

Rev Calum Smith - Precious to God

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Let's turn back to our reading in Isaiah chapter 43. We're going to look at verse 1 to 7.

Isaiah chapter 43 and at verse 1 down to verse 7. We can just get rid of our Bibles because they're dated, we've moved on from our Bible and now we have our own wisdom.

We don't need the Word of God. Who said that? It sounds like something many people say today. We don't need the Bible.

We've moved on. But as we look back in Isaiah we see the people there who are saying exactly the same thing. We don't need the Word of God.

We've got our own gods. We've got our own wisdom. We know how to live our lives without God. Look at every generation of mankind and there are people in every generation saying these words.

[1 : 13] We don't need the Word of God. We don't need God. It's not something that's unique in our day and age.

Something we see down through every generation. And what makes things so remarkable is that despite what we say so often, despite what mankind says so often, we don't need God, God still turns to his people and says to them, you are still precious to me.

Despite your disobedience, despite your rejection, despite your not realizing just how much you need me, you are still precious to me.

Isaiah was a prophet, a prophet who had to come to God's people and remind them of just how much they needed God. And you find at the beginning of the book of Isaiah, as the wickedness of Judah has outlined for us, it says in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 2, hear O heavens and give ear O earth for the Lord has spoken.

Children I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. That was God's Word to the people in Isaiah's day and it's still so relevant to ourselves today.

[2 : 42] How much do we need the Word of God? If we put away the Word of God, we are putting away what should be most precious to us and what we really need.

And that's the Word that Isaiah was bringing to his people then and it's the Word that God brings to us today as well. As we look through the Bible, we find that God is teaching us all about life.

You go back to the book of Genesis and at the beginning or the middle of book of Genesis, about chapter 28, there God speaks about his covenant, his relationship to his people.

And there in Genesis, he is saying to his people, I am going to send you out. I am going to send you out to the north, to the east, to the south and to the west.

You are going to go out to all corners of the world, back in the days of Genesis, the beginning. And we find in the book of Luke, Luke chapter 13 verse 29, it says there that at the end God is going to bring back his people from north and south, east and west.

[4 : 06] He is going to gather them back in. So the Bible tells us God's people are being sent out to all corners and a day is coming when they will all be brought back in from all corners of the world.

And so we ask ourselves, well, what's happening in the intervening time? Does God just send his people away and say, just go and grope around in the darkness and see what you can find.

Just go your own way, do your own thing. Does he put them on way and say, you go now, you're out of my sight, I have no thoughts towards you.

You're your own people, do as you please. No. Instead, we see that even as he sends them out, even as people spread to all corners of the world, God sends messengers, God sends his word out to all people.

So we have God's word. God's word is a light to his people. And yet people love darkness as the word says, because our deeds are evil.

[5 : 21] And yet God continues to send forth his light and his truth that we might have light to see the way. And what we find is that in this intervening time from God sending his people out until the day comes when he will gather his people in once more, that God is still with his people.

And that's what the people in Isaiah's day were reminded of. And that's something we should be reminded of ourselves this evening as well. If you look at verse four of Isaiah 43, they are great words.

Because you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

You are precious in my eyes. That is God's word to his people. And yet as we read here in Isaiah, we're reminded too of the disobedience of God's people.

As we read in chapter 42, the end of chapter 42, we are reminded of the disobedience of God's people. No one is listening to God.

[6 : 33] And it's not that God isn't showing them. It's not that God's not speaking to them, but they're just not listening. Hear you deaf and look you blind, he says in verse 18, that you may see.

Who is blind but my servant or deaf as my messenger, who my send? He sees many things but does not observe them. His ears are open but he does not hear.

People are choosing not to see the things of God or not to listen to the things of God. We don't need God. We've moved on from God's word.

You see the same as through today. Perhaps you've said it yourself. I know I've said it myself, my own heart. Don't need God.

But God reminds us that we do need Him. So you see in chapter 42, there is this disobedience and because of this disobedience, there must be consequences.

[7 : 35] And you see the consequences in verse 25 of chapter 42. He poured out on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle. It set him on fire all around, but he did not understand.

Even this consequences of disobedience, God bringing them into exile, God showing that he is angry towards him still, they don't understand.

It burned him up, but they did not take it to heart. Still, they didn't listen. Even under this punishment, people wouldn't listen. And now as we come into chapter 43, you're expecting a judgment from God in a more serious way.

An announcement is coming from the Lord and you're almost saying to yourself, well, this must be God just pouring out his wrath on his people.

See this is the God that we see in the Old Testament that people speak of. An angry God, a God who has no care for anybody or anything, a God who is just fire and brimstone.

[8 : 44] Surely this is the God we would see if we turn to chapter 43. People are disobedient, so God will punish them. But what do we find in chapter 43?

We see grace. God doesn't just pour out his anger. That will come. But God says, 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. That is the hope of the sinner who is far away from God, that God will bring his own to himself.

I have redeemed you. Even in our sinful nature, as Paul says to the church at Ephesus, you when you were dead in your trespasses and sins, God made alive with Christ.

Even when you were dead in your trespasses and sins, God still had his eyes on you because you are precious to him.

[10 : 09] God's people are precious to him. Their sins deserve to be punished, but how often does God remind us of his wonderful grace that God is committed to his people?

He is in covenant with his people. He is in relationship with his people. God's people are precious to him.

And that's really what comes across in these verses. Verse 1 to verse 7, and first we see, well, people are precious to God.

And how does he remind the people of this? Well, he takes them back to the past. He who created you, O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel.

God reminds his people that he has given them a divine status. You are mine.

[11 : 17] You belong to me. And you think of how God has reminded his people of this again and again.

You go back to Genesis chapter 32 and there. Jacob's encounter with God as he wrestled with God. And verse 27 it says, he said to him, what is your name?

And he said, Jacob. Then he said to him, your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.

So as God reminds his people of just how precious they are, he takes them back. He takes them back in time to creation, if you like, but not just the creation of the world and the universe and how marvellous that is, but to how God made mankind.

In his own image he formed them, to be in relationship with him. This is how close God is to his people.

[12 : 28] He made them. He who formed you, he who created you. You are made by God.

And though you are disobedient to God, though you can try and say, God is not real, I don't need God, there is nowhere you can go to get away from God.

There's no hiding place. We can be like the ostrich sometimes, we just bury our head in the sands and think, nobody will see me.

That's the way we are if we're trying to hide from God because God sees us all the time. God's eyes are upon us.

He has made us, he has formed us and we are precious to him. And he's reminding them as he looks back into their past, just how he has been with them.

[13 : 25] When he took them out of Egypt, as he watched over them in the wilderness, as he provided for them, as he took them into the Promised Land, it was God who was making them his people.

You will be my people and I will be your God. That was his desire. But even as the people went into the Promised Land, he said to them, do not forget the Lord, a generation long before Isaiah's day, but still the same problems, forgetting God.

And so he is reminding his people, he's reminding ourselves tonight, you are precious to me.

You are precious to me. God is making his people. He's making you and I into what he wants us to be.

He's forming us, he's shaping us, he's molding us. There's very much the imagery here, he who formed your Israel of the potter and the clay.

[14 : 36] God is the potter, we are the clay, we are in his hands and he is forming us, smoothing out the blemishes, forming us into what he wants us to be.

I have called you by name, you are mine. So there is this great reminder. And it's a great reminder that we see as we go throughout the Scriptures, you go into the New Testament and you see the same things.

Peter says to his people then, to God's people, once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

How often does God remind us that we are precious to him? When was the last time you just sat and marveled at how God remembers you?

Sometimes we think of the past and we say, I just want to forget that. I just want to put what's in the past, what's in the past, I just want to put it behind me and forget all about it.

[15 : 46] But we have to remember what is in the past. Because as we remember what is in the past, it makes the present even more marvelous, even more wonderful.

Once you were not a people. It's by remembering that you see how precious it is now that you are the people of God, the wonder of grace.

He says, fear not for I have redeemed you. This is how precious you are to him. He has paid the price.

He has redeemed you. And again you see how this goes into the New Testament. It's pointing ultimately towards the Lord Jesus, how the price was paid, that we might be a people of God.

Again in 1 Peter this time it says, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

[17 : 01] You were ransomed, you were redeemed, the price was paid for you. You are mine, he says. I have redeemed you, I have called you by name.

He will not abandon those who are his own. That is a reminder we have here first of all. The second thing we see is, as well as how precious we are to God, we see God's presence promised as well.

And you see that as you go through these verses in particular verse 2. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. His presence is promised throughout all our lives.

We see that in Psalm 66 which we sang together as well. There was those promises, you tested us O God, as silver is refined, you laid sore burdens on our backs and chains, we were confined.

[18 : 10] You let us be oppressed, we went through flood and fire. But yet you brought us to a place which met our hearts desire.

All these things that happen have a purpose because they are from God. God let us go through these things.

That is, it is not going through then that we recognise God with us. God is with us. It is not if you go through.

He doesn't say here, if you go through the waters, I will be with you. Or if you go through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. But when you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

And through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. Too often we can come to God and think that we are going to be exempt from difficulty.

[19 : 09] That all our challenges, all our trials will just fade away. But it's not true. But what you recognise is that as you lean upon God, He never fails you.

He never leaves you. So many of us learn that through hard experience, through difficulties. And that's what He's reminding here.

When you pass through the waters, and the waters can push hard against you, they can take you off your feet if you're not careful. But God says, I will be with you.

They shall not overwhelm you. So there are these promises. How often do we see God's people going through trials?

And we say to ourselves, how can they carry on? Because of the grace of God. Because of His promises.

[20 : 11] Because He is faithful. That is how. And perhaps you've been through these times yourself and you've said, I'll never get through this.

But now you can look back and you see the Lord helping you. The Lord never leaving you. Never forsaking you, but upholding you and carrying you and bringing you through.

And it's to that place that meets your desire. Not always what you would want, but something that you realise is precious because it's from God.

We have a great example of this, don't we, of being in the fire. We look to the scriptures in Daniel chapter 3. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they were going to be cast into the fire because they refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar as king.

What did they say? They answered and said to the king, oh Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

[21 : 19] But if this be so, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. And He will deliver us out of your hand, oh king.

What faith? We serve a God who is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.

And they were. And you see, what wonderful faith, what a great God they were brought out of the fire. Is God only good if He takes us out of trouble though?

Well, listen to what they said after that, before they went into the fire. They say in the next verse, but if not, if we're not going to be delivered out of the fire, be it known to you, oh king, that we will not serve your gods, or worship the golden image that you have set up.

Whatever the outcome, we will still worship God, because we know He is great. We know He is the only God who is worthy of all praise.

[22 : 34] So whether they were delivered or not, they would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar. A great reminder to us of the presence of God.

There is no area of life that God doesn't work in. There is nothing that we do. There is nowhere that we go that God doesn't see, and that God isn't with us.

So you can take courage, because God is with you. God dwells in the midst of His people.

That is His promise to His people then, now and forevermore. God will dwell with His people. God stands ready.

God stands willing, God stands able to care in any situation. It may not be what we ask for.

[23 : 35] It may not be what we pray for that comes to pass, but God never leaves, and God is with His people.

So we see that in these verses too. Then we ask ourselves finally, how is God able to help?

How is God able to provide for our needs? How can God meet my needs, you ask?

Well you look at verse three. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel.

Your Savior. I am God. They are the words that resonate right throughout the Bible.

[24 : 36] I am God. There is no other. So it doesn't matter where you are trying to run to, where you are trying to hide, who you are serving, if it is not God, it is futile.

The only one who is able to save is this God. The one who declares I am the Lord your God.

And it was with this authority that Jesus came. He came recognizing these words too, and repeating these words.

I am. The I am sayings we have of Jesus in the New Testament. It's linked to the same God, isn't it? Because He is God.

I am. I am the Lord your God. And we see that with Jesus Christ. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[25 : 44] There's no other way to God the Father. God's provision is there for us.

There is nothing that will stand in the way of God fulfilling His covenant promise and bringing His people to Himself. I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel.

There is nothing that is too hard for me. There is nothing that can stand between me and my people. And you think of God's people down through the ages.

The difficulties that they've been in. The children of Israel in Egypt bound in slavery there. Egypt such a powerful nation.

Nothing to God. God was able to overpower. Because anything is possible with God. And so you see here the hold that God has of His people. And you see it as He goes down here to say in verse 5 to verse 7. Fear not for I am with you.

[26 : 57] I will bring your offspring from the east and from the west. I will gather you. I will say to the north give up and to the south. Do not withhold. Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth. Everyone who is called by my name.

Whom I created for my glory. Whom I formed and made. There is nothing and nowhere that can keep God's people away from Him. He will bring His own to Himself. From the north, from the south, from the east and from the west. God is calling His people in.

There is no power that can stop God. And today we hear so much about the power of Islam at work in many parts of the world.

We hear the words of the secular society who are trying to overrule in so many Christian decisions and the authority of Christ and His word.

Their goal is destruction of the Christian faith. Will they be victorious? Will they get their way?

[28 : 16] Maybe for a short time. Maybe for a time it God will allow it. But God will have a purpose in it. Just like Psalm 66 says.

He will lead us through the fire and the water. There will be times of difficulty but it's to bring His people to their desired place. God will bring His people through. And God is reminding His people here. Don't be afraid because I am with you.

God's people, you have a bright future. You have something to look forward to.

Together we can look at God's word and realize as God speaks to us, there's nothing that is too hard for Him.

He will do it. He will overcome. He will bring His people to Himself. There's these great words in Malachi chapter 3 verse 17.

[29 : 39] They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts. In the day when I make up my treasured possession and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Wonderful words.

They will be mine when I make up my treasured possessions. God's people are precious to Him.

And how will He do this? How will He bring His people to Himself? Well just finally we just see in verse 4. These great words.

Because you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you, I give men in return for you. Peoples in exchange for your life.

Because you are precious and I love you, I will give people in exchange for your life. What does that say?

[30 : 48] Well I say again so often as we see is looking into the future. And here we are reminded of what God has done for us.

Because we are precious to Him, He gave His own Son in exchange for your life and mine. Those who are precious to Him, He gave His Son. Romans 8 verse 32 says for us, He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.

How will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? What we have to look forward to, we have to look forward to because He did not spare His own Son. But anyone and all who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. In exchange for your life, He gave His Son. He accomplished our redemption through His Son. That is how precious we are to Him.

Because you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you, I give men in return for peoples in exchange for your life. We are reminded here of just how precious God's people are to Him. We are reminded of His presence.

He goes with us always. And we are reminded of the provision that He has made and that is ahead of us. He gave His Son.

[32 : 54] You might have life and life to the full. That is how precious we are to Him. How precious is He to you? He says, I love you.

Do you say, I love the Lord? May we come to say the words of the psalmist. I love the Lord because my voice and cry He did hear. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that indeed your people are precious to you. That you have done all for your people.

That all our sins deserve condemnation. We thank you for your grace towards us. Your grace, O Lord, shown to us in particular through your own Son who you gave, who you did not spare, that gave more to death than we might have life.

We thank you that He has risen and that today is a reminder to us of that and a reminder that the day will come when we will all be part of the resurrection. May we have Christ for that day, the one who says, I am the way, the truth and the life. May we come to put our trust in Him. May you lead us, Lord, by your word and by your truth and to see how precious we are that you might be more precious to us.

We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.