

## Isaiah 41:1-21 Fear Not I Am with You (part 2)

If you remember from 40:1, Isaiah's message is meant to comfort the people of God: **“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God . . .”** And comfort does not come if we live in fear. In vv. 1-7 we see a picture of the world. And they are afraid (v. 5). But, when addressing the people of God, we see the command: **“Do not fear”** (10, 13, 14). And we have 3 pictures of comfort from God that are designed to keep the people of God from fear. Oh, how we need these truths today. In the first part of this sermon the circumstance was fear because of human hostility. And in the midst of this hostility, God says, **“I will help you; you will be victorious; you are chosen, you are called, you are my friend.”** This week, I want to continue this message with two more reasons not fear: 1) A Redeemer overcomes our weaknesses; and 2) The Creator will miraculously provide during adverse circumstances. So, Do not fear!

1. A Redeemer Overcomes Our Weakness. Look at vv. 14-16. **“Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. 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; 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.”** The context is the weakness of Judah and Jerusalem. They've been dominated for years by the Assyrians and surrounding powers. And a transition is coming. Babylon will become very powerful and do much more damage than the Assyrians. Jerusalem will be destroyed and the people will be carried across the desert into captivity.

Notice the picture God gives. Jacob (God's covenant people), are seen as a worm. I am sure everybody listening to these words has thoughts about worms. Which of us has not encountered a worm? I used to dig them up before fishing with my dad and grandpa. Every year I see them in my garden. In the spring, the birds pick them up. I think of my kids playing with worms when they were smaller. In all of these pictures there is a common theme: weakness. We can dig them up so easily. There's nothing they can do about it. And they can no more stop me from putting them on my hook than we can stop the tides. Even the birds do with them as their appetites dictate. Even Abby and Olivia as children can pull them from the ground and play with them. This is Isaiah's picture for God's people!

But, right after showing HOW WEAK we are, unable to help ourselves, God says in v. 12: **“I am the one who helps you . . . I am your redeemer . . .”** This is God's answer to human weakness. **“Fear not, I am your redeemer?”** So, what is a redeemer? What does a redeemer do? In the context of the OT it means to perform some act in order to purchase or acquire someone or something in order to restore their rights. In the OT if a man became poor to the point of having to sell his property or sell himself into slavery, a relative could come and buy his property and restore them. We see this played out in the Book of Ruth. During difficult economic times a husband, wife, and two sons moved to Moab in order to survive. While there, the husband and the two sons died. The only ones left were the wife (Naomi), and her two daughters-in-laws. So, Naomi decided to move back to Israel, with one of her one daughters-in-law, Ruth. And upon returning, she realized very quickly she could not keep her land. She was older, and all she had was Ruth. But there was man, a relative of her late husband who purchased her land, her

daughter, all her goods so she would not lose her inheritance. What a beautiful picture! All her possessions and rights restored because of a redeemer. Boaz used his own resources, his own hard-earned money to purchase, to restore the rights of two very weak women.

We are the same! We are weak! How so? We have lost our standing in Adam. Our sins have separated us from a holy God! And as hard as we try to work to buy our salvation with our good works, we cannot. We are like the worms in the garden, (even worse if you consider that we are dead in our trespasses). We are weak, too weak to help ourselves. Well, Boaz is a picture of Christ! He is our redeemer? He purchased eternal life for his people. He restored to us what we lost in Adam and so much more. Instead of sin and death, he gives us life eternal. **“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Rom. 5:6-8).

Brothers and sisters, in weakness, there is strength. And this comes because we are redeemed. Look at vv. 15-16: **“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; 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.”** Listen to these words from Rom. 8: 1-4 **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”** And later in the same chapter we read: **“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? (same argument from Isaiah 41) It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, **“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”****

Application: Weakness is good! Why? Because when we are weak, He is strong! When we cannot meet our needs, God can! When God does what only God can do in the midst of weakness, the glory belongs to him. And when weakness becomes strength, when God does what only God can do, fear goes away! We can apply this to many situations. God strengthens things that are weak. God can make a timid Christian bold in his witness. God can give courage in the midst of this life. Consider the sending of missionaries to the hardest places. How can this be? How can people go? Consider marriage. God can take a weak marriage and make it beautiful. What about an illness or a situation in your life you cannot change? Paul prayed three times for God to heal him, but He did not. And Paul says, **“In my weakness, you are strong . . . your grace is sufficient.”** When we are weak, we give glory to God who is not weak.

Application: If your weakness will be turned to strength, you must look to Christ! If you are not a Christian, you are the worm. You cannot, you will not, you will never be strong. Therefore, turn to him. If you are a Christian, you are like a worm. And your strength comes from the one who has purchased your salvation. Christ is your redeemer! And notice something very important. His weakness is our strength. Remember, before he redeemed us, he became weak. Phil 2:6-9: **“Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** Consider the cross! Consider where He is now. “the holy one of Israel” (41:14) sits at the right hand of God. And his strength becomes our strength. Weakness is turned to strength. In weakness we rejoice. In weakness we glory in the Holy One. Therefore, Do not fear! The Holy One of Israel is your redeemer.

3. God, the Creator, Miraculously Sustains the Needy. In this passage, we (entire world) is seen as needy. Look at v. 17: **“When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them.”** Here we see God meeting the needs of his people. (The context I believe is future exile in Babylon.) Now, this is a general principle from the entire Bible: God will not forsake his people but give what they need (us). He also provides for the world, (though they do not give him thanks or glory). Jesus emphasizes this truth when he tells the crowds in Luke 12:7: **“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”** And then in v. 29-30 of the same chapter, **“And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.”** God meets our needs! And v. 20 says that God is our creator.

But, Isaiah’s point is not God’s general physical provision for the world as creator. This goes without saying. The picture of these verses goes much deeper than mere provision. Here we see God the creator doing something miraculous for HIS PEOPLE (us) in the midst of adverse circumstances. Look at vv. 18-19: **“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. 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 . . .”** God’s people are seen as the **“poor”** and **“needy”** (v. 17) looking for water as they are thirsty, **“and there is none”** (v. 17). But God will meet their needs and sustain them. How? Miraculously! Have you ever seen rivers flow from the very top of a dry, parched, mountaintop? No! Can you imagine fountains of water emerging from a dry, worn out, desolate valley? No! Can you think of dry, barren desert producing water? No! This is our picture. And it isn’t as if there is a spring over the next hill. If water comes, it will be a miracle. Do you remember the Israelites in the desert? Over and over and over again God provided water (miraculously) to sustain them.

Another picture in this text is shade. Recently I watched the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*. And there they were . . . in the desert. And no matter where they looked, they found no shade from the sun. But here Isaiah says that God will do something miraculous. He will create the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive for shade. The picture is shelter; for none of these trees are fruit trees. And, these trees do not grow together. They grow in different areas. What a beautiful

picture! We also see the cypress, the plane and the pine together in the desert. These trees do not grow in the desert! These trees are pictures of God doing something unnatural. He is the creator and He can do as He likes in this world with the nations and with his people!

In this picture, we see innovation. How does water come from a barren mountain? God can do it! Brothers and sisters, God does things in ways beyond our comprehension and beyond our ability to do them ourselves. Whether it is physical provision, physical healing, boldness and courage in in special times, or a sense of great love in your prayer closet during a great time of need, God gives help to his children that are contrary to our circumstances, UNNATURAL!

In this picture we see multiplication: Think of springs flowing from the earth. What happens next? Those springs become great rivers, rivers that flow into great oceans. Truth: God will multiply his glory over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). And how does this happen? It happens as we make disciples of the nations. His glory will cover the earth.

In this picture we see transformation: How? First, with us. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). This is a miracle! Think of your lives, what you used to be before the Holy Spirit transformed your life! Also, this picture in Isaiah goes beyond us. In our text, God the creator, transforms the earth. Think about it: water flowing from a dry mountain top, streams in the desert, fountains in worn valleys. Foreign trees grow in the desert. Different kinds of trees grow together miraculously. Here, Isaiah is picturing the new heavens and the new earth. This is big!

At the end of the day, this passage is a beautiful picture of the gospel! Who could have imagined that God would meet our needs through the person and work of the Son of God? Hab. 1:5: **“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.”** We are poor and needy. And if God will provide and sustain us in this life, He must overcome what cannot be overcome, namely, our sin problem. And how does this happen? We’ve already seen that He is our redeemer. But, we must also see that everything He does in Christ to overcome and meet our needs and sustain us is miraculous (at least to us.) Remember, miracles are not miracles to God. They are just unnatural in this world. Think about Christ. He left glory and took on flesh; 100% God, 100% man, in the most beautiful union. From our perspective, this is unnatural. It can’t happen. What about the virgin birth? Unnatural, miracle. What about the death of Christ? It was the most unnatural death ever in the sense that He gave up his own life. He died when he chose to die. After seeing his death the Centurion said, **“Surely this was the Son of God”** (Matt. 27:54). And the resurrection? Miracle! What about his resurrection body? Miracle! And his ascension! Miracle. And what about us with the new birth? Miracle! Every part of God’s work to bring out the salvation of his people is miraculous. Only God can do it! This is Isaiah’s point.

And we can’t simply stop with these things. Ultimately, this is a picture of another miraculous truth. Don’t forget v. 20: God is the creator. And because of the gospel, he is victorious. And He will recreate a new heaven and a new earth. All creation awaits this fulfillment. And God’s people are the recipients! Can you imagine? Brothers and sisters, when we grasp such truths by the Spirit, we are sustained, even through exile! For the gospel doesn’t simply take care of our sin problem. It sustains us we wait for the new heavens and the new earth. We need the Gospel.

Often we forget and need to be reminded. And this is one of the goals of preaching: give the gospel as it sustains us. For we are needy! In day to day life when no means of relief are seen, we quickly fall into despair, and when this happens our hope is small. And what do we do? We look to the things we see for help. We look to the gifts and not the giver. We take things into our own hands instead of waiting on God. Brothers and sisters, Look to Christ! Do Not Fear!

Finally, give God glory for what He has done! Why does God miraculously sustain the needy (us)? Look at v. 20: **“that they 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.”** Give God glory! He is our great redeemer who helps in our weakness. He is the creator (our creator) who works in miraculous ways in adverse circumstances.