

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
December 12, 2010

I Am Your God

Isaiah 41:8-10, 17-20

Key verse: “Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10)

An internet website call Phobialist.com lists some 500 *fears*. Some of them are unusual, for example:

Peladophobia: fear of bald people

Pteronophobia: fear of being tickled by feathers

Aulophobia: fear of flutes

Parskavedekatriaphobia: fear of Friday the 13th

Geniophobia: fear of chins

Entheraphobia: fear of mother-in-law

Whether or not we have any one of these fears, everyone deals with fear in some form. Perhaps that is why “fear not” is the most frequent command in the Bible.

Isaiah 41 is addressed to the Jewish exiles. And these folks certainly had reason to be fearful and anxious about life. In 586 B.C. their homeland was invaded by the Babylonians, and most of the people were carried into exile to Babylon.

By 539, another great power had arisen—the Persian Empire. And in that year, the Persians conquered Babylon. From the perspective of the Jewish exile community, it looked as if they were merely pawns caught in a tragic clash of kingdoms. But God is ultimately in control of history, and what looked like another tragedy—the invasion of the Persians—turned out to be the means of God’s deliverance. For in 538, the Persian leader Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to begin returning to their home in Israel.

This historical setting is the context for Isaiah 41, a passage in which God speaks to the frightened exiles God’s timeless command: “Do not fear” (v. 10).

Through faith in Christ, we too become recipients of the promises God gave those Jewish exiles. Think about your fears, real and imagined, and claim these promises of God for your life.

God says to us “do not fear.” And in these verses from Isaiah 41, God gives us at least five reasons why we do not have to be afraid:

1. *“I have chosen you and not cast you off”* (v. 9). God’s covenant with his ancient people Israel meant that God was committed to them, no matter what.

Through Christ, we are heirs of that same covenant. So, in times of anxiety and fear, it is good to remember that we are chosen by God and God will not cast us off.

2. *"I am with you" (v. 10).* Knowing that God is with us means no fear should overwhelm us. This time of year especially, this season of Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the birth of God's Son, the one known as *Emmanuel*, which means "God with us." If God is with us, who can be against us!

3. *"I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (v. 10).* The apostle Paul faced life with this bold affirmation: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Never forget God's promise to strengthen, help and uphold.

4. *"I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water" (v. 18b).* Verses 17-20 paint a picture that would have had special meaning to the exiles who were so familiar with dry and parched deserts. Still today, we all face spiritual deserts—times when life is hard and spiritual refreshment seems absent. In those times, we can hold to God's promise from Isaiah 41:17-20. God is able to turn our "deserts" into beautiful and fruitful oases. Jesus said: "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

5. *"Do not be afraid, for I am your God" (v. 10).* These words sum up why God's children do not have to be ruled by anxiety and fear. The reason? "I am your God." Certainly, the world we live in can be a fearful place. Today, we face the very real threats of economic recession, terrorist attacks, and moral decline, just to name a few. Today, God's voice speaks to us—"Do not fear for I am with you, do not be afraid for I am your God."

I am reminded of one of my favorite quotes: "Don't tell God how big your problem is. Tell your problem how big your God is." (Owen Orr)

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