

“YOU ARE MINE”

It is a wonderful thing to have someone who is truly committed to you, someone who is always in your corner, someone who will be on your side through thick and thin. We all want someone who will say to us, in the words of a well-known song, “I’ll be there for you.” Many of you experience this through your spouse, parents, or even a close friend. It is a blessing that is not to be taken lightly. There can be times, however, when it is difficult for even our most fervent supporters to be loyal to us in the right way, to be there for us in the way that we really need them to be. What I mean is that it is not easy for our loved ones to know how to support us when we are clearly in the wrong about something. Different people respond to this challenge in different ways. Some are so afraid of harming their relationships that they keep silent and remain “loyal” even when those they care about are wrong. Others may decide to confront or rebuke, but they don’t always do this in the right way, and that only compounds the problem. The fact that it is so difficult for us to know how to be truly committed to those we love when they sin should cause us to be all the more grateful for the nature of the Lord’s commitment to his people. Our God is always faithful to those whom he calls to be his own, but his faithfulness never causes him to overlook or condone our sin. This is what we see in the passage

that we are studying today. It shows us that sin brings trouble upon God's people. But it also tells us that God promises to see us through our troubles, for the sake of his glory. This passage teaches us that *the redeemed of the Lord will bear witness to God's faithfulness in delivering them from all of the misery that they bring upon themselves by their sin.*

### **God's Promise of Redemption**

In the first seven verses of our passage, the focus is upon God's promise of redemption. The Lord says some glorious things in these verses. But to truly appreciate these things, we need to remember how the previous chapter ended. Israel's failure to listen to God's word brought them under God's fatherly displeasure. Chapter 42 ended by telling us that the Lord "poured on [Israel] the heat of his anger." Furthermore, it said that even though God's anger burned Israel up, they still did not take it to heart.

When we keep this preceding context in mind, it makes the first two words of our passage all the more amazing. God says to this people upon whom his anger had been poured out: "But now..." These words mark a critical turning point. The Lord is telling Israel that he is not going to leave them in their miserable

estate, and he says this even though they had not yet learned their lesson. He is going to show them mercy, even though they do not deserve it.

The words “But now...” are at the very heart of the gospel. They pop up again and again in the Bible, especially in those places where the gospel is set forth so clearly. Consider a few examples:

“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. *But now* the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law” (Romans 3:20–21)

“For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. *But now* we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” (Romans 7:5–6)

“for at one time you were darkness, *but now* you are light in the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8)

As I noted in last week's sermon, the gospel is the great reversal. It is God's determination to lift his chosen people up out of the hopeless mess that they have made of their lives and bring them to a place where they have a solid footing and a clear path.

As the Lord speaks these words of comfort to his beleaguered people, he gives them five reasons why they should not be afraid. First, he says that he has created them. Just as he created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, so also has God created his church out of nothing. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God. Second, God says that he has formed us. He is the potter and we are the clay. We need not worry about anything, because he knows what he is doing with us. Third, God says that he has redeemed us. This implies that we were in bondage and needed rescuing. We could not set ourselves free from our slavery to sin, but God has done it for us in Christ. Fourth, God says that he has called us by name. He knows each and every one of his sheep. Not one will be overlooked or lost. And lastly, God says, "you are mine." He claims us as his own. Our identity is in this: we belong to God. If all of these things are true, then how could any harm ever come to us? If you are a Christian, then you should not be afraid of any form of trouble that comes into your life. Your God is with you, and he is in control.

This point is further emphasized by the images that are employed in verse 2. God says that we will not be harmed, not even when we have to pass through rushing waters and burning flames. This fire is the same fire that was mentioned at the end of chapter 42: the fire of God's anger. Even though this fire was brought upon them because of their sin, God has not abandoned his people. He continues to be with them, just as he was with Israel when they passed through the Red Sea, just as he was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were thrown into the fiery furnace.

Notice also that God does not promise a quick fix to his people's troubles. They are going to have to pass through the deep waters. They are going to have to walk through the fire. This reminds us that God does not promise to deliver us *from* our trials and our troubles. His promise is that he will always be with us and will bring us *through* our trials and troubles.

In verse 4, the Lord gives the reason why he is so intent upon redeeming his people. He says that it is "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you." God's people are precious in his sight. Now, if we have been listening to the things that have been said about Israel up to this point in Isaiah's prophecy, it should be clear that God does not love them because of anything good that is in them. On the contrary, God set his love upon his people even

before they were born. And he did not do this because of anything special that he saw in us. He did it because it pleased him to make us the objects of his love. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 1, God “chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world... In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.” (Ephesians 1:4–6)

The Lord says that his love for his people leads him to give men in exchange for them. He says that he gives the nations of Egypt, Cush, and Seba as Israel’s ransom. This may be referring to the fact that these nations came under the control of Cyrus the Great, the ruler who issued the decree that allowed the people of Israel to return to the Promised Land. The point being made by this is that God orders history for the sake of his elect. Empires come and go, but the kingdom of God continues to advance. Great nations fall in order to make way for the church of Jesus Christ. Even as we speak, the Lord is gathering his chosen ones from the four corners of the earth. He calls us by his own name. He created us for his own glory. It is utterly inconceivable that even one of his sheep will be lost.

### **God's People as Witnesses**

In the second part of our passage, the emphasis is upon how the redeemed of the Lord will serve as his witnesses. As in chapter 42, the people of Israel are described as blind and deaf. But notice what else is said about them: they are blind, yet they have eyes; they are deaf, yet they have ears! God gives eyes and ears to those who would otherwise refuse to see and hear what he has revealed in his Word. This is what Christ has done for you if you have been born again.

In verses 8-13, we find ourselves once again in a courtroom setting. God is summoning the unbelieving world to his court and challenging them to testify on behalf of their gods. Can their gods do the things that the Lord can do? Can they make sense of past history? Can they tell what will take place in the future? Can they give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf? Can they take deaf and blind people and turn them into credible witnesses? The gods of this world cannot do any of these things, but the Lord certainly can.

God's witnesses in this courtroom scene are the people that he has redeemed to be his very own. If you are a Christian, then you are one of Christ's witnesses to the world. You can testify that the gospel really is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. And it is important to remember that as a witness, you are not called to testify to yourself but to Christ. As strange as it

may seem, there is considerable confusion about this in the church today. There is a lot of talk about the importance of “living the gospel.” But that is not what we are called to do. We cannot live the gospel. No one can. It is certainly true that the gospel brings about change in people’s lives, but the gospel itself is not about anything that we do. It is the announcement of the salvation that Jesus Christ has accomplished on our behalf. As Christ’s witness, you are not called to point people to yourself or your deeds but to your Savior and his deeds. You can testify that what God says about himself really is true. Besides him there is no other savior. And you did not do anything to qualify for this salvation. As God says in verse 10, you did not choose him, but he chose you.

What a privilege it is for us to be given the responsibility of bearing witness to the one true God. And it is not just a privilege. It is also a source of rich blessing. Our faith is strengthened by our witness. God says, “You are my witnesses...that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.” Your witness for Christ is one of the things that the Lord uses to strengthen your own faith in Christ. As one commentator puts it, “Witness is not an onerous burden, but an unspeakable privilege. It is a means not only of projecting the truth about God into the world, but of strengthening God’s people themselves.” [Webb, 176]

### God's Promise of a New Exodus

In the third part of our passage, the focus is upon God's promise of a new exodus. Like Israel in the days of Moses, the people addressed in these verses had been taken into captivity. They were living in exile, in Babylon. But God promises them that he will do for them the same thing that he did for his people of old. He will make a way in the sea, a path through the mighty waters. He will bring his people to their true home.

This promise had an initial fulfillment when Cyrus the Great issued the decree that allowed the Jews to return to the land of Palestine. But that was only a foreshadowing of the deliverance that is foretold in these verses. This promise is for us as well. For we too are living in exile. Our days in this world are days of pilgrimage. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, we are seeking a homeland. We desire a better country, a heavenly one. But we are not building the kingdom by our own efforts. We are receiving it as a gift of God's grace. God is preparing for us a city that cannot be shaken, a city with foundations, a city of which he is the designer and builder. (see Heb. 11:10, 13-16; 12:26-28)

In these verses, the Lord points to his works of deliverance in the past in order to assure us that he will follow through on his promise to bring about a

final deliverance. It is good for us to study the great works that God has done in the past. But we should not dwell in the past. We should not idealize any era of church history as if it were a golden age. This is what it means in verse 18 when it says, "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old." God is saying that he does not want us to retreat into sentimentalized notions of the "good old days." He wants us to apply the lessons of the past to today and to keep our eyes fixed upon our future hope.

The secularization of our society can sometimes makes it seem as though God's greatest days are behind him, but of course that is not at all true. Our Lord is still doing new things. He is doing new things right here and right now. He is carrying out his great plan of redemption in our midst, the same plan that is set forth in this text. It might be true that New Hampshire's nickname of "the Granite state" is descriptive not only of its geology but also of its spiritual condition. Some have said that doing ministry here is like trying to plow concrete. There is probably something to that. But when we remember who our God is, when we think back upon the astounding things he has done in the past, when we realize that all of those things were only shadowy pictures of the true deliverance that is yet to come -- when we keep these things in mind we will see that the conditions in which we find ourselves are ripe for a fresh display of

God's power. Our God is a God who is able to do things like plowing concrete. He is the God who made a way for his people in the wilderness, the God who made rivers run in the desert. The Lord gives guidance, relief and refreshment in places where there is none. He has done it in the past, and he will continue to do it until his redemptive purposes are completed.

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If you are a Christian, then you are precious in God's sight. There is nothing for you to fear. Your God is always with you, even when you pass through deep waters and fiery trials. He will redeem you from bondage. He will make a way when there is no way. He will provide relief and refreshment when your own resources have run dry. Why does he do these things for you? He does it for the sake of his glory. He does it so that you might declare his praise. "[Y]ou are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)