

Refreshment for the Spiritually Thirsty

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[0:00] Take your Bibles and turn to Isaiah chapter 44. Isaiah 44 and our scripture reading is the first eight verses.!

For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. One will say, I belong to the Lord.

Another will call himself by the name of Jacob. Still another will write on his hand, the Lord's, and will take the name Israel. This is what the Lord says, Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty.

I am the first and I am the last. Apart from me, there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people.

[1:26] And what is yet to come? Yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble. Do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other rock. I know not one. My text this afternoon is Isaiah chapter 44, verses 1 through 5 is what we'll be looking at.

Lord willing, in the next little while that we have together. I have a job and you have a job this afternoon. It's mutually to help one another.

The church I pastored for 33 years, we had back-to-back services every Lord's Day. And when we first started doing that, I noticed, I couldn't help but notice, that sometimes some were falling asleep.

And the only thing I knew was that if I was in the congregation, I'd probably beat them to sleep. So, I really couldn't blame them. So, I said, here's what we're going to do.

[2:41] I said, I see that this is happening with some of you. And I understand I'm not rebuking you. I'd be doing the same thing. I said, now, you know, when I see we're beginning to drift a little bit, we'll just stop right in the middle of the message.

We'll sing a stanza of a hymn. And we'll stand up, sing, and then we'll, you know, just get the blood flowing a little bit. And then we'll be able to finish. And so, I did that a number of times.

And one time, I got home and Raina said to me, really, I wasn't going to sleep. And I could see that I was putting fear in the congregation.

I thought, I better not do that. So, we quit doing it. But we learned to stay awake. So, my job is to try to keep you awake with my preaching. And your job is to try to stay awake while I'm preaching so that we can all profit from it together.

So, that's what we'll try to do. And I think my job is to be a little briefer this afternoon than this morning. Now, that's very hard for a preacher to do. But we'll make every attempt to do that. Well, Isaiah 44 is our text.

[3:46] And the theme is missions. This morning, really, in the message, was talking about the purpose of missions. That is, the glory of God and the salvation of the nations. And the theme this afternoon is the certainty of the success of missions.

And because of the certainty of that success, that the church never need to be afraid that our job will fail.

We're not going to fail. The church is not going to fail. The cause is not going to fail. It is, indeed, going to succeed. And we see that here in verse 1. Do not be afraid, O Jacob.

Do not be afraid. And then Isaiah begins to unfold why we need not be afraid. It's because there's going to be these, he's going to pour, the Lord's going to pour out his spirit.

The Lord, in pouring out his spirit, one is going to say, I belong to the Lord. Another one's going to say, I belong to the Lord. So, there's really no need to be afraid. And, for me, this is just a wonderful and glorious truth.

[4:50] That we don't need to be afraid. We know that the cause of the gospel is, indeed, going to succeed. Now, maybe it's more exciting to me because I grew up in a, I hate to use this term, but it's what's used in the modern day, so I'll use it.

A faith tradition. You know what a faith tradition is? That's what you believe. That's what you've been taught from your youth. I was taught that the church was going to fail, but that there'd be this wonderful rescue at the end and that Israel would, national Israel would succeed.

And once I began to see the, understand the scriptures and the Old Testament scriptures, I said, wow, this is wonderful. The gates of hell are not going to prevail against the church. And not only that, but the church is going to succeed.

And the gospel is going to conquer. And this is just one of the many passages which makes that very plain. But, you know, as we look at the situation in the United States today, we could become discouraged.

There's a drifting away from the truth, from, of course, the major liberal denominations have been drifting for almost 100 years now. And they're experiencing the results of it because their, their, their, their attendances decline, decline and decline and their churches close and they're empty.

[6:06] And that's basically what they deserve, isn't it? Because they've drifted away. And then, then out of that arose the fundamentalist movement and the evangelical movement, which has, from the 1940s and 30s and 40s and 50s and on, it really, really blossomed and really grew, exploded, as it were, here in the United States.

But then out of the evangelical movement has come a questioning of fundamental, fundamental doctrines of the scriptures. Back in the 70s, for instance, Harold and Zell called the task those evangelical colleges that no longer believed in the, in the inerrancy of the scripture.

And then in, in more recent times, past the 70s into the 90s and so forth, I, I know I had a, a student from our church that went to an evangelical college.

It was a Nazarene college, but nonetheless evangelical. And they were teaching the old JDDP theory. I learned all that in seminary, which means, you know, there's four different authors in, in the Mosaic canon, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

And there's a D author and so forth. And, I mean, the liberals themselves could never agree on who was the author of which parts, except, of course, the D part was Deuteronomy.

[7:24] They could agree on that. And, and, and here is the same old, the same old era, the same old heresy being taught in, in an evangelical college and, in, in more than one. But then beyond that, and perhaps corollary with that, has been the decline in missionary activity from the shores of the United States of America.

In 1950, the decline began. In 1950, there were 100,000 missionaries from the United States in other foreign countries that were preaching the gospel, attempting to win people to Jesus Christ. By the year 2010, that had declined to 50,000 people. So, cut in half in 60 years, basically, the number of missionaries that were on the foreign field.

And, and of those, we, we have to acknowledge that many of them were support ministries. They weren't really out there preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. But, if we get a little closer to home, we sadly see somewhat of the same thing in our own association.

We, Don Donnell was sent out in 1999. And, until this year, 2012, there was no one that was set apart and sent out for foreign missionary service. Now, thankfully, that's changed this year, 2012.

[8:41] We do have a new missionary to the Middle East who has been approved by our RBMS committee and the administrative council and who's being set before the association for support.

And, I assume this is being recorded, so I'm not going to tell the country he's going to or even mention his name right now because of the sensitivity of those issues. So, we're thankful for that.

And, we have another young man in the hopper, as it were, who wants to be approved.

We're holding him off, and perhaps approval will come in 2013. Who will go, he will go to Ireland. But, the fact is that there's still a huge, a huge population across our world that needs to hear the gospel.

I mentioned this morning a little bit about northern India. You've heard, I'm sure you've heard of the 1040 window. That's an area that stretches from 10 degrees to 40 degrees north of the equator and

stretches from North Africa over across to China.

And, there are literally millions of people that are listed in Operation World as being un-evangelized. 105 million Turkic people. 16 million East African Kushites.

[9:52] 14 million North African Berberists. And, I've got a whole list further here. But, in China, southern Chinese, 121 million. Now, we thank God for what's happened in China.

China has exploded. Some have called it as greater revival in China has happened since

Pentecost. And, it's true that there's great numbers that have come to Christ.

But, there's sections of China that are yet un-evangelized. I mean, there are more professing evangelical Christians in China today than there are in the United States. However, the percentage, of course, is so tiny because they have 1.3 billion.

And, we have a mere .3 billion, 300 million here in our population. There's 119 million Asian Muslims that are un-evangelized.

And, on and on it goes. So, the task looks overwhelming. I've just said that we don't have to be afraid. We know that the church is going to succeed.

[10:50] We know the world is going to be evangelized. We know that God is going to save people from every tribe, nation, language, and tongue. And, we need not fear that. But, sometimes, I believe we need to be reminded of the fact and of the truth that we don't need to be afraid.

And, why we need not be afraid. And, that's why I've selected this passage. Because, this passage gives us what I see as three reasons why the church never needs to be afraid.

But, rather, be encouraged in this whole matter of evangelism, missionary work, reaching our globe with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, let's look at these three reasons together. I think because it's in the afternoon, I'm going to give you all three reasons at the beginning of the sermon. So, if you do go to sleep, you'll have them, at least, before the end.

So, the first reason is this. It is because of God's special love for His people. We'll see that in verses 1 and 2. The second reason is because of God's special provision for His people.

[11:54] And, we'll see that in verse 3a. And, the third reason is because of God's special promise to His people. Verse 3b through 5. See, I couldn't get three Ps.

But, I've got a love. I've got a provision. And, I've got a promise. So, that's as close as I can get to alliteration. So, let's look, first of all, at why we need not be afraid because of God's special love for His people.

And, listen. Listen, Jacob, is what the Lord says. Listen, my servant, Israel whom I've chosen. You don't need to be afraid because of the special love that I have for you.

In verse 2, the Lord says, He who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you, do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

I formed you in the womb. I have chosen you. You don't need to be afraid. You see, there's going to be many people that are going to call your God their God.

[13:11] And, that's what he says later on here. That's the promise that we'll look at as we look further in this sermon. They're going to say, Israel, I'm an Israelite.

I'm a Jew. God is my God, just like you. So, you don't need to be afraid. Now, they had reason to be afraid because the Lord pronounced judgment on them at the end of chapter 43.

Verse 28 is the summary of that judgment. So, I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple. That is, you, Israel, your temple, your dignitaries.

You're going to disgrace them. I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn. And, of course, historically, we've seen that fulfilled. That's exactly what happened. The Babylonian captivity. They did come back.

But, then later on, the scorn that came as a result of the rejection of their Messiah. And, then the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. That all happened.

[14:05] But, in spite of all that, in spite of the destruction that was going to come and the destruction that did come, Jacob, the Lord says, Jacob, you don't need to be afraid. And, I think you all know, I'm so glad when I'm in a congregation, I don't have to try to prove who the true Israel is.

You are the true Israel of God as saints of Jesus Christ. The true Jew is the one who's been circumcised in his heart and is united to Jesus Christ, who is the greatest Jew.

He is the Messiah who came to save his people from their sins and make us all true Jews who believe in him. So, you see, this is applying to us that we need not be afraid.

And, this is such a wonderful promise because we know what we were like before he saved us. He chose us while we were yet in our sins, before the foundation of the world.

We were in a living death, in rebellion against the true and the living God. But, yet he saved us. And, why did he save us? Why did he choose us? Well, he chose us so that we could spend eternity with him.

[15 : 12] But, he chose us for service. Jesus Christ said, I have chosen you and selected you, he said to his apostles, that you might bring forth much fruit.

So, we are the subjects of God's election. He chose us because he loved us. He loved us. And, because he loved us, he's going to help us.

He's going to help us in this great enterprise of reaching the globe with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, not only did he chose us, but he shows us how dear he is to us.

Verse 2, the last clause in verse 2 is just such a precious thing. Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. He doesn't just say, I've chosen you.

He says, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. Now, according to the Hebrew scholars, and I'm not one. But, according to the Hebrew scholars, this is a term of great endearment.

[16 : 15] It's used four times in the Old Testament. And, three of those times, it's used in a special, endearing way. Where the Lord speaks to his people and says, you are very dear and very, very precious to me.

This is a great encouragement. I want to illustrate it this way. So, I don't know, do we have any 8, 9, and 10-year-old girls here today?

Just lift your hand a little bit. Okay, we've got some. Okay. Precious, precious little girls that are 8, 9, and 10-years-old. And the boys are, too. But, you know, we don't call you precious.

We call you gangbusters, you know. Right? Yeah. Okay. But, here's these precious little girls that are 8, 9, or 10-years-old. And, just imagine in your mind, if you would, that Daddy's got home from a hard day's work.

And, he sits down. And, his little girl comes and cuddles up in his lap. And, then, he says to his precious little girl, he says, would you do Daddy a favor?

[17 : 21] Oh, yeah. You know, 8, 9, 10-year-old girls love to do favors for their daddies, don't you? Yeah, that's just the greatest thing. And, she says, what do you want? She says, what do I want? I'd like for you to go out.

Now, I'm speaking for myself here. But, this is probably what I'd say. If you go out in the kitchen, you know, your mom just makes some new cookies. The chocolate chip oatmeal cookies that I love so much. And, then, if I could have a glass of grape juice with those.

And, so, she climbs off his lap, goes out to the kitchen. And, she gets the grape juice out of the refrigerator, pours it into his glass, and then takes him a cookie and grape juice.

And, when she comes back in and hands it to her daddy, her daddy puts his hand on her head and pats her head and says, you're my precious little girl.

Now, that's what the Lord is saying here in this verse. He's saying, my precious little righteous people whom I have chosen.

[18 : 22] You don't need to be afraid. You do not need to be afraid. You are my people. And, this whole matter of people calling your God their God is going to happen.

And, you need not be afraid. You see, now that comes down to us across the ages. And, it assures us, as the people of God, that this whole cause of the gospel and of missions is going to succeed.

Because, he loves us. And, he has chosen us. And, so, it's going to happen. Well, let's look at the second reason. Let's look at the second reason as to why we know that this is going to succeed.

And, I've already told you, but I'll remind you. And, that's because of God's special provision for his people. Verse 3, the first part of verse 3. For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground.

Now, when you're in a desert, you get thirsty. And, a man is in the desert. And, it's a hot day. And, he's working.

[19 : 38] There's desert out there in Arizona. I've been there. And, it's hot out there. They say it's a dry heat. Call it dry or whatever you want. It is just plain hot. And, when you're working in the desert, when it's just plain hot, you get very, very thirsty.

And, what the Lord is saying here. He says, I'm going to pour water on the thirsty land. Imagine yourself. And, then, not only that. He says, and streams on dry ground.

Some other translations say floods on dry ground. So, it's not a tiny little stream that we're talking about here. It's a big one. And, all this water is going to be poured out on this dry ground. And, what does this mean? Well, he's speaking, of course, in language that illustrates something. In figurative picture language. And, so, we must think of this spiritually. And, what the Lord is saying is this. There's going to be plenty of water for you in the most difficult of times. I like to think of it this way. Think of a man who's in the desert working away. [20 : 41] And, this actually happened to me. I was with Chris Marley, the mayor, the elder, at his home in the desert.

It's a higher desert. And, he was getting ready for their family conference. And, so, as we were getting ready for the family conference, I was helping him get ready for Armageddon. That's another story in itself. But, he has this big PVC tube that shoots water balloons. It's a lot of fun. And, we were working away at that. And, he says, now, you won't even know you're thirsty. He says, but you've got to drink. And, so, there was this water cooler up against the side of the house. I opened it up and there were, I don't know, 20 water bottles in there floating around the ice. Just lots of them. He says, you just go over there and you drink it. So, I did. I went over there and I'd take a water bottle and drink all 16.9 ounces of it. [21 : 40] And, then you get thirsty, you go over and you get another one. The point is, there was just plenty of water. Even though we were in the desert and even though we were working and even though the sun was beating on us, there was plenty of water. And, that's the picture that's being painted for us here.

God's special provision for his people. Yes, it's hard work. Yes, it is true that you're in the desert of the world. Yes, it's true that there's so many people who reject this message.

But, there's lots of water. There's plenty of provision. It's not that you're crawling along the desert floor and seeing mirages and getting there. Oh, I'm still thirsty.

No, you see, he says, I'm going to pour water on the thirsty land. Plenty of water. Plenty and plenty of water. Now, the point is, or an application, I should say, is this.

Are we thirsty? Because, if we're thirsty, there's plenty of water. What's the water? Well, it's the teaching of the word of God. It's through prayer. It's coming to Christ for new encouragement and fresh vigor to do the work of Christ.

[22 : 44] I've heard a sermon. I think I've heard it three times now. And then I went on the Internet and I read about this fellow. And it's a sermon preached by Duncan Campbell. He was called to preach on the Isle of Lewis over in Scotland.

And there was a revival that occurred there from 1949 to 1952. And he came there to preach two weeks. He ended up there being two years when the Lord poured out his spirit in a very wonderful and glorious way.

And there's lots of accounts of the things that occurred. Amazing accounts, really. Some of them I scratch my head on. I say, I don't see how that kind of thing could happen. But I have to acknowledge, unless he's lying, that it actually did happen there on the Isle of Lewis.

But one of the accounts, and I listened to the sermon Friday as we were driving here again. And one of the accounts that I heard was about this 84-year-old saint and her sister who lived in this home together.

And they prayed and they prayed. And they believed that something great was going to happen. And indeed it did. But when Duncan Campbell came and he was called from a place where there were lots of people being saved.

[23 : 58] He said, oh, that wasn't revival. But revival happened on the Isle of Lewis. And he came to a meeting. And he preached at this meeting. And the meeting house was full of people.

And then after the meeting was completed, there was one man that stayed back with him. And the man says, we need to pray. He says, we've got young people in this town that don't have any teenagers at all in the church.

They are just godless. They go to the dance hall. They miss all the services. They want nothing to do with the church, nothing to do with Christianity. And so they prayed. And as they prayed, he says, I believe God's answering.

They went outside and they saw that there were people waiting outside. So they had another service. And then one young man, this young man went to the dance hall and stopped the dance and said, listen.

He says, this preacher's there. And you realize that you're neglecting your soul. And you're not following Christ. You're not being serious about the Lord.

[24 : 58] And the Spirit of God fell on those young people. And they, in mass, left the dance floor, came to the meeting, and stayed there until, I don't know, two or four o'clock in the morning, praying and hearing the word of God preached.

And these old saints, this 84-year-old lady, said, see, this is the promise we've laid hold on. And the promise is that God says I will pour water on thirsty land.

And we're thirsty. We know there's plenty of water. We know there's plenty of water. That the Lord has plenty of provision. And so they laid hold of that promise. And God, in this very unusual way, heard their prayers and answered them and did it.

Now, what does that mean for us? Well, you know, there are dry times in a church. And there are times of great blessing. But whether a blessing or dry, whether people are interested or whether they are uninterested, there is plenty of provision from our God.

And we need to lay hold of the throne of grace and plead for the water that's already there. It's in the cooler, you see. We just need to pray and ask and take it, as it were, and expect for him to bless the efforts and to bless his word as only he is able to do.

[26 : 17] Now, God doesn't always send unusual times of revival. But he may. And he does. And we should pray for such.

Sometimes he just uses the ordinary preaching of the word of God, which is wonderful. That's the way that he normally works. But he can bring special times of blessing. And it would appear that it may be what this passage is talking about.

And he says, I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. Well, let's look at the third reason. The third reason.

Why it is that the church need not be afraid and may be encouraged. And that is because of God's special promise to his people. And there is a special promise that's given here.

When we read that, I will pour out my spirit on your offspring. That's a promise. This is what I'm going to do. And my blessing on your descendants. And they will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.

[27 : 22] There's such picturesque language in Isaiah, isn't there? But we begin to get the idea of what he's saying with this picture that he's given. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is going to cause grass in the meadow.

I know you've had drought here this summer. I came and I thought, well, it looks pretty good around here. The grass is greened up again. Well, the Lord gave lots of rain yesterday, which is a wonderful, wonderful blessing.

And so there's grass in the meadow. The rains begin to fall. Then the poplar trees by the flowing streams. These are willow type trees that are by the streams.

And they always have plenty of moisture because the stream is flowing. And they always produce their rich green hue as they are growing.

And when God's grace flows amongst God's people, there's this uninterrupted experience and joy and the grace of God. And then you see the promises in verse five, as God's grace comes to God's people.

[28 : 28] Then we see that one will say, I belong to the Lord, verse five, and another will call himself by the name of Jacob. Now, certainly clearly implied there.

We must infer from it that they weren't called by the name of Jacob. So these are people who are outside of the old covenant nation of Israel. But they're going to come to call themselves that.

What do you call yourself? You call yourself a Christian. Well, yes, we are Christians. Christians were first named at Antioch, weren't they? But we know Christian, we means we're a little Christ. Who is Christ?

He's an Israelite. He's a Jew. We're calling ourselves by the God of Jacob. We are glad to say that we worship the same God as Jacob worshiped, aren't we?

We are very happy to say that. We delight to say that. And what are we doing? Well, we're fulfilling the very prophecy that we find in this verse. There's one will say, I belong to the Lord, call himself by the name of Jacob, verse five.

[29 : 29] Another will write on his hand, the Lord's and will take the name of Israel. And that's what we do. We take the name of Israel. That's who we say we are. We are the Israel of God.

We were going to sit down at this great feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and enjoy the same things which they have enjoyed. And we know that our knowledge and blessing in our lifetime is greater than the knowledge and blessing which they had in the old covenant.

They could only couldn't even imagine all the truth and all the knowledge of Christ, which we have today. They believed in one who was coming, but he has come and we have the record of it.

So here are the nations, the nations coming to worship God, a great number that are coming to worship God. And have we not seen this?

We live in such a glorious age, do we not? I mean, many of us here remember 1989, don't you? When the Iron Curtain fell, when the walls in Germany was torn down, and then the former Soviet Union basically collapsed.

[30 : 49] And what did we find? To our amazement, we found that there were scores, if not hundreds, of fellow believers worshipping Christ in Russia.

And I often think the devil had his chance. He had a government that was officially atheistic. He had a government that had power to enforce the atheism. He had everything that he could ever want.

And he utterly failed. Because the gospel penetrated in spite of all of his efforts. And there were hundreds and thousands of believers that were there.

And he had the same thing in China. He had an even better deal in China because he had Mao Zedong. I mean, who can be more of a tyrant than Mao?

[31 : 54] From what I've read about Mao Zedong, he makes Hitler look like child's play in what he did in that country. And yet, and yet, in God's providence, the church survived.

And then exploded after Mao's death. And then, of course, they tried to put down political freedom in 1989 in Tiananmen Square. But I've met Chinese believers who said that's what led to their conversion.

And the conversion of hundreds, if not thousands. What's happening? Well, you see, the water was poured out on dry ground.

There's the wonderful provision for God's people. And then the wonderful promise is fulfilled. As one calls himself the Lord's. Another one says, Jacob's God is my God.

And so they come. And so they come. That's why we need not be afraid. The church is going to succeed. The gospel is going to succeed. There will be people from every tribe, nation, language, and tongue.

[33 : 02] Oh, yes, it will come through suffering. There have been and there are martyrs today. Do you know the gospel? The gospel is embedded in Iran.

I heard a man give testimony at a Banner of Truth conference a number of years ago. How it is that he's visiting scores and scores of secret groups of believers in Iran of all places.

But it's there. Because, you see, God's word cannot be bound. And the spirit of God cannot be bound. And so it is all over the world.

And the devil tries to keep the gospel out of France by a different method. And that is by humanistic, atheistic philosophy. But he has failed again.

God saves people there as well. And so it is. You see, so the church of Jesus Christ need not be afraid. Because of God's special love for his people.

[34 : 07] God's special provision for his people. And God's special promise for his people as well. So I encourage you to be encouraged. To be encouraged to pray, to seek the Lord.

And to know that the cause of missions is going to succeed. And to be, therefore, active in it. We will see.

We are seeing and will continue to see the salvation of the nations. But I want to bring one more application. That is this. Young men, middle-aged men, old men. Young women, middle-aged women, old women.

I've got you all, don't I? I've got you all. Think about, what can I do? What can I do? What can we do as a church? What can I do for the cause of Christ and the cause of his gospel in the world?

For some of you, it may be God will place his hand on you and call you. And fling you out to the unreached areas of our world. For some of you, for all of you, it will be that you can pray for the spread of the gospel.

[35 : 13] For probably almost all of you, it's that you can give of the resources that God has given you. To help others reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But we must think in that way. What is it that we can do for the cause of Christ? It is our Lord Jesus Christ, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his heavenly session now.

That guarantees the success of the gospel. And as it's recorded in Isaiah chapter 44 verse 1. Do not be afraid.

The cause is going to succeed. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for these promises that you've given us, for the assurance.

Help us, we pray, in the darkest of hours to believe it when we become discouraged. When we see things, as it were, falling apart around us and we don't see the progress that we'd like to see. Grant us the grace that we need to believe your word and to hang on to these truths and to hang on to these promises.

[36 : 20] Knowing that you will always, always keep your promises and that your cause cannot and will not fail here on the earth. Help us to be active and engaged in doing what we can do for your glory.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.