

THE PROMISE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Isaiah 41:10.

All along the pathway of human history man has been afraid. Conscious of the fact that he was a sinner, Adam heard the voice of God and said: "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). When we read the Bible we find that the patriarchs, psalmists, prophets and apostles passed through experiences when fear possessed their hearts, and filled their minds with dark forebodings. Even the great Apostle Paul was sometimes gripped by fear. He confessed that there was a time when "we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears" (II Corinthians 7:5).

Our Lord found people full of anxiety and fear about material things, and about their future. They feared that they would not have a sufficiency for the morrow. Sometimes the Lord Jesus had to rebuke His disciples for their fears. When a storm arose on the Sea of Galilee, they were panic-stricken and firmly believed that they would perish. To those fearful and despairing men Christ said: "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

When Christ found people so fearful about their future, He gently rebuked them and urged them to think of God's care for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Christ admonished them to trust Him, and assured them that, if they would put first things first, and would trust God, He would supply their material needs.

H. B. Blakely has called fear "the disease of our age." Many are in its thralldom. It is doubtful if there has ever been a generation as frightened as ours. There are two realms of mystery which produce a sense of fear. They are the unfathomable present and the unknown future. Even many of God's children are afraid. Some are afraid of the past, others of the present, and still others of the future. Fear destroys happiness and lowers efficiency. Oh, how miserable fear can make you! Fear disturbs and distresses many people of all classes -- the high and the low, the educated and the uneducated, the wise and the simple, the rich and the poor, and the old and the young. As people grow older their fears multiply.

Many of our fears are to be traced directly to self-interest. The real root of fear is that people are too much wrapped up in themselves. People are afraid of themselves, illness, losing their jobs, that somebody is going to get ahead of them or be preferred before them, the disapproval of others, misfortune, failure, poverty, being laid on the shelf, loneliness, growing old, loss of loved ones and death.

It is very important that we learn how to conquer our fears. To this end God has spoken our text. If we will only appropriate it, we shall be sheltered beneath His wings, protected by His omnipotence, and provided for by His immeasurable and unfailing love.

While the words of our text were spoken originally to the Israelites, all of God's children can enjoy the same blessed assurance.. His encouraging message, "Fear thou not," is meant for all of His children, regardless of their circumstances. What a privilege to receive such words of encouragement and inspiration spoken by the One Who has never yet been known to fail! These glorious words should ease the mind and satisfy the heart of every believer who has learned to trust Him fully. There has never been a time when we needed the support and comfort of these words more than we need them today.

I. "I Am With Thee."

This statement derives its value from the One Who made it. If these were only the words of a mere man, they would not be so encouraging.

Regardless of how sincere, well-meaning and faithful the man might be, it is quite possible that he would be powerless to give the help that we might need. But these are the words of an Infinite Being, the Mighty God, the power-ful Defender of His own, and that makes a tremendous difference.

When the disciples had the Lord Jesus with them they were full of confidence and courage; but when He told them that He was soon to leave them, they were troubled. That in part accounts for the great message of the wonderful Saviour: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:1-3.

When the great Napoleon was with his soldiers they were not afraid, but they exclaimed: "Long live the Emperor! Lead us and we go to victory at the death." In view of the fact that the Christian has a far greater leader than Napoleon, the believer should dismiss his fears when he hears the Eternal God say, "I am with thee." The promise of His presence is a wonderful encouragement, for He does not make a promise which He will not fulfill.

God's presence cheers and inspires us with fearlessness. He has promised to be with us. Circumstances and surroundings may seem dark and discouraging, but we are always safe when He is near. God is fully able to cope with the situation, regardless of how serious it may be. He is equal to any possible emergency. None of life's perplexing problems will be too hard to solve when He is with us, but most of them will dissolve into nothingness. This assurance of God's presence applies to life's struggles, afflictions and trials. Job was tried as was no one else. He lost his ten children at one time. He lost his property. He lost his health. He lost his position. Even his wife turned against him. Yet, in all of his trials God was with him, and the last of his life was more prosperous than the first.

In the midst of great enterprises, unusual responsibilities, and strenuous labors, it is delightful indeed to know that God is with His people, imparting joy and peace which surpass all understanding. It is impossible to explain fully the exhilaration which the child of God has in the consciousness of His nearness. The realization that the powerful, wise, and loving God is with us gives us something which is sufficient for all emergencies.

"When we cannot see our way,
Let us trust, and still obey;
He who bids us forward go,
Cannot fail the way to show.

Though enwrapt in gloomy night,
We perceive no ray of light;
Since the Lord Himself is here,
'Tis not meet that we should fear.

Night with Him is never night,
Where He is, there all is light!

When He calls us, why delay?
They are happy who obey."

God does not say, "I am within call" at the moment of need, but He does say, "I am with thee" right now where you are. He will be with us in all of life's perplexing problems. He will be adequate and sufficient for all emergencies. His presence does not mean that the road will always be smooth, or that trials will never come our way, but it does abolish our fear and increase our faith to hear Him say, "I am with thee." This assurance of His presence is not only a comfort, but a challenge. It not only begets a confidence, but it calls us to obedience.

II. "I Am Thy God."

"Be not dismayed; for I am thy God." The marginal reading for "be not dismayed" is "look not around you." We must not focus our eyes upon our environment. If we do, we shall become fearful. When Peter kept his eyes on Christ Jesus, he walked on the stormy waves of the Sea of Galilee, but when he ceased to gaze at the Lord, he began to sink. Why? He was afraid. If we look around us today, we shall certainly be non-plussed, because we see trouble on every hand. We have sad hearts because the outlook is gloomy. We are made to wonder what will happen to us tomorrow. But our heavenly Father says, "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God."

Here is the most endearing relationship in the universe! It is a relationship which exhibits the infinitude of His love and the unspeakableness of His mercy. I entreat you as a believer to ever remember that He who makes the sun to shine and the stars to twinkle is yours. As Paul said, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." Acts 17:28. "I am thy God." On our part these words imply reverence, submission, and obedience. On God's part they imply guardianship and blessing. He takes special care of His own, and they are always safe because God is with them.

In Devonshire, England, there was an old farmer whose homestead had belonged to the family for three generations. At last the old man had come on what he called evil times and had to be sold out. The auction took place. Everything was sold. The old man came back into the farm kitchen when the auction was over. He sat down on an old box and looked around at the empty farmhouse. As he looked around he said, "Thank God, there is one thing they have not sold. The auctioneer has overlooked it--the most precious thing." That was a little card with silver lettering that hung up over the mantelpiece, "Thou remainest." All else is gone: "Thou remainest."

In the second century they brought a martyr before a king, and the king wanted him to recant and give up Christ and Christianity; but the man spurned the proposition.

"But," the king said, "If you do not do it, I shall banish you."

The man smiles and answered, "You cannot banish me from Christ; for He says He will never leave me nor forsake me."

The king became angry, and said, "Well, I will confiscate your property; take it all from you."

And the man replied, "My treasures are laid up on high; you cannot get them."

The king became more angry and said, "I will kill you."

"Why," the man answered, "I have been dead forty years; I have been dead with Christ; dead to the world; my life is hid with Christ in God, and you cannot touch it."

In whom was the confidence of this martyr? He had heard God's voice saying, "I am thy God."

The God Whom we trust, worship and serve will never fail us in the hour of need. In Him are all the resources that we shall ever need.

"I will strengthen Thee."

If we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, then we certainly have a right to claim this glorious promise. Whatever our circumstances may be, as believers we can rest implicitly upon the Word of God. We will never be in a position where God cannot strengthen us. He is sufficient for all circumstances and for all emergencies. His all-sufficiency is an excellent incentive to fearlessness. There need be no fear on the part of those who really trust in the Living God. He will be with His own in sustaining power. He knows just how to infuse strength into our sinking hearts and to invigorate our spirits.

When He says, "I will strengthen thee," He means that He will fortify the heart against suffering and trial. Near the end of an illness, when the strength is returning and the weakness is departing, there is genuine gladness and gratitude, as those can testify who have been afflicted. It is likewise a great joy to learn that God is able to change our weakness into strength. In the consciousness of our weakness we should remember His promise, "I will strengthen thee." When we are confronted with some gigantic task, or with some duty that seems to appall us, it is strengthening to know that there is not anything that is too difficult for God. No matter how seemingly impossible the task, nor how heavy the load, His resources will be sufficient. He is able to cope with any and every situation. We need the strength which He promises, and which He alone can give.

In services in the Coliseum in Saint Louis, William R. Newell, the well-known Bible teacher, spoke on the text, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). Then he called for a period of prayer. One brother prayed, "Lord, we'll furnish the weakness if you'll furnish the strength." God is able to change your weakness into strength and He says that He will do so. "When my weakness leaneth on His might, all is right."

IV. "I Will Help Thee."

In Hebrews 13:6 David is quoted as follows: "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." The Lord was not only the helper of David and of Paul, but He is also our helper. God's promise, "I will help thee," suggests that we have something to do and that God will help us to do it. It speaks of cooperation in a common task.

The promise, "I will help thee," means "I will render thee personal assistance." It implies that as we go through this world that we shall have burdens to bear, and some of them will be too heavy for us. How sorely we need help when we are taxed beyond our ability -- physically, mentally and spiritually. But, thank God, there is One Who is with us Who will help us. He will take the heaviest end of the load and assist us in carrying it.

God can give us all the help that we shall need, just when and where we

need it. Not only is He able to help us, but He is always willing to do it. He may not always help us just at the time or in the way we desire, because that way may not be best; but in His own time and manner He is ever willing to help us.

V. "I Will Uphold Thee With The Right Hand Of My Righteousness."

The grasp of the hand signifies present and close friendship. The right hand is an emblem of power -- here of omnipotent power. There is no left-hand work with God; no sinister work; with Him it is all right-hand work. His faithful and victorious right hand can be relied upon to support us. If we will only place our complete trust in Him, He will shelter us beneath His wings, protect us by His omnipotence and provide for us by His immeasurable and unfailing love. God will never fail us, and His strength will be sufficient for every need of ours. The awareness of His presence is the source of a courage which danger cannot dispel, suffering cannot exhaust, and death cannot destroy.

I Do not know of any encouragement to surpass that which is given in these glorious promises of God if we will only appropriate and apply them.

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

In ev'ry condition, in sickness, in health,
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth;
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,
As your days may demand, shall your strength ever be.

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.

When thro' fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flames shall not hurt thee;--I only design
Thy dross to consume, and they gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, tho' all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!