

Fear not

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev K.M.Macdonald

[0 : 00] We now read Isaiah chapter 41 and we look for a few minutes tonight at words that we find in verse 10. Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God.

I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Particularly those words, fear thou not, for I am with thee. Now I find that in my study of the Bible and as we go through life, that there are times when I have to search out for things in the Bible that are of particular encouragement to me.

Because when we do a series like the Sermon on the Mount, we find that it is so searching and that it is so hard on us that we often have to throw up our arms in despair and say, well, it is pointless, it is absolutely hopeless going on because the demands made on an ordinary human being are just too much.

But then when you look and read extensively through the Bible, you find that every so often God reaches out a hand of comfort and encouragement to us.

In the midst of the threatenings of the law, in the midst of pointing out how far wrong we have gone and how impossible it is to be good, God reaches out and says, hear thou not, for I am with thee.

[1 : 23] And here we find it exactly the same, that he was speaking there, the prophet Isaiah was speaking to the children of Israel. They were in rebellion against God, they were moving away from him, they were indulging in all sorts of things that were displeasing to God, and God was telling them and leaving them in no doubt that their behavior would lead to disaster.

But then, in amongst it all, there comes those tokens of goodwill, those tokens of mercy, that he reaches out and tells them, if they turn, if they try, then he is a God who reaches out to them in love. So it is good for us in the middle of studying the Sermon on the Mount to turn to words like this, and see how it encourages us, and how we see that we are not alone.

As Christians, we are not alone in the Lord, that the Lord is with us, and that when we fight on and try to do what is right, then he enables us because he is with us.

We find here that God was telling the Israelites about the threatenings of the law, and how far they were going wrong. And he tells them, fear thou not, for I am with thee.

[2 : 34] In other words, he knew that they would be afraid if they listened at all, and certainly the prophet Isaiah was afraid. When he was telling the people this, but God reaches out and tells them that they do not really need to be afraid if they put their trust in him.

Now fear is a form of unbelief. It is a form of unbelief that makes us distrust God. We as Christian believers are quite safe in God's hands, and when we are afraid, then we are dishonoring God. Fear is not what it ought to be. It means that our trust in him is only a superficial, maybe surface trust, because we do not trust him enough not to be afraid.

And fear is something that holds us back. Fear holds back the Christian. Fear holds back a Christian and prevents him or her from doing her duty, or his duty, so that the spiritual life of the Christian suffers if that person is afraid, and certainly the cause of Christ suffers.

If a gardener is afraid to sow seeds, then nothing will come up. If a farmer is afraid to start ploughing, then there will be no crops. If a young person is afraid of trying anything, because he says there is no use trying for a prize, then of course there is no use because he or she won't get it.

[4 : 03] And as well as that, fear is infectious or contagious, whatever you wish, because fear discourages others. Remember the children of Israel. The children of Israel on the borders of the Promised Land.

They had come through all the desert, and there they were, right on the borders of the Promised Land. And instead of taking God's word and saying, go in and possess it, they said, oh, wait a minute, hold on. We'd better see what it's like first.

And they sent in spies to examine it. And the spies came back with a glowing report about the land. They said, it's a magnificent land. A bunch of grapes which took two men to carry.

They brought back as a proof that this land was great. We came unto the land, whether thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey. And this is the fruit of it.

They saw that it was a great land. And God had told them, go in and possess it. But they said, nevertheless, although it is a good land, and although everything is, as you said, it was flowing with milk and honey, the people that live there, they are strong.

[5 : 05] And the cities are walled and very great. And we saw giants there. We saw the children of Hanak there. And the Malachites, the dreaded Malachites, they dwell in the land of the south.

And the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites, they dwell in the mountains. And the Canaanites, they dwell by the sea and by the coast of Jordan. And you can see them holding up their hands in horror. And in his spite, the voices of Caleb and Joshua, who said, let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.

And despite this being the land that God had promised to them, God himself had promised them this land, the children of Israel lifted up their voices and wept that night.

They wept all night. And in the morning they said, let us make a captain and let us return into Egypt. Fear kept them out of the promised land.

But despite being taught by the Lord about this fear paralyzing us and giving us this curious apathy and lethargy, we as ordinary human beings are still very prone to fear.

[6 : 14] Attacks on our human, on our spiritual lives, which spoil our service to the Lord. And if it is as a spoil or service to the Lord, then it certainly spoils our enjoyment of our Christianity.

Enjoyment of being sinners set free by God. The blessed Redeemer has come and set us free. And yet our fear shackles us and we are not able to enjoy this liberty.

Many, if not all, of God's people are full of fear. Some of them, by their very nature, more so than others.

John Bunyan says of Mr. Fearing, He was a man who had the root to the martyr in him, but he was one of the most troublesome pilgrims that I ever met with in all my days. And yet, God in his great mercy knows all our weaknesses.

He knows us. And he knows that we're weak. And he knows that we're afraid. For he remembers we are dust. And he, our frame, well knows. He knows that we're prone to anxiety and fear and worry.

[7 : 23] And he comes to us so often in the Bible with this tremendous encouragement. And in our text he says, Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God.

I will strengthen thee. Yea, I will help thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. This is only one of 70 times in Scripture where he says, Fear not.

In fact, within a few verses of our text there, he repeats this twice. Fear not, I will help thee, he says in verse 13. And then verse 14 he says, Fear not, thou warm Jacob. Though we might speak lightly and sometimes disparagingly about fears and doubts.

And we're often impatient with people who harbor these fears and doubts. We find that God treats those fears and doubts seriously. He doesn't just push us to one side and say, You shouldn't fear anyone, ignore us.

No. They are to him great evils. They are of consequence to him. And he does not like it because they are dishonoring to himself. And he tells us, don't be afraid.

[8 : 34] He says, fear not, for I am with thee. He assures us of his own almighty presence in combating the very force of fear.

We as human beings, we can only come to others to reassure them. And we can only say glibly, don't worry. Or fear not. Because we really are pretty helpless when we are dealing with people that have fears and worries.

Probably fears and worries that we cannot understand ourselves. And we are often glib and often uncomfortable when somebody says that they are so afraid that they are paralyzed that they can't do well.

But God comes with more than just a word of encouragement. God comes and he backs up his fear not with the most potent argument of all. He says, for I am with thee.

Fear not, for I am with thee. Fear not, for I am with thee. Now the believer is in need of such encouragement. For the believer's journey through life is a most peculiar one.

[9 : 41] Have you ever examined or thought of your own journey through life as a believer? The life of faith is one long miracle. Day by day it is an absolutely astounding miracle that we cannot understand.

A life that does make sense to the natural man. The inner spiritual life of a believer is a mystery. Because we cannot prove anything in a court of law.

We cannot see anything with our human eyes behind us. We cannot see anything with our human eyes before us. Yet we stand solidly on a rock. And we go from strength to strength. Because we take the word of God as it stands. With all its promises we take them at face value. And they may sound ridiculous to the world.

But we say God says that. And we cling to it. And we live our lives as a people who do believe it. Because God says it. We march with the eye of faith.

[10 : 45] That is inexplicable. Unless you've got it. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things not seen.

That's not evidence in a court of law. They would demand to see it. They would demand to number it. They would demand to show it to the judge. And to the jury. And to the opposition. And to everybody else.

They would demand to see it. And to stand up and say that I've got faith. It's the substance of things hoped for. It's the evidence of things not seen. It's absolutely ludicrous. To the ordinary man.

But we march through life as the children of Israel marched out through Egypt. Through the wilderness to the promised land. Totally dependent on God. They came to the Red Sea. With the Egyptian army closing in on them. It looked bad. Because they couldn't get across the Red Sea. And there was the mighty power of the Egyptian army closing down upon them. And it looked as if they were an absolute cul-de-sac.

[11 : 45] But fear not. I am with thee. God is with his people. And the Red Sea opened. And the children of Israel marched through its depths. Dryshod.

They don't know the way to the promised land. They reach the other side. And they say we don't know which way to go. We can't move. We've got no scouts. We've been slaves all our lives. We don't know which way to go. And the whole of the desert looks in front of them. And looks an absolutely impossible thing. Fear not.

I am with thee. And a polar cloud by day. And a polar fire by night. Guide their movements. And who's going to feed them? As they go through the desert. Three million people.

Of all shapes and sizes. And everything else. Young and old. Who's going to feed them? As they go through there. There's no oasis. They don't know a thing about it. Who's going to feed them?

[12 : 41] Who's going to provide for this great crowd of people? As they cross the dry desert ways. Fear thou not. For I am with thee. And the very rocks open to give out water.

And the very heavens open and manor drops right down. And the quails come flying in. Fear not. I am with thee. And they come to the last obstacle. After fighting their way through all the difficulties. And the river Jordan is in flood. It looks as if they had come at the very worst time. How are they going to cross over this river Jordan? That's in absolute flood. Fear not. For I am with thee.

And Jordan was driven back to let them all through. You see all of that is recorded for us by the Holy Spirit for a purpose. It's recorded for us that we may be encouraged in our daily lives. Comfort ye. Comfort ye my people. That is God's command. That's God's command to Christ's own ministers. That we have to comfort the people.

[13 : 41] Comfort ye. Comfort ye my people. God could come down and comfort you. God could do a whole lot of things. But he commands me. He commands the ministers of Christ. To comfort his people.

To reach out to them in love. And let them know that he is a God who cares. A God of the impossible. Is anything too hard for the Lord? He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom. And shall gently lead those that are with young. And as we go through life and we come to our last obstacle. Our river Jordan. We know that we will hear the sweet voice of our saviour saying. Hear thou not for I am with thee. And Jordan will be driven back. And we will be able to cross over dry shod. Into the promised land. But again. Despite knowing all this. And accepting all this as true. We find that just as the children of Israel came under attack.

[14 : 36] And they came under attack from enemies outside the camp. That is the Amalekites and the Canaanites etc. And they came under attack from enemies within the camp. Remember Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

So the Christian is under attack all the time. Our faith comes under attack at certain times. From within. And at certain times from without ourselves.

Because of all times of physical illness. There are illnesses. And even pain. Which we can stand. And we can remain. Absolutely calm.

But there are other illnesses. And other sort of things that come upon us. When both our head and our heart cry out. When the whole system is disarranged.

When our natural inclination. Is to cry out like Jacob. Remember when he thought he had lost Joseph forever. And Simeon was held prisoner in Egypt.

[15 : 33] And they were wanting Benjamin to go down as well. He says all these things are against me. There come times when we think that that's it. We are being absolutely overpowered. If it was only one little illness.

Or one little thing that was wrong. Then we could cope with it. But maybe our own illness. And the illness of other members of the family. And things piling in on top of us like that. Distress. And hospitals.

Operations. And complications. In the midst of all that chaos in our lives. Oh my friends. This is not good. To hear the voice of the Lord saying. Be not afraid.

For I am with thee. Fear thou not. For I am with thee. The gentle whisper from heaven. In the midst of all that's going wrong. Fear thou not. For I am with thee.

Times of sorrow. When a loved one is removed from the family circle. When there's an empty space before your very eyes. When part of your heart dies.

[16 : 31] Part of your heart is dead and cold. Because the anguish of pain and remorse and sorrow has destroyed it. Then is it not necessary for the heavenly comforter to whisper to you.

Fear thou not. For I am with thee. Times when everything seems to go wrong. Against you. When providence itself. Seems to work against you.

Remember Sisera. In the Old Testament. In the book of Judges. The stars and their cruisers.

Fought against Sisera. Even providence seemed. To take a delight.

In going against you. And this is harder still. When you're a Christian trying to do your best. When you're even trying to do things that are good. Trying to be good.

Some of you may have discovered or experienced. The sudden fall. In your status in life. The sudden fall from comfort to want. Maybe from full employment.

[17 : 28] With this practical material provision to unemployment. With this unrelenting pressures and even debt. Some of you might have experienced that. It's not easy to accept. Not easy to say.

As Paul was taught to say. I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content. You see it's very difficult to say it when you're down in the rock bottom. When you're down in the gutter and things have gone wrong.

And your whole world has collapsed. It's easy enough to say it when things are going well. And you're able to pay the rent and the electricity. And the kids are fine and everything's alright. It's easy enough to say yes. I agree with Paul. But when the whole map has been dragged out from under you.

And you're left with an absolute shattered life around about you. Then it's difficult. Even for a Christian of great faith to say that. And should we ever find ourselves in a situation like that.

In such a needy situation. We pray that we would hear the voice of the Lord saying to us. Fear thou not for I am with thee. Be not dismayed. For I am thy God.

[18 : 26] You see all the mysterious arrangements of providence are working for your good. Every single thing that happens is working for the good of the Lord's people.

You may not see it at the time. All the kings of the earth, all the governors of the world are in subjection to the providence of God. The Pharaoh of Egypt, the mightiest power in the world at that time.

He thought that he could bargain with the Lord. He thought he could bargain and argue. And bring things forward and pull things back. And reason things out with God.

For the release of the children of Israel. And God in his mercy gave him time. Time to relent. But when the Lord's time came. For the children of Israel to leave Egypt.

Not another half minute. While the children of Israel kept in slavery. And not all the horses and soldiers and chariots of Egypt. And they were a fearsome power in their day.

[19 : 25] Not a single thing could hold back. The children of Israel coming out of Egypt. They had to do only one thing. And that is submit.

And then of course there are times of exhaustion. Times of physical exhaustion and spiritual exhaustion. Times when you are so tired that you begin to feel sorry for yourself.

When maybe you have taken on too much responsibility. When you are so full of zeal and so full of exuberance for the Lord. And you have overstretched yourself. When you feel washed out.

Like Elijah under the juniper tree. Is it not a comfort to know then and to hear the voice of the Lord.

Fear thou not for I am with thee. Come unto me and I will give you rest.

And you are able to say even in the midst of your exhaustion. The Lord is with me. My responsibilities, my work are too much. But God is with me. And my God is all powerful.

[20 : 27] He will carry my burden. He calls me. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Fear thou not for I am with ye.

In the hard times. In your non-success. In your castings down. In your disappointments. At not being appreciated even. Be not dismayed. For I am thy God.

The last absolutely comfort of the Christian. That God is his. We read of Jesus himself in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion.

And he went in there with Peter, James and John. And he told them to watch and pray. And he himself went a little further into the garden.

And there we read that he fell on his face. And he prayed. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly. And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

[21 : 25] And what happened? There appeared an angel unto him from heaven. Strengthening him. Have these strengthening angels stopped working? Have they been paid off?

Are they not available? Are they not with us? Are they not still at God's beck and call? They have not stopped working. Have you not had times in your life.

When you thought you couldn't stand much more. When you wept tears of exhaustion and frustration. And you bowed to God in prayer. Pouring your heart out to him. And you got up prepared to go on.

An invisible spirit sent from heaven to strengthen you. In conclusion. When viewed on his own. This promise is most thrilling.

And is very very comforting to Christians. But when we examine the context. When we see that it was the children of Israel. To the children of Israel. In rebellion against God.

[22 : 24] Then the promise takes on a glory. That can only cause us to praise and adore. The God of our salvation. The prophet Isaiah was speaking to the Israelites. At a time when they were at the most rebellious against God.

Sinning against him and going their own way. And would expect a stern message of judgment. But we find instead a message of comfort. And as we apply this to ourselves.

And as we look at our own condition. This is not an excuse for our sin. For this in no way condoned sin. But we do see.

If we understand it properly. The amazing mercy of God. Because his love and care for us. Is never dependent on our faithfulness. But on his own holy character.

You see. It's not just that he is measurable. He is mercy. It's one of his attributes. It's part of his makeup. That he is mercy.

[23 : 23] He is love. And there are many many times in our Christian lives. When we ought to forfeit altogether. The blessings of God. But in such moments.

Our loving father surprises us. As he bends down to us. With those beautiful tokens of love and care. Whilst we were enemies. Jesus died for us.

Is that not repeated a thousand times in your life my friend. And in my life. That while we were yet enemies. Jesus died for us. And as we think of going back into the world tomorrow.

Into whatever job we have. Or in whatever company we have. There are at least two things that we ought to remember. And take away with us. One of them is. Remember who you are.

If you are a Christian here tonight. Remember who you are. Remember you are a sinner. Saved by grace. Remember that you are a sinner. That God thought enough of you.

[24 : 24] That Jesus Christ took your place. And my place. On that cross at Calvary. That was my place. But Jesus took my place there. On that cross at Calvary.

He died that I might live. He died that you might live. Accept this my friend. Accept that you are a Christian. That you are precious to God.

That you are precious enough. That he redeemed you. He reached out to you. He gave the best thing in heaven for you. He gave his own son.

To die for you. You are precious to him. And then the second thing that we must remember is. Remember who God is. Remember who he is. You may feel weak.

You may feel unworthy. You may say often I cannot. But the one who whispers to you now. Fear thou not for I am with you. Is the almighty God. Is the almighty God.

[25 : 24] The creator of heaven and earth. The almighty God of power and gentleness and comfort. And the purpose of his power and gentleness. Is to gather you and to care for you.

All the days of your life in this world. And then to gently take you home to be with him. When he calls you home. So remember who you are.

And remember who God is. Fear thou not. For I am with thee. Amen. Let us pray. O Lord we give thee thanks for the comfort and the strength that we find in our own word.

And we ask that we would understand it more fully. In order that our trust in thee would be greater. We give thee thanks for the guidance and the direction. The warning that thou dost give us. But oh we thank thee.

For those fear not of scripture. Help us to gather them up. O Lord God. Hold them close to our breasts. And we know that the gathering of them does not spoil the fragrance of them.

[26 : 28] Help us to reach out. And receive freely. What thou art giving us freely. Bless each one of us we pray. And make thine own people strong.

Strong in the Lord. That they may push back the powers of darkness. And reach into the mighty pit and into the clay. In order to bring poor lost souls into the kingdom of Christ.

Help us O Lord God. For Jesus sake. Amen.