

Title: Mighty to Save - forever  
Text: Isaiah 50.10-52.12  
Theme: Get ready for the salvation of God  
Series: Isaiah #43  
Prop Stmt. The God who pulls off the impossible can redeem and rescue you.  
Aim: I aim to call my people to embrace God's power for their personal challenges.

Life does not usually turn out the way that we dream. Most of us live with some level of disappointment, even regret. Yesterday, Cathi and I drove to PA to see Arianna, our daughter who is a freshman in college. She is in the marching band, so we wanted to see the band perform at halftime of the football game. We were sitting in the stands next to three dads, who each had a son on the football team. The dad on my left had a boy who was senior defensive back. The dad in front of me had a son who was a sophomore back-up running back and the dad on my right had a freshman son who was just hoping to get into the game for at least a play. The senior defensive back made a great interception. We celebrated. The sophomore running back made some great runs while people slapped his dad on the back. The freshman got in, and we all got excited. He ran a route out of the backfield. The quarterback threw it right to him. It went through his hands, bounced off his pads and fell to the ground. I did not even look at his dad. The family drove from almost 7 hours to watch him. And immediately, the coach pulled him out of the game. It was not how they had planned the game to go. But, it is a game. For most of us, we live with disappointment, failure and angst that is deeper. And therefore for most of us, the on-going challenge that we have is to believe, accept, embrace, and rest in the promises of God, to find joy in gospel rather than being defined and dominated with the challenge.

The audience, to whom Isaiah is writing, was a people who were overwhelmed with grief, with abuse, with war, with destruction, and with exile. The nation of Judah had for years ignored the Law of God and the warnings of his prophets and God's offers of mercy. In their rebellion they mocked God and dared him to keep his promise to judge their sin. Well, God did. Every consequence that God warned about came to be. And now, these people were overwhelmed with the consequences they brought upon themselves. The Babylonians did invade. They defeated Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, slaughtered thousands, pillaged, raped, plundered, looted and took thousands into exile back to the land of Babylon. For Judah, it was not simply a matter of God changing the circumstances; they needed to address the issues under that. They had rejected God and his promises. Even if, they were somehow able to return to the land, what was going to be different? So, Isaiah is writing to them and is saying that God is not going to leave you in this mess that you created. God is going to rescue you. Even though it looks impossible, God is mighty to save. He is going to save you from this. But, this salvation from exile is not the goal. The goal is to be rescued from a heart that is in rebellion to God. That is the ultimate issue! So, God is going to send a Savior to you, who will secure a salvation that will accomplish that. Therefore, this section of Isaiah has both an immediate salvation and an ultimate salvation in view. The rescue from exile that God pulls off illustrates the rescue from sin that God accomplishes. But, how is God going to do that? He promises to do that through the Servant that is coming. Isaiah is

calling upon his audience to believe in God's promises that he will send a Servant who will do all of this. Believe this and live in light of that. Salvation is coming. God will come through.

Read Text:

**I.     Get Ready for God (50.10 - 51.1-8)**

**A. Prepare your heart to listen. (50.10-11)**

Verse 10 is a very engaging and powerful text. In the midst of telling us about the servant of the Lord who is going to come to rescue his people, God asks a question that, like a surgeon's knife, opens us up and exposes a core issue of our hearts. Do you fear God enough that you will obey the voice of his servant, even though, that path of obedience may take you through dark nights, where the path seems to have no light at all? Are you willing, even in those shadow-lands of the soul to believe God, lean upon God, embrace the promises of God, when all that you have are the promises? This picture of and call to perseverance is not only a mark of those who listen to the voice of the Servant, but this perseverance is what the Servant does perfectly. Even when he felt abandoned by God, and was counted as guilty for our sin, his cry to his Father of "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" was in itself an honest expression of his condition, but expressed, in faith in "my God." Our King walked that road for us, so that we would never have to experience that, and yet, there are times, when we feel abandoned, we feel like we are groping in darkness, we feel like we have lost our way. And to us comes this call, even when in darkness, "trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon God."

V.11 shows the contrast to that. To those who decide, that instead of trusting in God, they will follow their own path, and attempt to create their own way of dealing with pressure, that is, light their own torches and make their own light; they will find that it will never work. As Patrick illustrated so well in his sermon, there are two ways to live; man's way or God's way. But, preparing our heart to listen to and obey the voice of the Servant is not automatic. Relying upon our own understanding, creating our own torches in order to make our own paths is so easy to do. Here we see how we prepare ourselves to hear the voice of the Servant.

**B. Look at what God has done. (51.1-3)**

These verses are such an encouragement to those who are seriously pursuing righteousness and in so doing, are seriously pursuing God. Think with me. When Isaiah wrote this, what do you imagine that person was like? For one, there weren't many of those people. Most of the Jews were in rebellion to God. But, the person who was serious about pursuing God, was given revelation from God, as to what that looked like. That revelation was the law of God. The person who was serious about pursuing God would be confronted over and over and over with his own failure and inability to live up to what God expected. The person who pursued righteousness was pursuing a dream that could not be fully grasped. It would be very tempting to quit in frustration and admit – I cannot

get there. Which, of course, was the purpose of God revealing the law (summarized by the 10 commandments). The laws of God reveal the reality of our need of God. And yet, even as God revealed the law, he revealed the law in the midst of a story of salvation. He put clues that revealed that there is more to the story.

Here in Isaiah God is in the process of revealing how it fits together, isn't he? When he says to look to the rock from which you were hewn and the quarry from which you were dug, he is saying to look at what you were saved from. You were rescued. The father and mother of your nation (Abraham and Sarah) were, like you rescued. The clear implication is that you, unlike all of the other nations were rescued. You are different. I rescued Abraham, not to destroy him, but to bless him. I rescued you, not to destroy you but to complete my purpose with you. Your rebellion is bringing consequences, but my purposes and promises remain. I am going to keep those promises. Your setting right now is as dark as you have ever known, but that does not stop me from keeping my promises. I will save you. I have promised it, I will bring it to pass. Look at your own story. You were rescued out of Egypt. You were rescued at the Red Sea. You were rescued in the wilderness. You were rescued at the Jordan. You were rescued at Jericho, Ai, by the judges, from the Philistines, from Goliath, from Assyrians as well and you will be rescued from the Babylonians, because I want you to know that I am the God who saves. You will be saved and you will be comforted. The desolate land will be a garden once more. My purposes in making the world to be like Eden and to fill the earth with joy, gladness and the glory of the Lord will be accomplished. Just as I was able to make an entire nation, just like I promised from Abraham and Sarah, I am making a promise of comfort and restoration to you. My salvation is coming. Look at what I have done. I promise to save you. Look for it. Believe in it. Live in view of it. Die, believing it, because it is coming.

### **C. Look at what God has promised. (51.4-6)**

In these three verses (4-6) God is saying that his justice, his law, his governing is like a light that attracts people. What kind of justice is this? What kind of governing attracts people? We are not given a detailed answer to that, but we are certainly given some indications. His governing somehow involves justice, strength and salvation (5). We long for a King who is truly just and who possesses the might to be able to enforce his justice. This salvation is so compelling that people from other nations want to be part of this nation to experience it. It is a complete reversal of what they experience in exile. Instead of being taken away by force, they will be in their land and others will come to them, by desire. Here is a kingdom where the leadership is worthy of trust and mighty to save. These promises are designed by God to prepare people to long for the Servant who is coming and who will bring salvation with him. This section of the poem concludes with:

### **D. Do not fear man. (51.7-8)**

If you have a heart for God and for his righteousness, you will be out of step with this world. God prepares his people for this by telling them not to fear the reproach of man. God knows that those who believe his promises will face the displeasure of this world.

For one, the promises of God are offensive to the world. Many of you get a taste of that when conversations go to matters of belief about sin, righteousness, salvation and eternity. If you express belief in what the Bible teaches about these matters you are often viewed as being a threat. But secondly, when you believe the promises of God, there is usually a gap between promise and fulfillment.

Here, Isaiah is writing to a people who are going into exile in Babylon. He tells them that God has promised to deliver them and bring them back home. This salvation from Babylon serves God's purpose of showcasing a greater salvation that is going to come through the Servant that he promises to send. So, as these Jews are in exile, they are mocked. They are told to sing some of your songs from back home. They live under reproach, and some of them will die before God fulfills his promise. And yet, God does fulfill his promise. The Jews return to the land. And once they are back, some of them (a minority, a remnant) rightfully look at these promises of Isaiah and look for the Servant who would come and bring salvation. For over 500 years there was a remnant who believed, who waited for the promises to be fulfilled, most of whom died in faith, still waiting. In that long, but small line of believers was a man named Simeon, to whom God promised that he would not die until he saw the Servant who was to come. He longed for this. There was also a woman named Anna, a prophetess who too waited in faith for God's promise to be fulfilled. Luke tells us of their story how that on the day that Joseph and Mary brought Christ, as an infant to the temple that they encountered these two. Their waiting was done. God had come. He always does.

## **II.     See what God can do. (51.9-52.12)**

These words are simply further evidence that God can, that God will and that God has delivered us from our enemies. Therefore, the promises that God makes are worthy of trusting.

### **A. God has done the impossible. (9-11)**

These verses are a complaint in faith. I think Isaiah is showing us how to cry out to God in the midst of our distress and implore him to act in a manner that is consistent with his promises and consistent with this purposes.

Here is my paraphrase of these verses. "Wake up God, not that you are really asleep but because it appears to others as if you are asleep or weak, and I know that neither is true. You have proven your power to save. I believe in your power to save, and am crying out to you right now, because I am in serious distress and I need you. I know that when you rescue your people that they respond in joy and celebration and reflect great glory to you. Look upon me. I am needy. You have rescued people in the past; will you rescue me?"

I think this text is so helpful for us. Anguish of soul and faith in God are not mutually exclusive. Can I grieve and believe God all at the same time? This text says yes! Those who would try to sell you a cheap imitation of Christianity often offer a version where there is no trial, no struggle, no grief, and no anguish. They say, if you really have faith,

then all problems disappear. Where do you get that? Even Jesus, who had perfect faith, had anguish of soul. Are we better than Jesus? No! This text shows that you can believe God and honestly grieve. You can carry the weight of your circumstances, but know that they do not discount the promises of God and that joy will come. Even in the valley – God is good. Even in the night, God gives a song. The valley does not last. God does.

### **B. God will do the impossible. (12-16)**

God answers this cry. His answer is personal isn't it? "I, I am he who comforts you." At the same time, he gently rebukes the complainer by reminding him of what he (God) has done and reminding him of the fate of the wicked. Do not fear man who dies. God is. God hears. God knows. God acts. This culminates in v.16, where God, who established the heavens and laid the foundation for the earth, uses his hands to provide shelter and protection for his children.

### **C. God punishes sin and rescues his people. (17-23)**

These verses almost take my breath away. They describe a cup that is filled with a liquor that is so potent and so burning, that if one were to drink it, it would cause him to stagger into an unconscious stupor. This one who is drunk, passed out on the street, whose body people just step on is a picture of the people of Judah. The liquor is the wrath of God against their sin. They have sinned and have suffered the consequences of their sin. They are like drunks, who have been abused at the hands of their oppressors. God is saying to one who was drunk, that God is done punishing them. In fact, the ones who tormented them are now the ones who will drink from the cup. I see some historic parallels here. A few of you are still alive who remember the reports from Germany in the 30's and 40's regarding their treatment of the Jews. Like a story from the pages of Esther, Germans were essentially given permission by the Nazi regime to steal from and abuse the Jews. The excuse was they were the wealthy "1%" who was the source of Germany's economic problems. This abuse led to the Warsaw ghetto and eventually to the death camps, where 6 million were gassed. I know that the abuse of the Jews at the hands of the Assyrians and the hands of the Babylonians was a direct result of their rejection of God's word. I do not know if their abuse at the hands of Hitler, Himmler, Hess, and others was a result of their rejection of Christ. I do know, that they suffered then like they suffered in the exile. But like the Babylonians, Germany's power was broken. The Russian army raped its way into Berlin. The humiliation that they poured out was now poured out on them. When the war ended, and the reports of the atrocities committed against the Jews came out, the world powers were shamed because some of these things had been known beforehand, and no one acted. This embarrassment drove an international movement to give Israel a land. So, in the end, the attempt to destroy the Jews resulted in returning them to their land 2,000 years after they lost it. The cup of wrath that was poured out on them was now poured out on those who oppressed them.

So, notice how v.17 begins. Wake up! Slap yourself. It's like a bucket of cold water thrown in the face of one who was passed out. God is saying to Judah – get up, your time of punishment is over. God is calling upon her to arise. But, there is more to this. This

cup that is filled with the devastating liquor of God's wrath is the cup that stood before Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. The wrath of God against sin is terrifying. And no one human can bear it. God is indeed, perfectly and infinitely just, righteous and holy. Therefore, his wrath against sin is infinitely intense, and there is no escape. The cup of wrath is filled and has to be poured out against sin. That night, in the garden, Christ took the cup of wrath for every single person who would ever believe in him. He was staggered by it. He fell under the beatings, under the cross, and under the accusations and taunts, because now, everything that he was accused of was true. He was condemned. He was guilty. He was counted as being full of sin. He, who knew no sin, became sin, for us. He drank the cup. It is no wonder that he hesitated, and cried out to his father to see if there was any other way. There is no way that I can describe the intensity of the wrath that he experienced in your place, other than to say, that Christ experienced in those hours, an eternity of hell in your place.

The book of Revelation speaks of a day of judgment, called the Great Tribulation that will come upon the earth. That seven-year period will come to an end with what is described as the seven bowls of God's wrath being poured out upon the earth. Which helps us to see how this theme fits into the picture. Either trust in Christ, who drank the cup for you, or face the cup all on your own. The cup that could damn you is the cup of your salvation because it has been taken for you.

When you trust in Christ, there is no longer any condemnation, because the cup of wrath against your sin was taken by Christ, in your place. He drank it all, every single drop. But, when Isaiah wrote about the cup of wrath, he did not know all that we know. All he knew is that God promised to take the cup of wrath away from his own and pour it out upon those who were against him. But he did not yet know how the wrath of God against our sin could be appeased. This missing piece is provided in the 4<sup>th</sup> song of the Servant, that we will be study beginning next Sunday.

#### **D. God redeems without money. (52.1-6)**

This section concludes with two more things that we are called to pay attention to. In fact, 52.1 again says to the people of God to wake up! See what incredible things that God has done. The salvation that he provides means that he is going to buy you back without money (3). Remember 50.1? God told them that for their iniquities they were sold into slavery. So, how are they going to be redeemed? What is the price for their salvation? How much money does God have to pay get his people back? The cost is beyond money. The price of redemption cannot be measured in economic terms. The price of redemption is the life and blood of the perfectly, righteous Son of God, who became man in order that he could live and die in our place.

1 Peter 1.18-21

Since the price of your redemption is not money, it will not cost you payment, or work, or righteousness to attain it. What was done for you was and is by grace alone and therefore, can only be yours by faith alone.

**E. God reigns!** (52.7-12)

Therefore, tell others! Anticipate his return! Get ready to rejoice! Prepare yourself for the coming of the Lord. He does not forget his own.

Beloved, God is mighty to save. He can certainly rescue you by changing your circumstances. That is not difficult. But, he is not satisfied with that. He is committed to changing you, growing you, stretching you and using you. Are you ready for him to do that?