

What's To Fear? Is 41:8-20

Is 41:8-20; Last week we talked about what to do when feeling distant from God, while this week the issue is fear
A theme that we'll find repeated at least 2 more times in the next several chapters
Indicating that it was big deal then, just like it is now (**Intro**)

Isn't that true? Fear is a big deal

Not only b/c it's a *common* emotion, but an extremely *powerful* one
That's why there's a multi-million dollar niche in the movie industry for *horror* films – people want the experience without the danger; And producers prey on it
While the *truly* scary part is the doors you open in your life to *real* evil influences

It's common, it's powerful, and sometimes even *debilitating*

Like when you wake up in the middle of a nightmare, and can't move; Or hear a bump in the night, and stop breathing; We're *paralyzed* w/ fear
Not to outdone by real opposition and real danger during the *day*
It's common, it's powerful, it's debilitating, and it's real

➤ But as followers of Christ, we need not succumb; That's the point of this message; We need *not* fear; In fact, God *tells* us not to
And gives us a *litany* of reasons why; Starting in v8

[8] But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; [9] you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; [10] fear not [and therein lies the core of this entire passage], for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

The Babylonians were coming, God's judgment was at hand, and the world was shaking in its boots; Look at v5
The coastlands have seen and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble
Fear was in the air; People were gripped by it
And God says, *But you, Israel, you my people – fear not; Don't fear*

And in the process, he calls us his *servant*; Which is actually the first reason not to

1. We're God's servants (v8)

[8] But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob – fear not; That's the flow
Here's the deal – servanthood comes with protection and provision; And when it's for a *good* master, what's to fear?
Kind of like working for a large, financially secure company; There's less risk to you personally, and therefore less to fear; B/c they'll look after you; And so will God

But don't miss the *collective* nature of this – he's talking to us as a whole

It applies to us individually, sure – but only as part of the whole
Which should come as no surprise, b/c God's best is *always* found when we're rightly connected in community; That's the first reason to fear not – we're God's servants

And while it's not my intent that any *one* of these will overwhelm you – taken all together I hope they do; B/c I think that's *Isaiah's* intent as well

2. We're chosen by God (v8)

You, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen – fear not; And lest you think that only applies to them, check out **Eph 1:4-5**; Speaking to believers, Paul says . . .
He [God] chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us [he predetermined and appointed us] for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ [through faith in his saving power and presence], according to the purpose of his will [God chose us as his own, according to his own will]

Which means our salvation is not the result of blind chance, nor our own doing

We're handpicked by God himself to be in this battle*****

Which should calm our fears when it rages, b/c this is where we *belong*; We're chosen

3. We're a part of God's people (v8)

A part of the family – *the offspring of Abraham* as Isaiah says (8); Who, us? Yes, us
B/c Scriptures like **Gal 3:29** say – *If you are Christ's* [if you belong to him through faith], *then you are Abraham's offspring*; Pretty clear
Which means you have nothing to fear*****
Just like a player on the best team in the NFL has nothing to fear, when playing against 5th graders; Winning is a sure thing

4. We're close to God (v8)

That's the idea of being God's *friend* – something he's *explicit* about at the end of v8
You're *my friend*; The connotation being, my beloved
The one with whom I have a *relationship*; The one with whom I'm close
So close, that on *this* side of the cross he dwells *within* us
And there's nothing like the presence of a friend to allay our fears, is there?
Especially when he's the living God, closer than a brother

5. We're loved by God (v9)

You might even write in there, *treasured*; We have nothing to fear b/c we're treasured by God; I think that's the implication here in v9
[Fear not he says] *you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"*
You see, searching far and wide for someone, and pursuing them to the farthest corners of the earth – at the very least indicates you *treasure* them, and probably *love* them

And love, the Bible says, drives out all fear; That's **1 Jn 4:18**

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.
You see, *apart* from God's love, there's *plenty* to fear; Legitimately so
But *in* his love, there's not
It's like being and feeling loved by your spouse in marriage – there's no fear of abandonment, no fear of reprisal, and no fear of struggle; You are loved*****
That's #5

➤ And then, in v10, there's a slight change in perspective on God's part; He goes from – "You are *my* servant" to "I am your God"; Starting with the all familiar truth that . . .

6. God is with us (v10)

Fear not, for I am *with* you he says in v10; That's Immanuel, God with us; The great Christmas theme; Which for them, meant *among* them, and at their side
While for us, it's once again – *within* us; And since he who is in us, is greater than he who is in the world, what's to fear (1 Jn 4:4)?

God is with us, and . . .

7. God is for us (v10)

Be not dismayed [he says in v10], *for I am your God*

The implication being, that the supreme being of the universe is on our side and in our corner; What more do you need?

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31) Who can thwart our kingdom purposes? Who can defeat our God-given efforts? Nobody

Deter us, sure; Temporarily derail us, maybe; But never defeat us; Ever

8. God will strengthen us (v10)

That's what he says – *I will strengthen you*; The very thing we saw last week in 40:31

They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength

And it's not just *physical* strength; In fact, more often than not, it's *emotional* strength
Especially when we're frightened by powers beyond our control; Like natural disasters;
Or demonic influences; Or bad people

Whatever the case, there's nothing to fear b/c God will strengthen us; That's what he says

And don't miss the future tense of this – *I will strengthen you*

Which means you may not have what it takes *today*; You may not have strength for *tomorrow's* fears; But you will then; You will when they come
B/c that's what God does for his own, his servants, his people

9. God will help us (v10)

I will help you he says; And that help could come in the form of *calming* our fears, or helping us *avoid* them, or overcoming them *completely*

IOW there's no need to fear, b/c God will *help* us in that respect

And that help isn't far away; **Ps 46:1** says – *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

IOW when fear threatens or encroaches on your soul, you don't have to make an appointment; Hoping beyond hope he'll be there*****

He's a very *present* help in trouble; A very *present* help in times of fear

10. God will preserve us (v10)

Fear not, he says – *I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* That's preservation
Which recalls the image of Aaron and Hur holding up Moses' arms in battle

They had just crossed the Red Sea and were on their way to Mt Sinai, when a guy named Amalek came and fought with them it says in Ex 17

So Moses sent Joshua and the men out to fight, while he stood on a hill overlooking the battle, staff in hand, and arms raised

And as long as his arms were up, they won; But when his arms dropped, they started losing (**Ex 17:12**)

But Moses' hands grew weary [it says in v12], *so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.*
And they won; God's people were preserved*****

And while our battles may not entail a *physical* upholding, he'll preserve us just the same
Upholding us with his *righteous right hand* – his perfect power, perfectly applied
In which case there's nothing to fear

11. God will protect us (v11-13)

He says in v11 – *Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded* [confused, bewildered]; *those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish.* [12] *You shall seek those who contend with you* [you'll look for your enemies], *but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all* [inconsequential]. [13] *For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you."*

That's protection – when your enemies can't even be found; When you're looking for a fight, and can't find one; When God holds your hand in the midst of it all
And though it may not happen overnight, though your enemies may not disappear right now, or even this side of eternity – it *will* happen
And probably *multiple* times in the course of your life

B/c that's God's way; He protects and defends us, often by simply *removing* those who oppose us; Leaving no battle at all; Just like he did with the Israelites on occasion
In which case there's nothing to fear; Literally

12. God will empower us (v14-16)

[14] *Fear not, you worm Jacob* [you weakling], *you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.* [15] *Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff; [16] you shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.*

Here's the deal – nothing will stand in the way of God's purposes and God's people, who carry them out
Obstacles will give way like the dirt in a field under the weight of a *threshing sledge*
Or in our day, a **chisel** plow – compliments of John Deere here
That's from the ISV by the way – the Iowa Standard Version

The point being, that God will empower us to do his will, and his work*****
We don't have to fear a lack of ability, a lack of power, or a lack of strength

Nor do we have to fear his silence like we talked about last week

13. God will answer us (v17)

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them

Like Jeremiah said in **Jer 33:3** – *Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.*

Or how about **Ps 91:15** – *When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.*

Which means we need not fear his silence*****

We may not *like* his answer – whether it’s shown to us in the events that follow, or revealed to us in the Scriptures, or spoken to us by a brother . . .

Or impressed on us by his Spirit . . .

We may not like his answer, but he won’t ignore us; Call on him

Nor will he forsake us – *I the God of Israel will not forsake them* (17b). IOW . . .

14. God will remain with us (v17)

How many times do you see *that* in the Bible; *I will never leave you or forsake you*; Over and over again; He’s not only *with* us, but he’s not going anywhere

15. God will provide for us (v18-19)

[18] I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. [19] I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together

That’s 7th century BC language for *provision*; And not just barely, but fully
Giving us all that we need in places and circumstances we wouldn’t have thought possible; Like in the valleys of life
And the wilderness of our wandering when we can’t seem to find our way
And dry times; And desert places; Thin times, and needy places
God will provide

➤ And do so not just for *our* sake, but for his; For his glory

That’s the idea of v20; He does all this – *that they* [his own, and the world at large] *may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

We *benefit* as part of God’s family, much like children benefit from the honor received by their parents – but that’s not his primary goal

His glory is; His renown; His credit

And so *jealous* is he of his glory, it’s one more reason to fear not

B/c he won’t fail to protect it

I hope that overwhelms you, in the *best* sense of the word; And encourages you to *face* your fears like never before; What’s to fear? *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Pray – Lord, you’re so good to us; Knowing we live in a fallen, fearful world – you give us reason upon reason not to; Thank you for that

Lord, if anyone had reason to fear, it was you – bearing our sins in your body, on the cross; And yet you did it, b/c of your perfect love; Thank you for that; And find us courageous as we live for you; Even as we give now of our tithes and offerings