

GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR OUR TIMES

Isaiah 41:1-20 (NB V10)

Sunday August 8th 2010 Morning Service

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How are you handling life in these troubled times? The times are pretty fearsome in many ways with many gripped by various trials and afflictions. When F.H. Rowley wrote, 'Days of darkness still come o'er me, Troubles path I often tread' he was on target was he not? These old hymn writers were realists. They did not pretend that this world is comfortable and cuddly! They knew that many a time we want to ask 'WHY?'. Isaiah recorded their complaint "Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?" (Isa 40:27) The 'WHY' question here concerns their captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar?

This chapter tells us that deliverance was on the way through Cyrus the compassionate first King of the Persian empire v2. But they as yet could not see that. Like us the great plans and purposes of God developing around them were hidden from them and that is why they cry out 'My way is hidden from the Lord'

They and we are not the only ones who have asked the 'WHY' question. Jesus asked it as he hung on the cross but he put in a very vital word 'WHY GOD?' And this is what this chapter is all about. Its great message is clear GOD IS ON THE THRONE! Not Nebuchadnezzar, not Cyrus and not circumstances but GOD. Isaiah's concern is to show us where authority lies in this fallen world. **So here is his message for you and me if we are really His by grace, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** (Isa 41:10)

1. 1st: THERE ARE TWO THINGS TO BE AVOIDED BY GOD'S PEOPLE

The Holy Spirit boldly underlines both these things with clear reasons why they are to be avoided. Here is the first:-

1. **FEAR 'So do not fear'** Fear can be a good thing. It is something built into the fabric of each one of us in this fallen world. Ever since Adam fell in the Garden, fear entered into human experience. God in his graciousness created fear for preservation in a world that had gone wrong. Fear is most useful in so many ways. We warn a child that fire burns or that it is dangerous to cross the road without great care. And most certainly the fear of the terrible consequences of sin is a safe guard for those who are sensible enough to face them. Never say that we must never use fear to warn people to come to

Jesus. But here we are dealing with God's people who are liable to be gripped by a needles fear. You and I as Christians need to get to grips with this as these people did. God's people were in the midst of a very troubled world facing all kinds of pressures in their lives. The times were hard and of course but 'do not fear for I AM with you'. Can you want more than that? So fear is the first thing to be avoided by God's people. Here is the second:-

2. **(2) DISMAY 'Do not be dismayed'** Something has happened which has completely knocked them off balance. We could say that they were lost with no-one to turn to. Have you ever been there? You feel that things are just too much you cannot take any more. You feel like giving up? Many a Pastor or missionary has felt like giving up and many a Christian has been tempted to give up over health issues and many other things. These people were in danger of being dismayed. They were being overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. V14 'Do not be afraid O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you declares the Lord, your redeemer the Holy one of Israel' God knows that we may feel like worms before all that we are called to face.

2. 2nd: THERE ARE THREE THINGS GOD WILL DO FOR HIS PEOPLE

"I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (v10)

1 'I will strengthen you' God does sometimes deliver us from the storms of life but more often he strengthens us through them. How does God do that? It's 'By His Spirit'. Paul wrote "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being," (Eph 3:16) That is the great message of this chapter v15 'You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff..'. Mountains of difficulty are not a problem for this God! But one of the advantages of putting a text like this under close examination is that it throws new light on the way God strengthens us. The word here is a word not often used in our OT. It means 'To harden'. When Nebuchadnezzar plunged Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into his burning fiery furnace he was actually furthering God's purposes through these young lives in a very telling way. They were proving God's courage in the face of severe trial, making them more useful for his kingdom. Who are the people who help you most? Those who come out of the furnace held in God's strong grip! Paul wrote to Timothy 'Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ' no doubt because he considered Timothy needed toughening up for the battles that he was to face. 'I will strengthen you'.

2. I will help you. God is wanting us to grasp his help in an experimental way. He is drawing alongside his tested and tried people to give them certainty and assurance. He wants them, despite everything that looks to the contrary, to know his help in this difficult situation. Will the health problem end? May be not. Will the loneliness stop? We can't be certain. Will employment come? May be not. Does it mean that all the circumstances will continue? Probably so. What is certain? His help! Look at vv8-9-they were to look back and see what he had done! Has he not saved us by the Blood of the Lamb? Can we not sing with John Newton: 'His love in times past, Forbids me to think, He'll leave me at last, In trouble to sink'?

3. **I will uphold you.** How does he do it? 'With my righteous right hand' "Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob' (v14) Who was this worm of a man? The man who schemed and plotted his way through his early life until God got him totally in his strong grip as Israel. God transformed him into Israel, a prince with God. God is too righteous and true to his promises not to uphold us worms in the hour of our need. That is the point. Look at v13 "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you." (Isa 41:13)

3. 3rd:THERE IS A HAND WHICH WILL NEVER LOSE ITS GRIP

God's right hand. And every one of his people are in its vice like grip. Notice the 'I wills' in these verses? V10 'I will strengthen you', 'I will help you', 'I will uphold you' v14 'I will help you', V15 'I will make you', v17 'I will answer'. Not the words of a man, but of almighty God who never goes back on his word. Jesus said, 'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one'. Can anyone or anything pluck you out of his almighty hand? No! **So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**

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