

Godspeed Living

Isaiah 43:1-7

INTRODUCTION

- A. Our country is much older than we think.
- Four centuries old, as a matter of fact.
 - The year 2007 is the 400th anniversary of the first English colony in the “New World.”
 - Don’t be confused, now. This milestone has nothing to do with the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.
 - Instead, this anniversary goes all the way back to 1607 when the first permanent English colonists arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, beating the Pilgrims to the New World by 13 years.
 - One of the three ships that brought the colonists to Jamestown was Godspeed, a three-masted square-rigger that sailed the Atlantic for nearly five months to get to Virginia.
 - The ship was just 88 feet long—about the length of a double tractor-trailer—and had a top speed of about four miles per hour.
 - The colonists endured what we would consider to be intolerable conditions, with 13 crew members working on the deck and 39 passengers stuck in the cargo hold with 40 tons of supplies.
 - Imagine yourself on board the Godspeed, pulling out of London on a cold winter day, December 20, 1606.
 - You cruise down the Thames River without any problems, but then hit the English Channel, which is being racked by stiff winds from the ocean.
 - It takes you six full weeks of sailing to clear the channel.
 - Today, we can jet to London in six hours.
 - Four centuries ago, it took six weeks to make it down the channel and out to the open seas.
 - Then you cross the Bay of Biscay and turn south toward the Canary Islands. There you replenish your water supply, and catch the strong trade winds which push you across the Atlantic Ocean.
 - The weeks pass slowly, with nothing to look at, nothing to do. Boredom takes over. Food rots. Tempers flare. People stink.
 - Finally, you sail into the Caribbean.
 - The island of Dominica becomes your first landing site, and from there you hop to the Virgin Islands, where you do some hunting and fishing.
 - According to the records of John Smith, the most famous passenger aboard the ship, you feed every day on iguanas, tortoises and pelicans, as well as “Parrots and Fishes.” Delicious.
 - You sail north in search of Virginia, but find that your destination is not so easy to reach.
 - Although your calculations indicate that you should be there, for three days you search, but see no land.
 - Then a violent storm strikes your ship, and you have to drop sail and ride it out.
 - There is no way to steer the ship in such conditions, and you fear being blown onto the offshore bars of North Carolina’s Outer Banks.
 - There, all crew and passengers would be washed into the sea and drowned.
 - But God is with you, and you are driven by the wind into the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.
 - On April 26, 1607, you make landfall at Cape Henry, and then on May 14 you finally reach your destination—Jamestown.
 - You have been delivered by Godspeed, a ship whose name means “May God cause you to succeed.”
- B. That’s good to keep in mind as we begin our 401st year.
- This morning’s text speaks volumes to us as we contemplate beginning a new year.
 - As we look at this passage, we see WATER AS A METAPHOR FOR CHAOS, GOD IS PRESENT IN THE CRISIS, & THE MARKS OF GODSPEED LIVING.

WATER AS A METAPHOR FOR CHAOS, vv. 1-2

- A. The Lord gives a promise in these two verses: “But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 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. Water has often been used as a metaphor for the troubles of this life.
- There could have been few things as terrifying as being on the Godspeed four hundred years ago when the

- storms howled about and the ship was rocked back and forth like a kite in a hurricane.
2. The Jews, we must understand, hated the water and they avoided whenever they could, much like a cat.
 - a. To the Jews, water was a symbol of chaos and destruction—no wonder the Scriptures speak of the Spirit of God’s hovering over the waters (Gn 1:2), bringing order out of the chaos of the early earth.
 - b. That’s likely also why we read the special mention of the dry land upon which the Israelites crossed the Red Sea as they fled from Pharaoh’s army (Ex 14:26-29).
 - c. Water is even used as a metaphor for divine judgment in Isaiah: “The Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River—the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck” (8:7-8).
 - C. The people for whom this prophetic work was intended would have known quite well about chaos.
 1. They had been living in Jerusalem, the Babylonians had taken them captive, and they were dwelling in a foreign land.
 2. These individuals were growing old in a foreign country, and they were losing hope of ever returning to Israel.
 - D. You don’t need me to tell you this, but because we live in a fallen world troubles come from every hand.
 1. Job, a man who had to feel as though the floods were overwhelming him, said, “Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1).
 2. “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about” (Js 5:10-11). Those words seem strange indeed unless suffering is simply a way of life.
 3. “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pt 4:12).
 - E. While assembling their new water bed, Betty and her husband Everett realized they would need a hose.
 1. Everett dashed to the hardware store and bought one. They attached it to the bed, ran in through the apartment to the kitchen tap and left to wait for the bed to fill.
 2. About an hour later they checked on its progress. That’s when they discovered Everett had bought a sprinkler hose.
 - F. Our troubles may not be so humorous, but no doubt, we all have difficulties in our lives.
 1. Perhaps you have a child who is giving you fits and you’re just about at your wits end.
 2. Perhaps you aren’t as close to your husband or wife as you would really like to be.
 3. Perhaps you’re having trouble at work, lost a loved one, or struggling in school or having difficulties in some other way. But, don’t we all know quite well the difficulties in this life?

GOD IS PRESENT IN THE CRISIS, v. 2

- A. In this verse, we read these words of promise: “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. There could have been nothing more terrifying than crossing the Atlantic in a vessel all alone, without any hope that God was with you.
- C. More terrifying than that is the belief that we are crossing the choppy storms of life on our own, without the help of God.
 1. The promise we have as children of God is that we never, ever cross the choppy storms of life without the care and help of God.
 - a. “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My hearts leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song” (Ps. 28:7).
 - b. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is. 41:10).
 - c. “God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5-6).
 2. The hymn “It Is Well With My Soul” speaks volumes of the assurance we can have in Christ.
 - a. In 1871 Horatio Spafford and his wife Anna were still grieving over the death of their son.
 - 1) Horatio was a lawyer in Chicago.
 - 2) He had invested heavily in real estate. So when the Great Chicago Fire happened, it meant that he lost almost everything he owned.
 - b. Two years later, in 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday in Europe.
 - 1) He was delayed because of business, so he sent his family on ahead of him, his wife Anna, and his four daughters Tanetta, Maggie, Annie and Bessie.
 - 2) On November 21, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on the *S. S. Ville Du Havre*, the ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel and 226 people lost their lives, including all four of Spafford’s daughters.

- a) Somehow his wife, Anna, survived.
- b) On arriving in England, she sent a telegram to Horatio with the words “Saved alone.”
- c. Spafford then himself took a ship to England, going past the place where his daughters had died.
 - 1) According to his daughter, Bertha Spafford, the hymn was written in 1873 in the mid-Atlantic.
 - 2) Here are lyrics to the first verse: “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way / When sorrows like sea billows roll; / Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, / “It is well, it is well with my soul.”
3. How can any tragedy which occurs in this life be well with our souls? Is it not precisely because we have the promise of God that he will not leave us alone?

THE MARKS OF GODSPEED LIVING

- A. The question for us is: Are we living a Godspeed life?
 1. It’s pretty clear that the term “Godspeed” has nothing to do with velocity—the colonists’ ship topped out at a whopping four miles per hour.
 - a. In this case, speed comes from the Middle English word “spede,” which means “prosper.”
 - b. So, to wish someone Godspeed is to wish that God will help him to prosper, or cause him to succeed.
 - c. One source says that the word is an expression of respect and good will, used when someone is about to go on a journey or embark on a daring endeavor.
 - 1) We all remember the call over the loudspeaker as John Glenn rocketed toward space, becoming the first American to orbit the earth: “Godspeed John Glenn.”
 - 2) Anne Bronte used the term in her book *Tenant of Windfell Hall*—“I’m wishing you God-speed,” says one character to another, “and aiding you with my prayers.”
 2. Thus, Godspeed living means that we live a life where we depend on God.
- B. What are the marks of living a life of dependence on God?
 1. We know we are living the Godspeed life when we are confident of God’s love—“You are precious and honored in my sight, and I love you” (v. 4).
 - a. We know that the love of God for each one of us is as firm as heaven itself, yet is that a principle by which we live our lives?
 - b. In other words,
 - 1) In the midst of the trials of life, do we know that whatever happens God’s love will abide with us?
 - 2) Do we understand that because God loves us we have value and purpose in this world we trudge through day by day?
 2. We know we are living the Godspeed life when we realize that we are a part of the family of God—“I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.”
 - a. This is undoubtedly a prophecy that God would expand his family through the introduction of Gentiles into his fold.
 - b. Our Christian family helps us achieve the Godspeed life.
 - 1) The early church spent much time together—“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).
 - 2) What purpose does that fellowship serve?
 - a) Christian fellowship serves to encourage believers—“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).
 - b) Christian fellowship helps us overcome sin—“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).
 - C. Our good fortune as Americans has always been more spiritual than material.
 1. About 200 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in search of the greatness of the United States.
 - a. He looked for it in our fields and mines, our schools and government buildings, but he couldn’t find it.
 - b. Finally, he went to our churches, and there it was—the secret of our genius and power.
 - c. “America is great because America is good,” he concluded, “and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”
 2. That is Godspeed living—a focus on being God’s people, in the face of any obstacle, any failure, any challenge, any terror, any trial. That’s the right direction to head as we sail out into the uncharted waters of the year 2007.