

**Proper 11 (A)**  
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Isaiah 44: (1-5), 6-8  
TLC, Keene, NH

*Blessed Assurance!*

*“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts ... There is no Rock; I know not any.”*

### **Introduction**

*“Death and taxes.”* According to one source, it’s a saying that “is usually attributed to Benjamin Franklin, who wrote in a 1789 letter that ‘Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.’” However, as best as can be discerned, according to *The Yale Book of Quotations*, an earlier known use came in 1716, by Christopher Bullock in his book *The Cobbler of Preston*. There he wrote: “‘Tis impossible to be sure of any thing but Death and Taxes. [See also Edward Ward, *The Dancing Devils* [1724], “Death and Taxes, they are certain.” [Fred Shapiro, “Quotes Uncovered: Death and Taxes,” <https://freakonomics.com/2011/02/17/quotes-uncovered-death-and-taxes>]

Either way, we all feel it to be true. Even I have to send a substantial tribute to Caesar every three months. I mostly despise writing that check, even as I buckle when I see loved ones die. They’re two things that make all of us groan and grow tired of this old world.

Except ... in the midst of them, there is another assurance – one greater than any other – a “Blessed Assurance” – Jesus is ours, and we are His.

**Central Thought:** God assures His own that **“He** is the *only* true God in whom they [we] have redemption, security, and hope.”

“BY FAITH WE ARE SAFE AND SECURE IN HIM WHO IS OUR ROCK.” [Peter, CJ, April 1999, 202]

Amen.

For Israel @ the time of Isaiah, things aren't looking good. The people are in exile. The land, promised to them from the days of Moses and Joshua is firmly fixed in the grasp of another - no longer their own. Hope, for the most part, is lost.

Not unlike our time. I mean, if you were going to write a history of 2020 thus far, what would it look like? Doesn't look too promising does it? Suffering ... sickness ... political turmoil and unrest. Get me to 2021 already! All the while, Satan continues to "*prowl around,*" ever glad to be sowing "tares with the wheat!"

Where, "one of the tasks [Isaiah] faced was that of kindling the expectation that God would act to save them." [Craddock, et. al. *Preaching through the Christian Year, A*, 368] To restore perspective. To envision and embolden hope.

Good News! Even in our own time, He has! With "death and taxes" like certainty, the assurances, of His Word, forgiveness and grace, are all in place. Where, even in the midst of the terror, His assurances accompany us by His promise of:

A future and a hope. Where, in the age to come, we will "*shine like the sun,*" Jesus assures in this morning's Gospel [Matt. 13:43].

But while, in the meantime, says St. Paul in our epistle reading [Romans 8:18-27], the Holy Spirit comes to our aid ... "*with groanings too deep for words*" ... ever searching the heart, interceding "*for the saints according to the will of God.*"

This is no small comfort here! Where, even as we groan with creation, we will be lifted up. We will be delivered.

All because of the assurance of who and who's we are.

<sup>1</sup> "*But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!*"

<sup>2</sup> "*Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun ["upright"] whom I have chosen.*"

The remnant of God's people is not forgotten, cast off like some well-worn garment. No, God declares and re-declares, time and time again, who and whose we are by grace – by His choosing.

*“But now,”* says the prophet, signaling a change from the way it was, and perhaps is, to what is now and will be by His grace ... *“chosen”* ... signaling a completed action – by water and the Word – that cannot be undone. [*The Lutheran Study Bible (TLSB)*, 1161]

*“The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”* [Romans 11:29]

Yet, how easily such assurances are forgotten in the midst of the storm. We flounder and falter. Our faith, at times fails.

Where, says one commentator, “We have God's promise of love and forgiveness. We have his assurance that He is in control and the ultimate victory is His, but our eyes tell us that maybe God has things mixed up. Sin and evil seem to have the upper hand ... we feel as ... ones in exile, far from the reality of God and his promises. Maybe the ‘idols’ of wealth and material goods, selfish desires, and self-centeredness would serve me better. Maybe God isn't God after all.” [Poppe, *CPR*, 12:3, 32]

Child of God, Yahweh's assurances still stand, especially when the One making them is the Lord of heaven and earth, our Rock and our Redeemer!

***<sup>6</sup> Thus says the LORD [YAHWEH], the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.”***

Where, Isaiah piles up name upon name to set forth and reinforce for us who God is. In v.6 alone, He uses 6 different names – like 6 different camera angles – to demonstrate who He is:

*“The Lord”* ... *“I AM WHO I AM”* ... His covenant name, stressing His grace, his undeserved love and favor, his mercy, his compassion, his forgiveness.

“*King of Israel*” ... who not only rules, but who fights for us ... where, the greatest fight to the death took place on Calvary’s cross. There Jesus – our King – took off His gloves and disarmed the prince of this world, serving out His service unto death, all to rise again – “King of Kings, Lord of Lords!” [Revelation 19:16]

Our “[*Kinsman*] Redeemer” ... putting up the ransom for our life; doing so with “*mighty hands and outstretched arms*” – *literally!*

The “*Lord of hosts [of angel armies]*” ... sending them forth to do His bidding ... as “*ministers ... flames of fire*” ... “to serve and protect” the people of God in ways we don’t fully realize ... “*lest we dash our foot against a stone.*”

“*First ... Last*” on scene – before and after we arrive ... our A to Z ... the Pioneer and Perfecter ... Author and Finisher of our faith.

“*God*” ... *Elohim* ... Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Luther: “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress.” [*Large Catechism*]

Amen! Wherein, 100% of the time, the Lord’s promises are fulfilled. He does not make mistakes. He does not lie.

***7 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.***

The other so-called gods of this world? They are pretenders. Let them look at us with fierceness. But then grab them by the beard. Behold! It comes off. Their teeth are false. Their purported strength – hollow ... a sham. They may clamor for our tribute. They may seek to instill fear. But they are nothing!

Therefore ...

*“Fear not, O [insert name here] my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen ... **Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it?** And you are my witnesses! **Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.**”*

“Do not fear” ... such is the source of our salvation. Where, again, our Savior and His Word “means what it says ... [conveying] the sense that [He] has heard [His] people’s deepest prayers and means to act in [our] behalf.” [Craddock, 368]

He can do no other. We are His children. He has brought us to Himself in Christ Jesus. Where, we may be desert bound.

<sup>3</sup> *[Yet] I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.*

As we are borne of water and the Word, His name firmly fixed on and in you. This is our confession! This is our faith – a confession and faith that we not so much make, but rather one that is making us ... “the very truth of God and not the invention of any man.”

Where, by the Spirit of the living God, we are, even now, being transformed. “First, the people will grow and thrive, springing ‘*up among the grass like willows by flowing streams*’” ... “*that they may be called oaks of righteousness,*” Isaiah says elsewhere, “*the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.*”

“Second, they will know and affirm who they are, saying and writing on their hands that they belong to the Lord and calling themselves by” His name.” [Craddock, 368]

*“This one will say, ‘I am the LORD’s,’ another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.”*

Where, even in the darkest of times, “we need not fear. God has been faithful to save us in the past; he will be faithful in the future. [Wherein] there is comfort in knowing that we belong to God. ... *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* [Peter, 203]

Even as we, thirdly, are now sown into the world – “sons (& daughters) of righteousness.” Here our God would be served and revered as Lord and King, received as Redeemer, trusted in as the Rock, worshiped as *Elohim* [Father, Son & Holy Spirit], and borne witness to by His redeemed. [Adapted from Graudin, *CJ*, July 1987, 254]

*“Beloved, let us arm ourselves with all our might, let us prepare ourselves for the struggle by innocence of heart, integrity of faith, dedication to virtue.”* [Cyprian]

### **Conclusion**

A number of years ago, the Japanese attempted to attract endangered albatrosses to the Izu Peninsula in order to encourage them to breed. For more than two years, a five-year-old albatross named Deko tried to woo one of the wooden decoys by building fancy nests and fighting off suitors. He spent his days standing faithfully by her side. Japanese researcher Fumio Sato, talking about the albatross’s infatuation with the wooden decoy said, “He seems to have no desire to date real birds.”

So it is with those who put their affections in the gods of this world instead of placing their fear, love and trust firm and fast in the one true God. [*Leadership*, Fall 1999, 79] Yes, there “Ain’t nothin’ like the real thing, baby!” So it is in love. So it is in faith.

Today, as He has, and as He will, our God assures us that He is the only true God in whom we have redemption, security, and hope.

WHERE, BY FAITH WE ARE SAFE AND SECURE IN HIM WHO IS  
OUR ROCK.

We know not, indeed, there is not another! *Amen.*