

Isaiah 43 Epiphany 2025

We've all seen the cop shows – the kidnapper demands the ransom. What will the parents give for their child? It's a silly question, they will give it all.

We've seen or perhaps even lived this next one – that child is sick. Real sick. What will you give for treatment? Travel, bills? When is too much? It's a silly question, you do whatever it takes if there is a chance of recovery.

What would you give for someone you love?

And what if something stands in the way? And we red-blooded Idahoans say, “nothing can stand in my way! I'd break any law, I'd hurt anyone...” And we think of the movies where the protagonist will cut through dozens and dozens to save their loved one. We cheer them on. Yes, We sleep great at night when the wicked get their justice, do we think of the justice we deserve? That doesn't help us sleep as well does it?

In spite of our Hollywood bravado, and often warped view of justice, we read from God who is Good:

“For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give 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 return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.”

What is God willing to give for those he loves? Apparently Egypt, Cush, and Seba! What are we to make of these verses? On one end is this radical love that is willing to cut through the wicked and unrepentant to save his beloved people. On the other end do we perhaps struggle to

rationalize this with our God who, supposedly, loves the world and wants all to come to the truth as His word promises?

How do we hold these in tension? Because there is a radical love being expressed here. That God will crush anyone who seeks to keep his people from his love. Prov 21:18 “The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.” And we have his warnings, “For any who cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be greater if a great millstone were fastened around their neck and they were thrown into the depths of the sea.” Yeah, God loves his people. He cares when they are threatened, abused, and persecuted. He will act for those he loves.

But does he not also have a heart for those in these other nations, his remnant there, those whom he might have compassion on or be brought to repentance? I think our text today answers that quite clearly.

He promises he will bring his offspring from the East, and West, North and South, so that not a single son or daughter of his will be lost. Even from Cush and Seba. And if we think that is only for the Israelites, the descendants of a particular genealogy that happen to be in the north south east or west, well lets not forget Moses marries a Cushite woman, or the many other examples of God welcoming in foreigners to the covenant. Yes, he will save his called people from every land. Even as he will fight for them in the midst of a world opposed to his people.

The question then is, are you one he will save or one he will walk through? And I would hope we know the answer to this – yes, you are God’s child he has worked to save.

But just so we are clear lets ask it this way: Are you the ones he will *save based on your works and merit*? Nope. We know better than that answer don’t we? That isn’t to say we aren’t tempted

to pride, we are. We are tempted to say with the world “I’m a pretty good person, and so I deserve...” But look at that law of God. Look at his Holy, Good, and Perfect law, and pick it up. Earn your goodness! You can’t. Which is also why we are tempted to despair – “surely his call and goodness must be for someone else, he will cut me down in wrath for all the sin and doubt I have!” No! Neither. Neither pride nor despair! Look to the Savior who goes into the waters of baptism even though he had nothing to repent of, He will live that perfect life of repentance he will lift what we cannot and a river full of the blood of the wicked cannot be a higher price than one drop of his righteous, perfect, and innocent blood. The very blood that will pay the ransom so his loved ones might be his forever!

And so we know we cannot be God’s people whom he will save, not crush, based on merit. What then is it based on? And here there is little answer other than that same radical love that reaches out to the world. It’s by his grace. It’s because he takes joy in showing mercy to sinners. It’s because he rejoices in exalting the lowly.

And so his call goes out, as we read, east west north south. To gather the faithful. But again, “is that me? I am so faithless when I look at my heart and mind!” Well, the simple answer to that is, have you heard that Call? Of that love of God for the World, which means it is for you... right? Have you heard it? Here, far to the west of where this prophet preached? I’ve said it before and I will again, is this an accident? No it isn’t.

But God would have you be more sure. More sure that the Work of the Savior was for you to do just that – save, not destroy.

And so God teaches us through his apostle, “Do you not know? All who are baptized are baptized into his death.” This death of the righteous Son - It is your death. You’ve already died!

The punishment handed out on Jesus. And if you share in that death, which you do through baptism, you will share in a resurrection like his. You will be called from the north, from the west, to the Lord. To be His even as his name is upon you. So how could his cross not be for you?

And in this we see God's greater plan of redemption. Yes, God is willing to walk through the unrepentant and wicked to save his people. But he will do more to save the one he loves. Our God - He will give what is not wicked. His own Son. You don't see that as much in the cop shows do you? "Here, I give my son, who goes willingly to save the criminal!"

Yes this is the love of God. This Son, not as a castaway, but beloved the whole time, willingly lays down his life to a bloody, violent death, that we might be delivered. What is the Son willing to give for those he loves? His life! He is willing to hold back the 10 legions of angels that could have cut through every enemy, that he might, even when were enemies, be saved through his death. And this act of love, make no mistake, so graphic, is for the world. For Israel, for Cush and Seba, for the north, south, east and west. For you who have heard his Call, who have received his gifts in water and bread and wine that you might find certainty not in yourself but in his work and promise in Jesus' cross and victory over death.

Because he is risen, he is alive. And he still is at work to save. Still, even now, he acts to fight for his people, to defend them in the midst of trial and persecution and death. Even now, his Call goes out to the world to save – to call sinners to repentance, to make his enemies his children. May we confess both of these realities as we trust that he will do what is right with the people of the world. He is Just, he is merciful. And in time of doubt, may we look to where his justice and mercy meet: at the cross. Where we can see what he is willing to give to save the ones he loves,

and as we see that cross, as we hear his word and receive his gifts according to his promise: may we rejoice that those are all for us. Amen.