**January 23, 2022 Isaiah 43:1-7**

 ***Come to the Father***

**Scripture:** *Isaiah 43:1-7 NRSV*

 *(1)But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (2)When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (3)For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. (4)Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. (5)Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; (6)I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth-- (7)everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."*

**Notes:**

1. Isaiah is writing from God to his ***chosen*** people, the Israelites.
	1. God created the people of Israel, and they were ***special*** to him.
	2. The Lord had created Jacob/Israel, and He did ***transform*** and ***redeem*** him.
	3. Even when God was angry with them, God helped them to ***prosper***.
	4. God protected Israel in times of trouble and helped them to ***prosper***.
2. What does it take to be one of God’s ***children***?
	1. To be one of God’s children, accept God as our ***father*** in heaven.
	2. To be a child of God, we must also accept Jesus Christ as our ***Savior***
	3. Am I one of God’s ***children***?
3. God offers each of His creation the opportunity to be His ***children***.
	1. We who are born of the Spirit are ***adopted*** into God’s family.
	2. Nobody is able to answer this question for you. It is strictly between ***you*** and ***God***.
4. We wonder what this ***year*** has in store for us.
	1. You are the one who ***decides***.
	2. Allow the Lord to ***enter*** your life in ways that you have not allowed in the past.

**Script:**

Today I am going to share with you a third attempt at a sermon for this Sunday January 9. In the past week I have watched the Pittsburgh Steelers defeat the Cleveland Browns in a seemingly dominant defensive attack and an emotional Offensive battle. When all is said and done, victory was theirs, but that wasn’t the big story. The big story was the supposed last game of a quarterback in his home stadium. As I watched, emotions were high, for I was remembering my last day in public education, my last day in my home stadium. I was remembering the fears I had, knowing that even though I was following God, I had no guarantee of success or financial security.

Isn’t that what we all look for in our lives, guarantees of success and financial security? We want to know that the things we do will be worth the effort. We want to know that we will not fail. We want to know that in life we will be comfortable. But even more so, we want to feel the love and acceptance from those around us. We want to feel successful.

However, I am not sure we can or even should expect a guarantee of these things. But there is a passage in scripture that does assure us that we are God’s chosen people. A passage that helps us to understand that no matter what mistakes we make in this life, we can be saved. A verse that reminds us that no matter how far we travel from the safety of God’s loving arms, his goal and our choice is to be redeemed. Turn with me today to our sermon passage from Isaiah 43:1-7, and stand with me as we share in the reading of God’s word.

*Isaiah 43:1-7 NRSV (1)But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (2)When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (3)For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. (4)Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. (5)Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; (6)I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth-- (7)everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."*

Obviously in this passage the prophet Isaiah is not speaking to us here in the 21st century. Isaiah is writing these words from God to his chosen people of the day, the Israelites. We know this from verse 1; *“This is what the Lord says to you whom He has created Jacob. This is God’s message to you Israel whom He has formed.”* God created the people of Israel, and they were special to him. He urged Abraham to leave his father’s camp and move to a new place, and Abraham did. His child Isaac would take over his father’s role as patriarch of the family farm and he would prosper under God’s protective watch. Isaac would have twin sons, Esau would be born first and Jacob would follow. As they grew Esau was in line to take over his fathers lands and livestock. But through the advice of his mother, Jacob would deceive his father and obtain the family birthrate; but it would come at a cost, for he would run for his life in fear of what his brother Esau may do.

Jacob would go to his uncles and work for 7 years to receive the hand of the daughter he desired. But Jacob be fooled on his wedding day by receiving his love’s sister as his bride. So, he would work 7 years more to obtain the hand of his love. During these 14 years he worked and the Lord blessed his efforts, and his brother in laws became jealous, Jacob decided to return home and accept whatever place his angry brother would allow for him. But before entering into the land he sent his livestock and people across the river and spent the night alone. At least he thought he was alone until a stranger showed up and wrestled with throughout the night, only to find out it was the Lord he struggled with til dawn. At this time the Lord gave him a new name, and that name would be Israel.

*“This is what the Lord says to you whom He has created Jacob. This is God’s message to you Israel whom He has formed… Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, and you are mine.”* Yes the Lord had created Jacob/Israel, and he did transform and redeem him, as he did with his family of that day, and future generations; through Israel’s twelve sons, through their time in Egypt, even when they were kept as slaves, and on the journey back to the land promised Abraham from the very beginning of their relationship with God. God watched over them, during the times of the Judges, during the kingdoms of Saul, David, Solomon, and the generations that followed. Even when God was angry with them and allowed them to be taken into captivity, God helped them to prosper; we think of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, and Daniel.

God redeemed them and called them by name to be those who belong to him. God protected Israel in times of trouble and He helped them to prosper. God tells them, *“When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end…(V2 MSG)”* But we ask why? The answer is found in verse 3, *“Because I am GOD, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior. I paid a huge price for you: all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in! That's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! I'd sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you. (V3 MSG)”* The Lord allowed their captors to conquer other peoples and when they felt no threat from the Israelites, their captors allowed them the freedom to return home. They were important to God, He had made a covenant with their ancestors and he was keeping it, even though the Israelites seem to have forgotten it from time to time.

Isaiah was speaking primarily of Israel's return from Babylon. But there is a broader meaning: All God's people will be regathered when Christ comes to rule in peace over the earth. This broader meaning includes all of God’s people even us. We are important to God, too. But, again this is for those who are God’s people. This brings us to the questions; what does it take to be one of God’s children? Am I one of God’s children? Finally, what does this have to do with the insecurities that we feel on a regular basis, what does this have to do with our needs and desires?

To be one of God’s children, to be a child of God, it begins by accepting God as the father of the universe, our father in heaven. And like any father/child relationship the father gives commands and makes rules, and the children obey. Also, the father loves the child no matter what the child has done and in return the child does their best to please the father; not because it is required, but because it is how we show love.

To be a child of God, we must also accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who came to earth in human form and died on a cross as a sacrifice for our sin. To be a child of God, we must accept Jesus as our Savior by asking him for the forgiveness of our sin and believing that he has forgiven us. This all seems very simple, but there are times when this is a difficult thing to achieve. While we can ask to receive His forgiveness, it is difficult for us to accept such forgiveness and believe in it, because we have a thought process of “we only receive what we deserve” and “we are not worthy of God’s forgiveness.” These thoughts are true to one extent, but that is exactly why it is called God’s grace, though it is undeserved, he gives it freely and extravagantly, because he loves each one of us.

So we come to the next question, “Am I one of God’s children?” If you have been born again of the Spirit, then yes you are a child of God. John 1:12-13 states, *“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 NRSV)”* God offers each of His creation the opportunity to be His children. *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1 NRSV)”* Paul writes that we who are born of the Spirit are adopted into God’s family. *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. (Galatians 4:4-5 NRSV)”* To answer this question, you only need to consider these criteria and answer the question about your own self. Nobody else on planet earth is able to answer this question for you. It is strictly between you and God.

Finally, what does this have to do with the insecurities that we feel on a regular basis, what does this have to do with our needs and desires? Turn to Philippians 4:19, *“And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19 NRSV)”* Our Father in heaven loves each of us, even those who have not received the a new spiritual birth. But for those who look to Him as their Father, their Lord, their Savior, He will satisfy your every need, maybe not your desires, but definitely your need. We find this assurance in the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:31, *“So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:31 NRSV)”*

And so, here we are at the beginning of 2022, looking back at the year in the rearview mirror, maybe even two years in the past, and we wonder what this year has in store for us. We wonder if we can stand another year like the past two; we wonder if this virus will ever leave us alone, or if we will be forever dealing with mask mandates, vaccine wars, the fears of catching the virus, and the troubling things we have seen in the past couple of years.

You are the one who decides, “Am I a child of God? Will I seek the Lord as my savior? Will I trust in the Lord? Will I lean on His everlasting loving arms?” You are the one who decides if you will come to the Father, and become His child. He has done everything that was needed and required to forgive the sins of your past, you only need to accept his gift of grace and mercy, His gift of forgiveness.

There is a song we will sing in a few minutes, that many of us have heard in the past. But I want you to hear the words clearly today. It was written by Mike Weaver of the group Big Daddy Weave and Benji Cowart. The words of their song “Redeemed” reflects lot of how we feel in times like this. Listen to these words and let them sink in;

Seems like all I could see was the struggle,

Haunted by ghosts that lived in my past
Bound up in shackles of all my failures,

Wond'ring how long is this gonna last
Then You look at this pris'ner and say to me,

Son stop fighting a fight that's already been won.

All my life I have been called unworthy,

Named by the voice of my shame and regret
But when I hear You whisper child lift up your head,

I remember O God You're not done with me yet

Because I don't have to be the old man inside of me,

'Cause his day is long dead and gone
Because I've got a new name a new life,

I'm not the same and a hope that will carry me home

I am redeemed You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains,

and wipe away ev'ry stain
Now I'm not who I used to be, I am redeemed

Today I encourage you; allow the Lord to enter your life in ways that you have not allowed in the past, Allow Him to take control of your attitudes, your fears, and your needs. Stop struggling to live this Christian life on your own and lean on Him. Hear the word of the Lord today, *“Do not fear, For I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”*