

Set forth God's praise

(Isaiah 43:16-21)

* Dear Friends, reflecting over recent occurrences in our busy lives, we might remember the stormy rain striking our metropolitan area, just one week ago. It is especially memorable for the people who were traveling by car. And yet, there is one more thing of the past and it relates to the 2010 Ministry Leaders Conference; it might also be memorable for the people who attended that rendezvous. Thinking about both events, I come up with a point. Surprisingly, many leaders at the Conference found themselves in a difficult situation at least for two reasons. First, they could not start a mega-church; and second, they had to drive across waters to get back to their homes. From this I concluded, it is difficult to be a 2010 ministry leader!!!

* But despite this fact, the leaders were not discouraged to death because God gave them a hand. In addition to that, God sends us a good message. Today it comes from (Isaiah 43) which is a part of our Sunday reading. Thus says the LORD, ... *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; 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.* (vv.1,2). In your hearing of God's words from Isaiah, as they are addressed to you personally, you may feel as if something memorable came out of your past, something in connection with a threat on your life, but with a happy upshot. After all, don't your lips want to force God's praise like this?

* O my soul, praise the Lord of your salvation, for He alone is the Lord and besides Him there is no savior. O my soul, praise Him, for He is my health and my salvation. O my soul, awake, sing with harp and psalter to Him; sound forth in glad adoration. For the Lord has searched me and known me. He is acquainted with all my ways. Dear Heavenly Father, You see and know that I have a hearty desire to walk in Your ways and to live as Jesus has taught us to live by his example. I pray You, lead and guide me by Your counsel as You promised, *I will guide you with Mine eyes.* Here I am Lord; let Your good Spirit lead me in the land of uprightness. In the past You led Your people dry-shod through the Red Sea; You brought them unharmed through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Now I pray, lead me too, help me follow after Jesus in the way You made for his disciples, throughout all my life to its blessed end; govern my tongue to proclaim your praise now and through eternity, for Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

* Friends, according to the law of the natural world, sheep need a shepherd who would save them from starvation and predators; by the same token, people need a leader who would care for their spiritual and physical needs. When I looked around centuries after Christ, I found almost eighty leaders in a list who have claimed to be a number one leader. Surprisingly, they were believed and followed by many as a Savior. But who is the best one, who really knows all our needs, who loves us, and has power to save us? The answer is here, in the book of Isaiah chapter 43. There God declares Himself as the sole Head of our salvation through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah God says, *I am the LORD, your Holy One,*

the Creator of Israel, your King, (v.15). I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior, (v.11).

Surely there is no one leader like the Lord, God of Israel, Christ Jesus himself. First, He becomes known to us by creative and saving acts; for me especially by his very saving acts; and second, we knew about Christ from the Bible. For example, Jesus saved me from physical death when I flew a jet, or rode a heavy bike, or was on missionary trips. For today God in Christ Jesus continues to save us, leading his people into the Promised Land according to the way of life we found in the Scripture.

* Just as I've mentioned before, both the 2010 Ministry Leaders Conference and the rainy storm took place on the same day. Both events were challengeable for the minor leaders and for the skillful drivers. But because the leaders were also drivers, they received challenge upon challenge. Dear Friends, this remark may not sound remarkable to you, but it remarkable for those who were asked to raise up new leaders and then drive themselves through the waters. Now, thinking over my challenge upon challenge as a minor leader and unskilled driver, I've understood that I am not a leader, and my challenges are not really mine. In the light of Isaiah's 43, I received a new picture, a new vision of my vocation. Dear Friends, in place of being your driver heading into the Promised Land, I was assigned to lead you to Christ; in place of being a builder of a mega church, I am going to ask you to praise God!

* Friends, when a leader thinks over God's purposes with regard to his flock, there are several purposes. According to the Book, God intends his flock to set apart their faculties for Him, (Psa 51:16,17), in response to His salvation in Christ Jesus, (Joh 3:16). Next, even though the Almighty is the self-sufficient, ever living Deity, He wants to be praised and worshiped, (Psa 51:15; 95:6). Due to such a wish, God separates some people for Himself, He sanctifies them, blesses them and God has been praised. All other purposes, as for example, evangelism or planting home churches should be understood as secondarily purposes, (2Ti 1:8,9). Dear Friends, focus on the invisible God and follow after His Word, learn how to recognize the voice of your Shepherd; it is essential! And second, please understand that the main purpose of God's dealing with all humanity is to make the priestly nation that might set forth His praise, (v.21). This emphasis can also be seen from (1Pe 2:9). *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* Friends, believe me, if Christians would understand what I am talking about, then all seats in our churches would be taken, and people would praise God. There would be less social activities and evangelical programs as compared to the worshiping and praising God.

* In order to prove this testimony, we'll look at Isaiah 43 again. Here verses 19 to 21 indicate a main reason for God's activity. Figuratively speaking, God makes a way and rivers in the desert. Under the **way**,

we understand God's leadership and under the **running waters** we understand the Word of God and His Spirit. The chosen people get used to walking after God in Christ Jesus, (Joh 13:15) and drink the water from those rivers, (Joh 7:37). Although walking by God's way of righteousness and participating in the means of grace may seem as the most important things in Christian life, they are still the secondary purposes. The chief purpose is the praising of God as it says, they are *people which I formed for Myself, that they might set forth My praise*, (v.21). Did you notice as in one accord with this in mind that we sang today, *O Lord open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise*, (Ps 51:15). There is nothing to compare in the matter of importance than setting forth God's praise!

* Friends, have you ever thought that Jesus suffered the cross and death in order to redeem us in view of our future and inmost desire to praise God's name? In response to God's saving acts in this life and in the life to come, we cannot keep silent; we must glorify and praise the Father for his Son, and the Son for the Father and the Holy Ghost. Since God gives us the gift of speech, we have an advantage over creatures. But even the wild beasts will honor God, says Isaiah, (v.20). The whole creation is like a well-tuned instrument, setting forth praise to the Lord in his sanctuary and in his mighty heavens! We praise him for his mighty deeds, according to his excellent greatness! We praise our Lord, with the sounds of the trumpet and with lute and harp! O people of God, praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! (Ps:150).

Amen.