

## Blind Witnesses – Isaiah 43:8-21

**Introduction** - Isaiah is a book of promise surrounded by heavy oracles of judgment. Ministering during the reign of four kings of Judah and witnessing the destruction of the northern kingdom, Israel, Isaiah has seen it all. Near the end of his ministry, Isaiah prophesied that in the future Judah will fall to Babylon and see her children carried off into exile (39:5-7). With eyes of faith, they are not to fear (43:1) for God also promised to restore and return their descendants through a mysterious servant who will rise up from the east (41:2) and bring them back to their land (43:5-7). As we have seen, God has far more than the future return from exile in mind. Our God, unlike any other idol-god, is going to do a new thing (43:19) and blind/deaf Judah will be His witnesses.

**The Witness of the Blind** (43:8-13) – God calls out His own witnesses, who are blind and deaf (v8), and then summons the nations and asks of their gods, “*who can declare this and show the former things?*” (v9). Judah is God’s chosen witness (v10ff). But what good is a blind and deaf witness? God doesn’t save people who can save themselves. The redeemer will come and deliver Israel from exile but not by Israel’s strength, or righteousness, or testimony. They cannot witness to anything; they are the witness. They are the testimony. When God saves them in spite of their rebellion, they are a testimony to God’s sovereign actions according to His good pleasure (vv12-13). Our witness to God’s saving grace is in spite of ourselves.

**What Makes God’s People Blind?** – When God’s people are blind, they cannot see or testify to His presence, His providence, and His sovereign goodness. Judah abandoned faith in God and went on to serve idols because other gods “seemed” to be more present, predictable, and in control of the world. In Jesus’ day and in Paul’s ministry, Israel also refused to see or hear God even though He was right there before them in the Person of Jesus (Matt 13:13-15, Acts 28:25-29). The Pharisees were blinded by their self-worship, their self-righteousness. Idols can be little statues that we bow down to, false religions; they can be systems of self-help and self-righteousness, a secular statism, or philosophical ideas that tickle our own sensibilities and fleshly desires. These idols are blind to the truth and their followers become like them (Psalm 115:4-8).

**The Privilege of Your Testimony** – These blind witnesses never did proclaim the truth of God in Babylon the way we might think of witnessing. They were poor at giving testimony. But when God made a way for them to return to Jerusalem, they were a testimony, for God declared here that He would do just that. Fast forward ahead. When Christ was crucified, where were His witnesses? When Christ rose from the dead, where were His followers? But once the Holy Spirit fell upon them, these apostles embraced their identity (i.e. 1 John 1:1-4).

It is important to grow in your understanding and ability to defend the faith. But it is also true that your imperfect “witness” in your life and words is used by God perfectly to show forth His mercy, His saving power, and His faithfulness (John 9:25, 1 Tim 1:12-17, 2 Tim 2:11-13). God used the rebellious, idolatrous, murderous Jews in Jesus’ day to bring His saving testimony to the Gentile nations. Don’t you think He can and is using your imperfect testimony and witness today? The witness of the blind, it turns out, is only more glorifying of the self-existent, self-sustaining, self-determining, utterly unique God and Savior (vv10-13).

**I Am the LORD, Your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, Your King** (vv14-15) – This is why Israel need not fear. This future enormous empire of Babylon, far outweighing little Judah in military strength, economic prosperity and influence, and geographic stretch, would find itself fleeing in the very ships it had rejoiced in, from Israel’s redeemer. But this redeemer is not selected by Israel (Cyrus does not even come from Israel). Physical might, economic prosperity, political power, geographic size, none of this provides assurance. Faith alone in the Holy One of Israel, the Creator and King of all, provides assurance and it is offered to the sons of Abraham, descendants identified with the faith of Abraham.

**Behold! I Will Do a New Thing** (vv16-21) – This witness to God’s sovereignty, holiness, and redeeming love will be far greater than the first exodus. There, He made the wet land dry for crossing (v16). One day, He will make a river in the desert, dry land wet (v19e). God never needs to do things the same way twice (just look at all the different ways He “creates” in the creation design). In the midst of Scriptures that constantly tell us to remember the Exodus and to remember God’s saving acts, He also says, “*Do not remember the former things*” (v18). The sense is not to expect that God will do His saving work in the same way. “*Behold, I will do a new thing*” (v19). Rivers in the desert will provide waters of life in the wilderness of the unclean (vv19-20). Paul reflects on this ministry of reconciliation and the work of Christ Who has made all things new (2 Cor 5:16-21). You are evidence of that new creation. You are the testimony of God that the world has been reconciled to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ. Peter reflects on the new people God has made for Himself through Jesus (compare Isaiah 43:21 with 1 Pet 2:9-10).

**God Is the God of New Things** – Some Christians seem to think that God has no new things to do, and certainly we must not deny the finished and completed work of Jesus Christ. However, every time someone is saved, it is a new thing God is doing. Every little deliverance you receive is a new thing from God. Every time there is a reformation, a revival, a new awakening, God is doing a new thing. It is all stemming from this One New Thing: Jesus is the Creator, Redeemer and King of this new creation.