

# God's Grace Reverses Our Place

## 5) From Scattered & Scorched to Gathered & Adored

Isaiah 43:1-7 • 2021-03-21 • Series for Lent



Earlier this week an Idaho state trooper arrived on the scene of an accident. It was on a bridge which crossed a 100-foot-deep canyon. Looking at the scene he saw a 30-foot trailer blocking the bridge. Upon closer inspection he also found the pickup truck attached to the trailer. It was hanging over the side of the bridge headfirst right in the middle of the 100-foot drop to the canyon floor. Nothing held it up except the chains attached to the trailer on the bridge. When the state trooper called out to see if there were any survivors, he heard two people in the cab of the truck. They had survived the crash but were now staring straight through their windshield towards the bottom of the canyon. He called out to them to let them know help is on the way. Then the Idaho Special Operations Rescue Team came to assess the situation. Within six minutes they had descended on rescue lines to pull the passengers out of the truck back to safety. They were even able to rescue the two dogs with them. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be hanging there? "Help is on the way." When the rescue team arrived, the passengers would have seen ropes come down to their doors. They would have heard the rescue team calling out to them. I'm sure those were the longest and some of the most hopeful six minutes of their life. It makes a big difference when you know your rescue is coming. What about when we are in peril and might feel like rescue is far off or impossible? Today we see some encouraging words from Isaiah 43 meant to help us endure far more than just six minutes of fearful situations. They are words to help us through a lifetime.

When you read the verses just before Isaiah chapter 43 you hear one of the strongest pronouncements of judgment on Israel. God indicated he would be pouring out his wrath on them. He describes the terrible mess they had put themselves in. For them, "there is no rescuer." (Isaiah 42:22) He speaks of setting fire all around them, but there is no one to listen or to help. Ancient Israel's kingdom crumbled under God's wrath. He sent the armies of Assyria and then Babylon to decimate the land. Jerusalem would be tossed into a heap of rubble and the people and their land ruined by it all. Many of them were scattered in exile in a faraway land. The rest were scorched and at a loss in the land. Their situation was far worse than dangling off a bridge and staring down a gorge. It was standing face to face with God's anger over their sin. God told them there would be no help coming. They were to pass through the fire and pain.

The people of ancient Israel weren't the only ones who have felt scattered and scorched because of sin. I have seen how the results of sin have ruined lives and left people feeling like rescue is far off. Drug abuse tears a family apart so that the abuser is left with no one to rescue. Life seems beyond repair and the person lives for nothing except the next surge of cash flow to feed the destructive habit. They are burned by sin. Pornography has taken the heart of many men and women so that they are left burned by it and their family life is ruined or their family scattered apart. Domestic violence leaves many feelings helpless and wondering who could ever rescue them if the person who is supposed to love them hates them and hurts them. They are scorched and burned. It seems like there is no rescue.

And if you don't feel like your life is dangling off a bridge in desperate need of rescue, you have to see the plight of this world which is so burned by sin. Believers all over the world are suffering trials and pains. They are scattered and scorched. The Church is scattered and scorched by the pain that comes from dealing with factions and false teachers. Where can you find a believer who is not at times fearful because of what must be endured as the end of the world draws near? Who is there to rescue the Christians being arrested, jailed, or beaten around the world? When you consider all the evils that must be faced, dealt with, and endured you have to join with the disciples Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5. You have to mourn over sin in this world, grieve over your own sin, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. I know what it feels like to be scattered and scorched, sometimes because of my own sin, sometimes because I live in a sin-cursed world. I'm sure you do too. It's a fearful condition to be in. We are all dangling over the bridge staring at the grave and the fiery judgment of God over every sinner.

That's why we constantly need to hear the rescue team calling out, "Help is on the way." But the people of Israel didn't have to listen for a rescue team calling out. They heard their Lord calling. "This is what the Lord says..." The words that are recorded in Isaiah don't begin with Isaiah himself saying "Help is on the way." These words don't begin with mere man-made rescue plans or offers of assistance. These words begin with the assurance that God himself speaks. What we read in Scripture is the chief of rescue operations himself. It is the Lord, their God.

He identifies himself as, "The Lord who created you, the Lord one who formed you." God doesn't just see the drug abuser and their broken family, the sexually immoral, or just the abuser and victim. He sees them all as those he has formed and created. And he speaks to them so that they might turn to him and listen to him. God doesn't just see the scattered Church all bruised and fearful. He sees all those who turn to him and listen and look to him for rescue. He is the one who created us all and has a plan to rescue us.

God told ancient Israel "Do not be afraid." Why? "Because I have redeemed you." He had paid the price for them. They did not belong to the Egyptians who had once ordered their firstborn sons to be drowned in the river. They did not

belong to the Babylonians who would crush them, burn their homes, and toss them into the fiery furnace. God had bought them and paid for them.

And they were not merely a scattered and scorched people. They had a name. *"I have called you by name."* God spoke to Israel through his prophets and told them they belonged to him. And each individual could trust that they belonged to the household of God. *"You are mine."* God made them to be his own possession. I can't think of anyone else I'd rather belong to!

God tells them how he will ease their fears. *"When you cross through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross the rivers, they will not sweep you away. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, and the flame will not set you on fire."* And it was true! The Egyptians tried to drown them. But God brought them through the sea. The Babylonians tried to burn them into submission. But God sent his angel and spared his people from the fire. God did this for them! With an amazing display he showed them his care.

Why did he do this? Not because their rescue was easy or because they deserved it. He did it for his own sake. He did it because of who he is, the God who saves. *"Because I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."* God's grace reversed their place!

Then God described how he would move the nations in history for the sake of rescuing his people. To lift them from the brink of despair he brought out the big chains. *"I gave Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious and honored in my eyes, and I myself love you, I will give people in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life."* Egypt, Cush, and Seba were all wealthy nations of the ancient world near Israel. But God would go so far as to hand them over so that Israel would be free. And God did this. He used these nations as a sort of bait to bring Cyrus the king of Persia across the land. Cyrus took possession of those lands and in the process set Israel free from their Babylonian captors. God controlled history for their sake. They were allowed to return home!

That return home was a grand reunion for ancient Israel. In the year 539 BC he brought them out of the nations where they were scattered to Jerusalem. He gathered them back together. *"Do not be afraid, because I am with you. "From the east I will bring your offspring, and from the west I will gather you. <sup>6</sup>I will say to the north, "Give them back!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—"*

But it becomes evident, brothers and sisters in the faith, that God's rescue extends beyond ancient Israel. God promises to gather everyone who is called by his name. *"(I will gather) everyone who is called by my name, everyone I created for my glory, everyone I formed, yes, everyone I have made."*

And he tells you, *"Do not be afraid because I have redeemed you."* The Lord redeemed us from our sins. He didn't do this by giving another nation or people in exchange for our lives. He did it by giving himself in exchange for our lives. So that we would not remain scattered and scorched by sin, the Son of God left the Father side. He came down from heaven and lived in human flesh. He said, *"the reason I have come is to give my life as a ransom."* He gave himself in exchange for us on the cross. He suffered the scourge and wrath over sin that every human being deserved. He redeemed us. *"I have redeemed you."*

And the living Savior God assures us that we have been redeemed from sin, death, and hell. He calls us by name and makes us his own. Your name was spoken as he made you his own. In the water of baptism, the name of the Triune God was placed on you. You belong to God in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Our fear of sin's curse is gone as we are assured by his Word that we now belong to him. We can take to heart the Word of the Lord, *"You are mine."*

Notice God never promised Israel they wouldn't pass through waters and face the fires. But what he did promise is *"when you cross through the waters, I will be with you."* So, they did not have to fear. And he didn't promise there would be no fire. But he did promise that the fire would not destroy them. We will face dangers and perils. There will be times when those who trust in the Lord feel scattered and scorched. But in grace he reverses our place. He takes us from this life of peril and pain to deliverance.

When the fires of judgment come and there is no one to rescue this world from the wrath of God over sin, we will not be burned. We will pass into glory with our living Savior God. We are his own. And he will gather all his scattered church together. That will include the person who struggled with the hopelessness of sin and trusted in him. It will include the baptized believer who turned in faith to the Lord from sin's scorching pain. It will include the abuse victim who is told by the one who loves them forever, *"Do not be afraid, you are mine."* It includes you!

These Words give us hope and remove our fears. It doesn't matter what peril or pains we face. We hear the Word of the Lord, our creator and Savior, speak. *"You are mine. You have been redeemed. You will be gathered and at peace."* You have been called by his name. You have been created for his glory. God's grace reverses your place: from scattered and scorched to gathered and adored.