

I Am Your God

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[0 : 0 0] For I am with you. Do not be dismayed. For I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. In years to come, as we look back on 2020 with its pandemic and lockdown, I wonder what we will remember most.

For some of us, it might be the eight o'clock clap for the NHS. For others, it will be the emergence of online platforms and the development of new words like Zoom fatigue.

For others, it has meant moving to homeworking as opposed to a lengthy commute to and from the office. But for many, many others, the pandemic, with all its lockdowns and its restrictions, spell darker words.

Fear. Anxiety. Loneliness. Young people are anxious about the future. Working people are fearful for their employment.

[1 : 1 2] Older people are experiencing an epidemic of isolation. This hasn't been a fun year for any of us, especially the most vulnerable. And when I use that word vulnerable, I want you to understand that not only are we all fragile, but that there are some among us who on the surface of things seem to be doing really well, but underneath it all are extremely vulnerable.

And indeed, right now, are riddled with fear, anxiety, and loneliness. Did you know that the most frequent command in the Bible is, do not be afraid?

Do not be afraid. God made us, and he knows that even the strongest of us are feeble and fearful. His message to us today is the same as it's always been.

Do not be afraid. There may be a thousand reasons why we were afraid, but the coronavirus pandemic, with all its accompanying anxiety and isolation, has made it all worse for us.

For many of us, as we look back on 2020, we'll remember just how fearful, anxious, and lonely we felt.

[2 : 3 8] But in this verse, God says to his people, and commands us, do not be afraid. Do not be dismayed. The word translated dismayed is a wonderful word.

It means to look around with anxious thoughts. To observe what's going on around you, and to be anxious. Well, I guess that's where many of us have been, and many of us still are today.

We are fearful. We are anxious. And we are lonely. We are watching the news, and we feel our anxiety levels rising. Check out the radio, and becoming ever more fearful.

Surfing the web, and still feeling that much, still very much feeling alone. And you know, it's okay not to be okay. To one extent or another, everyone in our world is feeling this way right now.

But what makes it bearable for us as Christians, is the good news of the gospel. As we're going to see this evening from Philippians 1.12, the gospel is not locked down, and God's grace at work, in us, for us, and through us, is effective.

[3 : 55] It's one thing for God to call us, not to be afraid, not to be dismayed. It's the gospel he proclaims, which enables us to overcome, and yes, even master, our fears, deal with our anxieties, and live with our loneliness.

Well, in this verse, in Isaiah 41, verse 10, God gives us three very powerful weapons against the fear, anxiety, and loneliness, which has been brought on by this coronavirus pandemic.

His presence, his passion, and his power. This is the gospel, and it's for us, handed to us on a plate, not a vaccine to immunize you against the dark side of the restrictions, but a treatment to help you overcome your fears, and your anxieties, and your isolation.

Since today is the Free Church's National Day of Prayer, I want us to reflect on how, in the light of Isaiah 41, 10, we are to pray for one another as Christians, and then, how we are to pray for, and speak to those we love, who are not yet Christians, cannot claim this gospel hope, but are experiencing the same fear, anxiety, and loneliness, many of us are.

First of all then, the presence of God, the presence of God. You are not alone. God speaks comfort.

[5 : 45] Fear not, for I am with you. Yes, I say it again, you are not alone. You may feel isolated. You may feel desperately separated from other people, but God is with you, right where you are today.

Earlier this year, when we were in total lockdown, in our morning devotions, I would often use the phrase, Lord, help us to see our homes as places we are safe in, not places we are stuck in.

Well, that was easy enough for me to say. After all, I have a family in my home. But what about those who were alone, who perhaps were shielding, living by themselves?

Some went for months without having another human being within their homes. For some, lockdown was torture.

Some of you may have seen this. There was a brilliantly painted mural on a wall beside the Clyde, about a couple of hundred meters down there, portraying an old man with a speech bubble coming out of his mouth, saying, stay at home.

[6 : 53] Soon after, some local worthy had written beside that speech bubble with spray paint, lockdown is brutal.

Brutal. I honestly think that it will take many years, perhaps decades, for some people to deal with the emotional brutality of the coronavirus lockdown.

And yet, for as true as that mural with its speech bubbles was, the deeper truth is that for us as Christians, we were never alone, nor will we ever be alone, because God is with us.

Psalms 23, verse 4, words we'll look at on November the 15th in the evening. One of the most precious verses for many of us as Christians, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Your rod and staff, they comfort me. You had the friend who sticks closer than any brother with you, and he saw you all the way through lockdown, and even though you couldn't see him, touch him, or even feel him, he was always there.

[8 : 12] After all, he promised his disciples, I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age, which means, which means he heard your lonely cries.

He was with you during those long hours of isolation. He may not have held your hand, but he held your heart. You are not alone.

It would be wonderful to say that we all experienced his presence in new and exciting ways during this pandemic, but I suspect that for many of us, it's just been brutal.

But for this, we give thanks and praise. That gospel promise which overcomes our fears is the witness, the intimate presence, the immediacy of our God with us.

And that's our prayer for you today. either here physically or watching from home, that from now on, you'd experience the presence of God in a powerful way.

[9 : 24] Second in this verse, we have the passion of God, the passion of God. God is with us. You are not alone, but not only are you not alone, God is with you.

Our verse says, fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. The last phrase would be better translated as I myself.

It is me who is your God. God is with us. But then, many people of other religions would say the same thing. That their God is with them too.

The God who is with us is the God of the Bible, the God of the gospel, the God of the cross, the God of the resurrection, the great I am who has pledged to love us deeper than the oceans and longer than the heavens.

Read in the Bible of his great love for you. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. Read of how his love moved him to give his son unto death for us on the cross.

[10 : 45] God demonstrated his own love for us in this. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The death of Christ on the cross is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us.

And then he says, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. There he is, Jesus, the crucified, risen, ascended, and glorified Jesus in Revelation 1, the liberator of his people, the forgiver of our sins.

He loved us then. He loves us now. He will always love us. Love for us moved God. Love was demonstrated on the cross.

And God loves you as much today as he ever has been capable of or ever will be capable of.

You are not alone for this is the God who was with you. Not just any old God, but this God whose love for you is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

[11 : 59] I sometimes wonder if what has made coronavirus restrictions so hard for us is that we cannot be with those we love the most.

It's really so tragic. But realize this. No coronavirus restriction can stop the one who loves you the most being with you.

Our God doesn't do social distancing. He doesn't have to wear a mask when he's with you. He doesn't have to speak to you from the garden through a window.

No, this God is with you. The God whose heart bursts, if I may use that term reverently, with love for you.

If we only knew how much he loves us and how hot his passionate heart burns for us, the anxiety and the fear and the loneliness would grow dimmer.

[13 : 08] Once again, that is our prayer for you, whether here in St. Vincent Street or watching from home, that from now on you'd experience both God's presence and passion.

And then lastly, the third reason why we fear not and are not dismayed is the power of God. The power of God. I will strengthen you.

I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Now, the gospel always follows the same pattern. Indicative and imperative.

Indicative and imperative. Let me explain. God indicates what he has done for us. Indicative. And on the basis of his loving and gracious actions as our Father, he commands us to obey.

Imperative. He tells us that he has sent Jesus to die on the cross for us. Indicative. And he calls upon us to believe. Imperative.

[14 : 14] And here in Isaiah 41.10 we see the same gospel balance of indicative and imperative. He indicates that he is with us.

Indicative. He calls upon us not to be afraid. Imperative. He tells us that he himself is our God. Indicative.

He calls upon us not to be dismayed. Imperative. And now in these last three clauses of the verse he expands on what it means for his people to have him as their God and for him to be with them.

He expands on the indicatives. He does this because he wants his grace to overflow into your heart like a Russian waterfall so that his call to you as father not to fear and not to be dismayed will be so much easier to obey.

Now each of these promises are given in a certain Hebrew verbal tense which is very difficult to translate into English. They are promises but they are more than that.

[15 : 35] They are sure and certain. They're certain. God has a treasure house of strength waiting for the fearful Christian to draw on.

He has resources of support ready to help you in your time of need, loneliness, fear, and anxiety. God promises three things here.

Strength, support, and security. These three are one, a holy trinity of God's sure and certain promises given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

He begins with strength. I will strengthen you. The word means to make strong, to establish, perhaps even to give courage.

This is the promise of God. He will give strength to the weak. Perhaps you feel weakened by the stresses of the pandemic. I know I do. And your God, the God who loves you, the God who is with you says, I will give you strength.

[16 : 47] Don't go looking into yourself to find the strength because you won't find any there. And don't go looking to the world around you because everyone in our world is just as weak and as clueless as we are.

Rather, he says, pray it from the God who says, I will strengthen you. Afterwards, when this is all over, and 2020 is just a bad memory, you'll look back and ask yourself the question, how did I get through it?

To which you'll answer, it was God who gave me the strength I needed to keep going. Second, he promises support, support.

God's promises continue to give. I will help you as we continue to experience the challenges and the difficulties of COVID restrictions. God promises to help them.

He will not endure them for us, but he will hold on to us so that we may both survive and thrive. love. Now just think for a second what this means, the mighty help of God.

[17 : 59] He is the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God of glorious love and loving glory. Nothing's impossible for him, even that he should help the most anxious, fearful, and lonely among us.

suppose you had to carry a 50 kilogram bag of cement and you're struggling under the load.

You're falling down under the weight of it. And then the world's strongest man, Magnus Magnusson, that's his name really, comes along and he helps you.

What is a heavy weight to you? It is nothing to him. And God says, I'll give you more grace, the greater the burden.

My grace will always be sufficient for you. And then third and last, security. God promises security.

[19 : 07] He concludes this trinity of holy promises saying, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. The word uphold actually means to grasp. God grasps us with the right hand of his power, right hand of his righteousness.

His grip is so powerful that none can prize us from his righteous right hand. hand. Picture the scene. Many of you have seen the film The Lord of the Rings.

Frodo and Sam, they have accomplished their mission of destroying the ring of power. They're lying half dead on a rock on the side of Mount Doom. They await death. And at that last moment, giant eagles led by the wizard Gandalf swoop down from the sky and grasp them in their massive talons and carry them to safety.

nothing can shake the grip of these mighty eagles carrying the half dead hobbits. And throughout this pandemic, whether you have been aware of it or whether you have not, God has grasped a hold of you in his righteous right hand of power.

He will not let you go and nothing can prise you from his grip. So you're fearful. And you're anxious and you're lonely and afraid that you're going to lose your grip on God.

[20 : 34] And all the while he says, by my grace, the grace of the gospel and the righteousness of the cross, I will never lose my grip on you for I am your security.

his power, his passion, and his presence, the three pillars of our defense in these trying days of pandemic and restrictions.

This is our national day of prayer. Will you pray for me? Will you pray for every other Christian to know and experience the power, the presence, and the passion of God over against the anxiety, the fear, and the loneliness of 2020?

Will by grace the gospel of Jesus Christ so impact you that in your vulnerability you would experience God's strength, in your fragility, God's support, and in your weakness God's love.

Fear not for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

[22 : 07] Bonjour. ■■■■■■■■ in way of Jesús to tud Pf ooze.

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