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Text: Isaiah 51:1-16

Isaiah's Book of Consolation (Isaiah 40-55)
(#18) The Lord Comforts Zion (Isaiah 51:1-16)

(The outline of Isaiah 40-55 is placed at the end of these notes.)

Let us read **Isaiah 51:1ff.**

¹“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness,
You who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug.

²Look to Abraham your father,
And to Sarah who bore you;
For I called him alone,
And blessed him and increased him.”

³For the LORD will comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD;
Joy and gladness will be found in it,
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

⁴“Listen to Me, My people;
And give ear to Me, O My nation:
For law will proceed from Me,
And I will make My justice rest
As a light of the peoples.

⁵My righteousness is near,
My salvation has gone forth,
And My arms will judge the peoples;
The coastlands will wait upon Me,
And on My arm they will trust.

⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
And look on the earth beneath.
For the heavens will vanish away like smoke,
The earth will grow old like a garment,
And those who dwell in it will die in like manner;
But My salvation will be forever,
And My righteousness will not be abolished.

⁷“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,
You people in whose heart is My law:
Do not fear the reproach of men,

Nor be afraid of their insults.

⁸For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
And the worm will eat them like wool;
But My righteousness will be forever,
And My salvation from generation to generation.”

⁹Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the LORD!
Awake as in the ancient days,
In the generations of old.
Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart,
And wounded the serpent?

¹⁰Are You not the One who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep;
That made the depths of the sea a road
For the redeemed to cross over?

¹¹So the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness;
Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

¹²“I, even I, am He who comforts you.
Who are you that you should be afraid
Of a man who will die,
And of the son of a man who will be made like grass?

¹³And you forget the LORD your Maker,
Who stretched out the heavens
And laid the foundations of the earth;
You have feared continually every day
Because of the fury of the oppressor,
When he has prepared to destroy.
And where is the fury of the oppressor?

¹⁴The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed,
That he should not die in the pit,
And that his bread should not fail.

¹⁵But I am the LORD your God,
Who divided the sea whose waves roared—
The LORD of hosts is His name.

¹⁶And I have put My words in your mouth;
I have covered you with the shadow of My hand,
That I may plant the heavens,
Lay the foundations of the earth,
And say to Zion, ‘You are My people.’”

As we have worked through these chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy, this “Book of Consolation” as it is commonly called, we have read of God’s promise to save His people through His Servant. And although

within these chapters the term “servant” has been used to identify several different persons or entities¹, we have seen the promised Messiah emerge within this Book of Consolation as the preeminent Servant of the Lord, Who would bring salvation to the people of God. The chapter we examined last Lord’s Day contained the Third Servant Song of Isaiah (50:4-11), in which the Lord Jesus Christ is foretold as the One God appointed to deliver His people. Immediately following that Third Servant Song we have this portion of Scripture before us. Here we read of God’s assurances to His people that He will bring them salvation, that He will deliver them from their bondage and alienation from Him into a relationship with Himself, which will continue through eternity.

God is the primary speaker through these verses (51:1f, 4-8, 12-16). In addition the prophet Isaiah interjects his assessments, pronouncements, and appeal to God (51:3, 9-11). The object of God’s saving action is “Zion” (51:3, 11, 16).

It is important for us to have a right understanding of “Zion” within this passage. We have considered this matter before today, when we addressed Isaiah 49:14-26.² Correctly identifying “Zion” is critical for a right understanding of our passage. It is due to the varied opinions regarding the identification of “Zion” that has resulted in wide divergence of interpretation of the prophecy. (1) For there are those who believe “Zion” is to be seen as referring only to those returning Jewish people from Babylon of the 6th century BC. They limit these prophecies to be God’s promise of restoration to His exiles that they would return to their homeland from their Babylonian captivity. (2) There are others who claim this is a prophecy of Jewish people turning to the Lord that will take place in the future, after the rapture of the church, at the end of a seven year tribulation period.³ They say this is a prophecy of what will take place at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. For example, here is an interpretation of Isaiah 51:6:

This begins to take place in the time of tribulation (cf. Rev. 6:12-14; 8:12, 13; 16:8-10, 21), setting the stage, along with the earthly judgments on land, sea, and fresh water (cf. Rev. 6:14; 8:6-11; 16:3-5), for a renewed earth during the Millennium. The actual “uncreation” or destruction of the present universe, of which Peter wrote (2 Pet. 3:10-13), occurs at the end of Christ’s millennial reign on earth, when a new heaven and a new earth will replace the present creation (2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 21:1).⁴

(3) There are there are those of us who understand “Zion” in this passage to refer to the elect of God who are redeemed through the work of the Servant of the Lord, even Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah. “Zion” is a metaphor for the true people of God, comprised of both a remnant of Jewish people along with numerous Gentiles whom God saves from their sin unto Himself through the Messiah. “Zion” is a metaphor for all the people of God that He saves through the life and death of His Servant.

And yet we need to recall the historic context to which God delivered this prophecy. God was assuring a remnant of Jews in the Babylonian exile that He would deliver them from bondage and enable them to return unto their homeland. But the language is broader and richer than that historic return of Jews from Babylon. The prophecy speaks to the salvation of a multitude of Gentiles along with a

¹**Isaiah himself** was identified as God’s servant in Isaiah 20:3. God referred to a **political leader** of Judah as His servant in Isaiah 22:20. **King David** was God’s servant when God said of the city of David, Jerusalem (Isa. 37:35). God called **the physical descendants of Abraham** His servants in Isaiah 41:8f. In Isaiah 43:10 God refers to “My servant” as all of the **elect Gentiles** whom He saves unto Himself. We have already seen Isaiah referring to the promised **Messiah** as His Servant Songs of Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-13, and 50:4-11. And so we see that God refers to anyone or any group of people that He uses to accomplish His purposes in history, whether they are individuals, kings, or peoples.

² FBC Sermon #789 on January 11, 2015.

³ One of the serious problems with this view is that it passes over the work of the Suffering Servant in redeeming Christians from the cross until the Second Coming. This view assumes that there are no prophecies in the Old Testament of the New Testament Church, which is terrible error.

⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 1034. This is the understanding of dispensationalists, who are premillennial in their understanding of the promised Messianic Kingdom.

remnant of Jews who travel from “Babylon”, indeed, from all over the world. God saves them from their sin through the suffering Servant and enables them to journey as “pilgrims and sojourners” travel to their heavenly Zion, which God has promised to them in a new heavens and new earth. This has been a major reoccurring theme throughout this “Book of Consolation.”

Let us begin to work through our passage.

I. God can and will establish His people before Him (51:1-2)

Beginning with **Isaiah 51:1**, God speaks to His people, the ones who are known by Him, those who know Him. They were in a low state. They had encountered the wrath of God for their sins. But God gave to them words of assurance that He would comfort His people with salvation. God declared to them:

*“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness,
You who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. (51:1)*

God encouraged His people to wait in hope for the salvation that is coming to them. Even though they looked to be rather few and feeble, and all that they had known had been destroyed, to them recovery and restoration seemed to be impossible, nevertheless God assured them, just as He was able to create them a nation, in which they had a small, insignificant beginning, God was able to do the same again in restoring His people unto Himself.

We see from verse 1 that God was not speaking of Jewish people who were Jews due to their natural birth. He was speaking of His people “who follow righteousness.” These are people whom God has worked His salvation for them and in them. To follow after righteousness is to order one’s thinking and practice by the standard of God’s law. To whatever God has revealed for His people to do, they make effort to conform their thinking and practice. They have a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and they shall be filled (cf. Matt. 5:6). We read that they “seek the Lord.” They desire to know God and be right with Him. This is not true of all Jewish people. But it is true of all God’s people who are the recipients of His salvation, whether they are Jewish or Gentile.

God would have them look to where God had originally found them and brought them unto Himself. They are portrayed as God’s workmanship. They are depicted as blocks of stone that God had quarried to fashion into an image that would reflect His glory. God had cut them from a quarry, even from an open mining pit. He shaped them, conforming their appearance to become the ones that He had designed them for Himself.

We read in **verse 2** the explanation for the “rock” or “pit” (quarry) from which God had found them. God directed them to consider the progenitors of their race, Abraham and Sarah.

*²Look to Abraham your father,
And to Sarah who bore you;
For I called him alone,
And blessed him and increased him.”*

The people of God are encouraged to look to their ancestors, Abraham and Sarah. Their beginning as the collective people of God could be traced to them. There was a time when there was only one, that being Abraham. He was called of God and given wonderful promises. God had called him and had promised him that he would be blessed, and so he was. The point is that what God had done once, He could and would do again. They would be restored to glory; they would be a great people again. God once made a nation great from one; He can repeat that miracle of creating a nation.

Now these two, Abraham and Sarah, were of course the physical ancestors of the Jewish people. But again, not all Jewish people are referenced here. These people are the objects of God's saving action through the Servant of the Lord. Abraham and Sarah are the spiritual parents of these spiritual people. These people also include Gentiles who are redeemed by the Servant. May we as New Testament Christians have warrant to look to "Abraham" as our father and "Sarah" who bore us? We can do so very easily and legitimately. In Genesis 17:3 and 4 God had promised Abraham that he would be a "father of many nations", in other words, the father of Gentiles, those who believe as Abraham their "father."

And what of Sarah as having "bore" us Gentiles who believe? Paul uses this metaphor for Gentile and Jewish Christians in the churches of Galatia.

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-- ²⁵for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-- ²⁶but *the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all*. ²⁷For it is written:

"Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband."

²⁸Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. ²⁹But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. ³⁰Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir *with the son of the freewoman*." ³¹*So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free*. (Gal. 4:21-31)

Paul included himself and believing Gentiles as children of the "Freewoman", in other words Sarah. Spiritually speaking God caused Sarah to give birth to us. Our identification as the one people of God redeemed through Jesus Christ began with Abraham and Sarah bearing Isaac, the child of promise. We who believe on Jesus Christ are children of promise, as was Isaac.

But what is the point of the metaphor within the context of Isaiah 51? When this prophecy was applied to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, there was little evidence that a glorious future was before them. They were weak and few in number. Was it possible that God could restore them and bless them to the end that they would again be a great and mighty people, a nation of pre-eminence before God? God told them to look to Abraham and Sarah to receive encouragement. There was a time when people of God were few in number. There was at one time only Abraham and Sarah, and from them was born Isaac, from whom God had formed a great nation. The point that God was making to this remnant was that what He had once done, He could and would do again. God would restore them to their former glory; they would be a great people again. If God could make a nation great from one, He can repeat that miracle of nation creating.

II. Isaiah then affirmed that God would restore His people from a place of barrenness to that like the Garden of Eden (51:3)

God spoke directly in verses 1 and 2. Here in verse 3, the prophet steps forward to speak. **Verse 3** of Isaiah 51 shows us clearly that God was speaking of His chosen people only, that remnant of Israel that had survived His judgment, that remnant that He determined through His grace alone that they would experience His salvation. God promised that He would restore them from their current state of ruin to experience the blessing of life with Him. Isaiah the prophet declared this:

*³For the LORD will comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD;
Joy and gladness will be found in it,
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.*

Verse two indicated God's ability to restore His people; verse 3 speaks of the certainty that He will do so. Although Judah and Jerusalem were in ruins, God would rebuild her. He would cause her to be fruitful a garden as the Garden of Eden had once been. The condition of joy, blessedness, peace, will be enjoyed by His people.

The original creation in Genesis one and two was regarded as similar to God's creation of the nation Israel, when God brought Israel out of Egypt. And so when the restoration of His people is mentioned, the idea of a new creation is sometimes brought into view, as is the case here. Judah had been laid waste by Babylon due to the judgment of God. But her waste places would be "comforted", that is, God's curse would no longer be upon them. Life would spring up where there was emptiness and chaos.

God identified His people by the term "Zion." Now, as we have stressed before, in one sense "Zion" is a synonym for Jerusalem, the city of God where God has placed His name and where He and His people dwell together. Zion is also a term that also applies to the remnant of Judah who were saved from bondage in Babylon. But Zion is also a term which came to represent the spiritual home of all the people of God, whether Jew or Gentile, and is used as such in the New Testament (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:10ff.). And so, as we said earlier, the promises of these verses in Isaiah regarding the redeemed of the Lord may be seen as promises to us Christians as well, we who are believers are part of "Zion", even though we are Gentiles and living on this side of the cross. Here are **Matthew Henry's** words to this end:

Observe, 1. How the people of God are here described, to whom the word of this consolation is sent and who are called upon to hearken to it, v. 1. They are such as *follow after righteousness*, such as are very desirous and solicitous both to be justified and to be sanctified, are pressing hard after this, to have the favour of God restored to them and the image of God renewed on them. These are those *that seek the Lord*, for it is only in the way of righteousness that we can seek him with any hope of finding him. 2. How they are here directed to look back to their original, and the smallness of their beginning: "*Look unto the rock whence you were hewn*" (the idolatrous family in Ur of the Chaldees, out of which Abraham was taken, the generation of slaves which the heads and fathers of their tribes were in Egypt); "*look unto the hole of the pit out of which you were digged*, as clay, when God formed you into a people." Note, It is good for those that are privileged by a new birth to consider what they were by their first birth, how they were *conceived in iniquity and shapen in sin*. That which is *born of the flesh is flesh*. How hard was that rock out of which we were hewn, unapt to receive impressions, and how miserable *the hole of that pit out of which we were digged!* The consideration of this should fill us with low thoughts of ourselves and high thoughts of divine grace. Those that are now advanced would do well to remember how low they began (v. 2): "*Look unto Abraham your father*, the father of all the faithful, of all that follow after the righteousness of faith as he did (Rom. iv. 11), *and unto Sarah that bore you*, and whose daughters you all are as long as you do well. Think how Abraham was *called alone*, and yet was *blessed and multiplied*; and let that encourage you to depend upon the promise of God even when a sentence of death seems to be upon

all the means that lead to the performance of it. Particularly let it encourage the captives in Babylon, though they are reduced to a small number, and few of them left, to hope that yet they shall increase so as to replenish their own land again.” When Jacob is very small, yet he is not so small as Abraham was, who yet became father of many nations. “Look unto Abraham, and see what he got by trusting in the promise of God, and take example by him to follow God with an implicit faith.” 3. How they are here assured that their present seedness of tears should at length end in a harvest of joys, v. 3. ***The church of God on earth***, even ***the gospel Zion***, has sometimes had her deserts and waste places, many parts of the church, through either corruption or persecution, made like a wilderness, unfruitful to God or uncomfortable to the inhabitants; but God will find out a time and way to *comfort Zion*, not only by speaking comfortably to her, but by acting graciously for her. God has comforts in store even for the *waste places* of his church, for those parts of it that seem not regarded or valued. (1.) He will make them fruitful, and so give them cause to rejoice; her wildernesses shall put on a new face, and look pleasant as Eden, and abound in all good fruits, *as the garden of the Lord*. Note, it is the greatest comfort of the church to be made serviceable to the glory of God, and to be as his garden in which he delights. (2.) He will make them cheerful, and so give them hearts to rejoice. With the *fruits of righteousness, joy and gladness shall be found therein*; for the more holiness men have, and the more good they do, the more gladness they have. And where there is gladness, to their satisfaction, it is fit that there should be thanksgiving, to God’s honour; for whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving; and the returns of God’s favour ought to be celebrated with the voice of melody, which will be the more melodious when God gives *songs in the night*, songs in the desert.⁵

III. God further assures His People that He will give them everlasting life and He will cause their enemies to everlasting destruction (51:4-8)

We read in **verse 4** of God again addressing His people. He declared to them that He will reveal to them His law, that is, His prescriptive will for them.

***4“Listen to Me, My people;
And give ear to Me, O My nation:
For law will proceed from Me,
And I will make My justice rest
As a light of the peoples.***

God will make His Word known to His people. His Word will be published to them and He would see to it that justice is rendered on their behalf. His law (Word) will be what rules the people and assures that there will be peace and justice within the nation. They will look to them as their king who administers justice on their behalf.

Upon God issuing forth His Word, the realization of his Word would be experienced. We read **verse 5**:

***5My righteousness is near,
My salvation has gone forth,
And My arms will judge the peoples;
The coastlands will wait upon Me,
And on My arm they will trust.***

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (Fleming H. Revell Company), vol. 4, pp. 287f.

God's ascendancy to rule over His people is certain and coming soon. God's righteousness is His faithfulness to bring salvation to His people as He had promised them. Even the outlying Gentiles, the "coastlands", will look to Him to govern them. He is righteous and therefore He is suited to rule a people. He has a strong arm so that He is able to enforce His rule.

We then read in **verse 6**,

*⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
And look on the earth beneath.
For the heavens will vanish away like smoke,
The earth will grow old like a garment,
And those who dwell in it will die in like manner;
But My salvation will be forever,
And My righteousness will not be abolished.*

God's people are encouraged to look about them. All that is, this present creation, will one day disappear, and all that are on the earth will perish, but the people of God who enjoy God's salvation shall live eternally. Because God is eternal, because He is immutable respecting His righteousness (He is forever faithful to His Word), His people may be assured of their eternal destiny. On the other hand, all opposition, all oppressors will be removed in judgment.

We next read in **verses 7 and 8**:

*⁷“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,
You people in whose heart is My law:
Do not fear the reproach of men,
Nor be afraid of their insults.*

These people are described as living righteous lives. God's law is in their heart; that is, it is their nature and their love to order their lives according to God's will. They delight to do His will. Because they can be so assured of their salvation, they need not fear what man can do to them, nor do they need to be concerned how others may view them as little and contemptible.

We read in **verse 8** the reason that His people need not fear those who threaten them is because God Himself will cause their ruin. They will fail, but He will dwell with His people forever.

*⁸For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
And the worm will eat them like wool;
But My righteousness will be forever,
And My salvation from generation to generation.”*

You need not be distressed what others think of you, for their existence is temporary. Their oppression will come to an end, for they will come to their end. The opposition of His people will cease to be in time. But God will be true to His Word forever. The people who have His salvation will dwell in perpetuity.

IV. The Prophet called upon God to act on behalf of His people (41:9-11)

We next read the words of the prophet once again. He calls upon God to act on behalf of His people. We read in **verse 9**:

*⁹Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the LORD!
Awake as in the ancient days,
In the generations of old.
Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart,
And wounded the serpent?*

The people were to be encouraged and strengthened by the prophet's prayer to God on their behalf. They were to rise in their thinking and anticipation of their sure future. Their assurance was based on their confidence that what God had promised, His power would bring to pass.

God called upon them to recall what He had done for them in the past, when they had trusted Him to deliver them. He makes reference to the time God had defeated "Rahab" and they had slain the "dragon." These are allusions to Egypt when God destroyed them in the beginning when He brought His people out of Egypt.⁶ The name of "Rahab" means to act "stormily or boisterously". Egypt had boasted itself over Israel then and was destroyed, so those who boast themselves now will be destroyed.

The prophet continued to enquire of God in **verse 10**:

*¹⁰Are You not the One who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep;
That made the depths of the sea a road
For the redeemed to cross over?*

Here we read a reference to the Exodus from Egypt. God had dried up the Red Sea when He had brought the nation out of bondage. God made a pathway to escape from what seemed to be an impossible situation. We may also be encouraged when we reflect upon God's works on behalf of His people. We are to reflect on God's past deliverances of His people in order be assured that He will and can deliver us.

We read in verse 11,

*¹¹So the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness;
Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

The Prophet expressed confidence in God restoring His people unto Himself. Again, we see the whole purpose of this passage is designed to give His people who have not yet experienced their deliverance, faith, hope, joy. God will save His people unto Himself. The people of God will rejoice in His presence.

V. God assured His people that He would deliver them; they may take comfort in God declaring that He will destroy all that had oppressed them (52:12-16)

His people were to replace their present fear, doubt and despair with joy and a sense of well-being and security in their relationship with their God. God's people are not to be afraid of "man who dies"; he is as grass, he won't last long, as we read in **verse 12**:

⁶ For the meaning of "Rahab" as a metaphor for Egypt, see. Isa. 30:7; Psalm 87:4; for the "dragon" see Isa. 27:1; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2

¹²***"I, even I, am He who comforts you.
Who are you that you should be afraid
Of a man who will die,
And of the son of a man who will be made like grass?"***

Notice that God is speaking once again. Because we know who our God is and what He is like and what He has promised us in our salvation, we need not fear. We will outlast all those that oppose us or afflict us. God not only saves His people from their sins, but He saves His people from other people's sins also.

We then read **verse 13**.

¹³***And you forget the LORD your Maker,
Who stretched out the heavens
And laid the foundations of the earth;
You have feared continually every day
Because of the fury of the oppressor,
When he has prepared to destroy.
And where is the fury of the oppressor?"***

Here is but another instance where God the Creator is identified as the One who created Israel. Indeed, He is the Creator of all of His people of all ages. Note the blending of the language of two events together--Creation and Israel's creation at the time of the Exodus. He who created can do so again. And further, the God who created can just as easily destroy.

God then assures the "captives" that their release would come soon. God assures His people in **verse 14**:

¹⁴***The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed,
That he should not die in the pit,
And that his bread should not fail.***

The people could anticipate their soon release from Babylon. There would be no more imprisonment, no more starvation. The reason is given in **verse 15**:

¹⁵***But I am the LORD your God,
Who divided the sea whose waves roared—
The LORD of hosts is His name.***

As a storm arises at sea, which reveals great power, so God will arise powerfully against their foes in order to secure their release.

Next we read a word that God speaks to His prophet:

¹⁶***And I have put My words in your mouth;
I have covered you with the shadow of My hand,
That I may plant the heavens,
Lay the foundations of the earth,
And say to Zion, 'You are My people.'"***

God placed His Word into the mouth of His servant. God would protect him even as He had committed to him the announcement that God would create his people anew. To say to Zion (the people

of God) that they are again God's people, in covenant relationship with Himself, is likened to creating the heavens and the earth. Again, the idea of a new creation is present.

We may understand the whole purpose of this passage as designed to give God's people, who have not yet experienced their deliverance, faith, hope, joy, in place of fear, doubt and despair. God's people are not to be afraid, but be assured in what God would do for them.

Let us emphasize this important truth as we conclude addressing this passage this morning. Let us recognize and acknowledge the overall thrust of this passage of Isaiah's prophecy and many like it in other places of Holy Scripture. The doctrinal teaching and emphasis throughout these verses is God's declaration of what He was going to do on behalf of His people. Salvation is of the Lord. The Word of God shows forth the people of God as wholly weak and defenceless, without power to enable their release from bondage and to return to their homeland and to their God. The point of this prophetic oracle was to stir faith and hope in God's people they waited upon God to do what He had promised.

Now we emphasize a great deal our responsibility before the Lord. We continually place before us our need for repentance from sin, obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord, and the important responsibility we have to persevere in faith and fellowship with our Lord. But in all of the pressing upon us our responsibility and the consequences of failure, we never should lose sight of the truth that salvation is wholly of the Lord. He has not given us a "plan" by which we save ourselves. He is decreed that He will save us, we who have fled unto Jesus Christ for refuge from His wrath. Salvation is wholly of grace, and that not of ourselves.

But the grace of God is not to be viewed as leading to passiveness on our part. The evidence of His saving grace in our lives is the application of diligent means to the end to which God has destined us. God's grace in our salvation and our duty of responding to the will of God are not mutually exclusive. Paul wrote of Himself,

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. ¹⁴Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. (Phi. 2:12-16)

If these professing Christians had failed to respond to Paul's exhortation to give forth all of their life and effort to order their lives according to "the word of life", Paul will have discovered in "the day of Christ", that is, on Judgment Day, that they were unsaved, in spite of all his labor among them.

Now we do not trust in ourselves, but in what God has done through Jesus Christ. But our response to this good news is how we show forth that His saving grace has been at work in our souls. The danger is to assume or to think, however, that the outcome of our lives, the great declaration on the Day of Judgment, is the result of our striving and working. No, it is through God's grace alone, both in what He has done in Jesus Christ on behalf of His people and what He has done through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Let us close with Paul's testimony:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His

will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:1 NKJ)

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

I. The Book of the Consolation of Israel (Chs. 40-55)

- A. The Prophet is to Announce God's Coming (40:1-11)
- B. The Creator of the Universe (40:12-31)
- C. God Promises to Deliver His People from Babylon (41:1-29)
- D. The First Servant Song (42:1-9)
- E. Sing to the Lord a New Song (42:10-13)
- F. God declares His resolve to battle on behalf of His people (42:14-17)
- G. Israel, the Blind and Deaf Servant of God (42:18-25)
- H. God's Commitment to Save His People by His Grace (43:1-7)
- I. The Servant Israel is the Lord's Witness (43:8-13)
- J. The Redemption and Restoration of Israel from Babylon (43:14-44:8)
- K. Satire against Idolatry (44:9-20)
- L. Israel is Forgiven and Redeemed (44:21-23)
- M. God Commissions the Persian Emperor Cyrus to Deliver His People (44:24-45:13)
- N. The Conversion of the Nations (45:14-25)
- O. Worthless Idols vs. the Living God (46:1-13)
- P. The Defeat and Humiliation of Babylon Predicted (47:1-15)
- Q. Israel Refined and Redeemed (48:1-22)
- R. The Second Servant Song (49:1-13)
- S. God's Restoration of "Zion"--His People--Who are Redeemed by His Servant (49:14-26)
- T. God Assures His People that He will Save Them unto Himself (49:14-26)
- U. The Third Servant Song (50:1-11)
- V. The Lord Comforts Zion (51:1-16)