

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – June 2, 2020

The Lord be with you.

Isn't it fascinating how a God made the human eye so that when we enter darkness the eye dilates the eye gets bigger to let in more light?

Now, as I look at scripture, I see something similar happening that when God's people enter a dark time, the eyes of the heart, dilate, they get bigger to let in more like much of the Bible was written by someone going through a dark time, to someone going through a dark time, such as the passage that I feel compelled to turn to the day. I mean with everything that's going on in our country I really need this passage, Isaiah chapter 43, as this comes at a section of the prophecy of Isaiah, that begins comfort ye, comfort ye my people says Your God. God wants to comfort his people who aren't so sure they are God's people any longer, not so sure that God would still claim them.

This is a dark time for the people of God when the eyes of their hearts can get bigger. It's a very dark time, as God's people are captives in exile in the Babylonian captivity and they're thinking that God has probably forgotten them that God doesn't care. I mean, they had rebelled against God, they had gone into idolatry, and they're thinking the god must have washed his hands of them and then under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah writes to comfort God's people.

But now, the text begins. But now, it's as if God is saying, Forget everything I've ever feared but now says the Lord, He who created you, O, Jacob, He who formed you O, Israel do not fear for I have redeemed you I have called you by name, you are mine. 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. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

As I ponder this passage today, the words that jump out to me are God's words, Do not fear. Now, from a human vantage point we might say that these people have every reason to be fearful. They had turned from God, they had landed in Pagan Babylon, they don't have a prayer. That must be what it feels like to them, and God comforts them do not fear.

Read the gospels and see how often Jesus says, Do not fear and see how every time Jesus says, "Do not fear Jesus gives the reason for not being afraid. And here in Isaiah 43. What is the reason for God's people not to fear? Here it is the Lord who created you, the Lord who formed you, he is the one who says, Do not fear for I have redeemed you I have called you by name.

I remember using a reading Dale Carnegie, who made the interesting observation about a person's name is to that person, the sweetest, and most important sound in any language. God calls you by name, that's how precious you are to Him, God calls you by name: You are mine, God says. Notice here that because of what God has already done for you, and me. Past tense. He has created us, he has formed his He has redeemed us, He has called us by name, he has claimed us as a own. Based on what God has already done for his people, God makes a promise for the future. 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.

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Why? Because God goes with you and as God's people prepared to journey across a desert back to their homeland, as they look at the daunting task of rebuilding a homeland that is in waste God does not say that their journey will be easy God does not say that their journey will be without danger.

What God does say is that he pledges I will be with you. As you and I make our journeys, God does not promise exemption from trouble, God does promise protection. God promises that He will be with you in trouble, that He will see you through to the other side, and then after this wonderful promise for the future, it's like, God, now puts his hand on the Bible and he swears for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel your Savior.

God did not create you for you redeem you and call you by name to lose you. And that's why you call him Savior.

I was about 19 years old, with all the fears and foreboding about the future that a young man could have. And I was in church on Sunday night and it was like, God call my name in the words of a song that went like this, When through fiery trials, a pathway shall lie, my grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply the flame shall not hurt thee, I only design, thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine. The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose I will not, I will not desert to its foes that so the all hell should endeavor to shake. I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.

I probably haven't told you anything today that you didn't already know, but at this difficult time, it's good to be reminded.

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

I am Tim Smith. A fellow traveler on the pilgrim way.

Thanks for listening, until next time.

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