

## Our God Saves: Believe

The Call to Believe

Isaiah 48

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*“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together. “Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken and called him; I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.” Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, “The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!”” (Isa. 48:10–20, ESV)*

Last Sunday, I concluded my sermon with a very helpful statement that my wife made to me, and I’ve heard from many of you that you also found it to be helpful: **God is going to help you. He has to!**

This statement serves as a reminder that when we feel vulnerable, frightened, anxious, and fearful, God promises that he will help us. We find this promise in many places, including the book of Romans.

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31–32)*

Paul directly connects this promise to the bedrock of the grace of God on the cross. The argument goes like this: if God used the death of his Son for his good purposes, do you not think he can use anything?

The death and resurrection of Jesus demonstrated God’s graciousness to us.

What’s more, God’s promises are directly connected to who he is. He swears by himself. That’s why he “has to help us.”

*“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:17–20).*

God is going to help you. He has to! That’s true. But do you know why it’s true?

Imagine someone hearing the statement “God is going to help you,” and they painfully retort: Why? The quick answer is because he wants to. But what if the person pressed you further and said, “Why does he want to?”

Your answer to this “Why?” question gets to the heart of the gospel. And it’s what makes the grace of God absolutely amazing. Here’s the truth that changes people’s lives: God rescues the unworthy to show his worthiness.

In chapters 46-47, we observed the contrast between the idols of culture and the faithfulness of God. Remember— “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose” (Isa. 46:10). Chapter 48 is an invitation to believe and celebrate the graciousness of God.

As Isaiah considers what God will teach the people of Israel through their coming captivity, he highlights the worthiness of God because of our unworthiness. It’s like what John Newton said, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” In Isaiah 48, we find another chapter designed to encourage the people of God with two foundational truths about God that should be believed and declared: the grace of God and the glory of God.

### **1. The Grace of God (vv. 1-8)**

The first eight verses help us to see that God loves his people and rescues them in spite of them. Now, this text is going to highlight five tragic characteristics of God’s people that make God’s love all the more amazing. You are going to see that God doesn’t love his people because of what they do but despite what they do.

But before I get into this passage, some of you already feel defensive. You already feel like a failure. You already know that you are a mess. You hardly need anyone telling you what you already know is true. I get that. But you need to know that the reason this is in the Bible is *not* to wound you but to welcome you.

The Bible tells us what we are like so that we can know that the offer of redemption is for us and be reassured. Knowing you need help is normal for a Christian. Ray Ortlund says it like this:

If you are in Christ, whatever God is doing in your life right now is not an experiment that he might abandon if he gets fed up with you. You need to know that God would have to stop being God

before he'd quit on you. And *why* is God devoted to you? It's not because you risk looking like a failure. You already do. So do I. It's because God will never let his purpose fail. The defeat of grace to sinners would be the defeat of God.<sup>1</sup>

Let's see what we learn about the grace of God through the lens of how Israel (and all of us!) are described here. Think of this way: God is gracious to the \_\_\_\_\_.

### **To the Inconsistent**

In verses 1-2, we find some amazing descriptions of the identity of Israel. The people have been given so much! They are called by name. They have a glorious history and pedigree. And they say all the right things. They swear by the name of the Lord and confess the God of Israel.

They have all the trappings of spirituality and religious fervor, but there is a problem: "not in truth or right." They were spiritually inconsistent. They were guilty of being hypocritical. Things looked good, but behind the scenes, there was blatant inconsistency.

I trust that you understand and relate to this. Jesus welcomes those who are exhausted trying to keep up appearances. He doesn't love us because of our curated online personas, our over-spiritualized answers, or frenzied activities. He doesn't love us because we "keep it real." Because he knows we really don't. He's gracious to us despite our inconsistency.

### **To the Stubborn**

Listen carefully so that you can help someone else with this issue. In verse 3, God explains what he did in the past with a special emphasis on the connection between his activity and what happened: "I did them and they came to pass." God acted this way (reinforced in verse 5) is because "you are obstinate." The Hebrew word here is used for a person who is rough with others (1 Sam. 20:10) and harsh (1 Sam. 25:3). It's the kind of person that makes everyone's life difficult, and it's a characteristic pattern ("neck is an iron sinew" and "forehead of brass"; v. 5).

God is gracious to the self-confident, to those with authority issues, to the opinionated, and to those who always think they are right. God extends grace to the obstinate and stubborn.

### **To the Selfish**

In verse 5, God explains that he announced things in advance because he knew the pattern of his people. They are often inclined to take the good things from God and attribute it to an idol of their own making. Notice the three uses of the word "my" in verse 5.

God extends grace to people who think that they're in control of their lives and brag about it.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [\*Isaiah: God Saves Sinners\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 314–316.

### **To the Arrogant**

In verses 6-7, God identifies that he's doing something new—something that they don't know about. If you read these verses carefully, you can see how intentional God is to make it clear that this is something he's doing and that it's unexpected. And he does this because he knows that his people will be inclined to be full of themselves, thinking that they knew about it before.

### **To the Rebellious**

This section is reaching a crescendo. Verse 8 is a stunning rebuke. "You have never heard, you have never known. . . your ear has not been opened." God's long history with his people demonstrates that we keep making the same mistakes over and over again. I was talking about this with two women on Tuesday who were coming from a Bible Study on the book of Judges. It's incredible how the rebellion of mankind just keeps repeating itself.

God's conclusion about the people at the end of verse 8 isn't some nasty judgmental critique. It's true! "I knew that you would deal treacherously and that from before birth you were called rebel" (48:8).

How do we think about this list? What does your heart feel when the Bible talks about the inconsistent, the stubborn, selfish, arrogant, and rebellious? Put those words aside for a moment. Pick your own words to describe what you are like at your worst. Here are a few: angry, conceited, vengeful, dishonest, insecure, covetous, lustful, vain, doubting, unbelieving, guilty, or anxious.

My guess is that these words feel heavy. Maybe discouraging. Some of you came to church looking for some kind of hope, and you might be tempted to think, "I don't need to be reminded how messed up I am." That may be true.

But you need to be careful here. Imagine how you'd feel if the list wasn't about who you really are, but who you need to be. Imagine if the list sounded like this: God's grace is lavished on those who are worthy, consistent, deserving, busy, calm, perfect, and generous. What would it feel like to know that your ability to receive God's grace was entirely dependent on how you performed?

Some of you know exactly what that's like. You lived in a home, played for a coach, had a friend, maybe even a spiritual leader—and everything about your relationship was based a condition. Be perfect or it's over!

But God isn't like that. His goal is to redeem broken people. He pours out his grace on those who are completely undeserving. That's what makes it grace! Do you why he does this? That leads us to our second point.

## **2. The Glory of God (vv. 9-22)**

Why does God love his people? Why does he treat us with such kindness? Why does he put up with our failures? The answer is found in verses 9 and 11.

- "For my own sake, I defer my anger" (v. 9)

- “For the sake of my praise, I restrain it for you” (v. 9)
- “For my own sake, I do it” (v. 11)
- “My glory I will not give to another” (v. 11)

God treats us with kindness and mercy because of his own glory. In other words, the grand plan of God in rescuing sinners is not to shine a spotlight on the sinner, but to celebrate glory of what created the spotlight. The purpose of grace is to display the kindness and mercy of God.

Some of you might be a bit uncomfortable with talking about God glorifying himself. It can make God sound egocentric or narcissistic. But in the same what God swearing by himself is the greatest assurance that something will happen, so too is the reality that there is nothing more attractive or worthy of praise than the glory of God. If the glory of God is both the best and our highest good, then it is appropriate and right for God to make much of himself. He is God!

The apostle Paul made the same argument in Ephesians 2:4-9.

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:4–9).*

The glory of God is the central motivation in the universe. It is both the center and source of everything. And the invitation in this text is to believe that God’s glory matters that much.

We see this in a number of places in this chapter:

- The suffering of God’s people fit into the plan of God for his name to be glorified (v. 11)
- God’s glory is connected to who he is— “I am the first, I am the last” (v. 12)
- He’s the creator, and his glory is displayed in the created order (v. 13)
- He controls the rise and fall of nations (v. 14)
- God empowers leaders who are able to conquer—like Cyrus (v. 15-16)
- God is the one who goes before everyone and creates blessing (v. 17)

This is who God is! His glory isn’t just seen in one arena, but it is displayed in everything he does. That’s because his glory is not a feature of his activity. His glory is not a character trait. Glory is the sum of what makes him God.

Glory is the effect of what he does. It’s the motivation for his actions. Glory is the “why” behind everything that God does. Nothing is greater than living by and for this glory.

Which is why verse 18 is tragic. God laments that his people chose not to follow his ways. He groans over the waywardness of his people such that he must discipline them. But take note that even their hardship was part of God’s plan for them. He was wooing them back to himself.

And so, this chapter comes to a climax in verses 20-21 with a choice to make in 22.

Isaiah looks forward to the day when Israel's exile will be over. In this historic moment, they will not only be delivered, but they will also celebrate their newfound freedom. Verse 20 sings: "The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!"

This is a bold declaration of praise and adoration as the people of God see the glory of God on full display. And it's followed by a reminder that God is able to provide for his people.

God rescues the unworthy to show his worthiness.

But this text ends with a sober warning. Really this entire chapter is designed to lay out a clear choice and a call to believe. Chapter 48 concludes with "there is no peace for the wicked." Each of us must make that choice—whether to acknowledge our unworthiness and live by the redemption offered to us through Christ or to live by our own efforts and be on the wrong side of God.

### **Applications:**

Let me invite you to consider three applications of this glorious text.

1. **Is grace your identity?** The people of Israel were marked by the singular idea that they were a people who were redeemed. Christians are to have grace define their lives which results in security (I don't have to be perfect), gratitude (I've got so much to be thankful for), and endurance (God's going to continue to help me).
2. **Is grace your posture toward others?** Those who see themselves this way and believe in God's grace should have a different orientation to others. They understand our collective unworthiness. They resist the temptation to be judgmental, harsh, and punitive.
3. **Is there a need to receive God's grace for the first time?** For some of you, the invitation here is to put your faith and trust in Christ – to embrace your unworthiness in light of the worthiness of God's grace and mercy. Why don't you come to Jesus today!

God delights to show his worthiness to those who are unworthy. Don't wait. Believe today.

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, love, and pow'r.*

*I will arise and go to Jesus;  
He will embrace me in His arms.*

*In the arms of my dear Savior,  
Oh, there are ten thousand charms.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/come-ye-sinners-poor-and-needy/>