Lent 5 Isaiah 43:16-24
April 3, 2022 372-715*-110-345
*CW-S – "What Grace Is This!"

What Grace Is This!
I. Deliverance in the past.
II. Comfort for the present.
III. Victory in the future.

Dear Christian friends,

I like that hymn we just sang. **I like** how each verse begins – EXCLAIMS! – "What grace is this!" As the author looks at the **different events** of Holy Week she just CAN'T GET OVER it. "Wow! AWESOME! UNBELIEVABLE! **Amazing**!" So every verse begins, "What grace is this!" and then there's that CLOSING LINE – "such grace – sweet grace – FOR ME!"

Next week is Holy Week. We've made **this trip** – we've seen **these sights** – so many times before. I can practically guarantee you that **you won't hear** ANYTHING NEW next week. NOTHING new- – **nothing** unexpected – yet **how** could we ever approach Holy Week with a BORING – BIG YAWN? No! See those **familiar sights** and exclaim, "WHAT GRACE is this – such grace – sweet grace – FOR ME!"

The Israelites of Isaiah's day had good reasons to **sing their own version** of "WHAT GRACE IS THIS!" **What grace** – FOR THEY HAD – and we have too - 1)deliverance in the **past**, 2)comfort for the **present** and 3)victory in the **future**.

I. Deliverance in the past.

When life stinks – when we're going through **tough times** and dealing with issues we'd **rather not** deal with – it can BE SO TEMPTING to want to live in the past. Ah, the GOOD OLD DAYS when everything was **perfect** – when we had our health – we could still drive, etc. **Ah, yes** BACK THEN – BUT NOW – let's not talk about it!

The PRESENT was not very pretty for these Israelites and it was only going to get **worse**. The northern kingdom of **Israel** had already fallen to the **Assyrians**. For the TIME BEING the southern kingdom of Judah was **spared** but their turn was **coming**. God was LOSING PATIENCE with His **stubborn, impenitent** people. Through Isaiah God had announced Judah's UPCOMING DEFEAT by the Babylonians and their exile in Babylon. God's faithful would **also suffer** through those LONG, DARK YEARS of **defeat** and **captivity**. How tempting it would be to LOOK BACK and want to live in **the past**.

We can't live in the past but we can certainly learn from it. **If** we don't learn from the past we will end up repeating the **mistakes** and **sins** of the past. The **past** also has much to teach us ABOUT GOD and our life of **faith**. Yes, looking back – "WHAT GRACE is this" we see!

"This is what the LORD says, who makes a road through the sea and a path through mighty waters, who brings out the chariot and the horses, the army and the strong warrior. They will all lie down together. They will not get up. They are extinguished. Like a wick they go out." Imagine living through the **Passover** – the **exodus** – crossing the Red Sea. WHAT LESSONS about God's almighty power – God fighting for and delivering His people from SEEMINGLY CERTAIN **defeat**. For God that was like ***"snuffing out a wick"*** – blowing out a candle – NO BIG DEAL. **What lessons** about God's love and patience – His faithfulness to His **Word** – His **promises** – His often stubborn people!

"WHAT GRACE is this" – grace indeed! Israel's history records the Israelites rebelling against God's **clear commands** – the Israelites doubting God's **clear promises** – the Israelites questioning God's

love and **faithfulness**. TIME AND AGAIN it would have been so easy for God to **just** give up on them. Yet no! "WHAT GRACE is this!"

WHAT GRACE we see in **our past**. Look back and **see God** watching over you – taking care of you – working all things for your eternal good. See God SO PATIENT and **forgiving** with you! With our sin and **rebellion** – our doubts and **disobedience** - WE GAVE GOD **good reasons** to be fed up and **give up** on us. Yet as we sang before, "WHAT GRACE is this! My God eternal dies to **bring eternal life** to me. The sinless Son bears each misdeed. He pays for all, FOR ME!" Oh, "WHAT GRACE is this!" indeed.

II. Comfort in the present.

Israel's present wasn't **going great**. The people didn't want to FACE UP to their **sin** and **guilt**. For many their faith was simply GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS of showing up **ever so often** to worship God but it didn't come from their hearts. **For others**, God was nice to HAVE AROUND when you **needed Him** but otherwise God should leave them alone and NOT INTERFERE in their lives. It was ONE THING that God should listen to them and do what **they wanted** – but it was TOTALLY DIFFERENT **when it came** to their listening to God and doing what **He said**. CAN YOU SEE some of that in yourself – in your **own heart** and **life**? Looking at how the **Israelites treated God** is like looking into a MIRROR. We can see a lot OF OURSELVES in them.

God was losing patience with the Israelites but He wasn't about to **give up** on them. Yes, times were tough and EVEN TOUGHER times **were coming**. But God was ACTING IN LOVE – trying to knock **some sense** into them – get them to **repent** of their sin and return to Him. God wanted the Israelites TO REJOICE and take comfort in **His love** and **forgiveness**.

"WHAT GRACE is this!" – what comfort God had for them. They were still His people! God calls them, ***"My chosen people, this people that I formed for Myself."*** WHY were they God's people? It WASN'T THEIR DOING – God returning some **favors** to them. ***"But you have not called on me, O Jacob. Instead, you have become weary of Me, O Israel. You did not glorify Me with your sacrifices."*** God's actually calling them to make an ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT, isn't He? Hypocritically showing up and **going through the motions** of worship – that DOESN'T FOOL God and it certainly doesn't PLEASE God.

"But you have burdened Me with your sins and wearied Me with your offenses." If anyone has trouble singing, "WHAT GRACE is this!" - or they see Holy Week as **boring** – they need to take a HARD, HONEST LOOK at how **they've treated God**. **If** YOU WERE GOD would you put up with **all the garbage** – all the defiance and excuses – GOD HAS TAKEN **from you**? **If you were God** would you be as patient – as loving – as FORGIVING as **God has been** with you? That **we are** God's dearly loved sons and daughters – that's NOT OUR DOING but all God's doing for us! Forget the "Look what I've all done for You, God – now You owe me!" LOOK WHAT GOD has all done for us! Oh "WHAT GRACE is this!" and take comfort **in that grace**.

III. Victory for the future.

"WHAT GRACE is this" as God says, ***"Do not remember the former things. Do not keep thinking about ancient things. Watch, I am about to do a new thing."***

God doesn't want His people to TOTALLY FORGET what He's done in the **past**. The Passover celebration, for example, was to be an annual reminder of **God rescuing** His people from Egypt. God's point is, "You may be impressed by what **I've done** in the past but you AIN'T SEEN NOTHING yet!" (I realize "ain't" isn't good English!) God's telling the Israelites, "You think the past was **great** – JUST WAIT till you see what's coming!"

When Isaiah wrote this **Babylon** was still pretty much JUST A SPOT on the map. Yet Isaiah saw Babylon becoming the **next superpower** after the Assyrians. Isaiah saw Babylon crush the Israelites – devastate the **country** – take the people into exile. NOW GOD SHOWS Isaiah Babylon defeated and the Israelites returning to the Promised Land! ALL OF THIS was well over a **century** in the future – yet "WHAT GRACE is this!" – God promises His people VICTORY **in the future**. In fact, IN GOD'S EYES it's already happening. ***"Now it will spring up. Don't you know about it?"*** God asks His people. For God this was AS GOOD AS DONE. He's said this **will happen** and SO IT WILL. God once brought the Israelites **out of Egypt** – He will bring them out of **Babylon**. NOTHING was going to stop Him!

For the faithful of Isaiah's day the Babylonian captivity would be **especially hard**. God's promise of the Savior was all tied up with the Jews living in the Promised Land. The temple – the sacrifices – ALL POINTED the people to the **promised** Savior. With the temple destroyed – the sacrifices **stopped** – the people living in Babylon it WOULD LOOK **as if** God's promise of the Savior was **down the drain**.

But God had promised and God ALWAYS KEEPS His promises. **So** God brought the Jews back to Canaan. The temple was **rebuilt** – the sacrifices were **once again** offered. But it DOESN'T STOP there! **Centuries later** God kept His promise of a Savior. AS PROMISED the eternal Son of God was born a descendant of Abraham and David – **born** of a virgin mother – **born** in Bethlehem. **As promised** and IN OUR PLACE Jesus lived a life of **perfect love** and **obedience** to His heavenly Father. **As promised** – as we'll see again this Holy Week – the sinless Lord Jesus went to His cross – shed His blood and sacrificed His life as ***"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** How can we NOT SING and exclaim, "WHAT GRACE is this!" as we stand at Jesus' cross and see again His empty grave. With His innocent death Jesus has FULLY PAID for all our sins. With His glorious resurrection from the dead Jesus has defeated death for us. "WHAT GRACE is this!" – trusting in Jesus we have both God's **forgiveness** of all our sins and God's promise of eternal life in heaven when we die.

And it doesn't stop there! ***"Watch, I am about to do a new thing. Don't you know about it?"*** Hear that and recall John writing, ***"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. From the throne I heard a loud voice that said, 'Look! God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away.' The One who was seated on the throne said to me, 'Look, I am making everything new!' He also said, 'Write, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"*** That's the victory God HAS PROMISED us – and remember God ALWAYS KEEPS His promises. "WHAT GRACE is this! Such grace – sweet grace – FOR ME!" Amen.

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