

Isaiah 43:22-44:8

Redemption is the motivation for a life of repentance.

This week once again the realization hit me that parenting, and arguably pastoring, is all about convincing your kids to experience some hardship to get better, to gain. As Ewen recovered from surgery to remove his tonsils and adenoids, the essential element to healing was hydration. And to be hydrated you have to swallow.

Turns out, when a doctor slices up your throat, it hurts to swallow! Even taking Tylenol to ease the pain, hurts. And this is often how life works, enduring pain to get better.

As we have been progressing through Isaiah, for Judah's part as the recipients of the message, it can seem like some severe slicing at moments. Cutting to the heart of the issue. Always delivered with the salve of hope, an ointment of promise. Always an invitation back to God, to life in him, worship of him as the only One worthy. Glorious enough to surrender to.

But this truth can be painful to swallow. Coming face-to-face with ourselves, our taste for sin and the conditioned disregard for God. And we have to take this medicine in order to see the better way.

The medicine relates to how we view sin or disobedience toward God, or ignoring the redemptive work of God, especially in Christ. And in our knowing will we turn from it to Christ?

Defining sin: violation of divine law, willful or conditioned rejection of God and his way resulting in the elevation of self or another to the place only God can reside.

This is what is before us in Isaiah 43 and 44. And as we search it we will find that redemption is the motivation for a life of repentance.

1) Our Pre-existing Condition

Getting up to speed where we are in the arc of Isaiah. There has been warning upon warning of rejecting God for the pursuit of other ways. Intermingled with consistent promise that God himself would save his people, he would work on their behalf, he would make a way, he would redeem them.

In these promises we have seen the gift of permanent redemption coming at the hands of the Servant, Immanuel, God with Us. Jesus. God calling a people personally to himself, through the work of the Righteous One.

But it seems that just as fast as this promise comes, the people forget it, ignore it and live numb to the stuff that is to make them unique and gives them true identity.

Speaking here to a people in exile, Isaiah again goes low to go high, rehearsing the way Judah has missed the meaning and desired result of the promise.

God promises refreshment, bending all of creation toward blessing these people that they would declare his praise, “Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel!”

Judah’s apparent disregard for the promise is lived out in the way they worship. In the second half of 43 God declares how they have missed him in their religiosity. What was meant to be heart-owned and oriented is ritual without God at the center.

Haven’t brought offerings to God... what they were meant to provide, satisfaction of wrath, a covering of sin, is never achieved and instead the people burden God with their sins, they weary him with their iniquities.

We can read this and think it seems that they just were not worshiping, not following the ceremonial law... but we know this is first read by a people still active in temple worship, so they were doing the ritual but disconnected to the meaning and purpose of those things. Not merely half-hearted but no-hearted.

“By making ritual the exclusive content of religion they had actually excluded themselves from the benefits the sacrifices were intended to bring. Ritual divorced from moral and spiritual commitment neither satisfies God nor blesses his people.” J. Alec Motyer

Their worship wasn't really about him, about God. We can study these Prophets and the history of those chosen by God and wonder why they have such a hard time of connecting the dots. Why do they always stumble back into worship of self?

It is deeply rooted, and frankly, it is not just Judah. It's all of us.

V. 27 “Your first father sinned, and your mediators transgressed against me.”

They might think of Abraham, and they would be right he sinned, but this goes back to the first father of all humanity, Adam. Who disobeyed God in the garden leading to all of us an inherited pre-existing condition as sinners. None beyond this sickness' reach.

The Apostle Paul includes all of us in his letter to the Roman church as he describes those we assume are sinners (immoral, idolaters), and keeps going listing those we assume are kind of righteous. **Romans 3:23** There is no distinction between us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (ESV)

It isn't more rigorous ritual that will solve it. It is about our very souls, the thinking, instigating part of us we label our “heart.”

And as we have come to expect, thankfully, there is a remedy to our condition.

2) The Remedy

It is stated twice in our text today. In 43:25 and 44:22 as bookends for us. Doses of a needed cure.

Isaiah 43:25 “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” (ESV)

This is the way to be found right, to trust in the redemption of God. That he will remove our transgressions for his sake, for his glory. That our sin would be cast into a sea of forgetfulness... to be remembered no more.

The burden of sin, the weariness of iniquity solved by God himself. This is what has been laid before us in Isaiah. God as Redeemer, accomplished not merely by his word but by his work, that he would come himself, as a servant, and provide the sacrifice necessary to blot our transgression. To satisfy wrath against sin.

The promise can be made because of God's plan, the price he will pay himself in Jesus.

Romans 3:21–26 “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (ESV)

Here is Immanuel, the Servant. Having established a new covenant by his blood. Giving grace, forgiveness, rescuing people who have it all wrong, and giving them life.

The very God who formed you, who chose you, will help you. **Isaiah 44:3** “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” (ESV)

The core of this promise is God pouring his Spirit upon us. We like Judah, need nothing less than the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to solve our condition, to hydrate what has been parched and broken. He will do it.

He can be trusted, he can be believed because he is God, he is the Redeemer.

Isaiah 44:6–8 “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. [7] Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. [8] Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.” (ESV)

The remedy. The end of sin’s oppression and burden is redemption by God himself, and there is no other. What hope! What joy!

“God is the one who can wipe out our sins, not allowing them to clog up his memory; instead of repentance and faith, however, the people risked hardening their hearts and facing God’s chastisement (Isa. 43:26–28). We must guard against the same mistake. Reflecting on his unspeakable grace in the gospel, our hearts are repeatedly refreshed, calmed, and softened.” GTB

Like any good doctor, that once the cancer is removed, once the bleeding is stopped, once the remedy is administered, God follows up with more diagnosis so we know the symptoms of slipping back into the darkness and death.

Isaiah invites us to be familiar with our condition so we can more thoroughly apply the remedy in all of life.

3) Considering the Symptoms

In what follows in 44:9-20 we have a shift away from the poetic to a clear description of the folly Judah was prone to, and it clearly states our own tendency away from our Redeemer.

As if Isaiah is saying “just think about it.” Realize how silly it is.

Isaiah 44:9–11 “All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. [10] Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? [11] Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.” (ESV)

The ironsmith fashioning gods, the carpenter shapes totems but these are mere men making their gods, believing in themselves. In fact the rest of the material is put into the fire to warm their bodies.

“He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” **Isaiah 44:18–19** “They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. [19] No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” (ESV)

The pre-existing condition symptomatically revealed as idolatry. “Why does Isaiah keep coming back to the problem of idols? Because idols are the problem. “The central theological principle of the Bible is the rejection of idolatry.” Think about it. If there is only one God, and if we are not experiencing his reviving fullness, there is a reason. The reason is, idols are clogging the inflow of his refreshment. The exclusive reality of God forces the question of idolatry. We need to think about this because our world is crowded with idols.” Ray Ortlund

And we have spent nearly a year talking about how idolatry isn’t dead. We don’t worship trinkets, but we fashion all kinds of gods to carry us through. Those things we obsess over, that we look to solve the deepest pains, the greatest needs. They are all different, a product, a plan, a philosophy, a politic...

Even the ritual you think will make you righteous. That which we think if obeyed or achieved will deliver the hit we need. Living with a set of disordered attachments we don’t realize are dragging us down.

Isaiah says, just step back and see how ridiculous that is. See the sin in it, the disregard for the redemption God has promised, has already accomplished in Christ. See how it is a return to the bondage you were weighed down with before God spoke of blotting our transgression.

Paul asking with Isaiah... **Galatians 4:8–9** “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. [9] But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?” (ESV)

Really this is just being aware. “Man, I am like this... how silly.” And then leaning back into the remedy. If we know how to fight the symptoms we will stay on the road to recovery.

4) The Road to Recovery - Returning

I think we latch onto idolatry so much because part of our pre-existing condition is a desire to have relationships, religiosity defined by transactions. I scratch some god's back and he scratches mine. If I do A, B will happen.

We are all about exchange... The logic of reciprocity runs deep in our moral psychology. “For example, when the Disabled American Veterans mail out requests for donations, the appeal draws out of the public a 19 percent response. But when the mailing includes free personalized address labels, the response rate jumps to 35 percent.” Giving in order to get... it is how our minds work.

So when we hear the voice of God saying, I am he who blots out your transgression for my own sake” we can far too easily think that means, “now build a checklist to earn that forgiveness.” Something deep in us doesn't want grace. We prefer to justify ourselves, at least a little.

That's the flow, God knows that's how we work so he follows the remedy of his forgiveness with a reminder about idolatry, then gives the plan for recovery.

Isaiah 44:22 “I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.” (ESV)

This is then the life of those redeemed. A constant returning to God. A return to the forgiveness of Jesus. We think it is only necessary one time, but it is actually like the regular vitamin we take to stay healthy.

Martin Luther's first thesis: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said “Repent,” he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.”

Undeserved deliverance, not mere command or conditional love, fuels repentance. And it fuels obeying him, living in his way, giving ourselves fully to him. Our response does not secure God's favor but flows from heartfelt gratitude for the provision of his grace.

This becomes our pattern, our passion. So transformed by his grace for us that we are always jumping into it!

We apply the remedy in repentance. Owning our sin, our idolatry and giving it over to the One who has redeemed us where we are reminded that he has blotted out our transgression like a cloud, our sins like a mist. Poof!

“Remember these things O Jacob!” God wants us to own not only our sin but his forgiveness. Jesus doesn’t want us to feel insecure in him. His remedy for our violations of his grace is more grace, and he wants us to know it, and return to it, over and over.

That’s our part isn’t it? To remember that God alone is our Redeemer. To return to him.

It is our circle of life if you will, Redemption, repentance... on repeat.

Redemption is the motivation for a life of repentance.

Do you notice your own tendency to fashion gods? Jesus has something better for us.

Are you thirsty and dry? Looking for the pouring of His Spirit upon you? This God is for you.

Own your inclinations - consider the symptoms, the heartless routine, the running after idols. See how you have disregarded God’s promise, his redemption.

Surrender them to Jesus - Turn it all over to him, return to him. Let his remedy wash over you. Forgiveness. You are made righteous in him.

Keep Going - Stay on the road to recovery. Live a life of repentance. Before God and in community. **James 5:16** “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (ESV)

This is how we stay healthy, this is how we make much of Jesus, embracing him as our remedy, as our hope, as our joy. It won't always be easy, it might even be enduring discomfort and pain on the road to getting better, but it is the way of real life.

Redemption is the motivation for a life of repentance.

He is our Redeemer, the first and the last, besides him there is no god. As we return to him we experience the revival only he can bring. The renewal of hearing his declaration over us.

When we return to him, he cares for us as he did John in his vision... **Revelation 1:17–18** “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” (ESV)

Here at last is a remedy to work, a God whose intensity is big enough to rest in.

Isaiah 44:23 “Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.” (ESV)

Communion: We are going to share the Lord's supper together as we worship. Taking time to fill out our connect cards as we seek the Lord, and return to him in repentance. After we have prayed, individuals are welcome to to the tables and partake in the elements. We ask that only those who have trusting in Christ for salvation partake, please watch us share this meal as it is a proclaiming of the saving work of Jesus for us.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (ESV)
But we don't take it lightly.

1 Corinthians 11:27–28 “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (ESV)

So like Isaiah's “think about it” moment we too want to be engaged as we partake. Taking time to owning our tendency, our sin, and surrendering it again to Jesus. And joyfully taking the bread and cup as a reminder of his remedy for us.

The tables are open.