

This morning, I am continuing in a sermon series that I am calling “The gospel according to Isaiah” which will take us through much of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah was what was known as a covenant mediator prophet, people who were called by God to be His spokesperson, to call out the sin of the nation and call them to repent of their sin and return to faithfulness to the covenant that God had made with them at Mt. Sinai, after He had led them out of Egypt. Isaiah prophesied to Judah, the southern part of Israel, from about 740-687 BC. The book of Isaiah can be broken up into two parts. Chapters 1-39 are mainly about God’s judgment of Israel and the surrounding nations for their sins. Chapters 40-66 are mainly about the restoration God will bring to His people once their time of discipline is completed. Earlier in this series, we looked at the three main areas where God through Isaiah was calling the Israelites out for breaking the covenant, areas that we also need God’s exhortation today: Judah’s injustice, their mistreatment of the poor and oppressed, their empty worship, their performative religion, and their idolatry, specifically the ways they were trusting in other nations for their protection and security instead of putting their trust in God.

But in chapter 40, the prophecy shifts from a focus on judgment to a focus on restoration. This morning, we will read a portion of Isaiah 41 and 43, where God emphasizes to His people that He is always faithful and present to help them.

Isaiah 41:8–16 - “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ¹¹ All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as **nothing and perish**. ¹² Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. ¹³ For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. ¹⁴ Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ “See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, **with many teeth**. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. ¹⁶ You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.”

And in chapter 43:

Isaiah 43:1–7 - 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.”

Remember the context. Israel is in exile because of their sin; they are slaves to Babylon. They are wondering if God has forgotten them, and if God is powerful enough to save them. If last week’s sermon was entitled, “God, where are you in my suffering?”, this week’s sermon could be called “God, where are you in my loneliness?” Have you abandoned us, forgotten about us, rejected us? Perhaps you have heard it said that we are suffering through a loneliness epidemic in our country. About 20% of adults in America say that they feel lonely on a daily basis, and it was much worse during the recent pandemic. From 1962 to 2022, the percentage of US adults who live alone has risen from 13% to 29%. And among 18-25 year olds, well over half of the population say they feel lonely frequently or almost all of the time.

What was needed in Israel’s time is more true today, to know that there is a God who is always faithful and always present to help.

I believe that in Isaiah 41 & 43, we hear three messages that God wants to communicate to the Israelites in Isaiah’s day and to us today about His faithful presence:

1) **I have chosen you and will not reject you**

Isaiah 41:8–9 - “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.”

Isaiah 43:1 - 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.

Israel, just because I have disciplined you, just because I have allowed your land to be conquered and for you to become slaves of Babylon, does not mean that I do not love you or that I have given up on you. I have chosen you, redeemed you, summoned you by name, and you are mine. And I will come to rescue and restore you.

I have chosen you and I will not reject you. This message was true for Israel, and it is true this side of the cross and resurrection for all who have trusted in Jesus. He is the one who has chosen us.

John 15:16 – “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”

In my early years as a believer, I used to think God was lucky to have me on his team, that I had chosen him. But over time I learned that He had chosen me, not because of how great I was but in spite of my sin. He has chosen us, and our salvation is not dependent upon our performance, so that He might possibly reject us, but is an undeserved gift of God’s favor.

Ephesians 2:8–10 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This passage is very similar to Isaiah 41 & 43 – God has chosen us, saved us by His grace, His undeserved favor, and not just to have us with him but to do the good works that He has prepared for us to do, to be a part of His mission to save the world.

Unlike others who may reject us, He will never reject us. Some of you have been divorced, abandoned, discarded as if you did not matter. The world operates based on works – if you do not measure up, then you will be fired, left, abandoned. But not the Lord. He operates by grace. It never was about your merits, and it never will be. His faithful presence and love and salvation has always been about grace.

Isaiah 49:15–16 - “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”

John 10:27–28 - My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

If you have trusted in Jesus, know that He has chosen you and will never reject you.

2) I will be with you and will help you through your troubles

Isaiah 41:10-16 - So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ¹¹ All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. ¹² Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. ¹³ For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. ¹⁴ Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ “See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. ¹⁶ You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away.”

Isaiah 43:2 - 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.

God’s second promise in these passages is that His presence will preserve you in the midst of trials, and you will defeat your enemies with His help. In this world, we are promised trouble. Becoming a Christian does not make the hard times go away. But God’s promise is that He is with us and will help us through our trials.

Psalms 23:4 - Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

John 16:33 - “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

God is with us always and is our helper. Think of the classic Footprints story – it was through our hardest times that He carried us.

Hebrews 13:5–6 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” ⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

Matthew 28:18–20 - Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Even though Jesus has ascended to heaven, we will never be alone, for He has given us His Holy Spirit to be God’s presence with us.

John 14:15–17 - “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

When God is all you have, you find out He is all you need. Turn to Him for strength.

3) I will pay any price to have you with me

Isaiah 43:3–7 - 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.”

His love is not cheap, and it is not just words; it is a costly love, and no cost is too high to ransom his people, to have you with Him.

Matthew 20:25–28 - Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In Isaiah 43, God promises to ransom his people, no matter the cost. And in Matthew 20, we see these words put into action. Jesus was the ransom. He is the one who gave His life on the cross to save you and rescue you from sin and death and to restore you to the Father.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And if God was willing to give His Son when you were His enemy, then you can trust that He will be with you and give you what you need, now that you are His beloved child.

Romans 8:31–32 - What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

God has chosen you and will not reject you. He will be with you and help you through your troubles. And He will pay any price to have you with Him.

In the Old Testament, there is a prophetic book called Hosea, who was a contemporary of Isaiah. In that book, God tells Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful to him, and so he marries Gomer. **Why would God ask this of Hosea? I can think of a couple reasons.** First of all, God might say, as my prophet who is going to be my mouthpiece, I want you to know my heart, understand how I am feeling about my relationship with my people, so that you can prophesy with power. And secondly, your marriage is to be a picture to the people of Israel of my relationship with them. **Their worship of other gods is not just idol worship, but spiritual adultery.**

Hosea 1:2–3 - When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.”³ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

Hosea is unfaithful to Hosea and eventually leaves him for other men. But in chapter 3, God comes to Hosea and tells him this:

Hosea 3:1–3 - The Lord said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.” So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”

Picture this scene. Gomer has left Hosea and become so lost in her adultery and prostitution that she is up for public auction. She is for sale – either in slavery or put out by her pimp. She would have been naked, so people could see what they were getting. And Hosea buys her back. He covers her. He brings her home. And he tells her to come again to live with him, to no longer be a prostitute or intimate with another man. You will be mine, and I will be yours. This is the image of our God who will pay any cost to have us with him, as unfaithful as we have been. It is always about grace, about a God who loves us and is willing to pay any price to bring us back to Him.

And one day we will be in His faithful presence forever.

Revelation 21:1–5 - Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

God is the always faithful, always present one in our troubles. He has chosen us and will not reject us. He will be with us and help us through our troubles. And he will pay any price, even His own Son's life, to have us with him. Trust in Him.

Let me end with a story. Three months after becoming a believer, I went on a retreat with Musicon Ministries. Musicon was made up of a group of teens and adult leaders from around Connecticut that would learn a Christian musical and take it on tour throughout the year. As someone who was so new to the faith, I was like a sponge that weekend, and I still remember so many details from that time. I remember Jon, the Musicon leader, sharing from **Isaiah 40:9** - You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

I remember him asking us, "Can you imagine going out on the streets of New Britain (where we were) and declaring enthusiastically "Here is your God!"? What would happen?" I seem to remember that most of the teens said something like, "You'd be shot!"

I remember attending Kensington Baptist Church (now Wellspring Church) that weekend, and hearing Pastor Rick share a story of a New England farmer who had put up a weathervane with the words "God's love" written on it. One day, the farmer's cynical neighbor said to him, "Does it say 'God's Love' because God's love changes with the winds and the seasons?" "No," the farmer replied. "It's because no matter where the winds blow, God's Love is there." I remember learning that weekend, as a young Christian, that God was a faithful God, a God who was always there for you, who would never leave you or forsake you, no matter what happened in your life.

And I remember staying at the apartment of Mike & Linda Smith with Glen, a friend from UConn. I remember going with Glen to CVS to get a thank you card for our hosts. While we were paying for our card, an old woman came up next to us and made some comment to the clerk about the two of us being such "handsome young men." "Oh, thank you," I remember Glen saying. The woman began talking to us about how she would walk around New Britain talking to people, just having conversations with whoever was willing to talk. What a strange lady, I remember thinking, as I inched away from her towards the door. I remember her reaching into her pocketbook to give us something, and pulling out two little tracts. On the outside it read, "*The Lord says, 'I am with you.'*" I opened up the tract and read the inside, which was simply the words of **Isaiah 43:1-5**:

“But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 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. 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. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you”

I was floored. I remembered Jon’s words about going out on the streets of New Britain and declaring that Jesus is Lord, and here was this little old grandmother doing exactly that, and she was protected by the Lord. I remembered Pastor Rick’s story about the constancy of God’s love, and I knew God was trying to communicate something to the depths of my heart. I quickly asked the Lord’s forgiveness for my attitude towards this woman, and listened with a joyful heart as she proceeded to tell us story after story of the times she spent walking around, telling people about Jesus. She even told us about someone who tried to rob her at a gas station, and how she had responded, “Why do you want my money? You should work for your own money.” And how God had protected this feisty old woman in her boldness! She told us how she was just trying to follow the Holy Spirit, and even though He always seemed to lead her to uncomfortable places, it always turned out to be a place where the Spirit was working. She told us that although she was poor, and although people did not help her out much, and even though many people thought she was weird, she knew God’s love was always with her, and that this was all that mattered.

Before we left her, she asked us our names, and we asked her what her name was. “Connie,” she replied. “Oh,” Glen replied, “my mother’s name is Connie too.” “What is her full name?” the old woman asked. “Concepcion,” replied Glen. “Oh,” said the woman. “My name is Constance.”

And that was when God’s love pierced through, right to the depth of my heart.

As Webster’s Dictionary so eloquently puts it, Constancy is:

(1) The quality of being unchanging or unwavering, as in purpose, love, loyalty, etc.

(2) Stability

(3) Steadfastness, fidelity, dependability.

Constancy. What a perfect word to describe the love of God.

The writer of Hebrews tells us in **Hebrews 13:2** – “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

I will never know for sure whether Constance was dropped out of heaven precisely for me that evening in New Britain, but I know that God used her to convince my heart that His love for me is unchanging, unwavering, and always Constant.

God is the always faithful, always present one in our troubles. He has chosen us and will not reject us. He will be with us and help us through our troubles. And he will pay any price, even His own Son’s life, to have us with him. Trust in Him.