

# Who Rules the World

*Isaiah: Strength for the Weary*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 43:11  
**Preached on:** Sunday, October 9, 2016

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*Gracious God and ever blessed Father, we thank you now for the word of God, for the Scriptures that holy men of old wrote as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit, and we pray that you would come hide your word within our hearts that we might not sin against you. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Last week we began a series that will take us through November, a series of 8 or 9 studies in the second half of the prophecy of Isaiah and looking at some of the great texts that are to be found in the second half. Our text this morning will be verse 11 of chapter 43, "I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior," and we need a context and we're going to go back all the way to chapter 42 and verse 18.

18 Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! 19 Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? 20 He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. 21 The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious. 22 But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, "Restore!" 23 Who among you will give ear to this, will attend and listen for the time to come? 24 Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? 25 So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him up, but he did not take it to heart.

1 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, 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, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. 4 Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. 5 Fear not, 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 up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar 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." 8 Bring out the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! 9 All the nations gather together, and the peoples assemble. Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right, and let them hear and say, It is true. 10 You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. 11 I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. 12 I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and I am God. 13 Also henceforth I am he; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work, and who can turn it back?" 14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice. 15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." 16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

Verse 11 of chapter 43, "I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior."

God's people here are in trouble. Isaiah, you understand, is looking to the future; he is looking 100-120 years into the future to the captivity of Israel in Babylon. He's a prophet, he can do that. And he speaks about their emergence from Babylon a century and a half in Isaiah's future.

They are in trouble. He talks here about looting and plundering and so on in verse 24. The looter and the plunderer, Israel and Jacob have been given over to looters and plunderers. He's talking about Babylon. And the question that sometimes we ask when we find ourselves in trouble is: why? Why has this happened to me? Why has this trouble

come upon me? Why this particular providence? Why these set of circumstances? And it is difficult to answer that question. The prophet himself will say in chapter 50, "My ways are not your ways, my thoughts are not your thoughts."

So the question here is not so much why but who? You see there in verse 24, "Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers?" And the answer is: God did. "Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned?" And what follows in the rest of chapter 42 is a catalog of sins, a catalog of reasons why it is that Israel had been given over to bondage and to captivity and to Babylon: because of their spiritual insensitivity, because of their willful deafness and their willful blindness. They have been given many advantages, they have been given many privileges but they have broken God's law. They have transgressed his commandments and God has poured forth his chastisement. Verse 25, "he poured on him the heat of his anger," just like Hebrews 12 says that, "those whom I love I chasten," quoting from Proverbs 3.

Stephen Charnock, the Puritan, said, "We often learn more of God under the rod that strikes us than under the staff that comforts us." We often learn more under the rod that strikes us than the staff that comforts us. God put his people, well, as we might say, through the wringer. He put his people into captivity. He set his people in difficulty. They were looted and plundered and he did this because of their sin, because of their waywardness, because they weren't listening. They had been given many privileges but they weren't listening. They were given many advantages but they were falling asleep. So God came and he chastised them and he wants them to know, he wants them to know that he has a great future ahead for the people of God. That's what that section right at the end of our reading was all about when he talked about beasts and jackals and ostriches and water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert and so on, and drink for my chosen people. And Isaiah is thinking about the future as he so often does in this prophecy and he's thinking about a glorious and a magnificent future. He's going to do a great thing. He's going to do a magnificent thing.

What kind of God can do that? What does it take for God to do that, particularly to a people who seemingly are blind and deaf? And that's what the opening of chapter 43 is all about. He gives you a little glimpse of this great God and that's what I want us to consider together this morning, a little glimpse of this great God.

What kind of God is he? You notice in verse 13, he says, "I work, and who can turn it back?" That's the kind of God that we have. He doesn't give up. He doesn't break his promise. When he begins something, he finishes it. The salvation, the redemptive purposes of God are not an array of half-finished enterprises and half-finished projects. Many of us have half-finished projects in our homes that have been there for years. They are never going to be finished and we'll put them out on the roadside one day in a garage sale and get rid of them and salve our conscience. And God doesn't have half-finished projects. "I begin and I finish my work and who can turn it back?" The power of God at work in the lives of his people.

I want us to see this great God and there are six things that he mentions beginning in verse 1 of chapter 43: he is the Creator. He is the Creator. "But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel." Then you notice if you drop your eyes all the way down to the end of verse 7, "whom I formed and made." Created, formed, made. They are three different words, all three of them are found in Genesis 1 and 2. They are three words that Moses implies to speak about creation. The first word is the word that signals the creation of something new, that brings something new into existence. The second word is a word that is sometimes translated even in Isaiah, it's translated as "potter," and has the idea of fashioning and forming and molding into a certain kind of shape into the very thing that God wants it to be. And the third word is a word that has the connotations of God's sovereignty and will involved in this creative process. We are created. Israel is created. God made her just as he made you and me.

I like sometimes to look at objects that I may purchase or I may find around the house and they may be bits of clothing or they may be something else, and you look for a label that says, "Made in wherever." Well, if you look in the mirror, my dear friend, there is a label and it's stuck right here on your forehead and it says, "Made by God." Made by God. He made you. He formed you. He fashioned you. He molded you. He shaped you. He gave you your characteristics. He gave you your personality. That's not to say that there are aspects of our personality that have been molded by sin and need to change, but God made you who you are and God made you in a very special way.

Now, one of the problems, one of the setbacks that we face in our time is a distrust of the doctrine of creation and people are confused and sometimes Christians are confused and they get all caught up and so on in how do you reconcile this, the age of the earth for example, with Genesis 1, or whatever. And these are legitimate questions and they deserve thorough going answers, but this morning all I want us to see is this: the doctrine that God created us is absolutely essential. It's absolutely vital because it means that our very existence we owe to him. It means that we owe him our allegiance. We owe him everything. He made us. He brought us into being. I exist for him. That is the reason for my existence. God breathed into Adam the breath of life. He kissed him into existence. You know, that's a wonderful little metaphor: God kissed you into existence. By the kiss of his mouth, he brought you into being. He is your Creator. Never forget it, my friend.

Then you notice, secondly, he uses the word "Redeemer." Still in verse 1, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you." It's one of these great Old Testament words and it's implied again in the New Testament when we think, for example, of Boaz. The word here is "goel" and Boaz was a goel. He was a kinsman redeemer. He was one who drew near to a next-of-kin and met the obligations, the legal obligations of that individual. Well, that's what God has done. He's drawn near to us and acted as though he was our next-of-kin, as our Father. He has paid the price. We find ourselves in debt. He pays off the debt. He sends his own Son to pay that ransom price. We are redeemed not with silver and gold or precious things but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot or blemish or wrinkle or any such thing. "Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb." Do you know that song? Fanny Crosby's song? Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it. I am redeemed. The payment has been paid in full.

He says, "You are mine. I call you by name." That's what redemption means. "I call you by name. I was telling the little children this morning in the first service I had one of these senior moments this week. I was on a plane and sitting opposite a few rows away but within my sight and line of vision, my wife was in another part of the plane, too complicated to explain. We don't need counseling. I had been upgraded but I gave her the seat so I was in the back of the plane. But moving on, I saw this person and I knew this person, a graduate of the seminary and former student of mine but I hadn't seen him in probably 15 years and I could not remember his name. I went through the alphabet, beginning with A, and just to see if a name would pop into my head. I kept looking at him and thinking and every now and then it almost came. I could almost taste it, this name, and then it disappeared again. Then when I got off the plane and he had disappeared, I said to Rosemary, "Who was that?" And she said, "That was Wes." She knew his name.

Well, God knows your name. He calls you by name. He knows your name. You're on a first name basis with God. He gives you his name, his name Yahweh, his name that he gave to Moses, the "I am that I am," and then shortened to "I am." And it sounds like, well, it sounds like Yahweh, it sounds like the verb "to be." He is the covenant God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who makes promises. The God who keeps promises. He's our Redeemer.

Then we're still in verse 1, he says, "you are mine," with the implication that he's our preserver. "You are mine." Because he has paid the ransom price, we belong to him and he preserves. When you pass through the waters, they will not overflow you. And when you pass through the fire, it will not consume you. You notice the fire is mentioned in verse 25, "poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him up," and so on. God isn't saying here that he'll keep you from the fire. What he's saying is that he will keep you in the fire. He's not saying he'll keep you from the trial, from the difficulty, from the chastisement, but that in the chastisement and in the fire he will keep you and sustain you.

Then you notice in verse 4 something else, "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you." He is our Creator and Redeemer and preserver and lover. He says, "I love you and you are precious to me." Oh, love that will not let us go, I rest my weary soul on thee." "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life."

God says to you, "I love you. I love you." And perhaps some of you need to hear that this morning. You're in this dark place, plundered and looted, and the clouds have come in. And perhaps you've wandered off the reservation a little in your waywardness and God is calling you and he says, "I love you. I love you. You are precious to me. I sent my Son for you. I gave him up for you."

Every relationship benefits when you tell someone that you love them and you say it with meaning and you say it with intention and you say it with affection. And God, the infinite

God, the Creator God, the omniscient God, is saying to you, Christian, he's saying to you, "I love you. I've always loved you. I will always love you. I'll never stop loving you."

Then you notice in verses 5 and 6 something else, "Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you." He's the great gatherer. And what is he talking about here? He says, "to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold." Well, in one sense he's looking into the future and perhaps initially his thoughts are on Babylon which are a century ahead of him and he's thinking to the exodus from Babylon which is a century and a half in the future and he's saying, "I will gather you. I will bring you out again and not one of you will be lost." But I think the prophet is thinking in greater terms than that as he so often does in this prophecy and he's thinking just as he does in verses 18 and 19 and 20 when he talks about the deserts, as it were, with flowing rivers in the desert. He's thinking about a glorious future.

That's difficult to imagine and difficult to take in, when the lion will lie down with the lamb and the child will put his hand on the cockatrice's den and so on, and the world, the earth, will be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. And whatever your eschatological views may be, whether you view that in this world or whether you view that as a description as I do of the new heavens and the new earth, he's saying to these benighted, deaf, blind children of his who have wandered off the reservation, "Open your eyes and see what I'm going to do!"

What a word for our time. Salvation doesn't belong in the election of a new President. Mercy, it does not. Our hopes are not built there. They are shifting sands. Our hope is on the solid rock and foundation of the mighty purposes of God. Look beyond that. Ah, we may be asked to go through a period of trial and difficulty as a nation but these are not promises for the United States of America, these are promises for the church of Jesus Christ and that's a very different thing.

And he's saying to the people of God, "I'm going to do," well, what he says is in verse 19, "I am going to do a new thing. I'm going to do a new thing. I'm going to bring into being a new heavens and a new earth. I'm going to do something that's going to just boggle your minds." He's the great gatherer and he's saying, "I will find you. I will find you."

Do you remember in "The Last of the Mohicans," well, the movie perhaps, set as it was in 1756 in the wilderness of upper New York and you remember there was Nathaniel charged and some others charged and some Mohican warriors charged to take two daughters of a certain colonel to a fort. And it's easy to remember for me, it was called Fort William Henry. That's my name. And there was a massacre. You remember the Huron tribe massacred so many of them and you remember that moment when Nathaniel is standing before a waterfall, Daniel Day Lewis, and he's speaking to Cora and he says, "I will find you. No matter how far you go, I will find you." And then he dives into the waterfall and then you shed some tears, that moving moment.

Well, that's what God is saying here, "I will find you." Some of you are in a dark place of depression, almost unreachable sometimes. The mind can grow sick from its encounters

with the sinfulness of this world and perhaps others can't find you and they speak to you but you can't hear their voices and you have turned in upon yourself and God is saying, "I will find you. No matter how far you go, I will find you and I will bring you home to myself."

It's a beautiful description, isn't it? But there is one more thing here, you notice in verse 7, "everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory." Well, there it is. What is the point of it all? Why are we here? What is the point of my existence? Why did God save me and rescue me and bring me to himself? What is my obligation as somebody who calls himself a Christian? What is my obligation? To live for his glory. It always has been. It always will be. To live for the glory of God. We are to shine forth the glory of God. A little bit of the glory of God is to be reflected in you and in me. That's our purpose.

You notice in verse 10, he assembles in verse 9 the nations and so on and talks about bringing witnesses. It's a courtroom drama. There is verse 12, there is mention here of a strange god. "Who is it that did this for you? It wasn't some strange god, some idol." You know, that was the problem and the prophet will return to it again. That was the problem why they were chastised, that's the problem why they were deaf, that's the problem why they were blind, because they had turned to idols. Man's mind is a perpetual factory of idols and ancient idols required that you sacrificed your life to them and modern idols do the same. They want you. They want all of you. We call them by different names: money, power, ambition, sport, leisure, sex. And they want you and they offer you everything and they give you nothing in return. And they cheat. These idols, they cheat like some character on a trashy daytime soap opera. They cheat. Like the ring in Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings," it allures and it attracts and it promises power and all it gives is something evil in return. So why would you look there? Why would you give yourself to an idol when there is this glorious, amazing, beautiful God, our Creator, our Redeemer, our preserver, our protector, our gatherer, who says, "I will find you and I will bring you home"?

So open your eyes, my friend, and unstop your ears and behold, "I, I am the Lord and besides me there is no savior." The problem with idols in the end is that they don't exist, you see. They have no being. They are a figment of your imagination. That's all they are. They're powerful, oh, they're extraordinarily powerful, but in the end they don't really exist. They don't have being and God alone has being. He is the great "I am." "I, I alone am God and besides me there is no savior." Well, open your eyes to it and behold him in all his majesty and splendor and glory and give him glory in return.

*Father, we thank you for these beautiful words written so long ago. We thank you for the affirmation that you love us. You have created us and redeemed us and are determined to preserve us because you love us and we pray today that this might be our theme and that this might be our song as we look forward to that new thing that you will one day do in your mighty power and purpose. So bless us, we pray, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*