

## Don't be crippled by fear when going through hard times

Good day listeners,

Today I wish to draw your attention to comfort of the Word of the Lord as we read this in Isaiah 43:1, 2 and the first part of verse 3, "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.'"

These words are part of the prophecy of Isaiah known as the Book of Comfort – the chapters 40-66. The people of God are about to enter into exile. In these last chapters the Lord, through Isaiah, speaks words of encouragement to the faithful remnant. Quite understandably these people wonder if the Lord will abandon them. They fear the worst: they are leaving the Promised Land and it is entirely their own fault. They are spiritually blind and deaf (Isaiah 42:18-19). To get them back on track these people need more than a pep talk; they need redemption. Someone outside the nation must come to save them. Well, starting in chapter 40 the Lord reveals that the Messiah is coming to save. He will come to redeem them, not in a brilliant display of military fury and might but as a humble servant.

Now, what the Lord promises for the future, does not mean his people will escape trials and adversity in the present. God's people experience hardships like anyone else. If you open the file on the lives of God's children you will see plenty of evidence – believers pass through waters, rivers and fire like anyone else. Believers are not immune to or free from suffering.

Listen again to how verse 2 is worded: "When you pass through the waters - not **if** but **when** you pass through the flood waters - I will be with you." God's Word doesn't say there will be no storms or floods or fires. But God says, "When you go through them, I will not abandon you. I will give you the same protection that Noah received when the mighty waters of the flood covered the earth. I will give you the same protection the people of Israel received when they passed through the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The floods of your own struggles that threaten to drown you will not wash you away. They may rage horribly but I am mightier than the waves of the sea. And when you pass through the fire, you will not be burned, you will not be overcome by the flames and you will not die of smoke inhalation."

So the question is not: *if* trials, troubles, and distresses will come on in this life but *how* will we respond *when* they come? Oh, we'd prefer that the storms, flood and fire would just go away. No one enjoys going through them or the anxiety that comes with it. So how should we respond? Notice the way the question is phrased – how **should** we respond? It's important that we are clear on this because sometimes the way we **do** respond is not the way we *should*. When circumstances are less than pleasant and we are feeling frustrated and down, it is tempting to turn to something that we think will help drown out our sorrows – but eventually we find out that the alcoholic stupor or drug-induced haze only make us feel more miserable, disillusioned and down. Losing ourselves in video games, gambling, or responding to troubles with anger, violence and aggression solve nothing.

Do we have an answer? Yes we do! And that is why this text is so amazingly comforting. As an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer, Isaiah comes up with this solution: "Fear not". Two words – Fear not! But is that really a proper solution? How is that going to help you if you are walking through the fire of a terrible trial? These are very real adversities! Listen further.

God says to his children, who had to learn to depend on him, “Forget about escape mechanisms when you face something that terrifies you. Forget about looking for something that will put you on a temporary high. Fear not and don’t panic as you face waters and rivers and fire. Fear not as you face hardship, hurt, sickness and death. And, especially, ‘fear not’ as you face the judgment of God. But how is that possible and remotely comforting? Well, the answer to that has to do with Christ and God’s redeeming love in Christ. “Fear not, for I have redeemed you.” To redeem someone is to pay the required price to secure their release. God says to his people, “I have paid the price for you. I have set you free from your bondage in Christ. We are not able to help ourselves – as much as we’d like to think we can – God must take action and he does! He paid the price to set us free and he will not leave us in our sins. He sent his Son to help us out of our absolutely desperate situation.

Not only does the Lord say, “Fear not because I redeemed you,” but he elaborates on this and provides us with the reasons why we can place such confidence and trust in him. Look at some of the reasons given why we should not fear, contained in these verses:

- Fear not, for I have redeemed you (vs 1)
- Fear not, for I have called you by name (vs 1)
- Fear not, for you are mine (vs 1)
- Fear not, for I will be with you (vs 2)
- Fear not, for I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (vs 3)

There you have your answer. God says, “You don’t have to fear when I go with you – even if I take you into the dark days of exile.” Does this not give us perspective for today and bright hope for tomorrow? When I confess this to be true I also recognize it is absolute foolishness to say or think, “I don’t need God and I don’t need the Christian faith because ‘It doesn’t do anything anyway!’” In his amazing grace the Lord comes to a people who deserve nothing but condemnation and he says, “I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine! You are precious and honoured in my eyes and I love you” The challenges we face in this broken and sinful world can make it seem like God has abandoned us, leaving us to fend for ourselves – but there is nothing further from the truth.

Not only are we aware of the promises of the Lord but we also know how God’s children have responded to these promises. God says in Isaiah 43 “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.” Listen now to the confession of David in Psalm 23, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *I fear no evil*, for you are with me.” Isaiah 43 gives a promise and word of encouragement and hope from the Lord, and Psalm 23 states a confession: I fear no evil. In the face of our fears, whatever they may be, the Lord says to his people in their weakness and struggles: “Fear not.” Nothing in this life can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ. No matter what God brings you through, no matter what fire or flood, even if something dreadful should happen to your family or closest friends, and you are left to travel without them – you don’t go alone. So when you see the storm clouds of adversity or anxiety – do not fear. When you feel broken-hearted, do not fear.

God says, “Fear not! I have redeemed you. I have called you by name.” And we may say in response, “I fear no evil, for you are with me....Since I am surrounded by your love, surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” Well, dear listeners, take these words with you into your own life and be a tower of strength to others. Learn to confess, “Storms of adversity may break about me, fast flowing rivers of setbacks may threaten to sweep me away but in you, O God, I am safe, for I know that with you being present I have nothing to fear.”