

When the Waters Rise

Isaiah 43:1-7

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago my wife Karen and I were in Houston, TX. She was there to work with one of her oil company clients, and I tagged along to take advantage of a quiet hotel room in order to do some reading and planning. Most evenings we would go out to dinner and then return to the room and continue our work.

One night though we thought it would be fun to go see the Houston Astros baseball team play. If possible, I've always wanted to watch a home baseball game for every major league team. And since I had never been to that stadium, we decided to go.

There was some rain in the forecast but the weather radar looked like it would clear up around game time. As we left the hotel and hopped on I-10, the rain started. And boy did it rain. The windshield wipers were going as fast as they could. Traffic started to slow down. And then, all of the sudden, the traffic stopped.

Through the raindrops and sweeps of the wiper blades we could barely read the Artemis sign that was flashing up ahead.

Flash flood warning. Road closed ahead.

That would never do. I had a baseball game to watch. Little by little I was able to move across a couple lanes in order to exit the highway. I thought ... It might be slower, but surely these side streets can get me to the stadium. Boy was I ever wrong.

Those side streets that I thought were my escape route quickly started to fill with water. In fact, waves of water came at me, rolling down the streets from all directions. I tried to find a way to escape, but every turn was met with more and more water.

- In a matter of moments we could no longer see the curbs.
- The water was now up to the bottoms of the doors of our car.

- Then the interior carpet was starting to get wet.
- I was getting worried that the water would cause the engine to flood out.

I had to find some place safe to go. In desperation I pulled into a sloped driveway ... only to find that three other drivers had been equally desperate. And there we sat, like Noah on the top of Mt. Ararat, waiting for the rain to stop and the flood waters to go away.

I have never been that frightened in my life. My heart was pounding so loud I could hear it. And worst of all, we missed the game.

Do you know that experience? I'm not talking about the experience of missing a baseball game or getting caught in a flash flood in Houston TX.

- Do you know what it is like to suddenly be overwhelmed with the floods of life?
- No matter which way you turn you are confronted with another wave of chaos and confusion?
- In a matter of moments life gets upended?
- And just when you think it can't get worse ... it gets worse.

Listen to verse two again:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2)

If you have never experienced that, you will. The text doesn't say "If" you pass through the waters, but "when."

The flood waters of your life could be any number of things:

- An unexpected death
- A frightening diagnosis
- The loss of a job
- A family dispute that gets really ugly

For some of you, the waters are high right now. You can feel the carpet beneath your feet getting squishy.

- For others, the waters have started to recede, but you are still sitting in the driveway, on top of Mt. Ararat, not sure if it safe to move on.

To people like us, Isaiah brings these words of good new. He reminds us that our God can be trusted when the waters rise. Our God does not ask us to blindly trust Him with no evidence to support that trust, but our God calls on His people to use their collective memory about how He has responded to such moments in the past:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2)

God says “I was there” when you crossed the Red Sea. Remember? “I was there” when you spent time in the fiery furnace. Remember?

This morning God calls us to look back and remember how we have trusted Him, and to renew our trust in Him as we move forward in faith:

#1: OUR GOD CAN BE TRUSTED BECAUSE HE MADE US

Verse 1 begins:

But now, this is what the Lord says — he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

Karen and I took down our Christmas decorations this week. Each year of our married life we have purchased an ornament,

attempting with that purchase to capture a memory about that year. There are ornaments:

- Celebrating our first Christmas together
- Our 25th anniversary
- Our trip to Iceland to see the Northern Lights

But the ornaments that receive the most special care are Styrofoam birds with glitter, and pieces of construction paper with yarn woven around the edges. Why? Because those were made by our children and grandchildren.

In the same way God cares for you. You can trust in His care because you were created by Him.

#2: OUR GOD CAN BE TRUSTED BECAUSE HE LOVES US

Verse 4:

Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. (Isaiah 43:4)

If you were to take a tour of the Wartburg Castle, your tour guide would point out to you a black spot on one of the walls. That room in Wartburg Castle was home to Martin Luther when he was being protected from those who sought his life.

The legend connected with spot says that one night Luther was experiencing one of his frequent bouts of depression. As he slept, he dreamed that Satan appeared to him with a long scroll, on which were carefully written the many sins and transgressions of which he was guilty from his birth. Satan proceeded to read the list, mocking him all the time that such a sinner as he should ever think of being called to do service for God, or even of escaping himself from hell.

As the long list was being read, Luther's terrors grew, and his agonies of soul increased. At last, however, rousing himself, he jumped up

and exclaimed: "It is all true, Satan, and many more sins which I have committed in my life which are known to God only; but write at the bottom of your list, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.'"

Then grasping the inkstand on his table he threw it at the devil, who fled. That ink stain still remains.

Because of God's great love for you, Jesus died you. And you have been set free from your sins.

#3: OUR GOD CAN BE TRUSTED BECAUSE HE IS WITH US ALWAYS

Verse 5:

Do not be afraid, for I am with you. (Isaiah 43:5)

I have always liked the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. If you remember that story, when the king peeked in the furnace to see how things were going, he reported:

Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? ... Look! I see four men walking around in the fire ... and the fourth looks like the son of god. (Daniel 3:24-25)

God doesn't run when the waters rise. God doesn't run when the temperature rises. As He promises over and over again in the Scriptures:

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous ... (Joshua 1:5)

APPLICATION

When the waters rise, take heart! Don't be afraid! Remember the God who made you, who loves you and who never leaves you!

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2)

Amen.