

## Responding to a Season of Testing The Presence and Promises of the Lord

**Thesis:** We are in a season of testing. This season is hard and challenging. And, this is a season of potential and promise. The good news is that Lord has committed to us his presence and his promises to see us through this season and the days ahead.

**Text:** Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 66:8-16; Psalm 138:1-8; Romans 8:31-39

Calvary, we are in a season of testing. This is a hard and challenging season. And, this is a season of potential and promise. The good news is that Lord has committed to us his presence and his promises to see us through this season and the days ahead.

The question before us is this: **How will you and I respond to this season of testing?**

I believe that the Lord speaks to us from his word to help us rely on his presence and promises even when we go through difficult or challenging times, even when we go through pruning, and even when we go through seasons of testing. **We want to choose to rely on him and his promises.**

I believe the Lord wants to give us weapons and ammunition for fighting against the enemy and for fighting for one another.

Some of us are unable to fight because we are worn out, wounded, or sidelined by discouragement or disappointment. I commit to standing in the gap for you and for us until you have the physical and emotional strength to join in the good fight of faith. I would want you to do the same thing for me.

### Isaiah 43:1-7

<p><i>But now, <b>this is what the LORD says</b>— he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:</i></p> <p><i>“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.</i></p> <p><i><b>2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.</b></i></p> <p><i><b>When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.</b></i></p>	<p>Lord, you have spoken to us. You have formed us. You have called us for such a time as this.</p> <p><i>Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).</i></p> <p>Lord, you have promised your presence with us as we enter the promised land, as we pass through the waters and the raging rivers. You have promised that we will not be swept away.</p> <p>As we pass through this fire, you have promised that we will not be consumed. We will be purified, changed, but not destroyed.</p>
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*3 For I am the LORD, your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;*

*I give Egypt for your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in your stead.*

*4 Since you are precious and honored in  
my sight, and because I love you,*

*I will give men in exchange for you,  
and people in exchange for your life.*

*5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;*

*I will bring your children from the east  
and gather you from the west.*

*6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'  
and to the south, 'Do not hold them  
back.'*

*Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the ends of the  
earth—*

*7 everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made" (Isaiah 43:1-  
7).*

God doesn't promise that water and fire won't threaten us. But, the Lord does promise we won't be overwhelmed by the water nor consumed by the fire. Difficulties may come our way, but God will never let his people be consumed or overwhelmed. The waters, raging rivers, fire, and flames refer to the danger and affliction ahead. And, God will be with us and will fulfill his promises to us.

This is who God is for us. We declare that you are our Lord, our God, the Holy One of Israel, our Savior.

You have bought us with a great price; you chose us as your people.

You have declared that we are precious and honored in your sight. You love us. Help each of us to see and feel what you feel and say: **I am precious, honored, and loved.**

Therefore, you will do whatever it takes to fulfill your word over us and to do your work in us.

Again, you have promised your presence with us.

You have promised to gather our people from the north, south, east, and west-- those who are to labor in this harvest field and whom we are to disciple.

Lord, speak: "Give them up!" Send our children to us. We add our voices to yours: "Give them up!"

Bring our people from afar and from everywhere.

Bring everyone called by you, whom you, O Lord, called to be here and to reveal glory as a part of Calvary. Help us to partner with you in your harvest work and fields.

## Psalm 66:8-12

(Summarizing points from *Psalms for Everyone: Part 1: Psalms 1-72*)

The first section of Psalm 66 (verses 1-7) looks behind the current moment to an earlier moment, back at the beginning of Israel's story. At that time, God brought the people through the Red Sea and dealt with the army pursuing them. An implication is that when the nation goes through another experience of threat and vulnerability, it needs to think back to this original act of deliverance, which set the pattern it can expect to see repeated. The people's life as a whole has a place within God's wider purpose, and God can be expected to behave consistently in connection with the pursuit of this purpose.

**Calvary, the Lord has been faithful to us for 36 years. His past faithfulness prophesies his future faithfulness.**

The middle section of the psalm (verses 8-12) describes how little Israel went through that experience of control and constraint, fire and water. But, the psalm speaks from a time when it has come out the other side and is flourishing. The people of God can now look back and see that they were being tested or refined.

*Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard;*

*9 he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.*

*10 For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.*

*11 You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs.*

*12 You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance (Psalm 68:8-12).*

Such a crisis shows whom you can really trust, where your security lies, and whom you recognize to be in control of the world. Crises reveal character.

Any people or nation-- if they are vulnerable to and respectful of the Lord-- that people or nation can turn to God and claim this pattern of deliverance.

The psalm's last section (verses 13-20) indicates that the same way of thinking applies to the individual. Instead of an exhortation to other peoples to praise God, this section begins with an act of commitment to praise God for an individual experience like those described in the first two sections that came to the people as a whole. **The way God has acted in relation to the people provides individuals with a basis for looking to God to deliver them when they are in trouble.** Then, whereas Israel's job is to give testimony to the entire world regarding God's acts of deliverance, the individual's job is to give testimony to the entire people.

The warning recognition that you can't expect to cry out to God for help if you fail to deal with waywardness in your own heart applies to individuals as it does to nations.

**Psalm 138:1-8**

*I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the "gods" [probably heavenly hosts] I will sing your praise.*

*2 I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.*

*3 When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.*

*4 May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD, when they hear the words of your mouth.*

*5 May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great.*

*6 Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.*

*7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me.*

*8 The LORD will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands (Psalms 138:1-8).*

This is a Psalm of thanksgiving, praising God for his blessings and anticipating the wider extension of God's glory among the nations.

The Psalmist gives thanks to the Lord because God answered his prayers (verses 1-3).

Here is how the Lord answered prayer: God gave the Psalmist heart strength and helped his faith in God to stand-- to not give up nor give in nor fail.

People of position will praise the Lord and sing of his glory.

And common folk will praise the Lord because he attends to the needs and condition of the lowly and humble (verses 4 – 6).

As we read throughout Scripture, the Lord is with us in times of testing, trial, and trouble. The Lord preserves and protects his people. God acts powerfully on behalf of his people and saves us over and over again.

As Jesus said: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).*

The Lord will fulfill his promise and purposes for us according to his steadfast, loyal love. The Lord will finish what he started in us (Philippians 1:6).

## Conclusion

Humans are meaning making machines. That is neither good nor bad; it just is.

What meaning are you making of your circumstance and situation? What meaning are you making of what Calvary is going through?

I don't know where you find yourself right now. But, I pray that no matter what you are going through, you will rely on the Lord and his word, on his presence and his promises, on who he is for you (and us), and on what he has done and promised he will do for you (and us).

The temptation when we go through difficult and challenging times is to make meaning or to give into meanings like:

1. God doesn't love me.
2. God has forsaken me.
3. God is against me.
4. I have failed.
5. I am not good enough.
6. I won't make it.
7. What's the use?
8. Now, I will have to take care of myself.

May we make meaning in accordance with the Scriptures we have read today, and in light of what the Lord says in Romans 8:31-39.

*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).*

May our hearts and lives be strengthened with the presence of the Lord and his promises. May his love empower and sustain us now and in the days ahead.

**Reminder:** On April 29, I shared about our *Current Reality and Preferred Future*. In that message, I called us to action as a church in the following ways:

1. **Pray and fast:** I invite you join me in praying and fasting (however the Lord leads) in the Global Bridegroom Fast, Monday – Wednesday, June 4-6. Join in corporate prayer as possible. The Generations set is on Monday at 6:00pm; Corporate Intercession is at 7:00pm.
2. **Continue to give faithfully.**
3. **Step up and give if you haven't been doing so already.**
4. **Get intentional about reaching out.** Join us on June 9 for our Compassion Saturday.
5. **Share** with your Staff, Elders, and Deacons what you feel, think, and believe.