

Isaiah Part 25: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you...”

Isaiah 43

Overview

In Chapter 41 Isaiah showed that God has great purposes for Israel, and for his servant, Israel’s Messiah – to bless all nations (Chapter 42). In order to accomplish this purpose, God redeems his people from their plight, confounding those who trust in idols, and calling from near and far a song of praise to his name (Isaiah 42 v 10 to 12). Israel’s present condition, under punishment for sins, is indeed pitiable (Isaiah 42 v 18 to 25), but God will redeem his people, letting other nations suffer subjection instead (Isaiah 43 v 1 to 7), and Israel will bear witness before the assembled nations to God’s sovereign power and glory (Isaiah 43 v 8 to 13)...

‘Fear not’, knowing the LORD is with you... (Isaiah 43 v 1 to 9)

“But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel” (v 1) – God speaks to his people as their Creator. God has a special and unique claim upon us because he is our Creator. When people reject God as Creator, they fail in the most basic obligation they have to God.

“Fear not” (v 1) – this is a command, accompanied by promises. By outward circumstances, the people of Judah had reason to be afraid of Babylon’s army and the forthcoming exile, but God points them past present circumstances to this command and promises. “For I have redeemed you” – not only did Israel have an obligation to God as Creator, but also as Redeemer. He bought them out of literal exile and spiritual slavery. When God calls himself our Redeemer, he looks forward to the price that must be paid for our salvation.

“I have called you by name, you are mine” (v 1) – God right of ownership both as Creator and Redeemer. His ownership is personal, and certain, saying ‘you are mine’. Knowing we belong to God is a wonderful answer to fear. We can know that he holds us, protects us, guards us, and cares for us. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...” (v 2) – when God is with us, he is for us; then who can be against us? See Romans 8 v 31.

“Because you are precious in my eyes” (v 4) – here God describes the motivation for his work of redemption – he loves us! We are precious in his eyes! This is an Old Testament example of the truth in John 3 v 16.

“Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the end of the earth” (v 6) – we see this happening, the gathering back into the land of Israel. Initially this takes place in unbelief, but an event will happen that will change their hearts (Jeremiah 31 v 10).

“Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right” (v 9) – God invites blind and deaf people and the nations to prove him wrong or themselves right in their rejection of him, as if God is saying, ‘You have chosen to worship and honour other gods. Come before me now and justify yourself, and bring plenty of witnesses.’

The LORD commissions his people (Isaiah 43 v 10 to 13)

““You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD” (v 10 and v 12) – God’s people had witnessed God’s greatness. If only Israel would remember the great things God had done among them, they would see each wonderful work as a witness to the truth that the LORD is the only true God. Idol worshippers are not witnesses, because their gods can do nothing; but God’s people are witnesses of his greatness and power. If Israel would remember that only God had ever rescued them, they would not turn to other gods and away from the LORD. We should all be witnesses to the saving, rescuing, and healing work of God...

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“Besides me there is no saviour” (v 11) – God is the only saviour. Only God has declared and saved: he is our help and support. Sadly, we often turn to our only saviour as a last resort, rather than as a first resource. Since Jesus is clearly our saviour (Philippians 3 v 20; 2 Timothy 1 v 10), and there is no other saviour besides the LORD, then Jesus must be the LORD – Yahweh, or ‘Yod-He-Vav-He’, is One God in Three Persons.

God promises to judge Babylon and to do ‘a new thing’ (Isaiah 43 v 14 to 21)

“For your sake I will send to Babylon” (v 14) – Isaiah prophesied before the Babylonians ever conquered Judah and sent the nation into a 70-year exile. Yet Isaiah prophesies not only about the coming captivity, but also beyond it to the eventual judgment upon Babylon for what they will do to Judah. In these verses consider the wonderful titles of God: “the LORD your Redeemer; the Holy One of Israel; your Holy One; the Creator of Israel; your King” (v 14, 15). In this passage, prophetically intended to comfort Israel in the midst of Babylonian captivity, Isaiah sets forth images of God’s strength and power...

In making reference to Babylon’s impending downfall (verses 14, 15), God answers an unspoken objection – that such a thing is incredible: ‘Do you not remember what I did at the Red Sea?’ God asks (verses 16, 17). ‘Yet what I am about to do now is even greater’ (verses 18 to 21).

- What was the ‘new thing’ God would do, greater even than his deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea?

There is a fascinating, and instructive, ‘switch’ between verses 16 and 17, and verse 18. In v 16, 17, Israel is told to look to the past by remembering the great things God did for them at the Red Sea. But in v 18 they are told, “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.” There is a sense in which we must *remember* the past, in terms of God’s great work on our behalf; but there is also a sense in which we must *forsake and forget* the past, with all its discouragement and defeat, and move on to what God has for us in the future. “Behold, I am doing a new thing” (v 19) – staying stuck in the past can keep us from the ‘new thing’ God wants to do for us. If the people of Israel had stayed stuck in the discouragement and seduction of Babylon, they would never have experienced the ‘new thing’ of release from exile...

God’s mercy to a hard-hearted people (Isaiah 43 v 22 to 28)

God answers a deeper cause of their unbelief, namely a guilty conscience (verses 21 to 24). ‘I know it all’, God says, ‘but I will pardon all’ (verse 25); ‘My purpose toward you is one of blessing’ (Isaiah 44 v 1 to 5)...

- How do v 22 to 28 show that Israel was not justified by works, but by grace? See Romans 3 v 23, 24.

During Israel’s exile in Babylon, God did not burden them with demands for sacrifice and offerings. But they had burdened him with their sins (v 22 to 24).

“I am he who blots out your transgressions... and I will not remember your sins” (v 25) – what will God do with such a hard-hearted people? He will forgive them at the earliest opportunity. He will forget their sins. Despite all the sin and disregard for God, he still loves his people, and longs for their humble return.

“Your first father” (v 27) may refer to Adam (1 Corinthians 15 v 21, 22), or to Jacob (Isaiah 48 v 1); “your mediators” may refer to priests and prophets (Jeremiah 2 v 8).

Prayer – Lord, you have commanded us not to fear, for you have redeemed us; you have called us by name, and we belong to you. When we pass through waters, you will be with us; when we wade through rivers, they will not overwhelm us; when we walk through fire we will not be burned, the flames will not consume us. For you are the Lord our God, the Holy One of Israel, our Saviour. Your Word tells us that we are precious in your eyes, and honoured, and you love us... Help us in every situation to ‘fear not’, for you are with us always. We thank you for these wonderful promises, in Jesus’ name, Amen.