

Precious Promises for a New Year

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, for a short while, if we could turn back to Isaiah chapter 43. Isaiah 43, I just want us to look at the opening seven verses, where the Lord is speaking.

But we'll read again at verse 1. Isaiah 43 at verse 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. 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.

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. And so on. As you know, at the beginning of a new year, we often, I don't know if you often like to do it, but many people often like to make New Year's resolutions, where we resolve to improve upon last year.

And we do so either by losing weight or giving up smoking or reducing our alcohol intake or taking up exercise. Whatever it is, we often make New Year's resolutions where we resolve to improve upon the year that has just passed.

[1 : 40] But what about reading our Bible? What about reading our Bible? Because we all know that it's good to look after our body.

But what about taking care of our soul? In fact, at the beginning of a new year, we can often resolve to starting a daily reading, where there's many daily readings to choose from, many good ones, many not so good ones, many that will help us and encourage us in the year ahead.

And many, they resolve to beginning, they begin by reading a daily reading every single day. And if you don't have one, get one. Make sure you have one. Some people resolve to reading through the Bible in one year, which is a great thing to do, because you can't beat the Bible.

And there's nothing of more benefit to our soul than to read the infallible, inerrant, and inspired Word of God. And whether we follow McShane's daily reading plan, or we buy a Bible that is called the Bible in one year, it's a great way to read through the whole Bible in one year.

And, you know, I highlight this because, as with many of our New Year's resolutions, we're good at starting them, but we're often not good at sticking to them. We're good at starting them, but not good at sticking to them.

[3 : 04] But, of course, following a daily reading, or reading through the Bible every day, it's something worth starting, and it's something worth sticking to. Because our Bible, as you know, it contains prayers.

We sang one already, Moses' prayer. It contains praises. We sang Psalm 91, praise of God. But it also contains promises. It contains prayers, praises, and promises, which is actually the title of one of my favorite daily readings.

It was by Warren Weersbe. If you don't have it, get it. It's a walking through the book of Psalms, and it's called Prayers, Praise, and Promises. Prayers, Praise, and Promises.

And I mention that because in this passage, in Isaiah, we're given precious promises. We're given precious promises for a new year.

That's what we have in verses 1 to 7. Precious promises for a new year. And the thing is, there are so many precious promises in these opening seven verses that, believe it or not, I couldn't divide them into sermon points, which means I have no sermon points today, so I don't know how you're going to keep attention, but I have no sermon points, just precious promises.

[4 : 23] Precious promises for a new year. Precious promises for a new year. And that's what we see in this passage. Look again at verse 1. It says, And you're in this precious passage with precious promises.

The Lord is speaking, and He's speaking to His precious people. And in verses 1 to 7, the Lord declares, and He demonstrates His precious promises to His precious people.

But the first thing we ought to notice when we come to these verses is who is speaking. Who is speaking here? Because in this precious passage with precious promises, Isaiah the prophet, He gives that signature statement.

The prophetic signature statement, Thus says the Lord. That's what He says. Thus says the Lord. And as you know, that was the prophetic signature statement of all of the prophets.

All of the prophets who were prophets of the Lord, they would begin by saying, Thus says the Lord. And they would say that because it emphasized the authenticity and even the authority of the one who is speaking.

[6 : 01] Thus says the Lord. And here the Lord is speaking. He's speaking with precious promises to His precious people. And it's important that we note that the Lord is speaking.

It's not Isaiah that's speaking. It's the Lord who is speaking. And we have to emphasize that it's the Lord who is speaking. Because as we've seen and said many times before, whenever we see the title Lord, as you see it there in verse 1, you see the title Lord in capital letters.

It's the title of the covenant king. It's the title of the one who keeps covenant. That's what the word Lord means. The one who keeps covenant. It's a title that emphasizes and explains to us that the Lord is one who makes promises and keeps His promises.

He makes promises and He keeps His promises. So when Isaiah starts writing this passage, he starts with that signature statement, thus says the Lord.

And when we see that, we should know. And we should know that we can trust that what the Lord is saying is true. Because He's a covenant making and a covenant keeping God.

[7 : 14] He's one who makes promises and keeps His precious promises to His precious people. In fact, you know, the beautiful thing about our Bible, and I hope you think the Bible is beautiful, the beautiful thing about our Bible is that it contains 7,487 precious promises to His precious people.

The beautiful thing about our Bible is that it contains 7,487 of the Lord's precious promises to His precious people.

And I was thinking about that, the amount of promises. And it reminded me of, I don't know if you remember that children's address we did a while ago, thinking about the Lord's precious promises. We did a children's address, I think it was a couple of years ago. And if you remember, we were looking at different things from different rooms. We were going through different rooms of the house, and we were in the utility room, and we were talking to the children about being in the utility room, and things in the utility room that remind us about Jesus.

And we came across pegs. And I can still hear the Beatty twins, Callum and Alice, shouting, pegs, pegs, from the pew. But we're saying to the children that just like pegs that cling to the clothes on a clothesline, we need to cling to the precious promises of God's Word.

[8 : 41] Just like the clothes that cling to shapes with the shoes, to the clothesline. Just like the pegs, we need to cling to the Lord's precious promises in his Word. So every time you're hanging out the washing, gentlemen, every time you're hanging out the washing, just like the pegs that cling to the clothes on the clothesline, we need to cling to the precious promises of God's Word.

But not only cling to these precious promises, we need to claim them. They're our promises.

They're all ours, every one of them. Yea and amen in Christ Jesus. But not only claim them and cling to them, we need to confess them.

We need to keep saying them back to the Lord. Lord, you promised. Lord, you promised. Lord, you promised. We need to cling, claim, and confess these precious promises because there are so many of them. 7,487 of the Lord's precious promises given to us as his precious people. And one of those precious promises is the first thing the Lord says here to his precious people. What's the first thing the Lord says? Fear not. Fear not. That's what he says in verse 1. Fear not. And as you know, there are 366. Some would argue 365. Some would argue 366. I'll say 366 fear nots in the Bible. That's one for every day of the year, including a leap year, which is this year, 2024. The daily promise. You have a daily promise. Every day you wake up in the morning, the Lord says to you, fear not. Fear not. What does he say next? For I have redeemed you. Fear not. You know, you couldn't find more of a precious promise to be given at the beginning of a new year than this precious promise. Fear not. And this precious promise, as you know, it's scattered throughout Scripture. We see it all the time appearing in different parts of the Bible. It's not confined to one section of the Bible. It's all over Scripture, scattered throughout Scripture. But you know, my favorite

fear not is when Jesus, our good shepherd, says to us, fear not, little flock. Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Fear not, little flock. You can't find more of a precious promise than the Lord saying to each and every one of us, each and every day of our lives, fear not.

Fear not. And you know, it's such a precious promise because, well, we don't know what will happen. We often say it at the beginning of a new year. We don't know what will happen on any day of this coming year. And if the past year or even of previous years are anything to go by, then there were so many things that we encountered and we experienced without any warning. There was no prior warning. There were so many things that we weren't prepared for, things that we maybe even never thought possible. And yet when sin or sickness or suffering or sorrow or separation, when that stepped into our lives, it left us completely disabled with doubt and paralyzed with panic and filled with fear and weakened with worry. And yet the Lord gives to us his precious promises to his precious people every day of our lives. Fear not. Fear not. And you know, I say this to myself, Murdo, if you would only listen to what you're saying to these people.

Because every day we're so full of fear, and yet the Lord says to us every day, fear not. What a promise. What a precious promise to his precious people. And you know, we are his precious people because the Lord says here in this precious passage, he says about his precious people, he says that he has created us and he has formed us. He's created us and formed you. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. He is the one who formed you.

[13:08] He created you at the beginning of verse 1. He who created you, O Jacob. He who formed you, O Israel. It's the image and illustration of clay in the hands of a potter being formed and fashioned, being made and molded and modeled into the image and likeness of our creator. In fact, when you read through the book of Isaiah, you come to chapter 64, and there's that wonderful prayer where Isaiah prays, O Lord, thou art our Father. We are the clay, thou our potter. We are the work of thy hands.

And as you know, maybe only too well, my friend, as those made in the image and likeness of our creator, as those formed and fashioned, we are brittle and broken jars of clay. That's what we are. We are brittle and we're broken jars of clay. We are broken people living broken lives in this broken world. And as we often say, the church is not a museum of good people. It's a hospital for the broken.

Because Jesus, the great physician, came to provide balm for the brittle and bind up the brokenhearted. He came to provide balm for the brittle and to bind up the brokenhearted. But he not only created us as these jars of clay, we're also told in the second half of verse 1, he's also come to restore us and renew us and redeem us. 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. My friend, the Lord, the one who keeps covenant, the one who makes promises and keeps his promises, he's not only our creator, he's also our redeemer. Therefore, he's not only our potter, he's also our shepherd. That's the other image and illustration that's been used at the second half of verse 1. Because, you know, it's the potter who creates and it's the shepherd who redeems. It's the potter who creates and it's the shepherd who redeems. It's the shepherd who, as you know, he searches for lost sheep. It's the shepherd who buys us back at the auction mart of Calvary. It's the shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. It's the shepherd who calls his own sheep by name. It's the shepherd who claims and confesses about his sheep and says there, you are mine. I have called you by name. You are mine. That's not what Jesus says. Jesus says about his sheep. He speaks in John chapter 10. He who enters by the door of the shepherd of the sheep, to him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And Jesus declares, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Why? Because my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life and they will never perish. Neither shall they be plucked out of my hand. And you know, it's a wonderful verse. We've only reached verse one.

[16:30] And we're reminded right there from the outset that it's the potter who creates and it's the shepherd who redeems. Wonderful, precious promises in this precious passage. It's the potter who creates, but it's the shepherd who redeems. And you know, how many people in our congregation, how many people in our community were reminded and reassured of the precious promises of the Good Shepherd last year? How many people in our congregation and community were reminded

and reassured of the precious promises of the Good Shepherd last year? How many people were reminded that he's a good shepherd who leads us into green pastures and besides still waters? How many were reminded that he's a good shepherd who walks beside us through the valley of the shadow of death?

How many were reminded that he's a good shepherd who follows behind us with his goodness and his mercy? How many times last year did we sing Psalm 23 with a grieving family and remind them of the promises, the precious promises of this good shepherd? And then you start a new year and you ask the question, how many people in our congregation and in our community will be reminded of the precious promises of this good shepherd this coming year? Because the thing is, you look at this precious passage and this good shepherd, he is fully aware of the fact that with the fragility of life and the finality of death, there will be other homes and there will be other families in our congregation and in our community who will need to be reminded, who will need to be directed, who will need to be pointed to the precious promises of the good shepherd this coming year. And we know this because our good shepherd, he's fully aware of it because he says in verse 2, when, when you pass through the waters,

I will be with you. The good shepherd doesn't say if, he doesn't say if you pass through the waters, but when, when you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And the good shepherd says that, he says it not because he's pessimistic, but because he's realistic. He knows the fragility of life. He knows the finality of death. He paid the price for it. He knows the stresses and the sicknesses that we all face. He knows the suffering and the sorrows that often come into our heart because he came to bear our griefs and to carry our sorrows, which is why this good shepherd doesn't say if you pass through the waters, but when, 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. What a wonderful promise. What a wonderful promise, a precious promise. Most commentators have agreed that the two occasions that are being referred to here are when the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea at the exodus from Egypt and also the fires, the fires of the fiery furnace in Babylon. Because on both occasions, the Lord was shepherding his people.

The Lord was with his people. He was leading them. He was with them. He was behind them. He was shepherding his people. He, the Lord was leading the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground.

[20 : 23] And Moses, you remember, Moses was standing at the banks of the Red Sea and he was giving that prophetic proclamation to the people, fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord that he will work with you today. And in Babylon, when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, when they were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship the golden image, those looking on asked, remember that great question they asked, did we not throw three men bound into the fire? But I see four unbound walking in the midst of the fire. And they are not hurt. The appearance of the fourth is like the Son of God.

You know, my friend, it's wonderful, precious promises. The good shepherd doesn't say if, but when. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. 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. And you know, this verse 2, this precious promise to the Lord's precious people, reminds me of the poetry of that particularly precious person, you could say. She was a Christian.

She was a woman called Annie Johnson Flint. Annie Johnson Flint. Annie Johnson Flint, she was actually born on Christmas Day in 1866. But Annie, she had a tough upbringing. Her parents died when she was very young. But that didn't discourage her. It didn't deter Annie from her dream. Her dream was to be a primary school teacher. This is what she always wanted to be, was a primary school teacher. And so when Annie graduated and got her dream job, she thought that she was set for life as a primary school teacher.

But only in her second year of teaching, Annie had to give it all up because she was suffering with chronic arthritis. And it led to Annie having a life of pain, where pain was her constant and pain was her daily companion. And yet that didn't discourage or deter Annie from writing some Christian hymns and also Christian poetry. And one particularly precious poem that Annie Johnson Flint wrote, it's a poem called God Hath Not Promised. God Hath Not Promised. She writes, God hath not promised, skies always blue, flowers through and pathways, all our lives through. God hath not

promised, sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain. God hath not promised, we shall not know, toil and temptation, trouble and woe. He hath not told us what we shall not bear, many a burden, many a care. God hath not promised, smooth roads and wide, swift, easy travel, needing no guide, never a mountain rocky and steep, never a river turbid and deep. But she says, the last verse, but God hath promised. God hath promised strength for the day, rest for the labor, light for the way, grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love. God hath promised. [24 : 06] Don't you just love that? Strength for the day, rest for the labor, light for the way, grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love. They're precious promises. The Lord reminds us and reassures us as his precious people, he gives to us precious promises. In fact, the Lord assures and affirms his precious promises by asserting to us in verse 3. He says in verse 3, I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you, because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you.

I give men in exchange for you, peoples in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. And you know, it's the language of redemption in verses 3 and 4, but I believe that it's something that we don't think about often enough. In fact, I think it's something we don't even want to believe about ourselves, these verses. Because, you know, when we look at self, when I look at self, all I see is frailties, faults, and failings. And I'm sure you're the same. Frailties, faults, and failings. And yet, this precious promise comes to us, and it says, we are precious in the eyes of the Lord.

That's what he says. Verse 4, you are precious in my eyes. We are precious in the eyes of the Lord. The Bible depicts us and describes us. Believe it or not, the Lord describes us as the apple of his eye.

We are the jewels in his crown. We are his joy and his delight. We are precious in the eyes of the Lord. More than that, he says, we're honored. We're honored. We're his honored guests. We're his privileged people. We're blessed people. As we've seen in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we're blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. We are his treasured possession. But if that wasn't enough, if it wasn't enough to be told that we're precious in his eyes and honored, he also says, I love you. I love you. The Lord says, you are precious in my eyes and honored. And I love you. I love you.

[26 : 36] And this is one of the only times in the Bible where the Lord explicitly states to his precious people, I love you. He just says those three words, I love you. Of course, you look at the Bible and there are many occasions where the Lord's love is described. It's his chesed love, his covenant love. It's his sacrificial love. We see it throughout the Bible, his unconditional love, his unchanging love, his unfathomable love. And it's all because God is love. But the Lord's love is not only described, it's declared throughout the Bible. Our Bible declares God so loved. He loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. John says, behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. John even goes on to say and point us to the cross and say, here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. But you know, you look at the Lord's love and it's not only described, it's not only declared, it's also demanded. God's love is demanded. The greatest commandment is love.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus asked Peter, you remember, three times, do you love me, Peter? Do you love me? Do you love me? And throughout Scripture, there's declarations of love where the Lord's people are confessing. Psalm 116, I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here. But the Lord's love is not only described, declared, demanded, it's also demonstrated. Demonstrated. Christ demonstrates his love towards us, says Paul, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The cruel cross of Calvary is where the Lord's love has been demonstrated to us. My friend, the Lord's love is described, declared, demanded, and demonstrated throughout our Bible. It's described, declared, demanded, and demonstrated throughout our Bible. But in this precious passage, and it really is a precious passage. We have only one of the times where the Lord explicitly states and says to his people,

I love you, I love you. Do you know, just focus on those three words, I love you. My friend, do you know that the Lord loves you? Do you know that the Lord, you might think, how on earth can the Lord love me?

But that's what he says. It's his precious promise. He makes promises. He keeps his promises. And he's saying here, you are precious in my eyes. You are honored. And I love you. I love you. You

know, someone once said, I think it's from Christianity Explored. So it's probably Rico Taiz who said it. You are more sinful than you could ever realize. Yet you're more loved than you could ever dream. You are more sinful than you could ever realize. And that's so true. But you are more loved than you could ever dream. And this precious passage, it sets before us the Lord's precious promises to his precious people.

They are precious promises for a new year. Precious promises for a new year. In fact, this passage is so precious that it's bookended by that daily promise. The daily precious promise of the Lord, fear not.

[30 : 29] Verse 5, he says, fear not, for I am with you. Verse 1, we read it, fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. And then here again, verse 5, fear not, for I am with you.

And as we said, there are 366 fear nots in the Bible. One for every day of the year, including this year, the leap year, one for every day of 2024. Fear not, fear not, fear not, fear not.

But you know, as we conclude this precious passage, how should we respond? How should we respond to these precious promises for a new year? And of course, we should respond in praise. We should respond in praise. And I say that not just because it's the right thing to do or the right thing to say, but because the closing words of this precious passage, they echo the words or the opening words of Psalm 107. You read these verses. So in this precious passage, we read in verse 5, it says, fear not, for I am with you. I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west, I will gather you. I will say to the north, give up and to the south, do not withhold.

Bring my sons from my father and my daughters from the end of the earth. Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. So there, these closing words of this precious passage, they then echo the opening words of Psalm 107, where it says, oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered from the lands, from the east, from the west, from the north, and from the south, from all the different areas of the world. He has gathered them. He has redeemed them.

And he says, you are mine. My friend, the psalmist responds even to the precious promises of the Lord with praise. And that's how we should respond to these precious promises for a new year. We should respond by singing, which we will do in a moment. We shall respond by singing, praise God, for he is good, for still his mercies lasting be. My friend, their precious promises in a precious passage given to a precious people, because the Lord says about you, I love you. You are mine.

[33 : 18] What better way to begin the new year than that? May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we are amazed that thou wouldst speak to us at all, but even to speak to us in such a loving way, and to speak to us so graciously. We confess, O Lord, that we are undeserving of the least of it, the least of thy mercies, the least of thy promises. But Lord, we thank thee for every promise, every promise that is yea and amen in Christ, every fear not for every day of the year. And help us, Lord, we pray, to trust them, to trust these promises, that we might stand upon them, to stand upon the promises of God, and to know that they are all given to us, given to us lovingly and graciously. Help us then, we pray, as we go into this new year, that whatever is before us, whatever comes our way, to know that the Lord is there, and that he is there as we pass through the waters, and even going through the fires. Keep us then, Lord, by thy grace, and do us good, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen.

Amen. We're going to conclude by singing those words from Psalm 107.

I suppose that's how you often describe how some congregations, they describe the last Psalm as responding to God's Word. And I suppose that's what we're doing. We are responding to God's Word by singing in praise. Psalm 107, page 382 in the Scottish Psalter.

How do we respond? Praise God, for he is good, for still his mercy's lasting be. Let God's redeemed say so, whom he from the enemies hand did free, and gathered them out of the lands from north, south, east, and west.

They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest. And we'll sing down to the verse marked 8. We have this wonderful chorus, almost a prayer. Oh, that men to the Lord would give. Praise for his goodness then, and for his works of wonder done unto the sons of men. These verses of Psalm 107.

[35 : 57] I must stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. Praise God, for he is good, for still, let mercy's last in thee. Let God's redeemed say so, God's praise.

Praise God, for still, let mercy's last. Praise God, for still, let mercy's last. Praise God, for still, let mercy's last. Praise God, for still, let mercy's last, Lord, and have mercy. And gather them out of the land from north, south, east and west.

This trade in deserts, worthless rain, no city bound to rest.

For thirst and hunger in them fades, let their soul win strays and rest.

They cry unto the Lord, come deep and pleased from their distress.

[37 : 42] Them also win a way to all, the right and cheated guide.

That they might do a city go, wherein they might abide.

For that men to the Lord would give, praise for his goodness and.

And for his works of wonder come unto the sons of men.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.