the earth.

They will all be mine. No nation, no people can have power over God's people. He will not allow it. And even when we think of our own day and age just now, when we think of all the powers that seek to arise against the Christian faith, whether it's other religions or other ideas, secularism and all of these things that are trying to overwhelm and defeat the Christian faith, nothing will.

[19 : 28] Because, as it says here, I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Missionary Hudson Taylor, he had complete trust in God's faithfulness.

He had strong faith. And in his journal, he wrote this, Our Heavenly Father is a very experienced one.

He knows very well that his children will wake up with a good appetite every morning. You look at the children of Israel in the wilderness.

He sustained three million Israelites there in the wilderness for 40 years. Miraculously, every day, they were kept. And he said, we do not expect he will send three million missionaries to China.

But, he says, if he did, he would have ample means to sustain them all. What faith he had. And he went on to say, depend on it.

[20 : 39] God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply. God is able to meet every need. And we see the greatest need of all has been met for us in Christ.

How he speaks here of giving up men in return for you. Peoples in exchange for your life. In verse 4, because you are precious in my eyes and I love you.

Where is that love seen at its greatest? It is seen at the cross where God gives not just peoples but his son.

I will exchange peoples for your life. Well, God has given his son for our life. And that is how we are so precious to him.

As Romans 8.32 puts it, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[21 : 57] We have so many wonderful promises in God's word. So many powerful reminders to us in God's word. you let us be oppressed, the psalmist said.

We went through flood and fire but yet you brought us to a place which met our hearts desire.

What a precious word. Yes, he lets us go through flood and fire but it is with that promise when you pass through I will be with you.

fear not for I am with you. Why? Because you are precious in my eyes and honoured and I love you and I have given my son in exchange for your life.

We see a precious saviour but we remind ourselves that he sees us as a precious people. A people he loves.

[23 : 06] it is great to be loved in life and sometimes you wonder how can someone love me? But when you think of the love of God and you think of yourself you ask how could God love me?

Me in all of my sin. He loves us because he created us. He formed us. he has redeemed us. He has called us by name. We are his. We are precious in his eyes. We are honoured. He loves us and he has given his son for us.

We are precious to him. Let us pray. our Father in heaven we do rejoice in all your goodness to us. We thank you that despite what we are Lord despite our deafness and our blindness at so many times despite us not listening to you or heeding your word or trusting in you and despite us deserving none of your mercy yet as we have read in this passage we see the wonder of your grace.

[24 : 25] We see the wonder of the reminder of how you have made us you have formed us you have loved us that we are precious to you and we thank you for that love a love that will never let us go and so we pray Lord that you will encourage us and build us up that you will stir us up Lord to share your love with those around us people who feel unloved people who feel that they could never be loved and especially by a holy God we pray Lord that you will help us to show undeserving as we are how God's love is for all who will hear and listen and obey so Lord bless your word to us and continue with us as we ask all these things in his precious name Amen and we're going to conclude