

ALIVE: The Marks of a Christian
“I Will Be With You”
Peace: Isaiah 43:1-7

1 But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you,
I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.

5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children 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 hold 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 created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

Introduction

We live in tense, anxious times. Stress-related illnesses have reached epidemic levels. News outlets with varied agendas report on power struggles around the world, illicit drug dealing and use, school shootings, suicides, and the list goes on.

How can we know the peace of Christ when our culture and the world seem to be falling into pieces? How can we experience the calm, quiet fruit of the Spirit? Of the peace that God offers? If I had an anxiety scale numbered 1 to 10 (1 being very peaceful; 10 being very anxious), how would you rate your life? Sometimes I catch myself and say, “Wow, my anxiety is riding really high today or this week.”

In Isaiah 42, the Lord condemns his people Israel for their persistent, rebellious sin. Then God draws a contrast by saying, “But now...” Isaiah 43 promises the love and care of the One whose Spirit lives in us. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord promises new things as a word of comfort and peace for his people.

Did you notice the words and phrases that indicate God’s special relationship with Israel? “Created, formed, redeemed, summoned, you are mine, I will be with you, I am your God – your Savior, precious, honored, loved, sons and daughters.” All of this while Israel is still in captivity in Babylon under the great King Nebuchadnezzar. Condemned to exile because of their sin, the Lord is constantly at work on their redemption. Judgment had fallen. Yet, promise remained.

I. A New Creation

Saint Augustine expressed the remarkable way in which the two testaments of the Bible are so closely interrelated with each other. “The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed.” The Old Testament pointed forward in time, preparing God’s people for the life and redemptive work of Christ

in the New Testament. As we look through this passage in Isaiah, we also look to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full” John (10:10). Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. The old has passed; the new has come.” (II Corinthians 5:17). Isaiah spoke for God, “But now...”

The contrast is for us as well. “But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.’ God declares his intention to deliver his people. That his people need recognize that what happens to them in exile to Babylon isn’t God’s failure. It was the Lord who sent them into exile, and the Lord is fully able and willing to take them back whenever he chooses.

This is important for you and me to understand. When we are held captive by life’s disappointments, rejection, hurt or crisis, quite often it’s the Lord who put us there. Like Israel, we can get on with life without paying much attention to the God who gave us life in the first place. “But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel...”

Under the ministry of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, they had become “blind” and “deaf.” The more they heard from the prophets, the more and more “deaf” and “blind” they became. So, what’s God to do? Nothing happens to us apart from God’s will. In his perfect wisdom, the Lord puts them and us in a place where the only thing we can do is trust in him.

The Big Thompson flood of 1976 was the deadliest flash flood in Colorado’s recorded history. On July 31, between 12 and 14 inches of rain fell over a four-hour period in the mountains around the resort town of Estes Park. Water gathered speed heading for the bottom of the V-shaped canyon.

Our high school students just came back from their retreat and mission trip. We drove up and down Big Thompson Canyon going and coming back. I can’t imagine it: water sweeping into the Big Thompson River had taken it from an average depth of 18 inches to a 20-foot wall of water that crashed through the length of the canyon.

A carload of Campus Crusade staffers was swept away in the terrible flood, taking their lives. Kathy Loomis was one of them, daughter of Charles Loomis of Loomis Armored Cars in Seattle. Weeks later, from the depth of a broken heart, he told his pastor, “The hurt goes deep, but God’s love goes deeper.”

God promises not that his people would be immune to trial or tragedy, but that he is with them and that his love would go deeper than their hurt.

What did it take, what will it take for you to simply trust in God? What God now did for Israel, he does for us, all by grace. Like the first creation, this new creation comes from God’s grace. There was and is nothing you or I could have done or can do for God to bring us back.

This biblical view isn't mere determinism. It isn't God causing everything to happen and we just have to put up with it. God's word presents us with human responsibility with real choices. It is a paradox: God's sovereignty and human responsibility; a seemingly self-contradictory reality. Both are true.

Read Romans 9, 10, and 11. It tells how people reject Jesus as Savior/Messiah because it was what they were predestined to do. But, it also says that people reject Jesus solely because they choose to do so. In other words, God is God; and we're not."

II. The Good "News"

Here in Isaiah, the Lord says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name." Notice the I/You language used throughout God's word. "You are mine... I will be with you... I am the Lord *your* God... your Savior... you are precious in my sight... I love you."

If there's any hope for peace for the human race, it will have to come from God. Peace is the fruit of the Spirit. Human sin universally has severed relationship with God. And, only he can bring the remedy.

Poetically, the Lord said, "I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead... I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life." Why? Because you are precious in my sight, and because I love you." Here's the hint that in the end, it wasn't kingdoms he gave in exchange for us; it was his own self in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth (that's you and me), everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

"I will bring... do not hold them back... everyone who is called by my name." In Jesus Christ (his name means "Savior/Messiah"), God has redeemed his people. Jesus has paid the price, the ransom, by giving his life for ours on the cross.

Can there be any doubt that our Creator/Redeemer God wants us to have a personal relationship with him. More than in theory, more than an idea, but in fact, in reality. Not just a system of beliefs or habits more or less followed. But relating to God on a day-to-day basis. Read from the Bible. Listen for his word for you today. And pray. Speak your joys and concerns for the day.

Research professor of Old Testament John Oswalt put it this way: "Throughout the Bible, there is a Person who inhabits the universe, a Person who has a deep concern for his creatures, and, amazing as it seems, wants to be known by those creatures... God doesn't seek to be known by us for himself but for ourselves."

Conclusion

Ron Jones serves with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Israel. During a recent conflict in the Middle East, he wrote in a prayer letter: “The result of the fighting and killing has left a profound sense of discouragement that hovers over the country. Yesterday a friend said she was watching a shepherd caring for his flock near the area where guns are fired. Every time the shots rang out, the sheep scattered in fright. The shepherd touched each of them with his staff and spoke calmly to them, and the sheep settled down because they trusted the shepherd. Then another shot sounded, and the same routine happened. Each time, the sheep needed the shepherd to orient them again and to reassure them they were safe.”

Many times in the Bible, God’s word says that we are like those sheep. When we’re frightened, our Shepherd reaches out and touches us with his staff, speaking words of calm and comfort.

Peter wrote to the church, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you... And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (I Peter 5:6-7, 4).

Jesus told his disciples, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:26-27). For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace.

Let us pray together.

Mark 4:26-34

26 Jesus said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.

27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.

29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?

31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.

32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.

34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.