

September 21, 2025

“God Is With You”

Isaiah 43:1-7

Intro:

Three places of solitude:

Every now and then, as I scroll through my Facebook feed, I am presented with an offer to spend a specific amount of time on a remote deserted island, and at the end of that time there would be an award of a significant amount of money. It is all a scam, of course, but the thought can be tempting.

Microsoft built a room that holds the Guinness World Record for being the quietest place on earth. There is an unofficial challenge to see how long someone is able to stay in that room. Apparently the longest is 45 mins.

The harshest punishment that a person in prison can receive is not physical torture, but rather being sent to solitary confinement for extended periods of time.

Why is it that all of these things are so difficult to do? The thought of being on a remote island and receiving a bunch of money at the end sounds like a pretty good deal, especially if one is an introvert or is just fed up with people, but there is a reason that those sorts of contests exist... they are rarely ever completed.

The answer, of course, is that no matter how introverted you are, or how sick and tired of being around people you might think you are, we are built – wired – to be in relationship with other people. When people are isolated, away from other human beings and interaction, their minds and bodies begin to rebel in unhealthy ways.

Have you ever wondered why Psalm 23 is so often requested to be read at funeral services? It isn't because David wrote the psalm as a funeral dirge – it is actually a song of celebration and acknowledgement of God's care for us. It is because of verse 4: “Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.” (NLT)

Death, for most people, is an unknown. It is a dark and frightening concept. It has the sense and feeling of being left utterly alone. This is not necessarily a felt experience of those who are still living, but a fear for the people who have passed on. No longer are they able to walk alongside us, share a meal or a joke. Psalm 23:4 shouts comfort in the face of a feared aloneness. Even in the darkest imaginable moment, death, somehow God is present. Knowing this brings comfort to those mourning, and there is hope for comfort for the deceased as well.

Isaiah 43:1-7, that we read earlier, seeks to bring similar comfort to those listening on the basis that God is present with us.

Presence:

We have to remember that at this point, Isaiah is speaking to a people who are being faced with exile and the fear of being utterly separated from not only their homeland, but from their God, because in those days people believed that gods didn't travel away from their territories. There is the fear that God won't be able to find them if they are in a faraway land – which shows just how little they understood God. Isaiah brings words of comfort into those fears. In these words, God reminds his people of His relationship with them, and by extension, with us. He created us. He calls us by name. And even if we think great divides and vast distances separate us from Him, that is just not true. God is with us in every place we are, no matter how far away we think we might be.

Let me read this passage again for us, but from the New Century Version, which is what I was using for my summer reading challenge:

Now this is what the Lord says.

He created you, people of Jacob;
he formed you, people of Israel.

He says, "Don't be afraid, because I have saved you.

I have called you by name, and you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

When you cross rivers, you will not drown.

When you walk through fire, you will not be burned,
nor will the flames hurt you.

³This is because I, the Lord, am your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I gave Egypt to pay for you,
and I gave Cush and Seba to make you mine.

⁴Because you are precious to me,
because I give you honor and love you,
I will give other people in your place;
I will give other nations to save your life.

⁵Don't be afraid, because I am with you.
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.

⁶I will tell the north: Give my people to me.
I will tell the south: Don't keep my people in prison.

Bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from faraway places.

⁷Bring to me all the people who are mine,
whom I made for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

Notice in these words that God is not promising an absence of difficulty or trials. No, he is fully acknowledging that in life there is a very real chance that we will face times and situations that seem utterly dark and desperate. Where we will feel as though we are facing opposition and trials that are beyond our capacity and, quite frankly, beyond anything that we could endure. We get in over our head in troubles that feel like water in which we will drown. Opposition comes against us in such force that it is as unbearable as facing down a massive fire. We feel lost and out of place in the face of people and society challenging everything that we believe and hold to. It is lonely. It is frightening.

And God says, when you are facing these things... you are not alone. "I am with you. You don't need to succumb to fear, because I am present with you. You are mine", says God. "I have purchased you for a price and no matter how far away and lost you might feel, I am present there and will draw you back out of that to a place of safety and peace." This is the promise and the hope of Isaiah 43.

Purchased:

In reading this message from Isaiah, though, we have to also deal with those lines about Egypt and Ethiopia (or Cush). It is an odd thing to read in a passage about bringing comfort in the face of fear. Look at verses 3-4:

"I gave Egypt as a ransom for your freedom; I gave Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Others were given in exchange for you. I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to me."

Just how far is God willing to go in order to restore the relationship with his people? Well, in the context of the Old Testament, God's people were the Israelites and they were held away from God in exile in Babylon. Some commentators have suggested that God secured their return to Him by allowing (giving payment to) King Cyrus of Persia to extend his kingdom especially into Egypt in exchange for Cyrus' role in allowing the Israelites to return to Jerusalem. Most scholars, however, feel the passage is more poetic and simply shows the lengths that God would go to in order to restore relationship with His people and to show them that He is still very much present with them.

Of course, the ultimate example of those lengths is Jesus going to the cross – recall the words from Romans 5:10 that we read earlier: "For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son."

Conclusion:

Sometimes we think we would rather be alone, that we have had enough of the world around us and all the noise and difficulty that it brings with us. We think that the best thing we can do is retreat into our own private little corner and

ignore what is going on. The silence, we think, would be welcome. We think that is the way to find peace.

The comfort for me in reading this passage from Isaiah is the opposite. It tells me that retreating is not going to gain me the peace I am seeking. Peace is in the presence of God with me in the difficult times, and I need to embrace that. Not only do I need to embrace it, but I need to be a means of revealing it to those who are truly lost and alone in the world around me.

This is the task of us all.

Let's pray.