

WHY LIVE IN FEAR?

"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." Isaiah 41:10.

All along the pathway of human history man has been afraid. Conscious of the fact that he was a sinner, Adam heard the voice of God and said, "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). Jacob fled from the presence of Laban, and when Laban overtook him Jacob said, "I was afraid; for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me" (Genesis 31:31). In describing his experience when he was approached by the angel of God Daniel said, "I was afraid" (Daniel 8:17).

Fear is one of man's most common enemies. It is certainly a problem to be reckoned with because so many are in its thralldom. It touches nearly every one of us in some way. Fear disturbs and distresses many people of all classes — the wise and the simple, the rich and the poor, and the old and the young. Two realms of mystery produce a sense of fear — the unfathomable present and the unknown future. People are afraid of failure, losses, poverty, disease, being laid on the shelf, old age, loneliness, death and what comes after death. Many actually suffer from the dread of some misfortune or calamity which they think may overtake them. These things are true in spite of the fact that at least eighty-one times in the Bible God has said, "Fear not."

There are natural fears and there are neurotic fears. Natural fear, like pain, is one of the sentinels of life. When used rightly it is the father of courage and the mother of safety. The fear that is natural is a friend, but the fear that is neurotic is an enemy, and unless it is mastered one is very likely to be wrecked by it. These are days when neurotic fear has grown to such dimensions that it overshadows the lives of multitudes and robs them of both physical and mental health. Continued fear is a poison to body and mind alike. It is impossible to think clearly when one is in the grip of fear. It is a well-known fact that fear lies back of the greater proportion of the nervous and mental breakdowns which are so numerous.

It is very important that we learn that we do not have to live in fear. To this end God said, "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." What a privilege to receive such words of encouragement and inspiration spoken by Him Who has never yet been known to fail!

"Fear thou not!" Fear is the child of doubt, whereas, faith is born of God. Fear ends in failure, but faith leads to victory. "Be not dismayed!" This means "Look not around you." Men are sad because of what they see when they fasten their eyes on their environment. Neither must we look back. If we do, past sins and failures will add to our dismay. Guilty of transgression though we were, we must not brood over our shortcomings. If they are under the blood of Christ, through our genuine repentance and trust in Him, then let them stay there. To look within is likewise harmful to our faith. Rather than look around, or back, or within, we should look up to Him Who is all-powerful. God reigns and He will lead us into deeper experiences of His love and power.

What place should fear have in the life of a child of God? The experience of fear has little place, if any at all, in the daily outlook of life. Whenever it comes, it should be carried at once to the throne of grace and committed to God, and by no means be carried in the mind and heart until darkness, distress, dejection and dismay take possession; bringing a state of unfitness for life's duties and demands, and even making life one miserable existence, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Meditation thereon will cause Isaiah 41:10 to speak its comforting and stimulating message to our hearts. As you ponder its contents, let your memory get to work so that its message will become very personal to you, ready for your immediate use at any time as God's own means of deliverance, victory and blessing. Three outstanding reasons for not living in a state of fear and dismay are very simply and positively listed.

I. God's Presence.

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee." This statement derives its value from the One Who made it. If these were only the words of a mere man, they would not be so encouraging and helpful. Regardless of how sincere and well-meaning the man might be, it is quite possible that he would be powerless to give the help that we might need. But these are the words of an Infinite Being, the Mighty God and the powerful Defender of His own. That makes a tremendous difference.

For the silencing of fear and the encouragement of faith, the simplest and yet the greatest argument is presented -- "For I am with thee." Even in the worst of situations this should be sufficient and satisfactory. It is not merely that "I am within calling distance" at the moment of need, but that "I am already present, equal to any possible emergency." It is not that "I will be with thee," but that "I am with thee." God is fully able to cope with the situation, regardless of how serious it may be. He is equal to every possible emergency.

Surroundings and circumstances may seem dark and discouraging, but we are always safe when He is with us. None of life's perplexing problems will be too hard to solve when He is with us, but instead they will dissolve into nothingness.

"When we cannot see our way,
Let us trust, and still obey;
He who bids us forward go,
Cannot fail the way to show.

Though enwrapt in gloomy night,
We perceive no ray of light;
Since the Lord Himself is here,
'tis not meet that we should fear.

Night with Him is never night,
Where He is, there all is light!
When He calls us, why delay?
They are happy who obey."

II. God's Power.

"Be not dismayed; for I am thy God." What a delightful truth; "For I am thy God." On our part these words imply reverence, submission and obedience. On God's part they imply guardianship and blessing. He takes special care of His own, and they are always safe because God is with them.

After assuring His people that He was with them, God exhorted them not to be dismayed at the prospect that was so disheartening and distressing since He was aware of all that was going on and was fully able to deal with the situation, however serious it might appear to be. He was reminding them that His relationship to them and His covenant with them engaged Him to attend to matters for them fully and to see them through. The God Whom they trusted and worshipped would by no means fail them in their hour of need.

He had in Himself all the resources necessary to meet whatever conditions might arise. They could count on Him and rest assured of a satisfactory result. The record of the past with its manifestations of omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence was sufficient to calm their fears and to prevent their dismay. The gods of their enemies were but idols, dead gods, who could not do anything for their worshippers, but He was the living God. The fact that He was their God was a sufficient guarantee of deliverance and victory, with the full supply of all of their possible needs. He is the eternal and unchangeable God.

III. God's Promises.

1. Strength.

"I will strengthen thee." We shall not travel far without learning that the secret of strength is the consciousness of our weakness. When we are weak, then are we made strong. Our greatest victories will be won as the power of Christ covers our impotence.

"When my weakness leaneth on His might,
All seems light."

After Dr. William R. Newell, the well-known Bible teacher, had spoken on II Corinthians 12:9, "My strength is made perfect in weakness," in Saint Louis, he called for a season of prayer. One brother prayed, "Lord, we'll furnish the weakness if Thou wilt furnish the strength." May each of us prove the Lord to be the strength of his or her Christian life!

Regardless of what our circumstances may be, as believers in Christ we can rest implicitly upon the Word of God. We shall never be in a position where God cannot strengthen us. He is sufficient for all circumstances and all emergencies. He will be with His own in sustaining power. He knows just how to infuse strength into our sinning hearts and to invigorate our spirits.

When God says, "I will strengthen thee," He means that He will fortify the heart against suffering and trial. Near the end of an illness, when the strength is returning and the weakness is departing, there is genuine gratitude and gladness, as those can testify who have been afflicted. It is likewise a great joy to learn that God is able to change our weakness into strength. When we are confronted with some duty or task that seems to appall us, it is strengthening to know that there is not anything which is too difficult for God. He is able to cope with any and every situation. All of us need that strength which He alone can give.

2. Sympathy.

"Yea, I will help thee." This promise means "I will render thee personal assistance." As we go through this life we have burdens to carry, and some of them are too heavy for us. When we are taxed beyond our ability, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual, we sorely need assistance. Thank God, there is One-Who sympathizes with us and is near to help us. His tender eyes are over us constantly. He knows every step that we take, and He watches every move that we make.

From this promise of help we are to understand that God offers to take the heaviest end of our load and carry it for us. As we are moved with sympathy if we see a child struggling beneath a burden too heavy for his or her little arms to carry, so God offers Himself as our Helper. No matter what loads may be ours, the heaviest ones will be light indeed to Him for Whom nothing is too hard. "The Lord is my Helper."

God can and will give us all the help that we need, just when and where we need it. He may not always help us just at the time or in the way that we desire, because that time or that way may not be best, but in His own time and way He will help us.

3. Support.

"Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Here is power beyond our utmost thoughts, and yet it is at our disposal. The grasp of the hand is significant of present and close friendship. The right hand is an emblem of power. Thus this promise that the right hand will uphold us suggests the support of omnipotence. God's victorious and faithful right hand can be relied upon to support us. He will never fail us, for His strength will be equal to every emergency. I do not know of any encouragement to surpass that which is given in the glorious and unfulfilling promises of God if we will only appropriate and apply them. Why live in fear, in the light of the glorious truths of God's Presence, God's Power and God's Promises?

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

In ev'ry condition, in sickness, in health,
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth;
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea
As your days may demand, shall your strength ever be.

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.

When thro' fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flames shall not hurt thee; - I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

That soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, tho' all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."