

Isaiah 41:1-20 Fear Not I Am with You (part 1)

40:1-41:20 is still under the theme of Comfort for the people of God. But here, the emphasis is “Do not fear.” In cp. 41:1-7 We see God’s control over the world. And in v. 5 Isaiah says they are afraid. I think we can describe the people of this world as fearful. But, in vv. 8-20 Isaiah turns his attention to the people of God. And 3 times he says, “fear not” (v. 10, 13, 14). And the reason we are not to fear is because God is with us (v. 10, 13, 14). In our text today, Isaiah gives 3 distinct reasons why people fear: 1) Human hostility, 2) Weakness, and 3) Adverse circumstances (Everything is against you. There seems to be no way out.). But, in each case, Isaiah describes and pictures God as the One who gives comfort and help. And because He is our God, we will not fear! Oh, how we need these truths in our lives. Brothers and Sisters, “Do not fear!” Why?

1. A Righteous God gives help in the midst of human hostility. In vv. 11-13 we get the picture of what Judah and Jerusalem is experiencing. V. 11, “**people are ‘incensed’ against them.**” This word means to be “enraged” or “angry” or “infuriated.” Peoples are “**striving**” against them. V. 12, many are “**contending**” against them. V. 12, people are at “**war**” against them. All the surrounding nations were hostile to the Israel. I don’t need to recount this fact. We’ve seen this week after week in Isaiah. So how does this apply to us, more than 2500 years later?

There is human hostility against the people of God! Who are God’s people? Today, God’s people are Christians, those who have believed on the Lord Jesus. Psalm 2 says, “**Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us . . . As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, you are my Son; today I have begotten you . . . Now therefore . . . Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”**

Why do you think governments put Christians in prison? Why is it illegal in so many countries to evangelize in the name of Christ? Why are foreign Christians being kicked out of so many countries in the world? Even here, why is it that we can talk about “God” all day long, but when we turn the conversation toward Jesus Christ, who He is and what He has done, persecution comes? The examples are endless. Just a couple weeks ago, I read a story where a Christian family tried to adopt a child through social services in Canada. And during the interview process the social worker asked the family, “*Are you Christians?*” And specifically, “*Are you the kind of Christians who believe the Bible is actually true?*” After answering, yes, they were denied, even when there are so many children who need to be adopted! This is human hostility against Christians. And it is a form of suffering, it is persecution because of the name of Christ. Acts 5:41: “**Then they (apostles) left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.**” 2 Tim. 3:12: “**Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**” Brothers and sisters, this is our lot!

But, Do not fear! We have a righteous God who gives help in the midst of human hostility! In fact, he says, those who fight against you will ultimately be “**put to shame,**” “**shall be as nothing,**” and “**shall be as nothing at all.**” In this passage, our picture is a “victorious servant.”

In v. 8 Isaiah says, “**You Israel, are my servant**” (v. 8). And in v. 10, he says, “**I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**” God is the righteous master. And Israel is called God’s “*servant.*” Let me ask, “*What right does a servant have over his master?*” “*What authority does the servant have?*” A servant has ONLY what his master gives him. If I hire you in my business, I have authority over you. Your paycheck comes from my hand. But, at the end of the day, you go home. And you have great freedom and authority over your household. But, it is not so with a servant, also translated as “slave.” When Joseph was sold into slavery, what rights did he have? Every meal, every bath, every responsibility, etc. came from his master. This is the picture we have of Israel, and the people of God who are in Christ. (Today, if you are a servant of the living God, you have no rights, except what He has given you. Your life is not your own. Your things do not belong to you. Your aspirations and goals are under his authority. Your home is not here; it is in the house of your master.)

But, there is more to this picture. This servant is pictured as “victorious.” And the reason is because of the MASTER, particularly the sovereign blessings the master gives his servants. Let’s briefly look at these blessings of victory. First, we are victorious servants because we are chosen! Look at v. 8: “**Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham . . .**” Here, Isaiah is simply stating the facts. He is remembering God’s covenant with Abraham to bless his offspring. God chose Abraham from the east, a sinful man, not unlike any other man from the east, nothing special about him. And he “called” him (back to this in a moment) to pick up his household and move to another land. And there, God will bless him. He will give him the land. He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. And his offspring will inherit this land and the blessings (Gen. 12:1-3). We see this covenant continue with the birth of Isaac. And then with the birth of Jacob. And in all three cases, these men were very sinful and did not deserve such blessings. And such is the case with Judah and Jerusalem, the people of Isaiah’s day. This is the doctrine of sovereign election. And the emphasis is placed on the sovereign choice of God, not the works of sinful men. Isaiah is highlighting the fact that Israel did not deserve such a choice. Remember, they are servants, not masters.

When I was a kid on the playground we used to play kickball. Two captains were picked and then we flipped for who went first. And who do you think we picked? The best player, and so on, down to the last pick. And if you were the last, you knew why. (not so politically correct today). And this is how many people view the doctrine of election. But ,this so far from the truth! The election of the “offspring of Abraham” is not like this. This is not the best illustration, but maybe helpful. What if you are the captain, and there are some special needs children in your class, maybe a kid in a wheel chair, or another with cerebral palsy who cannot run. And instead of choosing the best athlete, you choose those kids instead, even if you know they can contribute NOTHING to winning the kickball game. I think this is part of Isaiah’s point when it comes to the doctrine of election. We cannot contribute to our salvation. In fact, Ephesians 2 says we are spiritually “dead.”

A better illustration is a valley of dry, dead bones from the Book of Ezekiel. God asks Ezekiel, “***Can these dry bones live?***” And He says, “***God, you know.***” We can do nothing! And, we did nothing to deserve it. And God doesn’t look down through the future and see a good choice and then decide to choose someone based upon a good decision. Do you remember the words of Jesus in Matt. 11:25-26: “**At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven**

and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”

Paul makes the same point in Rom. 9-11. Look there with me there. In 9:1-18: **“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” This doctrine is difficult. And there are many questions I have. Many think this doctrine makes God unjust because He is the master who elects his servants. And, Paul also recognizes this objection. He says in v. 14:**

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” And here is Paul’s point. In v. 16: “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.**” This is the doctrine of divine election. And because of this truth, we are victorious servants!**

But, there is more. Notice second, we are called. V. 9: **“You whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant.’”** You see, election comes before “calling.” If dry bones live, there must be an effectual, powerful, work of God. This is so important for us to understand! Look over at 41:2-4: **“Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, so that he tramples kings underfoot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow. He pursues them and passes on safely, by paths his feet have not trod. Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.”** This text may be a reference to Abraham. We’re not sure. But, it certainly fits. He was called from the east. He was a man of war, conquering kings, even as the minority in the land. Look at v. 4: **“calling the generations from the beginning . . . I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.”** And as I’ve said before, this is not the call to my cat: *“Kitty, kitty, kitty, come here,”* but instead the call of Jesus to the dead man Lazarus,

“*Lazarus, come forth.*” This is not the general call of Isaiah’s preaching to a nation with no ears to hear. This is not even my preaching that goes out week after week in this pulpit. This is the special “calling” of God. In Rom. 4 Paul speaks about the calling of Abraham (of which Isaiah refers). In 4:17 we read: **“As it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”** You see Abraham was the special needs kid who could contribute NOTHING to his election, to his salvation, to his calling. He was one of the dry bones who finds life in this life giving “call.”

Rom. 1:7: **“To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints . . .”** 1 Cor. 1:1: **“Paul, called by the will of God . . .”** and v. 2, **“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints . . .”** Heb. 3:1: **“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.”** Heb. 9:15: **“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.”** On and on we can go. This is the same effectual call of which Isaiah is speaking. And because of these truths, we are victorious. And because of such truths, we should not fear.

So how does the doctrines of election and calling help not to fear in the midst of human hostility?

Application: If salvation belongs to the Lord (every bit of it), if your salvation is not based upon works, then your comfort doesn’t ultimately come from yourself. Your ability to “fear not” is supernatural. The world “fears” because they are working for their salvation; they are working for their justification. And at the end of the day, this will never be enough. But, for the Christian, you can rest, knowing God has done it. And, He who has begun a good work in you will complete it on the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Application: These doctrines lead to assurance of final salvation. Listen to these words. In John 6:36 Jesus says, **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”** And v. 39-40: **“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day . . . everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** In another place, John 10:27 ff. **“My sheep hear my voice (calling), and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”** These truths bring the greatest comfort. Do not fear!

Application: The doctrines of election and calling result in “friendship” with God. We are not simply “victorious servants;” we are friends with God! Look back at 4:18. In John 15:16: Jesus says, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”** Friends have great benefits with one another. And our friend is the creator of the universe. So, when the world is hostile toward you, mocking you, ridiculing you, taking away your rights, burning you at the stake, “do not fear!” You are chosen, you are called. You are the friend of God.

General Application: Pursue doctrine. Pursue the meat of the Word. Why? Because application always follows doctrine. Consider Paul’s letters. The basis of application is doctrine. One thing

I've noticed with many churches whom have great motives and desire to grow, those who use methods of growth based on felt needs are heavy on application. And for a while, this is good. But, after some time, doctrine falls by the wayside and there is no foundation for application. And, if this continues, there is good possibility the gospel itself will be lost over time and the church simply becomes a place that does "good things." If you gain people with hot dogs and chips, then you better keep giving; because what you gain them with is what you keep them with. This is why we give the gospel! And not just the gospel, but the meat of the Word. Our diet determines our health. Therefore, pursue the difficult doctrines in the Bible. (election, calling)