

# Isaiah 41:1-20

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[ 0 : 00 ] The sermon text for today is Isaiah 41, 1-20, and as Rob explained at the conclusion of! I will declare this is the word of the Lord. And the church in joyful response to his revelation! given us will together respond thanks be to God. Listen to me in silence, O Coastlands.

Let the peoples renew their strength. Let them approach, then let them speak. Let us draw near for judgment, 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 the last, I am he. The coastlands have seen and are afraid. The ends of the earth tremble. They have drawn near and come. Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, be strong. The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer, him who strikes the anvil. Says of the soldiering, it is good, and they strengthen it with nails, so that it cannot be moved. But you, O Israel, my servant Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend. You whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called you from its farthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant. I have chosen you and not cast you off. For fear not, I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded. Those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them. Those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. For I, the Lord your God, hold your hand. It is I who say to you, fear not. I am the one who helps you. 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 you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth. You shall thresh the mountains and crush them. And you shall make the hills like shaft. 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.

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. I will open the rivers on the bare heights, and the fountains in the midst of the valley. And 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 plain, and the pine together, 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 this. This is the word of the Lord.

[ 3 : 46 ] Let us pray. Let us pray. is eternal, that is timeless, that is relevant today, just as it was when Isaiah prophesied this for the first time. God, would you speak to us? Lord, I don't want Mike Luce to be giving a message to Shoreline. I want you to be giving a message to Shoreline through your servant.

So speak, Lord, by your Spirit and change our hearts this morning as we gaze upon you and your glorious word. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well, good morning again, Shoreline. Again, we just want to welcome you here this morning. My name is Mike. Like I said, I'm one of the pastors here. There are Bibles on the back table. If you don't have a Bible, they're bookmarked to today's passage, and you are welcome to take that home with you as a gift to you. We also have kids. If you haven't gotten one of these, there's these worksheets on the back table. They're actually there every week. Christina's been making them each week to go along with the sermon. So I see a lot of you kids have these out there.

Here's some fill-in-the-blank, a spot for a picture, a puzzle, a crossword puzzle. So take one of these, and they can help you engage with what we're talking about today.

Well, help is only as good as the one offering, you know? You know, if you, I don't know, maybe lots of kids have a water bottle, and sometimes they get stuck on really tight. And if you can't get it off, and your younger two-year-old sibling says, oh, I'll help you, are you going to take their help?

[ 5 : 42 ] But if your dad says, hey, let me help you, well, that's good help. He can probably open that water bottle back up. Another example, if you're worried you don't have enough split wood for the winter, and I show up with my mall to help you out, you should feel a little sense of relief. Like, I can probably help you with that.

Now, if you have an electrical issue in your house, and I show up to you and say, don't worry, I'm here to help, you should probably preemptively call the fire department. You know, if another nation is under attack at sea, and a Royal Caribbean cruise ship comes to their aid, it's probably not going to ease their concerns, right?

But if the United States Navy says, no need to be afraid, we've already deployed three Virginia-class submarines to help, that's news that's going to drive out fear, is it not? Help is only as good as the one offering.

Now, if you're sitting here this morning, there's a good chance that you need help, and you know it. And if you're sitting here this morning, and you're thinking, I actually don't need any help, I'm good, I'd like to submit to you that you might need far more help than you realize.

And the good news for everyone this morning is that help is offered to you by someone that far surpasses the United States Navy in power and ability.

[ 7 : 01 ] Divine help is available, and it is available today for all of those who need it. Now, this morning, we are in the second sermon in a 14-week series in Isaiah 40-55, entitled, From Sighing to Singing.

And the title of today's sermon is, Fear Not, For I Am With You. Fear Not, For I Am With You. Now, the title and the main point of the sermon is stated this week in the form of a command, Fear Not. And that's because, you might have noticed, as Sarah ran through, there's that thrice-repeated command within this text, to fear not. And clearly, it's the message that Isaiah is driving home to the Jewish exiles to whom he is writing.

And the main point is this, Fear Not, For the God who reigns supreme over the nations also remains steadfast towards his people.

The God who reigns supreme over the nations also remains steadfast towards his people. That is what I think Isaiah is arguing, prophesying in chapter 41 here.

[ 8 : 07 ] God reigns supreme over the nations. I'm getting this from the first seven verses. And it starts like this. This is God speaking now. God is saying, Listen to me in silence, O coastlands.

Let the peoples renew their strength. Let them approach, then let them speak. Let us together draw near for judgment. The God who, a chapter earlier, declared his utter uniqueness and supremacy over all creation, here invites the coastlands, which is representing really all the nations of the earth, the extremities of the earth.

He's inviting them into his court in reverent silence. You know, no one speaks in court before the judge unless granted permission. And how much more so before the supreme judge of the very highest court.

Now notice the repetition here of the phrase, Renew their strength. You know, from only one verse earlier in your Bibles, chapter 40, verse 31, But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

So God is inviting the nations to come and renew their strength in his presence. But coupled with that is this ominous invitation, this ominous imperative, let us together draw near for judgment.

[ 9 : 26 ] See, there will be a reckoning. And the question is, how are the nations going to respond? Well, God opens the court session and now, acting as the divine attorney, he asks the nations some questions.

He says, 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. Envisioned here is a conquering king, almost effortlessly sweeping over foreign nations in conquest.

Who is, like who is this conquering king? Well, that's not actually the question that God asks or answers, is it? The question that God asks is who stirred up this victor from the east? But the victor himself is, is most likely the Persian king Cyrus, whom Isaiah mentions by name just a few chapters later, chapters 44 and 55.

[10:31] Now remember, a little history lesson. Isaiah is prophesying these words around 700 BC. But his message is mainly intended for that future generation of Jewish exiles living in Babylon, and that's at about the mid-500s.

At the time of Isaiah's writing, Assyria is the world power, not Babylon, and certainly not Persia, whose rise to power would only follow Babylon's. Persia is not even in existence, and Cyrus won't even be born for another 120 years, yet right here, through the prophet Isaiah, God is foretelling of his rise to power and his conquest over the nations.

So back to the question at hand, who stirred up this victor? Before an answer is given, a second question is raised. Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? This second question reiterates the first, but then it pans way out, right? To the very beginning of human existence. It's like God saying, Tell me, O coastlands, tell me, peoples of the nations, who is it that since the dawn of humanity has brought forth every generation and caused the empires to rise and to fall?

What an opportunity for those assembled before the supreme judge to bow in worship and declare, It's you. It's you. But they don't answer, do they?

[12:04] God replies to his own question, I, the Lord, the first and with the last, I am he. One commentator writes that the pagan gods often belonged in the family tree of the gods, but Yahweh has no genealogy.

Yahweh, the God of Israel, the one who preceded the first human and who will still remain when the last generation walks on this earth. He is the one who has performed and done these things.

Now before we reflect on the implications of this, let's see what happens next. The coastlands have seen and are afraid. The ends of the earth tremble. They have drawn near and come.

Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, Be strong. The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith and he who smooths with the hammer, him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good.

And they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved. Now what's happening here? In dramatic irony, the coastlands reject God's offer for them to come renew their strength in him.

[13:13] Their fears of this one from the east, it drives them not to the one true God, but to one another and to their man-made idols. Do you see what's going on here? The Lord of creation, the Lord of history, stands before them, offering himself to them, and instead they turn to their created things.

And laughably, as God had looked upon his own creation and declared that it was good, so they now look upon their pathetic idols of gold and say, It is good.

So in vain, they seek strength from sources that will inevitably fail. So I want to ask ourselves this morning, where are we turning to for strength?

What ineffective sources of strength are we running to, only to find their supply inadequate? We run to all sorts of things. Perhaps this morning, you are throwing yourself into your career and seeking to draw strength from your work, to build your reputation, draw fulfillment and satisfaction from that. Perhaps in moments of chaos, you run to social media through the endless scrolling and scrolling to get a little hit, a little high of some kind and draw strength from that.

[14:35] Or maybe you're trying to build your own reputation on social media and paint a picture of yourself to the world of who you are. We run to all sorts of things. Exercise. We run to physical strength to also gain emotional and spiritual and mental strength.

faith. We turn to political candidates, hoping that we will draw our strength from them. No, Isaiah is beckoning us this morning to instead turn to the Lord of creation and the Lord of history, to the God who reigns supreme over the nations.

Because he and he alone is the one who superintends over the events of human history. He is the ultimate agent in the rise and the fall of kings and nations.

In every movement and world affairs, as one commentator writes, the Lord is the initiator, purposing and achieving that which accords with his righteous nature and policies.

Real strength, church, real strength, therefore, is only found in him. Kids, real strength, true and lasting strength. It's not found in an older sibling or a parent.

[ 15 : 42 ] It's ultimately found in the Lord. It's not found in a peer group. It's found in God. And that, my friends, while it is a terrifying thing for the enemies of God, it is a great comfort for the people of God.

Which, similar to last week, is precisely Isaiah's purpose in this text. And that moves us to the second thing, that God remains steadfast, unwavering, faithful, committed to his people. steadfast. And he says, now turning to address a different group of people, but you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.

You, whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant. I have chosen you and not cast you off. God is affirming his unwavering commitment to his people.

Even though, remember, even though they are presently in exile in Babylon for their sin and their rebellion. God is affirming his undying commitment to the people of Israel.

[ 16 : 55 ] Now, the allusion here back to Abraham and to Jacob, the patriarchs of the nation of Israel, that would remind the people of God's unconditional covenant with them.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they had not first chosen God, right? God had chosen them. Of all the peoples of the earth, God had chosen them to make for himself a people for his own possession and glory.

He had set his steadfast love upon them and pledged his faithfulness to them. And now, even though they've been disciplined for their sin, God remains steadfast towards them.

He has not forgotten his promise to Abraham. Remember in Genesis 12, God told Abraham that he's going to bless him, he's going to make his name great. In him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

God has not forgotten that promise because God keeps his word, his word endures forever. God has not forgotten or abandoned his people Israel as offspring of Abraham, the friend of God, as servants of the Lord.

[ 18 : 06 ] They continue to hold a special place before God and a special purpose to fulfill. And so, in light of that, comes this beautiful phrase here in chapter 10, fear not, for I am with you.

Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. It looks despondent people, hopeless people, like you've been abandoned, but you haven't.

Right? It appears, exiles of Israel, like you have every reason to fear, but you need not fear. And why is that? Why need not they fear?

Because it's God's chosen special people. They have access to God's divine presence. Right? I am with you. God's divine presence. They have access to his divine commitment.

I am your God. I am for you. He is committed to them. I'm with you. I'm for you. They have access to his divine aid. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

[ 19 : 11 ] Divine presence, divine commitment, divine aid. They need not fear. You know, if you're here this morning and you've placed your faith in Christ, Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 3 that you are a child of Abraham.

God has redeemed us in Christ from the curse of the law, from sin and death by himself becoming a curse for us on the cross. And he's done that, Paul says, so that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

That's to the nations. That's to us. Divine presence, divine commitment, divine aid belong to the saints in Christ Jesus. Amen?

Whatever trial you are walking through today, whatever temptation has overtaken you, God will not, has not abandoned you. He has chosen you.

He has set his steadfast love upon you. He has pledged his undying faithfulness to you. He is with you. He is for you. He will help you.

[ 20 : 20 ] So fear not. Be not dismayed. God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear though the mountains give way. Right? Psalm 46. You say, but Mike, I am fearful. Like, what am I supposed to do with that?

And that's inevitable in the trials of life to be fearful. And I'd say the answer is Isaiah 40, 31.

In your fear, in your hopelessness, in your weakness and your weariness, wait on him. Wait on him. He will respond. Seek him. Go to his word.

Go to him in prayer. Seek him. On your knees. He will answer you. See, unlike the powerless idols that we turn to for strength, God is a reliable and never-ending source.

[ 21 : 27 ] Why? Because he is the Lord of creation and the Lord of history. And he's the steadfast, covenant-keeping, faithful God. And then the Lord, through Isaiah, he goes on to describe three different ways in which he will remain steadfast towards them.

Three different ways. And here's the first one. His response to the enemy's strength is victory. God's response to the enemy's strength. Now listen to this language. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded.

Those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them. Those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. This language is describing the enemy of God's people rising up in opposition. Right? From anger to striving to contending to war. But, notice, as the opposition mounts up, so too does their ineffectiveness.

Right? The enemy is put to shame and confounded. That's a common phrase in the book of Isaiah. Then they're brought to utter destruction and disappearance from the earth.

[ 22 : 38 ] It's kind of like a second exodus from Egypt. Right? In which Pharaoh and all of his army were buried in the Red Sea. It's kind of like a second conquest of the Promised Land in which the pagan nations were driven out before Joshua and Israel.

In fact, you might remember that the Lord told Joshua to fear not and be not dismayed for I'm with you. And how is this going to be? How is the enemy going to be put to shame and confounded and brought to destruction?

Is it because Israel is going to be supplied with an anti-missile defense system and nuclear weapons from an ally? For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand.

It is I who say to you, fear not, I am the one who helps you. The enemy is destroyed because God is the supreme victor.

Because God is helping his covenant people to gain the victory. One commentator writes that it's a foolhardy thing to meddle with the servant of such a master. You know, you remember Peter walking on the water and he takes his eyes off of Christ for but a moment.

[ 23 : 56 ] He sees the powerful waves and he begins to sink. And I imagine that right now, you know, the exiles in Israel were no doubt diverting their gaze from the Lord and his glory and power and looking at the strength of their enemies and they're crying but they're too strong.

Like they're too strong for these promises to come to fulfillment and God's response here is fear not for I am the one who helps you. The enemy might be strong but I am infinitely stronger.

I will ensure your victory. But then it's as if a second cry goes out from the people. Not just they're too strong but we're too weak.

So we see here the second thing, God's response to the people's weakness is transformation. Now listen to this. God says to them, 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. Now what an affectionate thing to say. You worm, Jacob. You know, the people, their land having been destroyed, now carried off into exile in Babylon, they certainly felt like worms.

[ 25 : 15 ] Weak, helpless, pitiful, likely to be trampled on or scorched by the sun. But look, over against human weakness and inadequacy is divine power.

Again, the Lord affirms, I am the one who helps you. He, the Holy One of Israel, which reminds them of his utter purity, his moral perfection, he, the Holy One of Israel, is also their Redeemer.

Now the Redeemer, I don't know if you remember, from the Mosaic Law, the Redeemer was a next of kin who would come to the aid of a family member in crisis. The Redeemer would essentially take upon himself the needs of that family member and pay whatever price was required.

And so here, in Israel's helplessness, God is proclaiming his commitment to rescue her, to take upon himself all of her needs, to pay whatever price was required.

And then this transformation results, because God says, 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.

[ 26 : 34 ] Now this is some strange language here. Now this was an agricultural society. They would, they would have easily understood what God is talking about. A threshing sledge, it's not like a wrestler's name or something, at least not that I know.

I don't follow wrestling. A threshing sledge was, it was a heavy wooden platform, and it was fitted underneath with sharp stones and with metal, and then it would be dragged over the crop to separate the wheat, the grain, from the straw or the chaff.

And after that separation would occur, it would be winnowed, which was simply allowing the chaff to be blown away by the wind into a heap. So what's happening here? God, he's causing the helpless nation of Israel to undergo this two-stage process of transformation.

The helpless worm, it's transformed into a threshing sledge, right, not to thresh wheat, but to thresh the very mountains and the hills. And then after that, it's complete.

Israel is transformed yet again into the winnower, aided not by simply a gentle breeze, which is what normally would happen in winnowing, but by this raging storm, right, that's a tempest, the wind from a hurricane.

[ 27 : 46 ] Now what's the point though? What is he trying to say? The point is that Israel is indeed helpless, invulnerable, but she need not fear because her Redeemer, because the Holy One of Israel is going to transform her into a people before whom all obstacles are destroyed.

And when the Lord has proven his unyielding faithfulness to her in this way, they're going to burst into joyful praise. And that's what we see. And you shall rejoice in the Lord, in the Holy One of Israel, you shall glory.

And I want to ask, saints that are gathered here this morning, have we seen the Lord remain steadfast towards us in bringing victory over the enemies?

Have we witnessed the power and the presence of God transform our pitiful, weak selves into people who trample over obstacles? Now I want you to hold that thought because the Lord addresses a third potential objection of the people as they consider these glorious promises of their restoration and their redemption.

Now remember, the first objection was, but they're too strong. And the second one here is, but we're too weak. And now they have this third objection, but the land is too barren. And so God's response to the land's barrenness is provision.

[ 29 : 12 ] Now remember, Babylon, Babylon's about a thousand miles away from Jerusalem across arid, dry desert. So the exiled Jews, they're hearing these words of promise that a way is being prepared in the wilderness, a highway, bringing them home to Jerusalem.

And God has spoken now to their fear of the enemy's strength. He's spoken now to their fear of their own weakness. But now they're picturing that long march back home, like their forefathers trekking through the wilderness.

And they're thinking, there's no way we can survive that journey. The land is too dry. The land is too barren. And the Lord says, 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. 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 plain, and the pine together. I'm assuming most of us have not trekked across hundreds of miles of arid desert.

[ 30 : 24 ] If you have, come to me afterwards. I'd love to hear the story. But I suspect that many of us have at least hiked in the heat. Perhaps you've journeyed in the Grand Canyon or in southern Utah when it's hot and dry or maybe just through the Groton Subbase on a hot summer day.

Now, what are the two things you especially need in situations like this? Right? Assuming you have all the food you need, what are the two things that you need? Anybody? Water and shade.

Yes, assuming you have food. Water and shade, right? And what are the two things that God is promising here to provide to his poor and needy people? Water and shade. Having defeated the strong enemy and transformed his weak people to overcome obstacles, he is not about to let them die of heat and thirst.

Right? He is going to supply them with abundant provision for the journey home. God is going to see their need. He's going to hear their prayers. He's going to answer them.

Right? And he's going to answer them by transforming now not them, but the barren wilderness into this fertile land flowing with refreshing water covered with trees under which they can take shelter from the scorching sun.

[ 31 : 41 ] Now what a faithful God towards his covenant people. He has chosen them. He has called them. He has not cast them off in spite of their many sins.

He will never leave them or forsake them. He, the God who reigns supreme over the nations, is moving history for his people's good. He will defeat their strong enemies, transform them from conquered to conquerors, and provide for their every need.

And what does this all have to do with you? What does this all have to do with us today? And I'd submit that it has everything to do with us today.

Because you know, this prophecy, it was fulfilled in part in the exile's return from Babylon. But these majestic words, they foresee a greater exodus to come.

They foresee a greater redemption to come. And that redemption has come through the person and work of Christ, has it not? See, Christ paid the ultimate price.

[ 32 : 44 ] He paid the cost of his own perfect life, laid down upon the cross in order to redeem us from bondage to sin and to death. God has moved all of history for the redemption of his people, for the redemption that is in Christ to be brought about.

Now, if you're here and you have not placed your faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, today could be the day that you embrace Christ as your Savior, as your Redeemer, as the Lord of your life.

And by doing so, you will have life in his name. You will become a child of Abraham and a child of God and therefore, a partaker, one who can enjoy the blessings and the promises that God makes to his covenant people.

And you know, if you are here and you've already done that, then these covenant promises are yes and amen for you in Christ Jesus. That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1. Our enemies, saints, our enemies shall be as nothing and shall perish.

Sin, Satan, death, they are no match for the Almighty God. All of those who oppose the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether Satan himself or worldly powers or the ideologies of our culture, they will in the end be put to shame and confounded by the judge and the king of this universe.

[ 34 : 16 ] You know, our helplessness and our weakness, those things become only a precursor of the transforming power of God. It's our weakness that displays the power of God in our lives.

Through our weakness, Christ makes us more than conquerors, Romans 8. over all obstacles to spiritual growth in your life, over all obstacles to gospel advancement in the world, through any circumstances that would steal our joy, that would cause us to doubt the goodness of God, by his spirit, he will enable us to triumph.

And you know, in times of lack, when we feel like we're in the wilderness, which all of us go through seasons like that, some of you are in those seasons right now, walking in the barren desert, our souls faint and thirsty, when we cry out to the Heavenly Father, he hears, he comes swiftly to our aid.

He will not forsake us, church, he will not forsake you. He supplies us with abundant provision for the journey ahead, for the long and arduous journey through this wasteland.

Church, he will shelter us in the shadow of his wing and he will cause rivers of living water to spring forth from within our hearts. That's what Christ said in John chapter 7.

[ 35 : 48 ] He was talking about the Holy Spirit that he's given to us, rivers of living water sprung forth from the barren hearts that we had. Fear not, for I am with you.

Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand. It is I who say to you, fear not. I am the one who helps you. now there's two more points of application I want to draw out of this text. The first one is about biblical counsel.

The second one is about the body of Christ. Biblical counsel. When a brother or sister comes to you in times of trouble or in times of trial, how do you first help them?

Like, how do you first counsel them? you know the world would offer all kinds of clever methods all kinds of self-care advice but church here is a word of true therapy for the soul from the one who knows you inside and out he says fear not i am the one who helps you you know as we walk with one another through life struggles let us lovingly humbly yet confidently hold out the hope and the



