

TCC Sunday 19th October 2014 – What will sustain you in the deep waters? - Isaiah 43

Title: “What will sustain you in the deep waters?”

Purpose: For us to learn about our God as one who not merely SAVES but one also who SUSTAINS.

INTRODUCTION

It is one of just many techniques in photography to use what they term – “**a shallow depth of field**” and what this means in practice is that the FOCUS of the camera is mainly on just one certain thing and then the rest falls into a somewhat hazy background.

Let me give you a couple of examples – and I’m sure you will have seen a lot of really excellent photographs that use this well-established technique:

***SHOW IMAGE #1 *** Here you see **the lady is in very clear focus BUT** all the things behind her **are blurred**
***SHOW IMAGE #2 *** Here you can see **the scribe’s pen and fingers BUT** the remainder of the writing is **hazy**

As we look at [Isaiah 43](#) – I want to use this very same technique – I want to narrow our lens aperture so that we focus quite majorly on the opening dozen or so verses – and then the remainder of the chapter we will simply dip into here and there for a bit of supportive yet more secondary background.

(Hopefully that’s clear and not too blurry – if it is – well all I’m saying is that I intentionally plan on FRONT-LOADING this message on the first dozen or so verses.)

Last time

Last time, in [Isaiah 42](#), we were talking about the fact that we were now being introduced to a NEW ERA – and that just like any NEW ERA –that, by the very nature of the case, was essentially an INVITATION for the NEW THING to be accepted – rejoiced over – and the implications embraced.

We saw, as you may recall:

- A NEW SERVANT – (and that was how the passage began): “Behold! My servant...my chosen one in whom I delight...”
- we saw A NEW SONG – this was the comprehensive response of JOY to the promise of God’s SERVANT
- last off, we saw A NEW SENSE – where God’s people were seemingly blind and sadly deaf to all that God had done and was doing – and God desire that they would gain a much needed NEW SENSE

Today

Today, we move on to [Isaiah 43](#) and for now this will be where we leave Isaiah – (see the bulletin if you want to know what’s coming up through to the start of 2015) and we are here given the treatment that God has in mind to give His people the NEW SENSE that up to this point they have lacked.

Remember their current state

Now let's be quite clear about their current state as a people:

- (People in Babylon) – Isaiah is writing, from **Chapter 40** onwards:
 - to a people as yet unborn
 - he writes to the exiles that will find themselves outside the beautiful, promised land
 - he writes to a people who feel thoroughly defeated.

These are people, who very much like Elijah (who we studied on Wednesday night – there in 1 Kings 19), who are literally “**SUBMERGED**” in, what I would call, “**Spiritual Depression**”.

Their environment in Babylon was ***NOT* faith-friendly**.

The Babylonians were ***NOT* interested in the God of the conquered Jews**.

Q. Why?

Well it totally stands to reason that if this so-called God, the LORD, was truly God then why would the Jews have been conquered in the first place and then their city smashed to smithereens!! (Der!!)

- (Unheard of “de-exile”) – And not only, the very notion that an EXILED people might one day be DE-EXILED was simply UNHEARD OF – it had never been done before.

And so, however many times God, through his faithful prophet Isaiah, spoke words about some sort of return to the land – it all seemed rather FAR-FETCHED and FANTASTICAL.

Surely it was in the realm of MAKE-BELIEVE.

The FOCUS in **Isaiah 34**

So that's the background – and the big question now is:

Q. How exactly, is God going to DELIVER THIS: “NEW SENSE” to a people suffering from INTENSE “SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION”?

No small question.

Q. Have you ever tried to reason with someone who is depressed?

You know someone who is demoralised and whose future looks a bit dim. Imagine someone who's been made redundant and cannot see how they are going to get another job. Their talk is all doom and gloom. They've submitted 100 applications and had only 2 interviews and nothing was forthcoming.

Everything you say to them, every line of reasoning that you give in order to inspire hope – sounds to them EITHER like an unhelpful platitude – “Cheer up something will turn up – it always does” – “No it doesn't!!!”

Or perhaps, even if you studiously avoid cheap clichéd words – your every suggestion meets with: “Yes, I've

tried that, didn't work." "Nothing works, there's no point. I might as well just give up."

Q. What would you do to give them a NEW SENSE?

And so it is with some interest we turn to Isaiah 43 to see how God, our WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR goes about things with his people.

Structure

I have just two headings to cover our material and to hopefully highlight God's approach:

- #1 – **Verses 1-7** and what I'm calling: "**SUSTAINED by HIS WITNESS**" then
- #2 – **Verses 8-28** (focussing mostly on the first few verses): "**SUSTAINED by OUR WITNESS**"

Ok then:

#1] SUSTAINED by HIS WITNESS (Verses 1-7)

The chapter opens in a promising way with the simple words "BUT NOW..." or "AND NOW" – it signifies that what has gone before is to be a thing of the past and that we are in for a treat, in for something else.

It was one of the big disappointments of the young years when my parents decided that I was just too young to watch a certain TV programme and that my brother, 3 years old than me, was old enough.

What made it all the more galling was the fact that as soon as I was dispatched off to bed and this programme would come on every week, I would hear the my Dad, my Mum, my brother all descending into hysterics – I was definitely missing out.

The particular TV programme, if you haven't already worked it out was one which had the catchphrase:

"AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!"

And the reason why this particular program was apparently so entertaining was that you never really expected what was going to happen next. It was always very SLAPSTICK and relied upon the ABSURD and the UNEXPECTED to bring a sense of lightness and laughter.

Turning into our chapter – it is as though God is saying, not in a JOKEY way – but in a COMPLETELY SERIOUS WAY:

- "And now for something completely different"
- "Now for something that will completely blow you away *NOT* blow you up"

FEAR NOT

Straightaway – God zooms into the real issue confronting His people – it is the fact that they are living *not* by FAITH but by FEELINGS.

The uppermost emotion for them, at the end of the day was FEAR.

He says (Verse 1) “Fear not for I have redeemed you...” and this is not the only thing God says at this most basic of levels. In Verses 11&12 He comes back to the salvation idea:

Verse 11 & 12 “I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no **saviour**. I have revealed and **saved** and proclaimed— I, and not some foreign god among you.”

Now God knows that the heart of their problem is not so much that they have forgotten that God is their Creator, that God is their Redeemer, that God is their Saviour – no, it is more than that they do not know God as their SUSTAINER.

Make personal

Let me make this more personal, let me apply this more locally:

- FOR YOURSELF – Q. Can you say (without a doubt) that God has (as Verse 1 says) at some point in the past “SUMMONED YOU BY NAME”?

Q. Has there ever been a clear time (even if you cannot point to a day, or a month, or even a particular year), has there ever been a time, when God called you?

Q. A time when you became SURE that you were His. That you definitely had a clear FAITH in God and in the work of His son Jesus on the cross for you. A time when you said YES, AMEN – I BELIEVE – Jesus IS my Saviour, and the LORD God, creator of heaven and earth is my God?

I hope you can answer that – yet if you can’t, don’t worry – every single day is another day of grace, another day when you can move from a place of uncertainty, a place of being in two minds – to a place of salvation.

Q. Is anything stopping you? No? Well just ask Jesus in simple faith to be your Saviour and to forgive your sins and then walk on in confidence and in repentance.

- FOR YOURSELF – perhaps you would say – well that’s really easy – Jesus has been my Saviour, for some long time and I am in no doubt about that.

Well good.

BUT – would you say that you know Him both as Saviour AND as SUSTAINER.

And I don’t actually just mean at your moments of CRISIS.

I mean SUSTAINER at a day-to-day, month-in-month-out way.

A recipe to SUSTAIN

What follows in the first dozen or so verses of Isaiah 43 is a RECIPE that is intended to deal and to drive away all the blues that these exiles in Babylon were feeling.

This is a RECIPE to stave off and starve out SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION whenever it pops its ugly head up.

Like a hot-pot

I suppose you could liken it to a wonderful warming hotpot – it has all the goodness of delicious garden vegetables, chunks of real meat and then topped off with thick flavoursome gravy.

Trundle down the verses

So join me as we TRUNDLE down the verses picking out all the good bits:

- (you are mine) FIRSTLY Verse 1, he has summoned **or** called you BY NAME.

It is “so” intimate. John’s gospel records Jesus describing himself as the good shepherd and says: (John 10 Verse 3) “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

It is wonderful to be called by name.

It is also wonderful to be owned – they are his OWN sheep – Verse 1 here finishes with those tender words – “...you are mine.”

It means that you have a permanent place in the family – you get given a surname – Verse 7 picks up on this reality of BELONGING (Verse 7) “...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

- (I am yours) SECOND, Verse 2, “When you pass through the waters...”:

Here in this bit we have vivid images of FLOODS and FIRES.

Let us be clear – God is not some abstract theory detached from reality.

No! God recognises that these are **TESTING TIMES** for the people of God.

The answer to their problem of deep-seated SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION is **not** “Just buck yourselves up because there is absolutely nothing to get yourself in a tizzy over!!”.

He says **WHEN** *READ* Verse 2 *READ* (emphasizing WHEN)

It is truly wonderful that God says – WHENEVER you are going through the mill (AND YOU WILL!!) – THEN I will **personally** be with you.

This is the other side of God saying “You are mine.”

He is saying in effect NOT ONLY are you mine BUT ALSO “I am yours”.

I give myself to you and that means that every time you need me then I am there for you. It is akin to that wonderful comfort that comes to a child when it knows that one or other of his parents is IN THE HOUSE.

- (precious) THIRD Verse 4 starts “Since you are precious...” or perhaps a better translation would be to follow the ESV which says “Since you are precious in my sight...”

One of the great problems with our FEAR, with our FEELINGS, with our STUBBORN DEPRESSION, is that we look at ourselves and thus fail to look at God.

We have the wrong reference point. “precious in my sight...” The fact that you might *not* feel precious and *not* feel valuable or worthy, is not what counts. **The only thing that matters is what God thinks.**

There was a time when the apostles, particularly the apostle Paul – were coming in for criticism – and there in 1 Corinthians 3 Paul has this to say:

“I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, **I do not even judge myself.** My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. **It is the Lord who judges me.**”

The truth is God’s FEELINGS are the only FEELINGS we need. They are certainly the only FEELINGS that we can really rely upon!

And He feels that you, who he calls MINE, are PRECIOUS IN HIS EYES.

Chip off the old block

You have to understand that you are a **CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK.** 1 Peter 2 Verses 4-6 reads:

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but **chosen by God and precious to him—YOU ALSO**, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, **a chosen and precious cornerstone**, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’”

God thinks that His Son is a perfect delight (you can look back to Isaiah 42 and the opening verse if you want evidence for that) he also considers Him as precious, as someone who is a TREASURE – and it is precisely the same for us –because He has chosen to make us “chips of the old block”.

I have always thought it was a very tender label when a parent would call their child MY TREASURE.

- (Honoured) FOURTH look at the next bit along (still Verse 4): “honoured”:

It is a remarkable UNDERSTATEMENT to call us “honoured” – this was the possession of God’s Son which we read about in the second Servant Song in Isaiah 49, Verse 5 there reads: “I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength— ...” and we have this same honour, again in God’s eyes.

- (I love you) FIFTH, let's pick off the last bit of that Verse (Precious or Treasured/Honoured) and now it says: "...because I love you."

These are some of the sweetest words that one person can say to another – and I can assure you – that given today is my 29th Wedding Anniversary – the one thing I will want to CLEARLY CONVEY is:

That "I love you – my sweet, my precious – because you are honoured, held up in my affection and in my esteem."

Now we don't have to wait all the way to [Isaiah 43](#) to hear God saying that He loves His people:

[Deuteronomy 7 verses 6-8](#) "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has **chosen you** out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, **his treasured possession**. The Lord did not set his **affection** on you and **choose** you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. **But it was because THE LORD LOVED YOU...**"

Can you hear, the LORD whispering that to you – ["I love you..."](#)

- SIXTH – take a look at [the end of Verse 3](#) "I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead." and [the end of Verse 4](#) "I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life."

I remember one time travelling to Nigeria and we flew in this instance by Virgin Atlantic. Now for some reason that I really cannot recall (and it certainly wasn't something we directly paid for), we got VIP status.

Q. Have you ever had that?

Well it was certainly a first for us – and you get transported (via lift) up into another world. There is a nicely furnished lounge where everything is free.

They serve you champagne, and there are as many sandwiches and cakes as you could possibly desire.

This is what you call PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT – and it is NICE!!!

Sometimes I feel a fraud

Sometimes, I have to confess, that I hold back from saying those words: "I love you..." and the reason is *not* that I don't want to say the words, but that the words might sound hollow – because I know that my actions maybe have not matched up. So I feel a bit of a fraud.

But let me say that God NEVER EVER feels a fraud saying those words: "I LOVE YOU"

And God says to His people, by the way, don't forget the VIP lounge – it's not just anybody you know that gets this treatment.

Are you getting the message

Q. I wonder, having listened to these SIX things whether you are getting the message?

God is not merely SAVING YOU, but He is SUSTAINING YOU
SUSTAINING YOU by the act of WITNESSING
WITNESSING to the way that He is
to the way that He feels and looks at things.

We get into SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION because we do not SEE all that we should SEE.

We get into EMOTIONAL SPIRALS because we think that the Bible is all about US – and it's not – it's about HIM:

- How He sees things
- How He is in Himself
- How He feels in regard to us
- What declarations He makes about us

Let me briefly put a second side to this which helps to complete or supplement the process of being truly SUSTAINED:

(#1 SUSTAINED by His WITNESS) – now:

#2] SUSTAINED by OUR WITNESS (Verses 8-28)

You may have noticed that twice in our passage (Verse 10 and Verse 12) that it says: "You are my witnesses...":

Verse 10 reads "**You are my witnesses,**" declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, **so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.**"

God, in his infallible wisdom, knows that the way we will be SUSTAINED is:

- to SEE WITH HIS EYES
- then to SPEAK WITH OUR LIPS

You see He knows that the way in which these remarkable things gets truly under our skin and into our hearts is for us to DECLARE THEM for us to GIVE WITNESS TO THEM.

Use it or lose it

You know the old saying: "Use it or lose it" – this is all about our talents that if we don't put them to use then we will find that we will lose them.

Similarly the things we learn of God will soon be lost (OR made of nil effect) if we do not **speak them out.**

Reading **Verse 10** from the end backwards: Q. How do we KNOW and BELIEVE and UNDERSTAND that God is the One He says He is?

Well by being His Witnesses – **verbalising** the things that He has already proclaimed.

As **Verse 12** says: “I have revealed and saved and **proclaimed** – I, and not some foreign god among you. **You are my witnesses...**”

Drawing from the background

Let me draw from the “out of focus” background for a moment:

Verse 21 gives us a helpful purpose statement: “...the people I formed for myself, that they may proclaim my praise.”

The NT corroborates and strengthens this – **1 Peter 2 verse 9** “But **you are a chosen people**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, **that you may declare the praises of him** who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

News to you?

Perhaps this is news to you. It has never really dawned that God has left it in your hands that you would have this life purpose to declare his praises – and that doesn’t just mean church, but means out in the world. Yes we are that city on the hill that cannot be hidden, we are the light of the world.

If you think – “well that doesn’t sound so very appealing” you are forgetting that God always has our good in mind He knows that:

- only in this way will we find FRESHNESS in our faith and in our knowledge of Him
- only in this way that we will find DEPTH & SUBSTANCE to our knowledge of Him

Demonstrated in the NT

What I am saying is borne out by Jesus and others in a variety of places – take for example:

- **John 7 verse 17** “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

So you have to DO in order to DISCOVER

- try **John 8 Verse 31** “If you **hold** to my teaching, you are really my disciples. **Then** you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

So the same again – you have to DO to DISCOVER

- **Luke 17 Verse 14** “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And **as they went, they were cleansed.**”

So a different area, that of healing – but the same thing – as you DO so you DISCOVER.

- Let me **finish it off** with one from Isaiah – (in case you think this is some NT truth alone)
Isaiah 58 Verse 13 & 14 “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

As you DO so you DISCOVER.

Let me come full circle:

CONCLUSION

This passage is one that, in context, is not so much as SAVING US but about SUSTAINING US.

It goes to answer the question:

- Q. How can I be sustained when the going gets tough?
- Q. How can I be sustained when the road seems long?
- Q. How can I be sustained when I no longer feel the things I want or should feel?

The answer here comes from DRINKING IN – Something completely new, something completely AFRESH.

God’s STRATEGY is one of WITNESS:

- **STEP 1** – He witnesses to you:
 - We’re summoned by name – and He says “You are mine”
 - When we go through the waters – He says not just you are mine but “I am yours”
 - You are precious – He says
 - You are honoured – He says
 - AND He says “I love you...”
 - To prove it, He gives us preferential treatment – giving others in exchange for us

That is step one

- **STEP 2** – is simple – FOLLOW MY LEAD – You Give Witness too – open your mouths and speak it out - and this will transform you as it enters the very depths of your being.

PRAISE BE TO GOD!

WHAT A **SUSTAINING GOD** WE HAVE!!

AMEN