

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#7) Sing to the Lord a New Song (Isa. 42:10-17)

Outline of Isaiah 40-66
SECTION THREE: ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION

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We have completed our consideration of the First Servant Song of Isaiah (42:1-9), which is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ coming to bring salvation to His helpless people. God had chosen His faithful Servant to accomplish for His people that which they could not do for themselves.

We now arrive to the next section of Isaiah's Book of Consolation, in which we read that the people of God are to sing to the Lord a new song. This is a song that celebrates the mercy and blessing of God for having promised and announced the salvation that God would bring to His people through His Servant. And so here the ones that are to be the objects of God's saving work through His Servant are commanded to sing to the Lord a "new song." This is a "new song" because God is about to do a new kind of work in bringing salvation to His people. That it is a "new song" also serves to accentuate the special and remarkable salvation that the Servant will bring to His people. Let us read **Isaiah 42:10-17**.

- ¹⁰Sing to the LORD a new song,
And His praise from the ends of the earth,
You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it,
You coastlands and you inhabitants of them!
- ¹¹Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice,
The villages that Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing,
Let them shout from the top of the mountains.
- ¹²Let them give glory to the LORD,
And declare His praise in the coastlands.
- ¹³The LORD shall go forth like a mighty man;
He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war.
He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud;
He shall prevail against His enemies.
- ¹⁴"I have held My peace a long time,
I have been still and restrained Myself.
Now I will cry like a woman in labor,
I will pant and gasp at once.

¹⁵I will lay waste the mountains and hills,
 And dry up all their vegetation;
 I will make the rivers coastlands,
 And I will dry up the pools.

¹⁶I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;
 I will lead them in paths they have not known.
 I will make darkness light before them,
 And crooked places straight.
 These things I will do for them,
 And not forsake them.

¹⁷They shall be turned back,
 They shall be greatly ashamed,
 Who trust in carved images,
 Who say to the molded images,
 ‘You are our gods.’

Let us work through these verses to understand their historical context and the present application.

E. Sing to the Lord a New Song (42:10-13)

We first read of the command to sing a new song unto the Lord. Again, **verse 10** reads,

*Sing to the LORD a new song,
 And His praise from the ends of the earth,
 You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it,
 You coastlands and you inhabitants of them!*

One once described these verses in this way:

He now exhorts the people to gratitude; for God’s favors ought always to excite us, by the remembrance of them, to give thanks and to celebrate his praises... We ought to observe this as the design of the prophet, that there is no reason why believers, though they are severely oppressed, should give way to sorrow, but that good hope ought to encourage them to gladness so that they may now prepare to render thanksgiving.

Here is another word regarding this “new song”:

By *new* he means an excellent, beautiful, and elegant song, not one that is ordinary or common, but a song which may arouse men to admiration, as relating to the extraordinary grace of God, of which there had never been so remarkable an example. In this sense it is also used in Psalm 33:3, and 96:1. *New* is here contrasted with what is ordinary, and thus he extols the infinite mercy of God, which was to be revealed in Christ, and which ought therefore to be celebrated and sung with the highest praises. Hence we infer that each of us ought to be the more zealous in proclaiming the praises of God, in proportion to the greater number of favors which we have received. It is indeed the duty of all men to sing praise to God, for there is no person who is not bound to it by the strongest obligations; but more lofty praises ought to proceed from those on whom more valuable gifts have been bestowed. Now, since God has laid open the fountain of all blessings in Christ, and has displayed all spiritual riches, we need not wonder if he demand that we offer to him an unwonted and excellent sacrifice of praise.

It ought to be observed that this *song* cannot be sung but by renewed men; for it ought to proceed from the deepest feeling of the heart, and therefore we need the direction and influence of the Spirit, that

we may sing those praises in a proper manner. Besides, he does not exhort one or a few nations to do this, but all the nations in the world; for to all of them Christ was sent.¹

Here is one more good description of this “new song”:

Now, this being the new thing which God declares, the newness of the song which is to be sung on this occasion is this, that whereas, before, the songs of the Lord were very much confined to the temple at Jerusalem (David’s psalms were in the language of the Jews only, and sung by them in their own country only; for, when they were in a strange land, they hung their harps on the willow-trees and could not sing the Lord’s song, as we find—Psalm 137:2-4), now the songs of holy joy and praise shall be sung all the world over. The Gentile nations shall share equally with the Jews in New-Testament blessings, and therefore shall join in New-Testament praises and acts of worship. There shall be churches set up in Gentile nations and they shall sing a new song.²

And again, we have even Gentiles brought into view. Isaiah has a broader scope of the salvation of God than just touching Israel. There is a universalism in God’s purpose reflected in our passage. The people who are saved from their guilt and bondage of sin are to go down to the sea shore, board ships, and travel to other lands making known to the world the good news of salvation through God’s Servant. God has purposed to save an innumerable number of people from every tribe and nation. This is a world-wide work of salvation and the Lord’s people will sing unto Him in the farthest places from Palestine.

This command is given to the people of God to praise Him for His salvation. All who are the objects of God’s saving action, but only them, are encouraged to join in this song. If you have been saved through the work of this Servant of the Lord, even the Lord Jesus Christ, it is your privilege, it is your right, yes, it is your duty, to sing praise to our God. God has purposed to save us from our sin so that we might be zealous worshippers of our God. Singing in the congregation is one of the most important ways in which the people of God can express their appreciation for the grace and mercy that God has shown them in Jesus Christ.

Isaac Watts conveyed the special privilege of the people of God to sing unto the Lord in his hymn, “Come We that Love the Lord.” In this hymn he exhorts the people of God to make known their privilege and declare their appreciation for what God has done on their behalf. Here are few of those words:

Come, we that love the Lord,
And let our joys be known;
Join in a song with sweet accord,
Join in a song with sweet accord
And thus surround the throne,
And thus surround the throne.

(Refrain)
We’re marching to Zion,
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;
We’re marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of God.

The sorrows of the mind
Be banished from the place;
Religion never was designed
Religion never was designed,
To make our pleasures less,
To make our pleasures less.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*.

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

Let those refuse to sing,
Who never knew our God;
But favorites of the heavenly King,
But favorites of the heavenly King
May speak their joys abroad,
May speak their joys abroad.

We then read **verse 11**:

***¹¹Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice,
The villages that Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing,
Let them shout from the top of the mountains.***

In verse 10 the areas to the West are mentioned but in verse 11 the places to the east of Palestine are described. In verse 10 we read of those “*who go down to the sea, and all that is in it*”, which, again, would be the shores of the Mediterranean Sea from which the ships would sail to the West, the coastlands to bear the good news. The “coastlands” was a common metaphor for Gentile country. But in verse 11 we read of points East of Canaan. In other words all peoples everywhere who are recipients of God’s salvation should join in praise.

All people who are the objects of the Lord’s salvation are to glorify God for what He purposed to do. **Verse 12** reads,

***¹²Let them give glory to the LORD,
And declare His praise in the coastlands.***

God is praised in the world at large for bringing His salvation to people in other lands to other people.

We then read of the resolve of our Lord to go forth. He is as a mighty Warrior who goes forth to battle with the strength and resolve to conquer and subdue His enemies.

***¹³The LORD shall go forth like a mighty man;
He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war.
He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud;
He shall prevail against His enemies.***

Here we read that God’s zeal in bringing salvation is likened to the intensity and resolve of *a warrior*. There is zealousness and anger and fury expressed in these words. God Himself is described in terms depicting an avenging warrior who has waited for the time to descend into battle to fight against his people’s enemies and that time as arrived. The Lord lets out a war cry and rushes into battle. God Himself is seen as going to slaughter the enemies that had held His people in bondage. So it is with great zeal God opposes our sins that binds us and sinners who would afflict us and attempt to keep us in misery. And He will be victorious! The God of Israel alone is to be given credit for this great work of deliverance but His glory is not merely to be acknowledged, but it is to be broadcast abroad.

F. God declares His resolve to battle on behalf of His people (42:14-17)

God first voices His desire to save His people had been upon His heart for some time. But now He has waited long enough. He Himself will go forth into battle in order to deliver His people. We read **verse 14**:

¹⁴“I have held My peace a long time,

***I have been still and restrained Myself.
Now I will cry like a woman in labor,
I will pant and gasp at once.***

God Himself will speak, actually it is said of Him, ***“He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud”*** (v. 13). Not only is God likened to a warrior (v. 13), but here He is depicted like ***a woman crying out as she gives birth to a child***. This may speak of His longing for the day when His people would be delivered as a woman looks forward to the day when her child is born. But perhaps the metaphor is simply to describe the shriek of His war cry as He enters battle.

The prophet then continues the idea of God waging warfare against the enemies of His people in **verse 15**.

***¹⁵I will lay waste the mountains and hills,
And dry up all their vegetation;
I will make the rivers coastlands,
And I will dry up the pools.***

The Lord will see to it that He will devastate the land and possessions of His enemies. Those things in which they trusted and sustained themselves He will remove. He will strip them of all defence. His foes are left in utter ruin.

But with respect to His own, He brings them out and leads them in paths to the place where they may dwell in safety and peace in fellowship with Him. We read in **verse 16**:

***¹⁶I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;
I will lead them in paths they have not known.
I will make darkness light before them,
And crooked places straight.
These things I will do for them,
And not forsake them.***

These people in and of themselves have no clue as to which way to journey nor do they have any means by which they may enable themselves to make their journey. God must direct them and assist them, and this He promises to do. And once He sets out with them, He does not leave them, but He escorts them to their final destination.

It is often advantageous to us also to have no way open to us, to be straightened and hemmed in on every hand, and even to be blinded, that we may learn to depend solely on God's assistance and to rely on Him; for, so long as a plank is left on which we think that we can seize, we turn to it with our whole heart. While we are driven about in all directions, the consequence is, that the remembrance of heavenly grace fades from our memory. If, therefore, we desire that God should assist us and relieve our adversity, we must be blind, we must turn away our eyes from the present condition of things, and restrain our judgment, that we may entirely rely on his promises. Although this blindness is far from being pleasant, and shows the weakness of our mind, yet, if we judge from the good effects which it produces, we ought not greatly to shun it; for it is better to be “blind” persons guided by the hand of God, than, by excessive sagacity, to form labyrinths for ourselves. (Calvin, 16th c.)

Now let us remember the state of these people to whom this portion of Isaiah's prophecy was specifically given. They readers to whom this was directed were in bondage in Babylon, due to the wrath of God upon them. There was no basis of joy in their lives as they saw themselves separated far from God and they were far from their home. Their lives were difficult and unpleasant. Nevertheless the promise of God came to them declaring that He had good designs upon them. Their faith in God and His Word was to lift their spirits. Their “darkness” was going to be illuminated by their God. Their difficult path, a very crooked

and harsh one, God would straighten. They were to look to what God had promised them to shape their thinking and their emotions.

Now earlier we had cited the hymn of Isaac Watts. I might cite another hymn at this point. This is a hymn of **William Cowper** (1731-1800). Cowper was an Englishman. He was a man who suffered terrible anguish throughout life. He spent time in an asylum during one period of great difficulty. He moved to the country town of Olney, where John Newton was his pastor. They became good friends and Newton spent years supporting and encouraging his despondent friend almost daily. Newton wrote of his friendship with Cowper:

“For nearly twelve years we were seldom separated for seven hours at a time, when we were awake, and at home: the first six I passed daily admiring and aiming to imitate him: during the second six, I walked pensively with him in the valley of the shadow of death.”³

In 1771 Newton sought to direct his friend in a course to encourage him. He proposed they together write a hymnal. Newton was a pastor, but also a hymn writer. “Amazing Grace” was, of course, his best known. Newton contributed 280 hymns for this hymnal. Cowper, who had been a recognized poet, wrote 68 hymns for the hymnal. These included “Oh for a closer walk with God,” “There is a fountain filled with blood,” and this one, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” This hymn was an effort to lead distraught and despondent Christians to look beyond their present plight unto their God who is guiding them and who will sustain them through their trials.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

³ Richard Cecil, *The Life of John Newton*, edited by Marylyn Rouse (Christian Focus, 2000), p. 125.

There is a story behind this hymn. One night Cowper decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He hired a cab and told the driver to take him to the Thames River. But a very thick fog enveloped London, a fog so thick that the carriage driver lost his way. They drove around lost. Finally the cab stopped for Cowper wanted out. He found himself at his own doorstep. He attributed that fog to be a godsend to keep him from harming himself. This hymn, it has been claimed, arose from this experience. Even in our darkest times, our God watches over us and will see us through. This is the kind of emotional condition the people might have had, the ones who were the direct objects of this prophecy.

Of course we as Christians are better informed through the fulfilment of these words in Christ and through further information that God has given us through His Word. Where these Israelites were to look forward to what God had promised to do for them through His Servant, we are to look to what God has done through Jesus Christ in the past as well as what He has promised for us in the future. The writer to the Hebrews gives us the clearer manner in which we are to prevent being overwhelmed by our troubles. We read in Hebrews 12:

³For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”

⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (Heb. 12:3-6)

If we fail to “consider” Jesus and His sufferings, we will become “weary and discouraged” in our sufferings. When we reflect and rehearse the sufferings of our Lord, the severe nature of them, and the tremendous benefit that they brought to us, we will be encouraged through our difficult times.

Returning to Isaiah 42, we next read **verse 17**, in which we read that in contrast to His own people whom God leads tenderly, He turns away all the others. These are idolaters who do not believe in the true God, but their faith is in gods who are no gods, in gods of their own invention.

*¹⁷They shall be turned back,
They shall be greatly ashamed,
Who trust in carved images,
Who say to the molded images,
‘You are our gods.’*

G. Israel, the Blind and Deaf Servant of God (42:18-25)

Here God addressed the people of Israel, who had failed in its role as the servant of its God. The people are described as ignorant and insensitive of the will of God. The immediate context would be the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. God had brought them to this place in His judgment upon them. They were undeserving of the least of God’s blessings. They deserved the judgment that they had received from His hand. We read in **verses 18** through **20**:

*¹⁸“Hear, you deaf;
And look, you blind, that you may see.*

*¹⁹Who is blind but My servant,
Or deaf as My messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as he who is perfect,
And blind as the LORD's servant?
²⁰Seeing many things, but you do not observe;
Opening the ears, but he does not hear."*

God had called the nation of Israel to be His servant to display His glory to the world. But they were blind and deaf to the mission to which God had called them. Our Lord Jesus spoke in similar ways of the Jewish people of His generation.

¹⁰And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

¹¹He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
¹⁵For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'

¹⁶"But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." (Matt. 13:10-15)

This condition of ignorance and insensitivity is true of all people everywhere, not just the people of Israel. This is the condition that sin has rendered us. Fallen man is depicted as spiritually blind to his condition as well as to his remedy. He is absolutely blind to his terrible condition. If he were but to get a glimpse of what he would one day face when he stands before an angry God, he would go mad, faint from the fear. But further, fallen man is spiritually ignorant. He is spiritually stupid. He is a spiritual ignoramus. He is ignorant of who God is and of what God expects of him. He is ignorant of the ways in which God governs His world. He is ignorant of God's presence beholding every deed, considering every thought, and recording every infraction against His holy law. But fallen man is also sinfully proud. If through the means of common grace, he is given a measure of understanding, he is too proud to acknowledge his shortcomings. And even if he were somewhat aware of his failings, he is too stubborn to seek counsel as to how his condition might be remedied. Fallen man is rebellious/self-willed. He wants to be the master of his own life, not submitting to any man or God Himself. Yes, he may attempt to change this or that, but it is only because he wants to do so, not because God may have commanded Him to do so.

Fallen man is also incapable of bring remedy to himself. He is "without strength" to lift himself from his condition. He is lost, unable to find his way. He is lost, alienated, and unable to find his way to God. God must find him, for he is lost and he cannot and will not find his way to the true God. Ultimately fallen man is "dead" in that he is unable to recover on his own. There is the absence of spiritual life that would move him to desire deliverance from his sin and be restored to God.

But God is to be contrasted with His wayward people. **Verse 21** records,

²¹The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake;

He will exalt the law and make it honorable.

Where Israel as God's servant failed in making God's law known to the Gentile world, the Lord will be faithful to Himself and will cause His law, His will, to be regarded and valued by those who formerly saw no value in His law.

And so, due to Israel's failure and due to its ignorance and inability to restore itself unto God, we read of God's judicial dealing with this people. We read in **verse 22**:

***22But this is a people robbed and plundered;
All of them are snared in holes,
And they are hidden in prison houses;
They are for prey, and no one delivers;
For plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"***

They had reaped the consequences of their sin. God had caused them to fall, to be defeated. God had caused Babylon to overwhelm the nation of Judah, destroy its cities as well as Jerusalem and its temple. God caused this people to be taken in captivity to Babylon. God then appeals to the people to awaken to their condition and desire the salvation which He has purposed to bring to them.

***23Who among you will give ear to this?
Who will listen and hear for the time to come?***

God then declared that He was the one who had brought calamity upon His people in His righteous judgment due to their sin.

***24Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers?
Was it not the LORD,
He against whom we have sinned?
For they would not walk in His ways,
Nor were they obedient to His law.***

God had judged His people. They had been stubborn, insisting on ordering their lives according to their own will rather than the will of God. They would not submit and obey the law of God. God had justly poured out His wrath upon Israel for its sin; nevertheless, God's judgment upon them for their sin brought no recovery to them. We read in **verse 25**:

***25Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger
And the strength of battle;
It has set him on fire all around,
Yet he did not know;
And it burned him,
Yet he did not take it to heart.***

The culpability of the people of Israel is set forth in a stark manner. They have no excuse. Rather, because of their privilege, their failure and defection from their God to prefer idols renders them hopelessly lost and under the just judgment of God. But veiled in this message of the guilt and condemnation of Israel, it brings about the cause and basis and hope for the nations of the world. For prior to Israel breaking the Mosaic Covenant with God, God had regarded the nation of Israel with favored status, the Gentile nations being excluded from this privilege. (We have spoken of these things before.) But with Israel's defection and subsequent rejection by God, God was free to have mercy on Gentiles who were under His wrath in the same manner that He would show mercy to the Jews who were under His wrath. Paul wrote of this in Romans

²⁸Concerning the gospel they (Israel that had rejected Jesus) are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³²For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all (i.e. Gentiles too).

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

³⁴“For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?”

³⁵“Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?”

³⁶For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.
(Rom 11:28-35)

“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. (Psa 95:1f)