

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 18: Israel Redeemed; the Folly of Idols -- Isaiah 43:1-44:28

Picture a man kneeling on the dirt floor of his shop at the end of a long day. He is tired and cold, so he reaches for a length of cedar and lays half of it on the fire. The flames catch, the room warms, and soon the smell of baking bread fills the little house. He stretches his hands toward the blaze and sighs, "Ah, I am warm, I have seen the fire." Then he takes the other half of that same log, the part he did not burn, and he carves it, and shapes it, and props it up in the corner. And then, on his knees again, he says to it, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" It is one of the most devastating word-pictures in all of Scripture (Isaiah 44:16-17), and Isaiah holds it up so we will see ourselves in it.

But before God exposes the absurdity of idols, He says something tender that we need to hear first. "But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (43:1). Notice the order. God does not begin with the idols. He begins with grace. He reminds a fearful, exiled, failing people that they belong to Him, that He knows their name, that He has paid to bring them home. Only a heart that has heard "you are mine" can rightly see how foolish it is to bow before a block of wood.

These two chapters move back and forth between two great themes, and they belong together. On one side: God alone redeems, God alone forgives, God alone saves. "I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior" (43:11). "I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (43:25). On the other side: the gods people make with their own hands are nothing, blind, deaf, unable to save even themselves. The contrast is not subtle, and it is not meant to be. Isaiah wants us to feel the gap between the living God and our dead substitutes for Him.

We may smile at the carpenter and his half-burned log, but the question lands on us too. What do we run to for warmth and rescue that we ourselves have built and propped up in the corner of our lives? Money, image, comfort, ideology, the approval of others, our own competence? This lesson invites us to do two things at once: to rest in the God who calls us by name and blots out our sins, and to take an honest inventory of the idols we keep bowing to. The God who said "you are mine" still says, "return to me, for I have redeemed you" (44:22).

Group Discussion: As a class, read aloud Isaiah 44:14-17, the description of the man who burns half a log to warm himself and bake bread, then bows down to the other half and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" What makes this picture so absurd, and why do you think Isaiah goes into so much detail? Where do you see this same blindness, where "no one considers" (44:19), at work in our own culture and in the church?

Personal Reflection: Isaiah 43:1 says God has "called you by name" and that "you are mine." Sit quietly with those words for a moment. Is there a fear you are carrying right now (about your

health, your family, your past sins, your future) that you have never actually surrendered to the God who says He is with you when you “pass through the waters” (43:2)? What would it look like to hand Him that specific fear this week?

Read Isaiah 43:1–44:28

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 43:1–2, God tells Jacob, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine,” and promises that when they “pass through the waters” and “through fire” He will be with them. On what basis does God tell His people not to fear, and what does this teach us about why a believer can have peace even in the hardest trials?
2. God says, “I have called you by name, you are mine” (43:1) and, “you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you” (43:4). When you are afraid or feel worthless, how easily do you actually believe that God knows your name and counts you as His? What in your life makes that hard to believe, and what would change if you took it as true?
3. Three times in these chapters God insists He stands alone as God: “Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (43:10), “I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior” (43:11), and “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god” (44:6). Why does God press this point of His uniqueness so hard, and what does it mean for how we are to worship and live?
4. In 43:18–19 God says, “Remember not the former things... Behold, I am doing a new thing.” Are you living chained to “the former things,” old failures, old sins, old griefs, in a way that keeps you from seeing the “new thing” God wants to do in you? What is one former thing you need to stop rehearsing?

5. Despite all God had done, He says, “you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities” (43:24), and then immediately, “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (43:25). What does it mean that God blots out sins “for my own sake,” and how does this shape our understanding of grace and forgiveness?
6. God promises, “I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants” (44:3). The apostle Peter says this kind of promise is fulfilled in the gospel age (Acts 2:16–18). Where in your own life have you treated the blessings of being God’s child as something to take for granted rather than to pour back out in service and witness?
7. In 44:9–20 Isaiah exposes the idol-maker who uses the same tree to cook his dinner and to carve his god, and says of the worshiper, “No one considers... half of it I burned in the fire” (44:19). What is the heart of Isaiah’s argument against idolatry here, and what does it reveal about the deceived condition of a heart that trusts in anything other than God?
8. Isaiah says of the idolater, “a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’” (44:20). What are the modern “idols” you are most tempted to trust for security, identity, or rescue (money, success, image, comfort, a relationship, an ideology)? How do you tell the difference between a good gift and an idol?
9. Pulling the whole passage together, God declares Himself the only Savior and Redeemer who blots out sin: “besides me there is no savior” (43:11), “I... blot out your transgressions... and I will not remember your sins” (43:25), and “I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you” (44:22). How is this

promise of forgiveness ultimately and fully accomplished in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; Colossians 2:13–14), and what does the cross add to what Isaiah could only foreshadow?

10. God ends the section naming Cyrus, a king not yet born, as His “shepherd” who will say of Jerusalem, “She shall be built,” and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid” (44:28), proving He alone declares “the end from the beginning” (46:10). Resting in that kind of sovereign, redeeming God, what is one specific idol you will tear down this week, or one specific fear you will surrender, so that Jesus can keep forming you into His image?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Acts 2:16–21, Peter quotes Joel that God pouring out His Spirit on all flesh is fulfilled beginning at Pentecost in the gospel age; Acts 4:12, there is salvation in no one but Jesus, no other name under heaven by which we must be saved; Colossians 2:13–14, God made us alive with Christ, having forgiven all our trespasses and canceled the record of debt that stood against us, nailing it to the cross; Psalm 115:1–8, idols have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see, and those who make them become like them; 1 John 5:21, little children, keep yourselves from idols

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