

Isaiah 43:1-21 (NKJV)

1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; *You are Mine.*

2 When you pass through the waters, *I will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

3 For *I am* the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.

4 Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life.

5 Fear not, for *I am* with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west;

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth--

7 Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes, And the deaf who have ears.

9 Let all the nations be gathered together, And let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, And show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; Or let them hear and say, "*It is truth.*"

10 "*You are My witnesses,*" says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that *I am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.

11 *I, even I, am* the LORD, And besides Me *there is* no savior.

12 I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, And *there was* no foreign *god* among you; Therefore you *are My witnesses,*" Says the LORD, "that *I am* God.

13 Indeed before the day *was,* *I am* He; And *there is* no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?"

14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon, And bring them all down as fugitives-- The Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships.

15 *I am* the LORD, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King."

16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea And a path through the mighty waters,

**17 Who brings forth the chariot and horse, The army and the power
(They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; They are extinguished,
they are quenched like a wick):**

18 "Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old.

**19 Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not
know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness *And* rivers in the
desert.**

**20 The beast of the field will honor Me, The jackals and the ostriches,
Because I give waters in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert, To give
drink to My people, My chosen.**

21 This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

Our text begins this morning with the words “but now”. We could probably stop right here. There is enough wealth in those two words for our souls to relish until Christ takes us home.

You might wonder what I mean.

What was your life like in the past? We could start before we came to Christ. Or we could start after. And we could go to as late as yesterday. Our story is always a mixed bag. It always has some Dr. Jekyll and some Mr. Hyde. If we are to tell our stories truthfully, the blame lies largely on us for our sinful choices. We might like to try to dodge the bullet but it is never pretty. There is no pretty Christian life. It just isn't. Because it was **WE** who lived those days.

So we always start with a “then” that is not wholly good, not wholly God honoring. And we move ahead. But praise God there is always a “**But Now**” in scripture. And that is what we must live in.

Then what use does the past have? How should we regard our pasts? Paul found his past very useful so we can learn from Him how to treat it.

We must tell the truth about our past. And it is worthwhile to think about our pasts until we can tell the absolute truth about it. Deceiving ourselves about our pasts can have serious repercussions in our present life. Lying about our pasts can have a negative effect on our future. So we must tell ourselves the truth about our pasts. If there are lessons we can learn, we should learn them. But Paul, while referring to his past when useful, both good and bad, was very big on pressing ahead. He referred to His past probably more than any other New Testament writer. His past was useful, but it did not keep him from living **now**. Living faithfully **now** with a view to the future was his focus.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NKJV)

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press

on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We need to see the truth about the past. But we **need not** stay there. We **must not** stay there. Because God has granted us a “But now”. It is never like the past did not exist. But it is not the most important thing about us. God always has a Now for His people that supersedes their past. He has a now for His people that is better than their past. In fact, our pasts are often what our most effective ministry in the future is based on. Oh praise God for the But Now.

There are so many good things to put on our refrigerators. This might be one of them. Did you make bad choices in the past. God says, **but now**. Did something devastating happen to you in the past. God says **but now**. Do you wish you could forget your unwise choices? God says, **but now**. Do your current failures loom large in your mind? Can it really get better than this? **But now** our God offers us wonderful things.

¹ But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.

Most of our dilemmas are a result of how we process our pasts. I was reading Albert Ellis’s RET therapy lately. And he is certainly not a believer. But he stumbled on some truth. He basically says that the issues we have are not so much **what has happened to** us, but **how we process it**. There are lots of people who have faced what we have faced but they have completely different outcomes. So it is not the event that shapes us as much as how we think about the event.

God here tells us how to think. And it is not a suggestion. He says, first, I am the one who created you and formed you. Who is the expert here? Who knows more about us than we know about ourselves? Who knows more than our seers know? Who knows more than our modern day experts know? Yes. The creator. And what does he command? This is not a suggestion. It is not one option of many. The Lord who created you says, FEAR NOT.

Now think about this. If God is saying “Fear Not”, there must be a way to “Fear Not”. We might not get there easily. We might need all kinds of help. But if

God says it, He means it. And if He means it, He enables it. And if He enables it, it is for us to have it. It is available and attainable. And if He commands it, He will help us as we try to obey it.

If you are tired of fear, take comfort here. God has better for you.

I have been thinking about fear a lot lately. Mostly because Isaiah mentions it so often. I think there are two parts. And for us to think rightly, we must separate them. There are feelings. And there are thoughts. Now, no one can directly change their feelings. Feelings are things **you identify as you experience them**. An honest person calls them what they are. But they are not the most important thing about us. What is more important is what **we think**. In scripture our feelings follow our thinking. You create how you feel by how you think. Now here is the rub. This is not universally true. You may sometimes feel things that have nothing to do with what you have thought. Sometimes we have feelings that just happen to us. So we might **feel fear** without ever thinking thoughts that create them.

But it is nearly always possible to exert some control over what we think. And it is also true that, over time, unless something is seriously wrong with our brains, what we think leads to what we feel. So we cannot change what **we feel** immediately. But we can change **what we think**. And normally what we think will change how we feel. Sometimes this takes a long time. But it is a truth.

So we may not be able to instantly control the fear **we feel**. But we absolutely can control the thoughts we think that lead to fear. This is either true, or the command to “fear not” means nothing at all. We must choose to take our **fearful** thoughts and replace them with **truthful** thoughts. We need to track them to their source and find out what it is that is driving them. And there is truth that will set us free of our fearful thinking.

Our text is wonderful in that it gives us pillars of thought to rest on. It gives us orientation points. We are given two very clear points.

Here they are:

What are His reasons for not fearing in this text?

First verse 1 **for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.**

Second, verse 5 **Fear not, for I am with you**

Let's start with verse 1. Do you see this? He doesn't say not to fear because we are so wonderful, or so skilled, or so brave, or so intelligent, or so strong willed, or so stoic. No we are not to fear, **not** because of **what we are** but because of **whose we are**. God redeemed us. God bought us back from the slavery we invited and deserved. We were on the block of slaves to be sold

and he placed the highest bid. We are important to Him. We were bought with a price. And it was way more than we were worth or would ever produce for our master. He bought Ford Focuses at the price of Lamborghinis. And He called us by our names. God knows us. He knows exactly **who** we are. He knows **where** we are. He knows what we struggle with. He knows what we think and feel. He knows how hard things are for us. He knows all this. But He continues to be straightforward with us. He doesn't buy our excuses. He doesn't believe our lies. He does not relent. He calls us to **that which is more than we are** because He has **enabled us to be more than we are** by the identity He has granted us. He says You Are Mine. And that is all the difference. We by nature think we are **our own**. We think our decisions don't matter because it is just us. But we are wrong. We are not our own. We are another man's possession. And He has every right to expect from us and demand from us exactly what He wants.

We are not to fear, because we are not our own. We have a new identity far greater than anything we could ever attain.

We will deal again with fear in verse 5 when we get to it.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

³ For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.

Look at this passage. God does not say fear not because you won't experience scary things. You absolutely will. You may pass through the waters that could potentially sweep you away. You will walk through fires that could potentially burn you. God is so very realistic with His children. He does not say we will not face situations that could do us harm. He tells us that He is with us when we face those difficult situations.

When we came to Christ, we may not have expected the difficult situations we would have to face as Christians. We might have thought that our situations would be much better because we decided for Christ. But life was full of surprises, surprises we may not have liked.

Our God does not promise that we will not face difficulties in this life. In fact the new testament promises that we will. It predicts hardship. But what God promises is **His presence**. And He promises that we will be ultimately protected. He does not promise that our bodies will not perish. But He promises that our souls will flourish and be protected.

In verse 3 we see something we need to think about. Look how God has used the nations to benefit God's people. God spent Egypt's firstborn to allow Israel

to escape their grasp. He spent Babylon's leaders and people when He gave them over to Cyrus for the benefit of Israel. One day we will see in perfect clarity that the non believers of this world were the props that God used to grow and foster His believers. There was nothing that was meaningless or purposeless, no matter how it seemed to be.

God is using all humanity for the benefit of His children. He will spend them for our benefit. We cannot see that. Sometimes it looks like the other way around. But it is not. God's people are that important to Him.

Why would God do such a thing?

⁴ Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life.

Some day we will not have to believe this by faith. Some day we will see this first hand. Some day we will fully see and experience the love Christ has for us. We **now know** how **unworthy** we are. We see it and we think, yes Christ loves us, but surely He cannot love us very much. After all, look what kind of people we are. But on that day we will see that we truly are precious in His sight. And we are not precious because we are such magnificent souls. We are only precious because He has chosen us for Himself.

Oh that will be such a wonderful day when we feel what has been true of us all along, when we see with our eyes how our Savior loves us. For now we do very well to believe this truth by faith. But one day we can set faith aside because we will experience this love that we have longed for all of our lives.

And what does Isaiah say next?

⁵ Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west;

Here we go again. We were told not to be afraid because we have been bought by Christ for Himself. Now we are told that we should not think fearful thoughts because we have God's presence with us.

Surely we do not believe this. Surely if we truly believed this it would change everything about us. God is with us. Where is your scariest situation? Do you realize this is saying that in the midst of that scariest situation, Christ is seated right there with you, or standing right there with you, or working right there with you. What would happen if we really in our heart of hearts believed that was true. If tomorrow the economic system collapses, or we learn we have cancer, or someone we love dies. If Christ is right there with us, what difference will that make. This is a promise that Christ makes to His people.

HE IS WITH US> Period.

Why do we act as if we are potential victims of time and chance? Why do we act as if we have no God, or if He exists, He is so very far from us now? We act that way because we do not believe what God says. If God is really with us, what do we have to fear. Clinging to fearful thinking is.....stupid.

Then God tells His people that He is going to gather His people back to Him. I think this happens several times. But one day it will be forever and it will be perfect.

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth--

7 Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes, And the deaf who have ears.

9 Let all the nations be gathered together, And let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, And show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; Or let them hear and say, "*It is truth.*"

Look what God is doing. He is bringing together all His people. And no one is going to stop that gathering. All those that rail against God now will be completely powerless.

Carla and I have been listening to a book on World War 2. Japan in pre war status regarded Christ as a devil. They would not allow any Christian missionaries into the country. Now, as a result of World War 2 missionaries are free to go there. Certainly World War 2 resulted in horrible catastrophes, but it was used to allow the gospel into a country where it had no presence. God is calling people from everywhere.

More Arab Muslims are coming to Christ now than ever before. And it is largely due to the horrible things that extremist Muslims are doing to other human beings. God is call people from everywhere.

Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.

God has a plan and He is carrying it out. We cannot figure it. It does not always make sense to us. It sometimes seems horrible the price it takes before people are ready for the gospel. But God will pay that price because His glory is worth it. And His love for people demands whatever it takes to win them.

Look at this wording- **Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.**

Then lets add verse 21 **This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.**

What is the purpose of a human being? What are we ultimately for? What is our purpose in existing?

This is the answer to that question in the shorter Westminster catechism.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

So with this in mind, what is **God's will** for our lives? If our **purpose** is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, what is **His will** for our lives? His will must be a path of God's making that will accomplish that purpose. He must be arranging the lives of His people to accomplish this end.

Now, where are you dissatisfied with your circumstances? Where are you dissatisfied with God's will? What can you not bring yourself to accept from God's hand?

I have been asking myself a question that I think would be good for all of us to ask ourselves. Could it be that a great deal of our dissatisfaction is because **our purpose** for our lives is different that **God's purpose** for our lives? Maybe what **we want our lives to be for** and what **God says our lives are for** are two different things.

Maybe **our** purpose for our lives is a safe, comfortable, predictable, pleasure filled existence keeping struggles to a minimum. Maybe what **we** want is an easy life with little pain. Maybe we just want to settle into a life where we are loved and respected. Maybe we want to avoid all human conflict and rejection. Do you realize that scripture never says that the purpose of our lives is for us to **be happy** in this world? Wow. How many times do we just want our kids to be happy? How many times are we dissatisfied because our circumstances do not make us happy. But that is not even in the list of God's purposes for our lives. Maybe we think the purpose for our lives is to have our lives as **we want our lives**. Do you realize that This puts us at cross purposes with God when He wants to use the tools of persecution and trial and difficulty and misunderstanding and human rejection to accomplish the greater good. If our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever, then all bets are off for **what God will use** to accomplish His ends.

When we pray Thy will be done, what we are inviting is for God to carry out **His purposes** in our lives. And we submit our desires and preferences to His intentions and purposes. This involves dying to ourselves and living to Christ. And while that seems like a wonderful noble thing to do, and so it is, **the intention** looks a lot better than **the carrying it out** does.

According to Isaiah God has created His people for His Glory. He formed us to declare praise. This is not what our flesh will tell us we are for. Our seemers will confuse our thinking with all of the yes, but's. Our world will absolutely laugh at the idea. But our purpose is for God's glory. And as such we can face whatever comes our way knowing that **God's ends** will always be better than ours. If we were given everything that we think we must have, we would never get where He wants us to be. And His purpose would not be best served. We really must embrace His purpose for our lives, if we are to live in peace and joy and contentment.

Augustine said it well when he said, "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." Christ is where our true satisfaction will come. And it will last forever.

10 "You *are* My witnesses," says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.

11 I, *even I, am* the LORD, And besides Me *there is* no savior.

12 I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, And *there was* no foreign *god* among you; Therefore you *are* My witnesses," Says the LORD, "that I *am* God.

Here we see it again. We are witnesses. God has shown us something so we can repeat it. God wants a people who will make much of Him. He wants a people who will represent God well because they live by trusting God. They agree with what He wants to accomplish. They admit that proclaiming His worth is worth spending one's life for.

We serve God best when we know God and believe God, like verse 10 says. We serve His purpose best when we really get who God is. God is the I AM. He is the eternal existence. He is the source of all things and the end of all things. He is everything that is worthy.

God wants a people who orient to God to the place that they accept their purpose for existence from Him, not the other way around like the idols people worship. We witness for God most purely when all of our idols have been put aside because of the worth of the one that we serve.

Speaking of being witnesses, the sign up for the fair is back there. Is there any good reason not to take advantage of this witnessing opportunity? Sign up.

13 *Indeed before the day was, I am* He; And *there is* no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?"

God is laying out His amazing credentials. He was the I am before there was anything else. That is the point. And as such, there is no competitor. As such

there is no foe to worry about.

14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon, And bring them all down as fugitives-- The Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships.

This is referring to the exiles of Babylon. God is saying that it is He who will arrange to have Cyrus overcome Babylon and send them scooting off in ships to get away from him.

15 I *am* the LORD, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King."

16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea And a path through the mighty waters,

17 Who brings forth the chariot and horse, The army and the power (They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; They are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick):

18 "Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old.

19 Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert.

20 The beast of the field will honor Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I give waters in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert, To give drink to My people, My chosen.

21 This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

What a wonderful end to this text.

18 "Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old.

19 Behold, I will do a new thing,

There are lots of places in scripture where we are told to remember. We are to remember all the things God has done. We are to remember what He said. We are to remember how He has intervened in our lives.

But here the Israelites are told **not to remember**. There is no sense recalling the misery years. The verb tense for remember and consider is imperfect. He is saying, don't keep doing this. Don't keep harping on this. Don't cling to it. Don't allow it to block out the new.

How do we carry this out in the best way?

We have already looked at drudging up the past and learning from the past are two different things. God does not want His people reliving the heavy years of His discipline over and over again, any more than we would want our kids to relive a spanking they received years earlier over and over again. No, that period was to serve a purpose. As the purpose is served we are free to move on to the But Now.

And God is doing a new thing. [2Co 5:17 NKJV] **17 Therefore, if anyone [is] in Christ, [he is] a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** You can't get newer than that. The word New is used 59 times in the New Testament. It is a very encouraging study. God is not only **doing new things**. He is **making new people**. And we are it. We cannot re-run the race behind us. We can't hit an undo button and have it gone. But the race we are to run is not behind us. It is in front of us. God has new mercies for us fresh every morning.

Our pasts cannot rob us of the new things God is doing if we don't let them. And it is exciting to be fully involved in the new project God is doing.

In our text, how is this new thing described? We again see the highway of God to reach His people. And we see water springing up. Sometimes God shows his blessing by providing real H2O to people and animals who really need it. But sometimes the word water is used figuratively. Then it is describing the refreshment of our souls by the provision of God. It is talking about the Holy Spirit's ministry to us. Our spiritual thirst, our desperation to be spiritually fulfilled is granted by God giving Himself to us. [Jhn 4:13-14 NKJV] **13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."**

This is the water we most need. This is what that new thing God is doing provides. **To give drink to My people, My chosen.**

²¹ This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

Is this what we crave for? Is this what we want most? Is this the thing our attention is fixated on? God is offering His people, those who He has singled out over all others, water for their souls. He has built a highway to their souls in Jesus Christ. Will we buy into our purpose? Will we accept our purpose for every breath from the hand of God? Will we say to God from the core of our being- **THY WILL BE DONE?**

Let's sing- Have thine own way Lord.