
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXXIII : THE CERTAINTY OF REDEMPTION (42:10-43:7)

General outline (from Oswalt's *Isaiah*):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-5)
- II. A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD (6)
- III. BASIS FOR SERVANTHOOD: WHOM SHALL WE TRUST? (7-39)
- IV. THE VOCATION OF SERVANTHOOD (40-55)
 - A. MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD: GRACE (40-48)
 - 1. The Servant's Lord (40)
 - 2. The Servant of the Lord (41-44)
 - a. God's Promises to His Servants (41:1-42:9)
 - b. Redeemed to be God's witnesses (42:10-44:22)
 - (1) The certainty of redemption (42:10-43:7)
 - (a) God's victory (42:10-17)
 - (b) Israel's blindness (42:18-25)
 - (c) Israel's redemption (43:1-7)

THE TRANSITION FROM THE PREVIOUS PORTION TO THIS LESSON —

Commentators are divided as to whether the song in 42:10-13 is a part of the preceding section (41:1-42:9), connected with what follows (42:14-44:22), or even if it stands alone. I am following Oswalt's division and he is convinced v10-13 go along with v14-17. "This section (42:10-44:22) differs from the preceding one which was setting the stage. It established the setting of the dispute with the idols, and the basis for that dispute: the activity of deity in history, particularly whether there was any evidence of activity according to plan and foreknowledge. Specifically, that historical activity included the coming of Cyrus and the return from the exile. That section also introduced the two servants: the disgraced and rejected one (41:8-20), and the one who would do the work of the Messiah (42:1-9). With those parameters established, 42:10-44:22 proceeds to expand on two of those features, especially as they relate to the Lord and his nature. **The first feature is the certainty of redemption (42:10-43:7). Whatever may have been the case, whether seeming divine inactivity (42:14) or the helpless condition of the people (42:22), God has not forgotten, nor is he unable to deliver the children he brought into existence (43:1-7). Israel need not fear; redemption is absolutely certain. The second emphasis is that Israel will be redeemed in order to be the living evidence that the Lord alone is God (43:8-44:22). They are to be God's witnesses (43:10, 12; 44:8) to prove by their lives that the idols are a lie (44:20). Far from being cast away and abandoned, they are God's chosen, who will be wonderfully used in God's plan to reveal himself to the world.**" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

The certainty of redemption: God's victory (42:10-17)

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. Let the desert and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. Let them give glory to the LORD and proclaim his praise in the islands. The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. But those who trust in idols, who say to images, "You are our gods," will be turned back in utter shame. (NIV)

Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands. The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods. (KJV)

Sing to Jehovah a new song, His praise from the end of the earth, Ye who are going down to the sea, and its fulness, Isles, and their inhabitants. The wilderness and its cities do lift up [the voice], The villages Kedar doth inhabit, Sing do the inhabitants of Sela, From the top of mountains they cry. They ascribe to Jehovah honour, And His praise in the isles they declare. Jehovah as a mighty one goeth forth. As a man of war He stirreth up zeal, He crieth, yea, He shrieketh, Against His enemies He showeth Himself mighty. I have kept silent from of old, I keep silent, I refrain myself, As a travailing woman I cry out, I desolate and swallow up together. I make waste mountains and hills, And all their herbs I dry up, And I have made rivers become isles, And ponds I dry up. And I have caused the blind to go, In a way they have not known, In paths they have not known I cause them to tread, I make a dark place before them become light, And unlevelled places become a plain, These [are] the things I have done to them, And I have not forsaken them. Removed backward — utterly ashamed, Are those trusting in a graven image, Those saying to a molten image, 'Ye [are] our gods.' (YLT)

THE WORLD HAS REASON TO SING A 'NEW SONG' (v 10-12) — this is a 'new song' to be sung by the inhabitants of the entire earth. "The sea and the desert (v. 11) probably find special mention because *they are great areas with few people*. Even in such places, however, there are

islands and oasis; and the people who live there are encouraged to join the universal song of praise (v. 12). The Bedouin, represented by Kedar, and the inhabitants of rocky Sela will also be involved in this vocal worship. *Even from the mountaintops, where perhaps only a wandering shepherd is to be found, singing voices are to be heard.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] What might have prompted such an outburst of song? Surely the reason to sing is because of the Servant who will bring God’s justice to earth (42:1-3) and will manifest God’s grace (42:6,7) and glory (42:8). *“It is because God’s Servant will make God’s salvation available to the whole earth that the prophet is caught up in a whirlwind of joy and praise and calls on earth’s inhabitants to join him.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

A NEW SONG FOR A NEW EVENT — At the very least the phrase refers to the promised return from the exile. “Never in recorded history had any people returned from their homeland from an Assyrian or a Babylonian exile. Thus in the world of continuity, since the gods had never done it before, it could not happen. But *God is not part of the world order; he can do something that had never happened before* — it will be a ‘new thing’. But surely more than merely return from exile is in view here. *That return is significant because it heralds a deliverance whose ultimate implications are worldwide (42:4). If it means there is no Creator but the Lord, then it also means there is no Redeemer but the Lord. Therefore, if he has shown himself faithful and gracious to Israel, he will be faithful and gracious to the whole world. That deserves a song of praise such as has never been heard before.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD WILL INTERVENE IN HISTORY (v 13-16) — The silence of God often makes Him appear either incapable or unwilling to intervene in human events. As Isaiah says here, that is not so! *The silence of God is merely the unseen hand of the Lord as He providentially oversees history until the right time and right circumstances for Him to work in what we might call a more obvious manner. But while His hand might be ‘unseen’ it is just as involved as when His hand is ‘seen’. He moves as He pleases without difficulty and nothing in creation hinders His movement (v13). Nor will the weakness of His people hinder His activity (v16).*

ALTHOUGH GOD USES PEOPLE, ULTIMATELY THE GLORY BELONGS TO THE LORD (v 13) — The comparison of the Lord with a warrior is often used in scripture. *While it might be the person of Cyrus who will conquer Babylon and allow the Jewish captives to return, it will really be the mighty arm of God that is accomplishing His purpose.* “The picture of the warrior preparing for battle is a universal one. He stirs up anger, putting himself in the right frame of mind by thinking of the wrongs that the enemy has done to him and those he loves. Then at the moment of attack he lets out a blood-curdling scream, both to fortify himself and to cow the defenders. The famed ‘rebel yell’ of the American Civil War is a more recent example of this phenomenon.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *“Jehovah goes out into the conflict like a hero; and like a ‘man of war,’ i.e., like one who has already fought many battles, and is therefore ready for war, and well versed in warfare, He stirs up jealousy. His jealousy has slumbered as it were for a long time, as if smouldering under the ashes; but now He stirs it up, i.e., makes it burn up into a bright flame.... The overthrow which heathenism here suffers at the hand of Jehovah is, according to our prophet’s view, the final and decisive one.”* [K&D, *Isaiah*]

GOD HIMSELF SPEAKS CONCERNING THE BATTLE FOR HIS PEOPLE (v 14-17) — The text changes from third person (*‘he will...’*) to the first person (*‘I will...’*) to impress upon the readers the importance of the promise. *It is not just a promise that God will fight for His people; rather it is the Lord Himself promising ‘I will fight for you!’*

THE WARRIOR AND THE WOMAN IN LABOR (v 13, 14) — The common transitional thought in these verses is the outcry: first of the warrior screaming at the moment of attack and then the woman in labor crying out at the moment of delivery, at the climatic moment. Scripture is not portraying God as a ‘mother’ but rather *using the illustration to emphasize the outburst at the moment of victory*. ‘*I gasp and pant*’ (NIV) is capable of being understood in a couple ways. Delitzsch (*Keil and Delitzsch’s Commentary on the OT*) understands it in the manner as the NIV translated it, as a woman gasping at the final intense moments of delivery. Delitzsch states it is a mistake to compare the Hebrew in this verse with Ezek 36:3 and he translates this as follows: ‘*I have been silent eternally long, was still, restrained myself; like a travailing woman, I now breathe again, snort and snuff together.*’ Oswalt disagrees and does compare it to Ezek 36:3 and places the emphasis not on the after-effects of the childbirth upon the mother but rather on the judgement of God with the words literally meaning ‘*make desolate and crush*’. Note how other translations agree and therefore translate the words: ‘*As a travailing woman I cry out, I desolate and swallow up together.*’ (YLT) ‘*now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once.*’ (KJV)

THE DELIVERANCE OF THE BLIND (v 16) — as the Lord will do new things as He judges the wicked when setting His people free, so will He do new things in bringing His people unto Himself. “Blind people can be amazingly self-sufficient when they are on familiar territory, but in unfamiliar surroundings — *a way they do not know* — they can do nothing without a guide. So it is with us humans: *unless God acts on our behalf to deliver us from the consequences of our sins, we are utterly helpless*. In this regard, it is important to recall 42:7 which states that the Servant will deliver the blind. Here it is God who performs that function. Thus the Servant performs a function similar to that of God in his deliverance of God’s people, hence the Servant in 42:7 is not the people.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The ‘blind’ are those who have been deprived of sight by their sin, and the consequent punishment. The unknown ways in which Jehovah leads them, are the ways of deliverance, which are known to Him alone, but which have now been made manifest in the fulness of time. The ‘dark space’ is their existing state of hopeless misery; the ‘rugged places’ the hindrances that met them, and dangers that threatened them on all sides in the foreign land. *The mercy of Jehovah adopts the blind, lights up the darkness, and clears every obstacle away.*” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE WHO REFUSE GOD’S GUIDANCE (v 17) — “*The blind will never be able to transcend their blindness; they can only sink deeper into it. Thus everyone who trusts in the gods of this world must eventually be disgraced, when it is shown that what they trusted in is helpless. That will not be the case for those who believe in the true God (Ps 25:2,3). Whatever may be the questions along the way, on the last day those who have dared to commit themselves to him will find their trust vindicated (Rev 7:14-17). Thus the theme of God’s superiority over the gods is continued, but now with a special emphasis on God’s own ability to intervene in the world.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

The certainty of redemption: Israel’s blindness (42:18-25)

<i>Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed</i>	<i>Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is</i>	<i>Ye deaf, hear; and ye blind, look to see. Who [is] blind but My servant? And deaf as My messenger I send? Who [is] blind as he who is at peace,</i>
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to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing. It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, "Send them back." Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law. So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart. (NIV)

perfect, and blind as the LORD's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not. The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable. But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore. Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart. (KJV)

Yea, blind, as the servant of Jehovah? Seeing many things, and thou observest not, Opening ears, and he heareth not. Jehovah hath delight for the sake of His righteousness, He magnifieth law, and maketh honourable. And this [is] a people seized and spoiled, Snared in holes — all of them, And in houses of restraint they were hidden, They have been for a prey, And there is no deliverer, A spoil, and none is saying, 'Restore.' Who among you giveth ear [to] this? Attendeth, and heareth afterwards. Who hath given Jacob for a spoil, And Israel to the spoilers? Is it not Jehovah — He against whom we sinned? Yea, they have not been willing in His ways to walk, Nor have they hearkened to His law. And He poureth on him fury, His anger, and the strength of battle, And it setteth him on fire round about, And he hath not known, And it burneth against him, and he layeth it not to heart! (YLT)

WE CANNOT BLAME THE LORD FOR OUR NEGATIVE CONDITION — after the opening comments of the Lord's intention to deliver His people, Isaiah now addresses Israel's present condition. Perhaps the thought here is in response to the general attitude of the Jews: *'Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?'* (Isa 40:27). There they were complaining of the Lord being deaf and blind to their needs and difficulties. ***"To all of this the prophet responds explosively: it is not God who has been blind and deaf, it is the people! God in his grace gave the Torah, but they would not obey it. Then when punishment for that disobedience came, they refused to learn the lessons that the punishment taught. What all this meant was that salvation, when it came, would not be because a lethargic deity finally awoke to his obligation, but because one who had been gracious in the past would be so again."*** [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE MULTIPLE FACETS OF THE SERVANTS — in 42:7 Isaiah describes the Servant of the Lord as leading the blind and imprisoned into the light. Now Isaiah describes the servant as being blind, deaf and even imprisoned themselves (42:22)! The only reasonable explanation of this is the

one adopted by the conservative bible students: two different Servants of the Lord are being discussed: one is Israel as the Servant who never quite reaches the pinnacle in which the Lord intended, and the other is the Messiah who is everything God intended and therefore delivers the other. ***“The place of the incompetent messenger shall be taken by one both able and willing to supply his deficiencies and correct his faults.”*** [Cheyne; q.v. Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “It is impossible to read the expression, ‘My messenger whom I send,’ without thinking of Isa 42:1ff., where the ‘servant of Jehovah’ is represented as a messenger to the heathen. With this similarity both of name and calling, there must be a connection between the ‘servant’ mentioned here, and the ‘servant’ referred to there. Now ***the ‘servant of Jehovah’ is always Israel.*** But since Israel might be regarded either according to the character of **the overwhelming majority of its members** (the mass), who had forgotten their calling, or according to the character of **those living members who had remained true to their calling**, and constituted the kernel, or as **concentrated in that one Person who is the essence of Israel in the fullest truth and highest potency**, statements of the most opposite kind could be made with respect to this one homonymous subject. In Isa 41:8ff. the “servant of Jehovah” is caressed and comforted, inasmuch as there the true Israel, which deserved and needed consolation, is addressed, without regard to the mass who had forgotten their calling. In Isa 42:1ff. that One person is referred to, who is, as it were, the centre of this inner circle of Israel, and the head upon the body of Israel. And in the passage before us, the idea is carried from this its highest point back again to its lowest basis; and the servant of Jehovah is blamed and reproved for the harsh contrast between its actual conduct and its divine calling, between the reality and the idea.... ***For it is really the mission of Israel to be the medium of salvation and blessing to the nations; and this is fulfilled by the servant of Jehovah, who proceeds from Israel, and takes his place at the head of Israel. And as the history of the fulfilment shows, when the foundation for the accomplishment of this mission had been laid by the servant of Jehovah in person, it was carried on by the servant of Jehovah in a national sense; for the Lord became ‘a covenant of the people’ through His own preaching and that of His apostles.***” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

ISAIAH AND ISRAEL (v 18-20) — it is impossible to read this without considering chapter 6 in which Isaiah received his call. ***“[C]hapter 6 suggests that the role of bearer of the message of God was committed not only to the man of unclean lips but also to the people of unclean lips.... 6:8 asked, ‘Whom shall I send?’ while 42:19 laments that ‘my messenger whom I shall send’ is yet deaf. As Isaiah was the messenger of God to Israel, so Israel was called to be the messenger of God to the world. But the still unanswered question was: What kind of coal from the altar would it take to bring the nation to its senses and cleanse its lips for service.”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The first double question implies that Jehovah’s servant and messenger is blind and deaf in a singular and unparalleled way.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

WHAT THE SERVANT HAD SEEN YET NOT SEEN (v 21-25) — Israel had failed to understand their own history. ***“They have failed to recognize what God was about in calling them, and they have failed to learn the lessons that their experiences with God should have taught them.*** It is relatively easy for us, living in the modern age and imbued with a concept of history and its lessons, to grasp this idea. But in Isaiah’s time this idea was revolutionary. Nowhere else in the ancient world of that day do we find the idea that human experience from the past could be classified and evaluated in such a way that it could be learned from, and that future behavior could or should be modified on that basis.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] It was a common belief that we all lived as a result of repetitious cycles and therefore were trapped within those cycles of cosmic control. Yet the Bible describes God as transcendent above the cosmos and therefore people could transcend the cycles of history by obedience to His word. ***“Today the Western concept of history***

is in desperate trouble because we no longer believe in one, transcendent, personal, righteous, purposeful God. yet we still talk about human accountability and responsibility, as if those concepts could long survive the loss of the entire ground on which they rest.” [Oswalt, Isaiah] Today, as it has been throughout history, people want the blessings of God without the Person of God!

THE GLORY OF THE WORD OF GOD (v 21, 22) — one of the purposes of God in this world was to glorify His word through the people of Israel. *Here again we see the loving heart of God for a fallen people. The answers to life is contained within His word and the only path to happiness is to follow His guidelines for life. He has not hidden the way to life; rather we have willfully chosen to ignore and choose other paths which ultimately lead to sorrow and destruction (v22).* “Whether Israel, as God’s now useless servant, hears that word or not, God has determined to magnify it. Here the objective greatness of the word of God is presented to us. In contrast Israel in Babylon is anything but great and glorious. Her lot is a sorry one. Not only have the people been plundered, but they are themselves plunder for their enemies.” [Grogan, Isaiah]

THE PLEA TO HEAR (v 23) — *“The question in v. 23 has not the force of a negative sentence, ‘No one does this,’ but of a wish, ‘O that one would’. If they had but an inward ear for the contradiction which the state of Israel presented to its true calling, and the earlier manifestations of divine mercy, and would but give up their previous deafness for the time to come: this must lead to the knowledge and confession expressed in v. 24.” [K&D, Isaiah]*

A FAILURE TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY (v 24, 25) — Isaiah attempts to get his hearers to face the facts regarding the disasters which have befallen them. “Any number of wrong answers had undoubtedly been proposed in Isaiah’s own day and would be proposed in the years to come: God was not strong enough to defend his beloved against predators; God did not care about them; the worlds of religion and of political events are separate from each other; God is capricious and unjust; and so on. Isaiah rejects all of these with an answer that may trouble some as simplistic, but all the alternatives to it are badly flawed. *He says that the calamities were permitted by God in direct response to Israel’s disobedience of its covenant obligations. They were not the result of chance or divine weakness or apathy. Neither were they the result of injustice on God’s part.*” [Oswalt, Isaiah] **This speaks to today’s world view prevalent among so many: ‘I am not responsible for my actions!’** Whenever anything bad happens it is somehow not correlated to the lifestyle in disobedience to God. One family member called my wife years ago and lamented ‘*Why does everything always go wrong for me?*’, to which my wife answered as kindly and tactfully as possible ‘*Well, have you ever considered how you are living?*’ It was the last time that person called my wife for advice! Rather than assume responsibility for their actions, this person would rather blame others (especially parents), ‘bad luck’ and ‘circumstances’ and therefore to this day is still imprisoned by their own choices.

The certainty of redemption: Israel’s redemption (43:1-7)

<i>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</i>	<i>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</i>	<i>And now, thus said Jehovah, Thy Creator, O Jacob, and thy Fashioner, O Israel, Be not afraid, for I have redeemed thee, I have called on thy name — thou [art] Mine. When thou passest into waters, I [am] with thee, And into floods, they do</i>
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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 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 created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (NIV)

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. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. (KJV)

not overflow thee, When thou goest into fire, thou art not burnt, And a flame doth not burn against thee. For I — Jehovah thy God, The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour, I have appointed Egypt thine atonement, Cush and Seba in thy stead. Since thou wast precious in Mine eyes, Thou wast honoured, and I have loved thee, And I appoint men in thy stead, And peoples instead of thy life. Be not afraid, for I [am] with thee, From the east I bring in thy seed, And from the west I gather thee. I am saying to the north, 'Give up,' And to the south, 'Restrain not.' Bring in My sons from afar, And My daughters from the end of the earth. Every one who is called by My name, Even for My honour I have created him, I have formed him, yea, I have made him. (YLT)

GRACE — That this section follows the preceding closely is indicated by Isaiah beginning with ‘but now...’. *“The tone of the address is now suddenly changed. The sudden leap from reproach to consolation was very significant. It gave them to understand, that no meritorious work of their own would come in between what Israel was and what it was to be, but that it was God’s free grace which came to meet it.”* [K&D, *Isaiah*] “The previous segment detailed in uncompromising terms Israel’s inability to recognize and respond to what God had done in her experience. As a result the nation had come under the severest judgment from God. But now, God says, a new day is at hand. God will act on behalf of his chosen people out of the purest grace. Although the fire had once burned them (42:25), it will not do so again (43:2). *This will not be because of anything they have done. It is not said that they have become more perceptive or more obedient; nor is God’s salvation made conditional on their repentance. Isaiah simply announces that God’s people need not fear that his acts of punishment signal a negation of their election or a suspension of God’s loving care. This understanding places 42:18-25 in proper perspective within the larger section (42:10-44:22). The overall theme of the section is the gracious salvation of God, and the opening segment (42:10-17) dealt with a challenge to God’s ability and desire to save. Having shown that the problem is not on God’s side, the prophet is now ready to return to the main theme: God’s activity on his people’s behalf.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

CONSIDER WHOSE YOU ARE (v 1) — *regardless of who they are and their failures in light of their responsibilities, the Lord says they are to now forget that and concentrate on one fact: whose they are!* “The oracular form ‘thus says the Lord’ underlines the firmness of this call. It is a call not to be afraid: ‘Do not fear.’ This expression points out what would be the deepest pain of the exile, the fear that Israel’s sense of identity, the glory of having been a particular people called out by the eternal God, was after all just a fantasy. ***Much can be endured if we have a sense of destiny borne out of particular identity. Strip that away from us and we think going on in life hardly worth it.*** The repeated ‘do not fear’ particularly addresses this issue: the fear that God has forsaken them, or worse, never was theirs in the first place.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS (v 2) — “The Lord will not now desert his people. They may have given up on him (42:18-25), but not he on them!” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] ***“This verse expresses the consequences of belonging to God: preservation in the midst of trials because of God’s presence. Calvin’s observation is particularly apt for the present age: ‘The Lord has not redeemed you so that you might enjoy pleasures and luxuries ... but so that you should be prepared for enduring all kinds of evils.’ God does not say that there are no floods or forest fires, but he does promise that one can survive them because of his presence.... (Note the repetition of the phrase ‘God was with him’ in the Joseph story.)”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

OUR SURETY: THE CHARACTER OF GOD (v 3, 4) — as support that He will always be with Israel, the Lord gives His own names to Israel as indicators of His character. “As much as Israel is the Lord’s, just so much is the Lord Israel’s. This reciprocity is what the covenant was all about: ***as Israel had committed itself to God, God was, incredibly, giving himself to Israel.***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The safety they enjoy under and within such life-threatening experiences is explained (*For*) in five ways.

- ***by the Lord’s name, LORD, Yahweh, the everlasting statement of his character (Ex 3:15).*** Yahweh is the God defined in the exodus revelation as the One who delivers and redeems his people (Ex 6:6,7) and overthrows his foes (Ex 12:12). Unless he changes his name (alters his character), he is committed to his Israel.
- ***by the relationship between himself and his people:*** not-withstanding all their failings (42:18-25), he still calls himself *your God*.
- ***by his holiness:*** the great Isaianic title, the Holy One of Israel (1:4), holds together the reality of his holiness and the reality of his relationship with Israel. If his holiness and their sinfulness did not militate against forming the relationship, then it cannot militate against its continuance.
- ***by his saving ability:*** while the verb *yāša‘* expresses salvation from sin (64:5), it majors on deliverance from afflictions (1 Sam 9:16; 2 Sam 22:4), suitably to this context.
- ***by the evidence of the past:*** ... the titles of the Lord in verse 3b flow naturally into a reference back to the exodus: because he is Yahweh, Israel’s God and Holy One, their Savior, he actually did give Egypt as their ransom. Faced with Egyptian intransigent refusal to let the people go, the Lord, so to speak, weighed up whether he was prepared to shatter Egypt in order to free Israel. There was ‘no contest’, and it was ‘at the expense of’ Egypt that Israel was freed.” [Motyer, *Isaiah*]

HE LOVES US, WARTS AND ALL! (v 4) — it is said there was a king who was having his portrait painted but the royal painter did not want to offend and therefore touched up the painting

as he went. After posing, the king went around to see the how the painting was progressing and was disappointed. He then told the artist to paint him just as he was, ‘warts and all!’ ***“The language is that which a bridegroom might use of his bride. Just as a groom finds his bride precious and worthy and lovable when others fail to see those qualities in her at all, God sees these things in us and is willing to pay any price to redeem his bride from her captors. But God’s grace is that he loves us without the self-delusion of some human grooms (and brides). He knows what his people really are (42:18-25) but that does not make them less precious to him. That is grace.”*** [Oswalt, Isaiah]

“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.”

— Isaiah 43:2 NIV