

God's 'Fear not...Fear not'

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[0 : 0 0] After 43 and looking at verses 1 to 7, particularly the first few verses there in Isaiah 43, we can read from the beginning again. But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Well, it's safe to say that this passage is one of the most comforting in the Bible for God's people.

It's a rich tapestry combining the threads of what God has done and who God himself is.

And it's as these threads of these two topics especially, these two themes are woven together in this tapestry, you'll find that they're both directed, what God has done and who God is, directed to this repeated note that God sounds, fear not.

[1 : 1 8] Twice in these few verses, God is saying, fear not. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. Fear not, for I am with you.

Fear not, for I am with you.

To give reassurance of his ongoing care for his people, such as you find in these wonderful verses. And that's what we're really looking at for a short time this morning.

God's reassurance about his care. His care for his people, for all those who've come to trust in him and know him as their God. And let's look at, first of all, how he speaks about that reassurance about his care.

And then secondly, we'll look at what you find in the passage as the basis for that reassurance. Because God doesn't just say, fear not. That's what he's saying, be reassured.

[2 : 3 8] He gives us grounds for not being afraid. And he does that by way of talking about himself. And as we'll see, revealing himself as our creator and as our redeemer, which is where our great reassurance comes from.

First of all, look at what he's saying here. Well, in the previous verses that we read in chapter 42, as you know, throughout Isaiah and the prophets, God is bringing to the people of Israel and Judah what is going to happen in the immediate future unless they turn from their wicked ways.

They have left the ways of the Lord. They have turned to idols. They've been doing despite to the history that they have of being God's people, rescued by him from Egypt, led through the wilderness, taken into the promised land.

And they have turned away from God. They have gone after other gods. And you know all of that from the prophets. So he's talking here about the heat of judgment, for example, in verse 25 of the previous chapter.

So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle. So it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand. It burned him up, but he did not take it to heart. And one of the really challenging things for the prophets like Isaiah was that despite the fact that they so clearly announced the word of the Lord and the ways of the Lord, many of the people weren't interested.

[4 : 01] They just kept on in the way that they had taken up for themselves. And although God was appealing to them to turn back to him, to return to him, many of them refused to comply with God's call for repentance.

But for those that were faithful to the Lord, these words in chapter 43, as we have it, would have been immensely comforting. They knew what was coming.

They knew that this was inevitable if the people as a whole didn't turn back to God. But now he's saying, But now, thus says the Lord, Fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have redeemed you. Therefore, you don't need to be afraid. And of course, you can translate that into our own personal experience under New Testament days, under the leadership of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and all who have come to trust in him, despite the fact that there are things in our lives that challenge them so much, things that cause so much pain and hurt and bewilderment even.

Nevertheless, this is God's continued speaking into those situations. And if you're here today and your heart is wrenched by something in your life that's caused you distress and pain in the providence of God, if you're bewildered about why this has come about, if you're wrestling with these matters and trying to find some meaning and purpose to them, well, this is a passage for you.

[5 : 28] It doesn't mean after we've dealt with this passage, you're going to understand things any more clearly or more fully. But surely it does mean that whether we understand it, and to whatever extent we do or don't, God is God.

And the God we trust in, as we continue to trust in him, is the same as he's always been. So he's saying, here is something for all your trials of faith.

God is not going to renege on being true to himself. That's one of the great truths always to hold on to. God is never going to be different to what he says about himself.

God is not going to renege on any of his promises, on any of the great truths that he says about himself. They're not all of a sudden going to turn out to be not true after all. Hang on to that. Let's really use that as a very important block on which we can stand through the trials of life.

Well, notice what he's saying here. In verse 2, he gives us details. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned.

[6 : 40] And the flame shall not consume you. And really, that's really saying, when it talks there about this imagery of the waters, these floods as it is, and rivers that are overflowing, and fire and flames, the imagery there really, in many ways, captures the totality of suffering that God's people might have to go through in this life.

It's really captured by that imagery of fire and of water. And in fact, it seems really that Isaiah almost certainly is going back in the history of the people that he's now prophesying to and says, remember the Exodus.

Remember what happened at the Red Sea. Remember how you were there hemmed in between the Egyptian forces closing in behind you, between the inhospitable terrain on each side of you, and the Red Sea in front of you.

Where were you going to go? What happened? What happened was that God created a path through the Red Sea across to the other side. And the waters did not overflow you.

They did not overwhelm you. You were not drowned as you went through that passage. It must have been a staggering thing, going through that passage in the Red Sea, where we learn from the account we have in Exodus there of the waters on each side of them that God had caused to build up, forming a passage on dry ground.

[8 : 02] Just imagine the awesomeness of walking through that passage that God had so miraculously brought about. And don't listen to those people who will say to you, well, that just didn't happen.

I believe it happened because this is God telling me it happened. And he brought them through to the other side. They were not overwhelmed.

The same in the Jordan. When they were to cross over into the land of promise, the Lord again created a passage for them. And all the way through the history of these people that God was writing to through Isaiah and speaking to through Isaiah, God had kept his promise.

God had looked after them. God is now reassuring them. What he had done in their history, he was going to continue to do for his people through all ages. There was no promise at all that they would be kept from the experience of passing through these waters.

There's no promise that they would not feel something of the heat of the flames and God's providence. That's not what God says to us. He doesn't say to us, I will look after you in such a way that none of these issues will come near you.

[9 : 17] He's not saying you will never feel pain and you'll never feel once you put your trust in me, I'll take away all of the challenges and the sufferings that you might have to go through in this life. What is he?

He's not saying that. He's not saying I'll keep you from the waters, I'll keep you from the heat, but I'll keep you in them and I'll keep you through them until you're safely through on the other side.

Just think of how that's been repeated in the individual experience of certain believers that you find all the way through the Bible. Let me just pick out three of them. Look at Jacob.

There he is preparing to go back down to Egypt. Genesis 46, where he obviously had some concern, some anxiety, and God came to him and said, don't be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I'm going to make you into a great nation and I will go down with you and I will bring you back up again.

You see, there is God saying to him, I know you're afraid. I know why you're afraid. I know what you're thinking. But let me say this to you. If I go down with you, what harm can be done to you?

[10 : 30] If I'm actually with you in the passage, why should you be afraid? And if I multiply your people in Egypt, why should you think bad of me?

Why should you think anything other than I'm still your God? There's a wonderful truth in that. I'm sure we looked at that passage at some point or other, but there's a wonderful truth in the passage that it's in the midst of those difficulties and trials and in the difficulties and the challenges of pagan Egypt that God multiplied the descendants of Jacob.

In other words, in the very midst of affliction, in the very midst of something like a pandemic, God is not averse to working mightily and savingly.

That's what the ladies heard this morning. I wasn't involved in the prayer meeting, obviously, but the ladies heard a report from an account from Muriel in Cambodia, the number of people that apparently have been converted and have come to know God through this time of pandemic and locked in her own locality there or throughout that country.

There is God, you see, and that's what we're praying for. And that's what we're praying will still be the case when this pandemic eases further, that we will see all of those places that are empty here today coming to be filled with people who have suddenly come to realize by the blessing of God there is more to life than materialism, that there's more to life than this life, this side of the grave, that there is an eternity to prepare for, that there is a God to trust in, that there is one who will take care of us through all the issues of life when we can't take care of ourselves or others take care of us.

[12 : 14] But he always will. As he did for Jacob, so he did also for Daniel. As he was put into the lion's den, God took care of him there.

You find the same with Paul. The number of times Paul mentions in his letters, as we see from time to time, the dangers that he faced, the persecution he experienced, the threatenings and the near-death experiences that he had in terms of knowing that it appeared at times that his life was just coming to an end and God rescued him and God was with him even in those situations.

Reassurance from God. Now thus says the Lord, fear not, for I am the Lord, your God.

But what is it that he gives us as a basis for that reassurance? Because you might say, well, surely it's enough that we have God's own word, God's own emphasis there that he is going to continue to look after us.

But how does he reinforce? This is the great thing about God. Whether it's a command or a promise, you will almost always find in the scriptures that he brings some sort of explanation or some added details along with the command.

[13 : 34] You go through the Ten Commandments and you'll see that they are accompanied by or bounded by or sometimes within the commandments themselves. You'll find God adding things just to explain further why this is the case, why this is important, how this is so.

And he's the same here with his reassurance of his care. And as we said at the beginning, it's very much in terms of his work and who he is combining together to form this rich tapestry of truth.

But there are two things, especially about God, from which he, in which he gives a basis for reassuring his people of his care. First is that he is God as creator.

You see what he's saying here in verse one especially. Now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob. And the emphasis there, as well as he formed you, O Israel, you've got the two words there, created and formed.

And the emphasis there in each, in turn, is on power and on craftsmanship. When God creates, he brings things into being that were not there until he created them.

[14 : 47] And that's the same, of course, with the whole of the universe, the whole created universe. But remember that that is also true spiritually. For example, we're told in Romans chapter four of the faith of Abraham.

What did Abraham's faith rest upon? What was it about God, especially, in Romans chapter four, that's singled out or highlighted for us, that was relevant for Abraham as the basis of believing God's word, God's promise?

Well, listen to what it says in verse 17 of Romans four. He's been saying there in verse 16 about the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations in the presence of the God in whom he believed. Well, who is this God in whom he believed? Well, he's saying who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

That's the God of Isaiah as well. Fear not, says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob. I'm the one who brought you into being. I'm the one who saw you in existence before you existed.

[16 : 07] I'm the one who saw what you would be like before I even created you and brought you into being. And it's the same for ourselves and the promises of God. Every single promise of God, God is seeing the fulfillment of and has always been seeing it before we come to see it, before we come to be born.

It's a little wonder that he's calling us today to trust in him. You know, we hear people saying to us, your faith is really futile because you're believing in a God that you cannot see.

Well, I reply to that and you can reply to that. I know from his word that he exists. Not only do I believe in the God who cannot be seen physically, I believe in a God who brings things into being that are not seen at the moment.

because that's part of his greatness. An aspect of his greatness. That's how he describes himself. The God who brings things into being, who causes them to be, though they don't exist now.

That's why he alone is God. That's why he alone is worthy of our trust. Nobody else can look after you the way this God can as creator because as he is your creator, so he is so dependable that you can place every single element of your life for time and eternity into his mighty creator's hands.

[17 : 40] But he's also redeemer. He's saying, fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. There's craftsmanship as well in terms of his forming of him there in verse 1.

Let's go back to that. He who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel. That's the kind of thing that's really a craftsmanship is described by the word formed.

God doesn't just create. He doesn't just bring something into being and leave it at that. He brings it into being and then he sets about shaping it and giving it a particular semblance.

He begins to really work on it so that it turns out to be exactly the way that he had always planned. That's how it is with our salvation. That's how it is with yourself as an individual believer.

Whatever it is he's brought into your life, he's treating you as the great craftsman. And as you place your trust in him, you're placing your trust in the hands of someone who describes, the God who describes himself in Jeremiah chapter 16, for example, chapter 18 rather, as the great potter who's handling the clay so skillfully.

[18 : 58] And there's a phrase in whichever verse it is in that passage from verse 1 of chapter 18. He describes God as the potter and it says, as it seemed good to the potter to make it.

What a marvelous description of God setting about, fashioning, forming something that he'd brought into being. Just like the potter with the pot of clay on the potter's wheel starts with that lump and he shapes it but he doesn't just leave it some sort of shape.

He works on it until it's actually like what's in his mind until it finally forms the shape that he had always intended it to take. Well, that's God. That's why he's got a hold of your life as a Christian.

Because he has a particular end in you, a particular purpose in your life to shape you, to mold you, to be like himself ultimately. How does he do that?

Well, he does it by his spirit. He does it by his word. But he does it by his providence as well. Because all of the difficult things that you find in providence, in the hand of God, they become instruments of bringing a further shape to our lives as we trust in him.

[20 : 14] He is God our creator. You see, it's not just a care. It's an exact care. It's not a generalized care.

It's an exact care because he who created you is he who formed you. He who has such an exactness in his care, even if at times we fail to see that unappreciated.

It's very difficult at times, isn't it, to really think of God being exact when he causes in his providence things which hurt you, when he presides over events in your life that really test you and challenge you and cause you so much pain, even bewilderment.

that's when we need to come back to the way that God is giving us a basis of reassurance of his care as our creator and the one who forms us.

He has that, you might say, passionate interest in his people that they will finally be in the very shape that he always intended. And he will use whatever is at his disposal that's right for him to use to bring that about.

[21 : 29] So, fear not. Thus says the Lord who created you, he who formed you, O Israel. But not only is he our creator as the power and craftsmanship of God is mentioned or referred to there, he's also God our redeemer.

And that's from verse 1 through, right through to verse 7. You'll find details there. We'll just mention a few of them to see how he presents himself as our redeemer as well, the redeemer of his people.

And there are three words there that are important for us just by way of guiding us through the passage. First of all, the word redeem itself. Fear not, for I have redeemed you.

And then he goes to verse 3. I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, I gave Egypt as your ransom. Redeemed, ransomed. And then in verse 4, he really crowns it all by saying, because you are precious and honored in my sight, I love you.

Redeeming, ransoming, love. What does it mean to redeem? It means, spiritually, it means to bring something back that's been lost, to buy it back, to have a purchase price, a ransom price.

[22 : 50] And you carry that with you all the way into the New Testament, of course, and in Paul's writings especially, you find a reference to God ransoming his people. The price of their ransom, the price of them being released as slaves of sin into the liberty that's in Christ, the salvation that's in Christ.

What did it cost God? What is the ransom price? It's not a question of asking, who was it paid to, but who was it paid by? It was paid by Jesus.

Because the price of our ransom, the ransom price of our salvation is his death on the cross. The exchange of one life for another.

And that's why he's saying here, I have called you by name. I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. How personal is that? How like that is John chapter 10 where Jesus is the good shepherd leading the sheep out, calling his own by name.

You know that yourself from your experience as a Christian. You heard the voice of God. It wasn't to somebody else. It was directly to you. You heard it in your own soul. You heard it in your conscience.

[24 : 04] You heard it in the way that his word addressed your situation. You knew that was God. You realized that was God. It doesn't mean you turned immediately to God, but you recognized that's the voice of God.

And today as a Christian, you listen out for that voice. That's why you're here today. You're here not just to give to him the worship that is due, but you're here to listen to that voice, to that one voice through the scriptures that's going to really touch your soul.

That's really going to be so precious to you as you go back out from this place into the world for another week as God wills it. I called you.

By name, you are mine. And you know, that's a reason why God sometimes, that's an argument that God uses and uses even here in Isaiah as well.

You only have to turn to the next chapter, but it's an argument God uses for his wayward people to call them back to himself, to repent of their sin and come back to himself.

[25 : 07] Listen to chapter 44 here and verse 22. He puts it there for them. Remember these things, he says in verse 21. And Israel, for you are my servant.

I formed you. You are my servant. O Israel, I will not be forgotten. 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. And every time we turn from the ways of God, even if it's just in the privacy of our own souls, that voice is addressing us saying, I have redeemed you.

I have made you mine. I have purchased you by my blood. How could you turn away from me? How could you be unfaithful to me? Maybe today, you're conscious in your own soul that you've turned to some extent at least away from the Lord.

Maybe you know of somebody for whom you're praying that has gone away from the ways of the Lord and either gone back into the ways of the world or approaching that. Well, here's God saying to us, whenever these moments come, be they small or great, I have redeemed you.

[26 : 29] You are mine. Did I redeem you so that you go back to the world? Did I pay the price of my blood on the cross so that you would turn aside from following me?

So that you would be untrue to me? So that you'd prove to be unfaithful? That you'd take up again an adulterous relationship with sin instead of having me as your master?

How wonderfully precious the call of God is using the argument of what He has done and who He is.

I am your Redeemer. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. And then in verse 3, he moves on to speaking of ransom. I gave Egypt as your ransom.

Now, this of course is developed in the course of history, the history of God's people and the history of salvation. Go back to Egypt. Remember what happened in Egypt when the death of the firstborn took place instead of the death of Israel's firstborn.

[27 : 42] Because in each home of the Israelites where they were gathered, there was a death. The death of the Passover lamb, the blood of which was put on the doorpost and on the lintels of the door.

And every single person inside that building, sheltering under the blood, you might say, was safe from the destroying angel that went about Egypt and killed the firstborn of the Egyptians.

I gave Egypt as your ransom. What He's really saying in a sense is the death that you deserved came upon them. And you translate that into what happened on the cross of Calvary where the death of Jesus Christ took place.

And of course, you find nowhere better than in Isaiah in chapter 53, verses 5 to 6. And that's set out prophetically.

And it's set out wonderfully in chapter 53 of Isaiah. It's presented as if it had already happened. And this is what He's saying, but He has carried our griefs and carried our sorrows.

[28 : 56] Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to His own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

What is that? It's substitution. The dearly beloved Son of God becomes the substitute for His people in the death of the cross.

The death we deserve for our sins, for our turning away from God, for our offensiveness to God. He took to Himself.

Why was that? So as to redeem us. That's the ransom price. Fear not, I have redeemed you. The Passover Lamb who died for the sins of His people.

[30 : 04] So there's redemption. There's a reference to ransom. And there's also a note of love. Verse 4, Because you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you, I give men in return for you and peoples in exchange for your life.

Fear not, for I am with you. Why did He redeem them? Why did He provide a ransom price for them?

Why did Jesus die the death of the cross for His people and instead of His people? Where is it all rooted? What does it all arise out of?

Well, one word, love. The love of God. God so loved the world. What is the world? It's what's entirely the opposite of Himself.

A world of sinners. A world of lost sinners. A world in need of redemption. God so loved that that He gave His only begotten Son. Why? So that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

[31 : 10] There is the love of God, the very root of our salvation. Because you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you.

That's why I ransomed you. That's why I have redeemed you. And it's all there God values His people. God dignifies His people.

And it's all out of His love. And that's where our assurance today rests. You know, you cannot find assurance or reassurance in yourself, in your love for God even if that love is immense.

Your reassurance of salvation, of being secure, of being in a position where you don't need to fear. Where is that found? Where is that security?

Where is that root of your assurance and reassurance? It's in the love of God. The love of God Himself. You know, our human soul craves being loved.

[32 : 16] And it's not a distortion caused by our fall, although there is a distortion, of course, caused in every aspect of our being and our behavior by our fallenness, our sinfulness.

But God made us not only to love, but to be loved. And it's an aspect of what God created that we as human beings have a craving to be loved.

There are many, many millions of people in the world today who would love to know that they're loved, who are desperate just for somebody to go to them and say, I know your loneliness.

Let me love you. Let me just provide for you. Let me look after you. And there are many millions in the world who don't have that, who are isolated and desperately alone and lonely, and who would just give anything for somebody to reassure them that they are loved.

And where is there a reassurance that we are loved like the reassurance we get from God? That is what he's doing through this wonderful passage.

[33 : 26] When we crave knowing that we are loved, and when human love can only go so far, precious, precious though it is, God is saying, because you are precious in my eyes, I loved you.

Now, if we sinners as we are, were so precious in God's eyes that he loved us to the extent that he gave his son to die on the cross, how precious should he be to us?

How precious should he be as our creator? How precious should he be as our redeemer? And how precious for this reassurance that he gives all who trust in him.

And if you don't trust in him, if you haven't yet come to trust in him, to give your life over to him, surely, surely from this passage itself today you're saying, whatever else I do in my life from this moment onwards, I must come to trust in the Lord because nobody else can do what this passage is telling me but God.

I need this God. I need this love. I need this reassurance. I need this care of my life. And I know that this God can do it.

[34 : 50] And I need to trust him for it. Well, you know that I've said a number of times how much I love the songs of Ellie Holcomb, that American Christian songwriter.

And one that came to mind as I was going over the sermon and preparing this was the song that she wrote called Red Sea Road. Let me just read something she wrote two years after writing the song.

She says, I wrote Red Sea Road smack in the middle of a three-year period of serious loss and seemingly endless, senseless suffering. I didn't have neat and tidy endings to the stories of loss we were in the middle of.

And I didn't have answers and I still don't. But what I did encounter in a life altering way during this deeply painful season is the person of Christ, a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief.

Jesus didn't just fix everything and make it better overnight, but there was a profound sense that even though we were suffering, we were not alone.

[36 : 02] The sorrow wasn't shocking to him. He had been there before and he knew the way through it and he held us as we wept and questioned and ached and doubted and prayed.

And that's why she wrote, I'll just do the first two verses to finish with, the song Red Sea wrote, God, we buried dreams, laid them deep into the earth behind us, said our goodbyes at the grave, but everything reminds us.

God knows we ache. When he asks us to go on, how do we go on? We will sing to our souls, we won't bury our hope.

Where he leads us to go, there's a red sea road. When we can't see the way, he will part the waves and will never walk alone down a red sea road.

May God bless his word to us. Lord, our God, we thank you for the care that you take with your people, the care that you have taken in creating redemption for them, the care that you have taken, Lord, in providing for us that atoning death and worth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[37 : 32] We thank you today for all that is contained in him, for all that your love has provided and continues to provide for your people. Lord, we pray today that our hearts would so often ache for love and ache for being given a sense of security and rightness.

We pray that you would look upon us, Lord, in your mercy to come to us and assure us and reassure us of your love. We pray for any here, O Lord, who have not yet turned to you and embraced you and welcomed you into their lives.

May they do so even today, and may they do so especially on the basis of your word that assures us, Lord, of your care, a care that no other can give us.

Bless us now and bless us throughout the remainder of this day for Jesus sake. Amen. Now let's conclude by singing in Psalm 66.

Psalm 66, and that's on page 299. Psalm 66 in the Scottish Psalter. We'll read from verse 7 singing to verse 12.

[38 : 41] He ruleth ever by his power, his eyes the nations see. O let not the rebellious ones lift up themselves on high.

Ye people bless our God, aloud the voice speak of his praise. Our soul in life who safe preserves our foot from sliding stays. Thou dost prove and try us, Lord, as men do silver try.

Brought us into the net and made bands on our loins to lie. Thou hast caused men right o'er our heads, and though that we did pass through fire and water, yet thou brought us to a wealthy place.

These verses, he ruleth ever by his power. He ruleth ever by his power, happens because ■■■■ to try tow'r■■■■s And so in life through sin we search

And through cross-finding days For the world is human, try us, Lord As men do silver try Crossed us into the net and reached And so on our voice to life Thou hast lost them, my Lord, our rest And all that we did pass

[41 : 36] Through fire and water Yet thy cross As to our wealthy place Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen