

I Know The Plans – Is 43:5-7

Is 43:5-7

Last week we looked at the first 4 verses of this passage, and found that the key to persevering in the midst of hard times . . .

And getting through, and learning all we should – is to trust God’s grace (**Intro**)

But it wasn’t just hardship that the Israelites were facing, it was also *uncertainty*
What was going to happen to them? What would the promised captivity be like?
How bad was it going to be? Would they really be released? If so, how? And when?
It was uncertainty through and through; And miserable

➤ And I’m pretty sure you’ve *been* there; We all have; In fact, it’s the world in which we live; From natural disasters to national takeovers, what’s going to happen next?
Where’s the next tornado? When’s the next hurricane? The next plane crash? And when are we going to hear?
And what about the next war? Is Russia going to push it too far? Are the North Koreans going to do something stupid? What about Iran? Uncertainty abounds

And not just on the world-wide scene; How about the uncertainty surrounding *health* care in our country? Or debt? Or the live and let live approach to morality?
And same-sex marriage?
Not to mention our *personal* lives; Like when or if we’re ever going to get married; Or get a job; Or make ends meet with the one we have

And what about the uncertainty surrounding a *shaky* marriage? Or prodigal kids? Or ill-health? Or chemo? Or a breakup with your boyfriend?

Uncertainty is a fact of life; And *sometimes*, it takes over – ruling our lives and robbing our joy; That’s how powerful it is; That’s how powerful the unknown is

➤ Which is why passages like this are so helpful; B/c it reminds us that some things *are* certain and *are* sure – bringing stability to all that isn’t; Look at v5

God is speaking, and says – *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.*”

Here’s the deal – while uncertainty reigns in our *world*, we don’t have to let it reign in our lives; Not only b/c of the grace of God’s protection, but the provision of his *plan*
And the point of these verses, is to trust it

When uncertainty reigns – trust God’s plan

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; That’s a plan

When I was little, my brother Randy and I used to wrestle – all the time; And b/c he was 6 years older than me, I usually got the short of the stick

Like the occasion when he had me pinned down on the bed, and thought it was cool to bounce me up and down with both hands around my neck

And the next thing I knew, I was on the floor saying – “Wow, I feel weird”

He had so suffocated me by strangling, that he rendered me unconscious

And after I came around a bit more, and he realized I was alright – we started laughing about it; As only two knuckleheads could
B/c in his words, I just “went limp and slid off the bed”

➤ And that’s exactly how the fear of uncertainty is – it’s suffocating; And debilitating
And will leave you on the floor in a little ball if you’re not careful, thinking there’s no hope and no future
But nothing could be further from the truth, b/c God has a plan

Just like he said 150 years *after* this, in **Jer 29:11** – *I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord* [he has a plan], *plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* God has a plan
And relief fr the stranglehold of uncertainty in your life, is found only in trusting it****

Starting with . . .

• **The plan to gather his people (v5-7)**

When life has you by the throat, and threatens to suffocate you with fear of the unknown – the key to staying off the floor is to trust God’s plan
His plan for wholeness and a future, when he returns to gather his people

Look at what he says in v5-6 again

[5] Fear not, for I am with you [as in, rest assured, I’ve got it]; *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*

What I want you to see here, is that this prophecy has 3 aspects to it; Giving us good reason to trust it; The first is . . .

1. Then

This prophecy has a *then* aspect to it; Then, in that it was a near-term promise to gather his people from the likes of Assyria and Babylon; Remember that?

The northern tribes had already been scattered in the Assyrian Overthrow of 722BC . . .
While the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin would be carried off into captivity by Babylon, 120 years after Isaiah wrote this

And God is telling them he won’t forget; And not only that, but has a plan – a plan to restore them; And he did

We see it in Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Nehemiah, and Ezra; Various accounts of their return, and the near-term fulfillment of this prophecy

God had a plan; And *trusting* it brought some desperately needed peace to their hearts, in the midst of massive uncertainty; That’s why he laid it out
To comfort his people when uncertainty *reigned*

And the same is true . . .

2. Now

This prophecy not only has a *then* aspect to it, but a *now* aspect; Now, b/c it's being fulfilled in a *spiritual* sense

That's the idea of God building us into one *spiritual house* (1 Pet 2:5)

And connecting us as one *body of Christ* (Eph 4:16)

And grafting us in to the *one tree* of God's people (Rom 11)

Various metaphors to describe the present tense *ingathering*, of God's people

Not physically, b/c we're still scattered all over the world

But spiritually, b/c we're one; It's happening; Right now

And then last, this prophecy is

3. Yet-to-Come

It was fulfilled *then* to some degree; And it's being fulfilled *now* in a spiritual sense; But it's final and complete fulfillment is *yet-to-come*

Indicated by the last statement of v6 – *Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth*

And then the beginning of v7 says – [bring] *everyone who is called by my name*

IOW it's a world-wide gathering, physically, that includes *everybody* in God's family

Something that hasn't even started

But its *completion* is confirmed in the NT

Like when the Apostle John, in his vision of the end times, sees – *a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb* (Rev 7:9)

That's everyone; Everyone identified with God and created for his glory (Is 43:7)

It's the yet-to-come fulfillment (**Summary**)

➤ 3 aspects of this prophecy, the point being, that uncertainty won't reign forever – either in your life, *or* this world

Disorder, chaos, sin, and calamity won't *always* rule the day; B/c God has a plan – a plan to gather his people; And you can trust it; Just like they did *then*

2nd, you can trust God's . . .

• The plan to build his church (Mt 16:18)

When God said in v5, *I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you* – it wasn't just spiritual, and it's not just future

It's also happening physically, in the *church* – the *local* church; Including ours

With people gathering from all over the world, to worship Christ, walk with Christ, and work for Christ every single week

And no wonder, b/c Jesus promised it as part of his plan

Saying in **Mt 16:18** – *I will build my church*; And started doing so a few months later at Pentecost, establishing the church in Jerusalem; And then Antioch, to the north

And then the churches of Galatia to the West; And then Philippi, and Thessalonica, and Corinth, and Ephesus; And eventually Rome, and beyond; Including us

Saving, and keeping, and blessing one *life* at a time, to establish one *church* at a time, and so build it all over the world – North, South, East, *and* West

It's right now, it's real, and it's ongoing; Giving relief from the reign of uncertainty, if you trust it; If you *trust* God's plan to build his church*****

➤ The problem is, that ain't easy; B/c issues abound

Like a culture that's increasingly antagonistic toward spiritual absolutes; And a moral climate that's increasingly dark, making it harder and harder for churches to grow

Or how about the issues of life that harden people's hearts? Or the lesser things of life that *divide* our hearts? Or the presence of sin that quenches the Spirit? Issues abound

And yet, despite all the opposition, and obstacles, and uncertainty – you can bank on it Jesus *will* build his church; No matter what; No matter what the drama; No matter what the issues; No matter what the difficulty

God said it, and we can trust it; And I can't tell you how many times I've preached this to myself over the years; Which is why I love testimonies like this

(**God@Work – Mike Martinez**)

➤ I love that, b/c in spite of the fact that Mike had no foundation, no certainty, no peace, and no answers – God still used him to build his church; It's a plan we can trust

As is . . .

• The plan to direct your steps (Prov 16:9; Jer 10:23)

When uncertainty reigns, trust God's plan to direct your steps

This isn't part of Isaiah 43, but it *is* part of the *bigger* picture; And really, where the rubber meets the road in our lives

God has a plan for each and every one of us, and we'd do well to trust it

Like Jeremiah says (**Jer 10:23**) – *I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.*

We don't have that ability; We don't direct our steps; *God* does

Which **Prov 16:9** makes explicit– *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* The Lord makes it happen; The Lord directs our path

Sometimes in step with our plans, and sometimes contrary to them

And when life's uncertain, that's comforting – that the all-knowing God of the universe is firmly in control; Allowing some things, and determining others*****

All for the purpose of directing your steps, the steps of your life; What you'll do, where you'll go, when, why, and how

We don't call the shots – he does; And does so in at least 5 ways

1. He numbers our days before we are born (Job 14:5; Ps 139:16)

Job 14:5 says that – [Man's] *days are determined, and the number of his months is with [God]*; And David affirms it in Ps 139:16, saying . . .

In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

That's the *first* way he directs our steps and implements his plan for our lives

2. He oversees our every move (Acts 17:28)

Like Paul said in Acts 17 – *In him we live and move and have our being* (28); In him

IOW he oversees every last aspect of our lives, as if we lived in a great big bubble

3. He determines our success and failure (Ps 75:6-7)

God has a plan for our lives, and implements it, by determining our success and failure in various things

Ps 75:6-7 says – *For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up, [7] but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.*

Your success in life isn't just happenstance; It doesn't just come out of the blue, and it doesn't come from you; *God* determines whether you succeed or fail in life

Which begs the question – “Then why even try?”*****

If God calls the shots and directs our steps, why make any effort to do anything at all?

And the answer is, b/c he tells us to; *Whatever you do, work heartily* [with *all* your might], *as for the Lord and not for men* (Col 3:23)

IOW work as if it depends on you, and trust as if it depends on God; B/c ultimately it does; And obedience brings blessing no matter how it turns out

4. He influences our leaders and rulers (Prov 21:1)

God directs *our* steps, by directing our *leaders* of various kinds

Prov 21:1 says – *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*

Just like you direct the water from a faucet, God directs the thoughts and actions of our leaders; And *our* lives, *through* them

B/c more often than not, as our leaders go, we go

5. He shapes our desires (Ps 33:13-15)

Ps 33 says that – *The LORD looks down . . . on all the inhabitants of the earth . . . [and] fashions the hearts of them all* (13-15)

That is, he shapes our innermost thoughts and desires; And thereby directs our steps, by giving us the desires of our heart

Not just the fulfillment of those desires, but the desires themselves

5 ways in which God forms and carries out his plan for our lives

And really, 5 reasons to trust him as he does; Even when life seems uncertain

➤ But doesn't all this mean that we're just glorified robots? Not at all

Scripture affirms again and again that we make *real* choices, with *real* implications

Especially so, b/c we're held accountable for those decisions

But the Bible doesn't tell us how all that works together with God's *plan* for our lives

It doesn't tell us how he *ordains* our steps, while giving us the freedom to choose them

It just says that both are true, and so we trust (**Summary**)

➤ And if you're wondering how to *know* God's plan for your life – you don't need to

We spend an *extraordinary* amount of time and effort trying to determine God's will for our lives, when all we need to do is . . .

Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:30), and do everything for his glory (1 Cor 11:31)

Love him and glorify him, and you won't *have* to worry about knowing his plan

You'll just naturally walk in it as you're led by his Spirit, and he opens doors in line with your heart; That's how he works

Which brings us to our last point, and . . .

• The plan to sanctify your life (1 Thess 4:3)

Uncertainty or not, God's plan for your life first and foremost, is to make you more and more holy; More and more like his Son; That's sanctification

1 Thess 4:3 says – *This is the will of God* [this is the plan of God], *your sanctification*

That's it; That's God's plan for your life

The problem is, we want to know the specifics, when we haven't even embraced the concept; We want to know the steps, when we haven't even set our eyes on the prize

That's like building a house and obsessing on the color of the tile, before you even agree on where to live; It's an issue

Far too often we're more concerned with the *what* of our lives, while God's more concerned with the *how*

We're more concerned with the *steps*, while he's more concerned with us

We're more concerned with the *details*, while he's more concerned with our *heart*; And attitude; And purity*****

And that we glorify him, and love him, and live for him no matter *what* we do

That's God's plan for your life; And that's where the peace is (**Summary**)

Especially when uncertainty reigns, and you find yourself on the floor

Trust his plan

Prayer – God, we take great comfort in the fact that you have plans for us; And that they're plans for wholeness, and hope, and a future; Help us to *trust* them when we're in the grip of uncertainty; And *follow* them as you lead

We love you, and give now as an expression of that; Acknowledging that this too, is part of your plan for our lives