

Not abandoned but restored

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[0 : 00] So we're actually going to continue in our series on Isaiah today.! We're in Isaiah 43. If you want to have a look for that in your Bibles.

So we're continuing our series on Isaiah 40-55. We're in chapter 43. We're going to be reading, starting at verse 1, reading to verse 13.

But before we read the text, I just want to spend a few minutes thinking about what this means for us. And just a few things to remind ourselves of Israel and what's going on there.

You might remember me saying last week that this was kind of like the second part of it. It's like a two-parter within our series. And last week we heard how the exile, God's people getting taken away from Israel into a foreign country, Babylon.

Surprisingly, was God not turning his back on his people, but was God disciplining his people? How they were looted and plundered because they'd ignored his law, ignored his word.

[1 : 04] And you might remember at the end of that passage, there was little resolution. God's anger had no impact on them. And so they carted off to Babylon for ignoring God and ignoring his word.

And I just want you to imagine that moment in Jerusalem happening. Imagine being led in chains, the smoke of your ruined city behind you.

And imagine what the voice that you heard in your head, the voice that would be heard in the whole of God's people. They would be thinking, God is done with us.

God is done with you. That is the silence that Israel sat in as they were carted off. And it is into that moment that we read today's passage.

It is into that moment that God speaks. And the thing is, what God says to his people Israel then, actually we need to hear today.

[2 : 00] Because just like Israel, we can feel exiled from God. Not by geography, but we can feel exiled by God by guilt.

When we feel we've blown it and messed up royally, we might experience that same voice, God is done with you. We might feel exiled by grief, that life's too hard after suffering the loss of a loved one.

We might feel exiled by chronic failure, that perhaps our past contains just too many mishaps to be considered by him. It is into those spiritual and emotional exiles, when we feel abandoned, that God still speaks.

And so if you've ever felt like that, or maybe you do today, what we have here is an opportunity to live differently and maybe ask the question, what if we could live knowing that no matter what we've done, the guilt, the chronic failure, what if we could live knowing that God's desire is never to abandon you, but always to restore you?

What if we could live, rather than feeling like God is absent, we could know that God is always present with his people and with us. What if we could be confident that God doesn't just love you, but that he actually likes you?

[3 : 34] He actually wants to be present with you. Let's hear now what God speaks into this situation and to us in Isaiah 43.

This is God's word. 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. 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 Saviour.

I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.

[4 : 44] 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. Everyone who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble, which of their gods foretold this and proclaim to us the form of things.

Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say it is true. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe and understand that I am he.

Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me, I. Even I am the Lord, and apart from me there is no saviour. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed.

[5 : 52] I am not some foreign God among you. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand when I act.

Who can reverse it? This is God's word. Lord, as we think about this passage, would you bless us, would you speak to us, and would you edify our hearts?

Amen. Big takeaway from what we see here. God never abandons, but always restores his people. God never abandons, but always restores his people.

You look me through, halfway through verse 1, you can see this is all in the past tense. Do not fear, 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. Verse 5 again, do not be afraid, for I am with you.

[6 : 55] Right in the very middle of Israel's darkest, hardest days of despair, God speaks words that are unexpected.

I have redeemed you. I have called you. You're mine. To redeem is to buy back at a cost. And it's not just transactional, but it is deeply personal.

This is, you know, this is not like someone using a coupon to redeem their shopping. This is the living God stepping in and setting his people free at a personal cost to himself because they belong to him, because they're his people.

And he simply won't let them see them and watch them struggle alone. And did you catch that, maybe if you were here last week, that magnificent reversal that we see?

You'll notice with me, just look with me, right at the end of our reading from last week, you remember this, right? Verse 25. He poured on them his burning anger, the violence war.

[8 : 02] He enveloped them in flames. And what do we see now? Yet now, when you walk through that same fire, you'll not be burned.

Why? Because of the presence of the Lord. He never abandoned his people. They are exiled geographically, but spiritually, he is with them in the exile.

But there's more. Not only will he never abandon them, but that is not the extent of his desire. His ultimate desire is to do more, that through his nearness and being with them, he will restore them as a people.

And not to restore them to what they once were, but looking to something greater. You see with me from verse 5, what does he say? I will bring your children from the east and gather you up 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, my daughters from the ends of the earth. Everyone, everyone, not just Israel, but everyone who's called by my name, who I created, for my glory, whom I formed and made.

[9 : 13] Here we have a kind of prophetic future picture of what God will do, that the restored people of God will not just be made up of those taken away to Babylon, but will be restored from every corner of the earth.

North, south, east and west, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be part of this restored, built picture, this body of the people of God, the church, and what it will eventually be.

This is the heart of our text today. God never abandons, but he always restores his people and he always, and he chooses to restore them to be greater.

Yet, as we know, as we read through this, restoration is never neat and tidy. It is always messy, it is always costly, yet, when successful, it is glorious.

It is glorious. There's a programme on T, perhaps you've seen it, George Clark's Remarkable Renovations. Most episodes begin with some old dilapidated building in a state of disrepair that no one wants to take a chance on, apart from one, sort of, or a couple of happy-go-lucky chances.

[10:38] And through the episode, they begin by detailing their plans, the costs involved, the time scale to restore, to renovate the building. And it's, but when they do it, it's renovated, it's renovated, not to its former glory, but to be greater than that, to be a beacon in the surrounding area, to surpass anything it was, to be restored in ways that no one could imagine.

Throughout the episode, as you watch, sometimes it looks like the project will never get finished. Sometimes it looks like the project should be abandoned. There's conversation about whether it's worth it or not.

Perhaps there's difficulties with costs. We should just give up. There's bumps in the road, structural problems. But, you see, that doesn't make a good TV programme.

99% of the time, you get the big reveal at the end, and you see the transformation. The restoration of God's people looks like an impossible building project.

It looks like halfway through, it should be abandoned, the stakes are too high, the cost is too much, and that it won't be worth it. It seems that there's too many bumps in the road.

[11:51] There's too many problems. It's too costly. It's too messy. And it looks to the outsider that it's not going to plan. But God never abandons the project of building a people for himself.

Like that restoration, he promises to restore his people to be even bigger and better than we could possibly imagine. that for the entirety of God's people, that this will be true.

Not just for us as individuals, although that is true, but that when the renovation, when the restoration is complete, it will be the most glorious thing to be seen.

However, there is a glaring issue, isn't there? There is a glaring issue. It comes, it's, it, it, I think it, what we see with what God says to them is that we, what we notice, and you can imagine how God's people felt, from, we said from the beginning, they're carted off with the, the smell of the burning city in there, in the background.

They are filled with doubt that the restoration is possible or achievable. God's people doubt they, that's what they fear, that, that restoration is even possible or achievable.

[13:11] It's not hard to understand why I've mentioned they're in exile. They're, when that, something like that happens, their current situation, the present issue, dominates their thinking.

As you would expect, at this juncture in the story, they look like a dilapidated building. And that brings fear.

It doesn't look like it's possible. It feels like the project has been abandoned halfway through. It's not worth it. That's what it feels. The obstacles are too vast. It's going to cost too much.

We know that's how they feel because twice God has to tell them, do not fear. fear. You only tell someone not to fear if it's obvious that they're really scared.

They're full of fear. And this is where it comes home to us is that when we value our lives in the present, at times we can make the same assessment of ourselves.

[14:15] We can think the same things about when things are going on in our lives. perhaps we may think that about our own sin. That's just one too many times of me getting angry.

That's one too many times of me overdoing it with the drink. That's just one too many times you fill in the blank. When we think we think there's just one too many times and it's God's done with us.

When we feel like that we usually try one of two things. Either we double down on self-effort must try harder must do more must double down to live rightly. We try that when we try that what we've done is we've stopped believing that God can restore us and we're attempting to restore ourselves.

The other way so that's the first one double down on self-effort or we double down on self-pity. I'm a lost cause. God's just going to give up. I'll never amount to anything and we've also stopped believing God will restore us but that he never will and that we can't do it to ourselves.

The message from our world only exacerbates our thinking. The world does not champion forgiveness and restoration. The message from the world is that mistakes stay with you forever.

[15 : 37] That is even more true in our culture at the minute isn't it? The cancel culture is so prevalent. What does that say to us? It says you mess up once and that's it. If you're in the public eye forget it you're done with.

You're done with. You make a mistake in your job don't because you'll be replaced. Being cancelled and exiled in the world is common place. Even in communities people remember something you did 30 years ago and it follows you like a bad smell.

Living in that world affects our thinking because we transfer the idea of what the world is saying and think well if that's what the world is like maybe that's what God's like. We doubt his forgiveness and we doubt the possibility of being restored.

Those thoughts only intensify if coupled with difficult life circumstances. The difficult life circumstance comes and you think what if this is to teach me a lesson?

What if this is karma for the mess I've made? And we fear what that means for our future because it's unknown and deep down it's because we want to control our lives and even deeper down than that it's because we thought that before all this happened that our good record our good reputation our self-sufficiency was the way to stay in control and the difficult circumstances remind us that we're not in control and it knocks us for six.

[17 : 18] The good news the gospel is that the answer to our despair is not to try harder it's not wallowing in self-pity and importantly it's not good advice either you see God's answer is that he is the saviour that he's a God that saves the God of the Bible you know he doesn't sort of totally forget and write off sin he doesn't he does but he doesn't just forget them but what he does is he redeems us from them he pays for our freedom the living God and what we see in this passage is that he roots the future of their forgiveness he roots it in what he's done in the past for their ancestors look at me from verse 3 for I am the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel your saviour and you see what he says I give Egypt for your ransom

Cush and Seba in your stead he's reminding them that he the living God goes to extraordinary lengths to save his people whole nations in their stead verse 4 since you are precious and honoured in my sight and because I love you I will give people in exchange for you nations in exchange for your life he's reminding them that Egypt you know it was Egypt in place for Israel a whole nation and now not just a nation but I will give people I will give a person in exchange for you I will give you my son the person in exchange for our life for your life who is exchanged for our freedom a person exchanged for us not merely a transaction but personal because the abandonment that we actually deserve it's Jesus who's abandoned

Jesus is exiled on the cross so that we who deserve to be alone and cut off never will be Jesus Christ is forgotten he's forsaken my God my God why have you forsaken me he's disgraced we the verse becomes sin for us and made worthless he bears our shame outside the city gates so that we can be known so that we can be honoured so that we become precious it is Jesus who takes the waters and flames of judgment alone so that in all our trials in all our storms of life we are not forgotten or abandoned we're not condemned like a dilapidated building but he is with us his people in the process of restoration know that God offers this know that God offers this verse 11

I even I am the Lord and apart from me there is no saviour I have revealed and saved and proclaimed and it cannot be reversed at the cross is where we receive God's presence not his absence the world says your mistakes define you forever but the cross declares your sins are paid for and your identity is secure in Jesus in the courtroom of public opinion failure is final but in the kingdom of God failure is the place where grace begins failure is the place where grace begins where not a people that can ever be forgotten or abandoned because he created us as a people out of nothing to be remembered loved and restored you remember what we discussed at the beginning what if we could live knowing that no matter what you've done the guilt the chronic failure what if we could live knowing that

God's desire is not to abandon you but to always restore you what if rather than feeling like God is absent we can know that he's always present what if we could be confident God doesn't just love but actually likes you he actually wants to be present with you God's people doubt that restoration is possible or achievable but in light of the cross we see that living and thinking and feeling and believing differently actually becomes a reality that we don't have to live in the old way of thinking but we can reject what the world believes we can reject how it treats people who've made mistakes we can reject that because our saviour the Lord Almighty never throws us on the scrap heap instead of feeling like God is absent the cross shows that he's present and he always restores you

see how that impacts fear you see how that impacts fear when we're fearful of what lies ahead even if you're in the middle of something right now whatever's going on in your life if it feels overwhelming the living God

[22 : 33] Jesus himself by the power of the Holy Spirit he is with you and he's with you tangibly our past mistakes don't follow us around like a bad smell and they don't cancel out his presence instead of fearing what the future holds God's with you in every moment when you're grieving he's right by your side when you're in pain emotional or physical he's with you even when you fall into sin God does not depart you at any moment you know he doesn't wait until you've repented and felt sorrow and then come back to you once you've repented he's with you in the repentance in the middle of repentance when you think I must repent to get his that nearness and closeness back with God no no no he's as close to you when you feel the sorrow of sin as to after you've repented he never strays from your side our new life in Jesus means that he's the one restoring you to create and form and fashion and build the best complete version of you he alone restores

I have revealed and saved and proclaimed no one can deliver out of my hand he says when I act who can reverse it this plan is set in motion it can't be reversed isn't that amazing it is the irreversible reversal we are reversed from sin to righteousness and now that we're in righteousness it can't go back it cannot be reversed in the building projects of the people of God he's the architect the structural engineer and he's the workman too God's building project in creating a people for himself it is his work he's the one at work in you to live that new creation life by his power the power of the Holy Spirit you're empowered to live this life knowing that he's present and never absent free of fear and full of hope this is the big message from the passage God never abandons but always restores his people

Jesus was exiled and abandoned so that you never will be almighty God the good news of Jesus is the best news anyone has ever heard it is the best thing that has ever happened to us and it is the best thing that will happen to anyone it is so good that it is almost unbelievable we can't comprehend sometimes how amazing it is and how we're constantly refreshed by the good news of grace that we deserve to be abandoned that we deserve to be forgotten condemned but Jesus you've come and been exiled and abandoned and condemned in our place so that we can live lives where you're always present when we're full of fear about things that are going in our life and about the future would you turn us to yourself and by your grace keep us living faithfully knowing and empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit connected and united to you forever we thank you and praise you in Jesus name amen mam