

The promises of God

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Let us turn to Isaiah chapter 43. Isaiah 43 at the beginning. But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel.

Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Now it's a great thing to be a Christian.

To be a true Christian is something of inestimable value. Because there before you are the promises of God.

And how great are these promises. And it is when you are going through some period of testing and trial, that here you can lay hold upon these promises.

[1 : 12] Because, as Paul tells us, all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. So that if you have Christ Jesus as your Saviour, every promise that God has made to his people become yours by right.

And so we can look at this passage and think, God is speaking to us. And what is God saying to those of us who are redeemed, who have been called by his name, and to whom we belong? He is saying this, When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. Through the rivers they will not overflow you.

And when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. Neither will the flame kindle upon you. That's God's promise to you. And it's a wonderful thing when sometimes you visit a person on their deathbed who belongs to Christ.

You can say these words to them. And you feel instinctively that these words mean something to these people. But here they have come to their crisis.

[2 : 35] It's the greatest crisis they have to face. It's the crisis of death. They are going to walk through the river. They are going to pass through their fire.

And what is God's promise? When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. Well, let's look at it like that for a little while together.

Here is God speaking, and he is saying to his ancient people, his covenant people, and he speaks to us in Christ, and he says the same thing. Thus saith the Lord that created thee, and he that formed thee, O Israel, fear not.

And that's a wonderful thing to be told by God, not to be afraid. Because this is a world that is gripped by fear.

Fear on every side. Fear of this, fear of that, fear of the other thing. And maybe it is that we ourselves have got our own fears.

[3 : 45] What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of that illness that's going to come, and you don't know how you're going to cope with it?

And you say, I can't bear too much pain. No, none of us can. And we are afraid of the painful thing. And we are afraid too of the thing that is going to decimate us.

The wasting process. We feel we couldn't stand it. And we are afraid. And God speaks to us today, and he says, fear not.

Don't be afraid of that wasting illness. Or perhaps it may be that we are afraid of death itself. And it's a terrifying thing as it looms there on the horizon.

And each day as we get older, it seems to see us drawing nearer to this awful scepter. Death, which looms up before us.

[4 : 48] And we know we must face it sooner or later. And you say, but I'm not terribly brave. I don't know how I will do. In the presence of death?

No, I don't know how I will do either. None of us knows how we're going to react to it when it does come eventually. I remember one of our older ministers writing me at the time when he had lost his own son through a terrible tragedy that had taken place far away from him. And I had written him a little letter of sympathy. And he wrote me back. He himself now has gone. Gone to his reward.

But I remember him saying this in the letter. Some of us, he said, are now within viewing distance of the Jordan. And how apt that description is of a man who is aging and he is coming nearer to the end.

And he is coming now within viewing distance of the Jordan. Well, it's all very well to come within viewing distance of the Jordan. But you see, what really terrifies us is not coming within viewing distance of it but seeing actually the river itself into which we've got to go.

[6 : 18] But here is God and he speaks to us and he says to us, fear not. Don't be afraid. I know when you come to it and when eventually you do come I will be with you.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. That's the promise of the Lord to his people. And that is why it is a great thing to be a Christian.

If you're not a Christian you don't have these promises. If you're not a Christian you face these things alone. And if you feel terrified now how will you feel then?

What does God say? Fear not, he says. I have redeemed thee. And to redeem means to buy.

And this is precisely what God has done. He has bought his people at the price of his son's blood. He gave his son in death for his people.

[7 : 32] That was the price that was paid to save men and women from their sins. That price had to be paid. And God gave his only begotten son.

And Christ willingly laid down his life for his own. And that is the redemption price. You know this word redeem was a word that was used away back in those ancient times particularly in the buying of slaves.

Here were these slaves up for sale and you went along to see them. And as you looked over the slaves you might have thought to yourself I'll take this one, that one and the other one.

And so you bought them. You paid the money. You bought the slave. You bought the slave. You bought the slave. But you could go a step further and you could say to that slave now that I've bought you I'm going to let you go give you your freedom.

That was to redeem. We were the slaves of sin weren't we? God has come to save us from the slavery of sin.

[8 : 48] And he has paid the price. And the price is in terms of his own son's blood and now he says you're free. But we are free to be his.

I have redeemed thee. And another thing that God says to those who are his people who are Christians is this I have called thee by thy name.

And this means surely that God has become familiar with us. And the expression is to indicate the familiarity that now exists between us and God.

I have called thee by thy name. Just as God called Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rebecca, Deborah.

Just as Jesus calls Peter, James, John, Martha and Mary. So God knows you and me by our names.

[9 : 59] In this intimate way through our names. You see, you don't call me by my name nor do I call you by yours until we get to know one another. And then when we get to know each other we become very familiar with one another.

And so when we come to know God like this he calls us by our names. And he says, thou art mine. Mine. We belong to him.

Not to anyone else. We belong to him. And it is for that reason that God says, when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee. And through the rivers they shall not overflow thee.

When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned. Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Just think of that. Here are these two elements. Fire and water.

And they're absolutely vital to human existence. You had to use fire this morning when you got up didn't you? You made your breakfast in all probability by fire.

[11 : 13] either using electricity to boil the kettle for your tea or to cook whatever you might have cooked before you came out here to the worship of God.

It's vital. And before the day is at an end you will still go on using fire. You can't do without it. But you see when it gets out of control as we were looking at yesterday oh the terrible devastation when a spark of fire gets out of control when it begins to rage like an inferno there is no holding it back there is no control of it in any way at all.

It's when you and I considered what some of us might have seen yesterday if you were watching the news and you saw that stand that football stand going on fire it brought to my mind the words that's given to us in Peter about the end of the ages when God will burn up the works of the world and all that is in the world and when everything will melt fire and it's the same too with water we can't do without it indeed there's so much of a percentage that's made up of water we're made up of water and we can't do without water we need it every day of our lives not just for cleansing purposes but for cooking purposes but when water gets out of control it's just as bad as fire isn't it it carries all before it when it gets out of control there is nothing to stay the awful havoc that is caused by water and so here are these two elements fire and water and they represent to us the blessings of life but they also represent to us the catastrophes that can come in life and what the Lord is saying to us is this when you come to the catastrophes when you pass through the waters when you go through the fires he doesn't say

I'll keep you from going through no God doesn't promise that at all but what he does promise is this when you are going through these catastrophes I will be with you and that is the promise that God brings to you today and to me if we are Christians and that's why I say it's such a wonderful thing to be a Christian do you remember Lot rather Noah in the days of the flood when God came to him and said to him Noah I want you to build a vessel nobody paid any attention to Noah but Noah went on building his vessel and then the day came when God said now go into it you and your family and there in the ark it tells us that God closed him in and no matter how the waters descended from the heavens and the wells burst up from the deep

Noah was safe when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and the same too when we think of the children of Israel when they reached the Red Sea here was this great sea that was keeping them back from safety the Egyptians were pursuing them how could they get to safety they had to get through that sea and suddenly God created a strong wind or rather brought a strong wind to blow upon the sea it divided and they went over dry shod when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee and there was the apostle Paul on that ship on the Mediterranean making his way to Rome there came a time when he wondered would he ever reach Rome the storm came upon the sea and at last he was able after prayer to say this to those who were sailing with him fear not for the angel of the Lord stood with me whose I am and whom I serve and he has told me that all will be well when thou passest through the waters [16:39] I will be with thee and literally the same thing could be said too with regard to the to Lot in the day when God sent fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah you remember how God saved Lot and would have saved his wife if she had obeyed and saved the family of Lot and took them out of the fire and the same with these companions of Daniel who were cast into the fiery furnace there was one like the son of man standing in the midst of them and not ahead of their head was singed and now walk us through the fire thou shalt not be burned but you know friend I'm not thinking of this in that literal fashion I am thinking of it in terms of the afflictions and the troubles that we have to go through in life when God comes to us and God says to us when you're passing through them

I'll be with you and I've often quoted and I would quote it again the story of Isabel Kuhn that wonderful missionary woman who after contracting breast cancer was sent home to the United States almost incurable and indeed she was incurable and as she writes her last book Green Leaf and Drought she writes these cancer years have been the happiest years of my life you and I say how possibly could you say that there's nothing happy about cancer when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee that's the guarantee that's the assurance that

God gives when we are going through some catastrophe he is there to be with us in the midst of it when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned some of our reformers had to go through the fire they weren't prevented from going through but those men who were burned at the stake supposing it was Latimer supposing it was Ridley and you know the story when Latimer raised his burning arm to his friend Ridley bear up master Ridley God is with us he won't leave us when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee when thou goest through the fire thou shalt

not be burned

God is with his people in the midst of the flames in the midst of the waters there to protect and there to guard and there to keep and so this is the promise that God makes to us and I leave it with you my friend what are you afraid of what am I afraid of and I know I know what I am afraid of I have my fears and you know what it is it's a fear for you I know how you pray Lord when I come to die make me brave make me strong help me to go through it Lord if there's going to be much pain give me grace that I may bear with it help me give me strength so you say your prayers even now you're saying your prayers about that well let's be sure of this when the moment comes and when we have to go down into that river be it the river of death or whatever river it may be when we come to that awful fire and we have to go through it to get to the other side here is

God's promise I will be with you fear not I have redeemed you I have called you by your name you're mine you're precious to me and if I have saved you through my son I will save you through these waters and through these fires until at last you're with me in glory that's the inestimable privilege of being a Christian happy you if you are a Christian but if you're not a Christian here today why not become one why not lay claim to these promises and make them your own may God enable you to do so let us pray we give thee thanks oh lord for thy word of truth and we pray that these promises that are made to us may they become part of our very existence part of our very lives so that in the midst of all the afflictions of life that we come to may we be supported and sustained in the knowledge that we are not alone in them but that thou art with us as we go through these difficulties and trials in

[22 : 41] Jesus name we ask all amen