

The great 20th century preacher Martin Lloyd Jones was often given to hyperbole. However, I think I agree with him when he says one of the most important words in the Bible is “but.” There are few more important moments in Scripture than when we have one to fully understand ourselves and our sin and our situation before God, only to hear the Scriptures say, “but, here is what God promises. Here is what He will do.”

Last week’s passage ended on a very hard note, which would have been painful for Isaiah’s first hearers to receive. Isaiah looked forward to the coming of the righteous servant who would bring about God’s kingdom and justice. But even as he pointed at Jesus, the term servant also pointed at Israel, God’s failed servant, which would one day need Jesus to come as a substitute servant in her place. Israel was meant to serve God by giving an account of his salvation and law. But look at 42:18.

READ Isaiah 42:18–20

Israel was blind to God’s salvation. They were deaf to his law. And Isaiah says this failure directly led to their exile in Babylon.

READ Isaiah 42:24–25

The exile in Babylon is a sobering judgement and reminder to God’s people - their confidence in themselves was terribly misplaced. They had grown arrogant and self-satisfied, like Hezekiah showing the Babylonians all his treasure. So the exile reminded them that apart from God, they were only enslaved sinners, exiled in Babylon just as they once were in Egypt. This passage lays low our pride as well. It shows us what our arrogance deserves, and the disaster that our confidence in ourselves will inevitably lead us to.

So how should we feel, how might Isaiah’s first hearers have felt to then hear him say: **But now, thus says the Lord.** That is how our passage begins this morning. Once we have seen the utter end of our own strength and ability, God has something to say.

Isaiah 43:1–7

Our first point this morning is this: **Having reminded His people of who they are on their own strength, God reminds them of who He is and who they are in Him.** If the exile was meant to be a rude-wake-up call to show Israel who they were apart from God, then the promised return from exile would be a reminder of who God was and who they were *in Him*.

God begins by telling Israel he formed and created them. And here he’s not primarily referring to his physical creation of all the world, but how he created them as a people. He called Abraham, named Jacob Israel, formed slaves in Egypt into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This creation happened through redemption.

And so God reminds them he has redeemed them. That He is their saviour. Not just from Egypt, but from the sinful fallen state of all humanity. He says He is their God. Calvin tells us this is a reminder not so much that he is the God they chose, but that He chose to be their God. He made them his own. He says: **I have called you by name, you are mine.**

This is God's word to his people in exile. They have his name. This is covenantal language. God has bound himself to them. The God who created all the universe, who governs the seasons and days and months and years, who made all the plants and animals to operate in their complexity, and who hold everything together, has given his own name to his people like a husband to his bride, and he says of this people who have sinned so much against Him. You are mine.

God is not grumpy that he is bound to such an unworthy, sinful people. He says **You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.** This isn't just a contractual relationship. God loves His people dearly. They are His most precious possession. And this love is meant to be their comfort and confidence that he will not abandon them. God says:

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.**

Notice that God does not promise his people that his love means they will never face storms of flames. God's love is deeper and richer than that. For God to create a people who faced no trials would be for him to create a people who rejected him. A child who faces no discipline and teaching will absolutely believe that they deserve to be free from pain because of their own merits. Israel showed this themselves before the exile, our own affluent self-involved culture shows it every day. A people without discipline would be a people who ruined themselves and refused to bring glory to God.

And so God says trials will come. We also see that these trials are varied. Yes he is speaking to a people in exile, but God is not just speaking of one trial, nor one promise of deliverance. Waters, rivers, fires and flames. Many trials of multiple kinds will face this people. But God who calls himself the saviour of his people will save them from every trial, and even work those trials for their discipline and instruction. He will even work every opposition His people faces to their salvation. God says

**I give Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
I give men in return for you,
peoples in exchange for your life.**

We know how God subjected Egypt to plagues and drowning and death to deliver His people. Isaiah lists them with other nations to show that there is no opponent or obstacle that God will count too high a cost to save His people. God love His people so that He will work all of history to redeem and keep them. This idea here of ransom, giving men in return for them, peoples in exchange for them,

points to God's willingness to provide a substitute for his people, to give whatever is necessary in their place to save them even from the obstacles they have brought on themselves, even from their sins. Isaiah is pointing towards the ultimate cost that God will be willing to pay for His people, even the messiah himself.

With these promises from God in hand, God twice repeats a command to His people. Fear not for I have redeemed you. Fear not, for I am with you. God says the reason they need not fear is because they can rest confident in the salvation He will surely provide for them.

**Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you.
I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth,
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.**

This is amazing language. In the Old Testament, it is rare to hear God speak of his fatherhood of individual members of His people. Calling them his offspring, his sons and daughters shows a level of personal love and commitment to them that would have sounded wonderfully shocking. We will see this relationship fully revealed in the New Testament, as Jesus shows that the reason that all exiles and enemies of God can come to Him as sons and daughters, is because the only begotten Son took the place of an enemy on the cross for us. This is the beautiful, high cost of receiving the amazing gift of being adopted by God, called his sons and daughters, and told to rest secure in the arms of our father without fear, so that Paul can say in **Romans 8:15**

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Our next point is this: **God promises his people that though their exile shows what they themselves can accomplish, He will surely save them to vindicate his own name and character.** God lays out a courtroom scene, and willingly puts himself on trial before all the world. He puts to the test his own existence and good character vs the idols of the nations. He tells them to bring forward their witnesses. But as Isaiah serves as court reporter, he makes a shocking revelation: God has brought out blind and deaf witnesses!

LET'S READ 43:8-10a.

Isaiah is maintaining this image of Israel as blind and deaf servants. He says they are blind yet have eyes, deaf yet have ears. God gave them every faculty necessary to be good witnesses to His glory and His love. This trial should have been easy to win. The other witnesses are all defending sticks and stones and bits

of gum they found on the sidewalk. God's people should be able to tell them all about the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan. God's perfect law. His creation. But t God's people totally fail in their role as witnesses. They have forgotten God's salvation, blind. They haven't learned his law, deaf.

So God provides his own defence.

Let's READ 10b-13.

God testifies that he was there before anything was made, before any foreign gods had been dreamed up. He existed in eternity past and will exist for eternity. And the chief evidence God puts forward of who He is is his sure word and his salvation. **"I declared and saved and proclaimed."** God desires that the evidence for who he is will be found in making and keeping promises to save his people.

God knows that the whole reason many people are seeking to know whether there is a god at all is because they want to be saved. It's not just that they want to know what's true, they want to know if the truth offers them hope. They want to know if there is a God who has provided an answer to despair and pain and death. So for God to prove that He is the one true God is for Him to show that He has revealed the answer to pain and sin and death, that He is the God who saves His people.

What this means for God's people is that God has bound up His glory, the proof of His character and even His existence, to their salvation. He is willing to let His reputation stand or fall on the promises he makes to them and the salvation He provides for them. If God says the exile shows His people their own sin, He promises that the return from exile will be the way that he vindicates His own name, as the one who has declared His covenant love and fidelity to them.

And the sin that made them fail as his witnesses will instead make them into evidence. As it is painfully clear this people cannot save themselves, God will demonstrate his grace and love by saving such unworthy people. But again he calls them to be witnesses. Don't close your eyes and ears anymore, as God is making these sweet wonderful promises to you. Trust them, bear witness to them.

God goes on to make these new promises to them.

Let's read verses 14-21.

God reiterates those beautiful assurances that he is their redeemer and they are his chosen people. And then he offers them clear, certain promises of salvation. The glory of Babylon will be brought down. God's people will be delivered. God brings back the images of fire and water as allusions to the exodus, to assure his people that he will do again what he did before. Make a way out of exile just as he made a way through the red sea, extinguish the fire of the armies of Babylon just as he drowned the fires of the armies of Egypt.

God concludes this in verse 21 by reminding his people that the whole reason he has created them and saves them time and again - so that they might be the people who declare His praise. This is why God has bound up his glory to the

salvation of his people. They were made and saved to be witnesses and proclaimers of his glory which he has manifested in his salvation. So they can tell the world of his love and redemption, all these sweet promises he has made to them and kept for them. This is our third point. **God makes promises for which his people can bear witness and praise him with total comfort and confidence both before and after they are fulfilled.** So God wants his people to offer him the same witness and praise that they would offer after his salvation, even before it is accomplished. This is because He knows He has given His people every reason to be assured of his promised salvation. His people have all the evidence they need of the promises he has kept in the past, the salvation He has provided.

God also deserves their worship because he promises them a greater salvation than they could have expected, asked for or imagined. He promises He is doing a “new” thing that will be so marvellous that it will make the former things - even the Exodus - pale in comparison. He promises a new exodus, a new way through the wilderness, for which even the beasts who witness with praise Him. The return from Babylon is just a part of something even greater He is promising.

We see this even more clearly back in verses 5-7.

**I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you.**

**I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth,
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”**

God says he will bring back his offspring from the east, which makes sense, because Babylon was east of Judah. But also from the west, the north, the south. He will even bring in sons and daughters from the ends of the earth. Look how this picture is growing. Now he is speaking of everyone called by His name, everyone created for his glory who he formed and made. In time all his people from all the world will be gathered and

Just as God called himself the creator and former of Israel, his promise to Israel is that he will form and create for her descendants from all corners of the earth, until she has become a thriving global people outlasting all the nations from which God has gathered her.

Isaiah was looking forward to the day when offspring for Israel would be raised up from all the nations called by God’s name. Just as Israel was meant to see itself as a people saved entirely by grace, God would magnify that truth by grafting into her number peoples whom he had saved from all those enemy nations that had once opposed her. This is one of the ways he would ransom those nations for his people, by plundering people out from all of those nations and numbering them among His own people just as He did with the Egyptians who had left Egypt with the Exodus of Israelites so long ago. See how this magnifies what God has

always been showing His people, that they are a people formed and created not because of anything in themselves, but entirely by His gracious salvation. And so God magnifies his purpose of saving his people so that they would be witnesses and proclaimers of his grace. God would raise up sons and daughters for Israel from all over the world so that they would come together as we are doing right now and say - the only reason we are here, the only reason we are among God's people is that He is a gracious God who makes good promises of a great salvation.

Throughout the new testament, God reminds us that this is our identity, just as he did through the prophets like Isaiah. We are not God's people because we have earned his love. We are His people because He is loving. He loves and saves us even despite ourselves. And so we are not saved to glorify ourselves, but to magnify Him.

Paul reminds the Corinthians to never forget their identity as a people saved by grace. That they were saved out of the world and added into Israel. When they forget, Paul says they are ironically acting like those Israelites in the Old Testament whom He now calls their forefathers.

1 Corinthians 10

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that God's people must never forget their identity as a saved people. Just as Israel was meant to look to God's provision in the Exodus, like water from the rock and remember that all they had was from him, so do we look to Christ and remember we are not who we are because of anything other than the grace of Jesus.

We see the same thing in the passage brother Roger read for us. Paul warns the Corinthians against how they have been trying to unite themselves with unbelievers, in business, in life, in culture, trying to become like the world around them. And Paul reminds them that God has saved them out of the world. Paul shows them this by compiling a number of promises from the Old Testament made to Israel, which he now tells the Corinthians are theirs also.

2 Corinthians 6:16-18

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

**“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.**

**Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,**

and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.”

This poem surveys a number of prophecies, but builds up to what we read from Isaiah this morning. Paul is telling the Corinthians, you are the sons and daughters of God that Isaiah promised God would raise up for Israel. Not just returned exiles from Babylon, but children drawn out of all the nations of the world, unto the ends of the earth. So Paul says in **2 Corinthians 7:1** **Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.**

Beloved, we have these promises. The people of Israel in Isaiah’s day, who knew their own sin had led them to exile, were shocked to hear that they were the beloved of God, his sons and daughters, that He had chosen them. How much more should we be astounded to hear that we have been invited into that people, we who were all the more distant from God?

Just like Isaiah’s original audience, we should be dumbfounded to know God’s promises have been offered to us. That we who deserve to die away from God as His enemies have been called His beloved sons and daughters. Paul tells us if we really do hold onto these promises, we should persevere in them. This is very similar to Isaiah’s word to the people of God hundreds of years before. Be confident in God’s salvation. Glory in it. Act in it. Praise Him for it. And do not give in to fear or compromise. If these promises are sure, then walk in them in confidence, rejecting sin, rejecting compromise, depending entirely on God with complete trust.

You might feel like God’s people were feeling during the exile. Are you in a season of trials where you are seeing all your effort and ability fail? Do you feel, in Isaiah’s language, like you’ve gone from the water to the fire, from one trial to another, without any reprieve? Or do you feel the weight of your sin and fear God’s justice?

What does God say to you. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. Fear not, you are mine. You are my son, my daughter, and I have redeemed you to give you my name.

I want to close by offering us a number of the comforts that God gives us in our distress. In Jesus, those comforts Isaiah has offered become even more clear and magnified. Jesus has secured them for us. If you do not know Him, then I would tell you that this fear and anxiety you want relief from is only a foretaste of the distress you will feel apart from God’s love and care forever. But trust in Jesus is offered to you right now, to know His peace, not just a feeling of peace, but a peace that rests in an absolutely secure peaceful relationship with God. Come to Him and these comforts can be yours as well.

So what is **God’s comfort in our distress:**

First, God loves us with a deeper love than we can ever know. When we were God's enemies, living so far from him, arrogant in our sin and with no hope of salvation, God made a way where a way seemed impossible. He sent His only son to die in our place so that we might be made His sons and daughters. And so God assures us, He has created us, not just as people, but as His people. He has already shown us greater love than we could know or understand. And even the hardest trials you experience are not meant to show you he has stopped loving you, but to show he is committed to loving you. His promise was never that you wouldn't experience trials, and believe it or not, even that is rooted in His loving character. But His promise is that there is no trial, no flood or fire, through which He will not be with you, with His promises, His hope and His love. He will not let any circumstance, even our own sin, take us from him. When you are feeling the weight of your sin, or the cruelty of the fallen world, any trial or pain, hear the Lord say to you **You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.** You belong to God.

God has bound himself to us and bound his own glory to our salvation. When you are afraid that your burden is too heavy, your situation too bleak, God's promises are unshakeable. Why? Because when He made you His own, He bound up His glory to you. When He called you by His name, He committed to you, and stakes his reputation on keeping all the promises He made to you. He was willing to pay the greatest price, His only begotten Son, to redeem you. And what will He now fail to do since He has already given Jesus to you? He stakes His glory on the promise that He will deliver you from every evil deed and bring you safely into His heavenly kingdom. There is no greater assurance than that.

God has demonstrated time and again he is able to do everything He promises.

God wants you to look back on everything He has accomplished. Every promise He has made and kept. The Exodus, the deliverance from Babylon, all pointing towards the death and resurrection of Jesus which He has already accomplished. Our saviour has actually already risen from the dead. We have already been justified by faith in Him. How can we look forward with fear of the future when we can already testify to what he has done, in history, and even in our own lives? Open your eyes to all God has done, and let assurance and thankfulness and praise for the promises He has already kept given you confidence for all He promises He will do.

God has made you to bear witness and worship Him for His salvation. God desires us to rest in Him, be comforted by Him, trust in Him, because this is how we will bear witness to His salvation, and worship Him for it. When we forget what God has done, what He has promised, and give in to fear, we are acting like blind and deaf witnesses. We are closing our eyes and ears to the testimony of all creation, all history, all his word, that He is our redeemer and He will surely bring our salvation to completion. Do not let the trials of this world upset your confidence and rest and worship of God for all He has done for you. The day is coming - just think about this - when all those trials will end, when we will sit around the banquet table with the heroes of the faith, with Abraham and David and Moses and Augustine and Calvin and Spurgeon and the loved ones who went to glory before

us. And we will talk together about all these promises God made, and what it was like on the day when He accomplished them. What it was like when Jesus returned, when He brought all His people to himself. When He made everything new. When sin and sadness was wiped out forever. Think about how confident and restful your praise will be on that day. Has God not proven Himself so trustworthy that we can offer Him praise with the same rest and confidence even as we wait for the final consummation of His promises? Has he not proven that his plan is so perfect, his promises so sure, his character is so trustworthy, his salvation already accomplished in Christ. He deserves that same glory and confidence from us even now. You can take rest from that. You were not made for fear, for blind confused stumbling. You were made for confidence and rest and praise in God's salvation. Enjoy that even now as you will for all eternity.

Therefore, **Trusting in God's certain promises is His answer to our fear and anxiety.** Why do you not need to live in fear and despair and anxiety? Fear not, because God is with you. Fear not for He says I have redeemed you. He has saved us. Jesus has saved you. He will complete your salvation through the worst trials and storms, because He loves you and you are precious to Him. That is His good medicine for your fear. Let this be the fountain of joy and hope and rest.

As we take Lord's supper together, we are bearing witness, to God, to the world, to each-other, even to our own hearts. We are remembering, opening our eyes, to the salvation God accomplished for us in Christ. Jesus body was broken His blood was poured out for us. It has happened. He rose, defeating the curse for us. It really happened. Our salvation is secure. And we know that our future salvation is secure. So we are proclaiming that coming salvation as well, when all that He has accomplished is brought to completion. This is our witness that we have no reason to fear. This isn't just witnessing its worship. Because to trust and rest in God's salvation is to give Him the glory He deserves. We come now with confident rest and trust in Him as a foretaste of the joy and rest of the banqueting table we will one day sit at together in the new heavens and new earth. Let's enjoy a foretaste of that glory together.