

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

JANUARY 13, 2013

IN THE EYES OF THE CREATOR

Pastor Jim Dunn

Isaiah 43:1-7

Israel's Only Savior

43 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 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.

5 Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you.

6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,

7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

"THE OLYMPIC MEDALS ARE WORTH ALMOST NOTHING"

So said a news headline this past summer. It was just before the Summer Olympics in London. This article came out and said the medals at this Olympics were the largest ever in both size and weight, double the size of those handed out at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

These Olympic medals required eight tons of gold, silver and copper from mines in Mongolia and here in the U.S. But there were 4,700 medals to produce. So, the way it ended up was that each silver medal was worth only about \$400. Whereas in past years the gold medals were 100% gold, that was not the case in London. Each gold medal given out at this Olympics consisted of just a little more than one per cent gold. The rest of it was 92 percent silver and 6 per cent copper. Each one was valued at about \$800. Each bronze medal was made of 97% copper, with some zinc and tin thrown in, bringing its raw value to a whopping \$6, worth almost nothing.

That is how the nation of Israel thought of itself. In the days of Isaiah, all that was left of Israel was two tribes. To the nations around them and especially to the mighty Assyrians and Babylonians, Israel seemed like nothing. A delegation from Babylon visited Jerusalem. King Hezekiah showed off Israel's royal treasures to the Babylonian delegation. It was like he was trying to make himself feel better, feel powerful. But he was only showing them the long past glories of David and Solomon, from a time long dead. So, in Isaiah 41, Israel is referred to as "O worm Jacob, O little Israel." Because that's how they felt about themselves! Israel did not think very highly of itself. Israel had successfully passed through seas and rivers, but how would the nation fare when passing through fire? Israel was not confident. They felt like they were worth almost nothing.

When we pass through flood and fire, we may feel the same. You pass through hospitalizations and tests, treatments and surgeries. You pass through the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, the loss of security, the loss of independence. You pass through critical moments and difficult times and the valley of the shadow of death.

As Martin Luther once said, when you pass through flood and fire, when you pass through "supreme trials you seem nothing in your own eyes." Then, you feel like you're worth almost nothing. Because in difficult times you may lose the *ability* to work and to create. Or you may lose *interest* in working and creating. The outside world becomes unappealing. No activity seems attractive. You lose interest in working and creating. And without those things, without a sense of contributing and creating, you feel worthless. You feel like you're worth almost nothing.

But even more so, you feel like you're worth almost nothing as you pass through supreme trials, because you believe you've become pitiful in the eyes of the world, pitiful in the eyes of your brothers and sisters, and cast off by God.

Fear not! The Lord says. "Because you are precious." Isaiah 43:4: "Because you are precious in My eyes, and honored, I love you."

Commenting on the worth God gives to His people, Luther writes,

"Because you are precious. Where? **In My eyes**. Who says that? The world does not say this. No, to the contrary, even in your own eyes you seem cast off. But in My eyes you are a noble jewel and emerald. Although in supreme trials you seem nothing in your own eyes and are condemned as one cast off by the world, in My eyes you are glorious. Therefore you may be pitiful in your own eyes, in the eyes of the world, and even in the eyes of your brothers. Fear not! In My eyes I regard you as a precious jewel."

You are precious and valuable in the Lord's eyes. The value or worth of something is determined by who has owned it. What is the value of my car? Now, compare that to any car owned by Elvis Presley. Any car he owned will be more valuable than my car. Any car he owned would be worth a great deal, just because he owned it.

Now think of the nation that thought of itself as O worm Jacob and O little Israel. Isaiah 43:1: "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.'" Israel had great worth, because it was the Lord's possession, because the Lord had redeemed Israel.

You are of great worth because you belong to the Lord because He gave His Son to redeem you! You see, the value or worth of something is determined also by what someone would be willing to pay for it.

Consider again those Olympic medals that were worth almost nothing. They were worth almost nothing until they were owned. Imagine the value of a \$6 bronze medal once it hung around the neck of Gabby Douglas or one of the other members of the U.S. women's gymnastics team. Experts say that Gabby Douglas's Olympic gold medal would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, because that's what someone would be willing to pay for it. The Lord gave in payment for you, to redeem you, to ransom you, to make you His own, the life of His Son. That is what you are worth. You are precious. Where? In the eyes of the Lord!!

Now what about in your own eyes? Israel had become pitiful in its own eyes. Not confident of how it would come through the fiery, uncertain future that lay before it. But the Lord called Israel precious and promised that when Israel passed through the waters He would be with them and when they passed through the fire He would be with them. This affirmation and promise would later enable Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to brave the fire of the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, believing that they were precious to the Lord and that the Lord would be with them. And He was. He was right there with them inside that fiery furnace, and they passed through that fiery ordeal unscathed.

What about the fiery uncertain days ahead us? What about the critical moments and difficult times? At those times will we see ourselves as precious? The Lord has already been with you as you passed through the waters of Holy Baptism. In Baptism you passed from death to life, from the death of sin into the new life of being born again, a new creation in Christ because God paid for you with His Son.

You are the precious baptized child of God. He promises to be with you when you pass through the fire. This affirmation and promise will enable you to brave the fiery, uncertain days ahead, believing that you are precious, able to see that you are precious to God and that you are a precious gift God gives to others through even the smallest things you say to encourage or compliment, through even the smallest things that you do. "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...when you walk through fire you will not be burned..." AMEN