

“FEAR NOT, THOU WORM JACOB”

Isaiah 41:10-20

*A message delivered to the Lincoln Wood Baptist Church,
Houston, Texas on March 26, 1992.*

This is God’s message to his believing people in this world. Though we are often troubled and tried, persecuted and perplexed, tempted and trampled upon in this world, our God says to you and me, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.” The purpose of God in these verses is to silence the fears of his children, to encourage his people to confidently trust him in the midst of trouble and adversity. It is contrary to the mind of God for his people to be a timid, fearful, anxious people. To suppress our fears he here assures us of his constant presence, power, and provision.

Three times in these verses God says to us, “Fear thou not” (v. 10), “Fear not” (v. 13), “Fear not, thou worm Jacob” (v. 14). It appears to me that God wants us to stop being fearful!

Though your enemies are many and mighty, “fear not.” God is greater than your enemies. He says, “I am with thee, and no man shall sit on thee to hurt thee.” Though your afflictions are painful and protracted, “fear not”. The Lord will deliver you. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Though your path of duty is demanding and dangerous, “fear not”. Your God will uphold you and sustain you. He will help you. “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” Though the fulfillment of God’s promise cannot be seen, “fear not”. Not one promise of God shall fall to the ground. “God is not a man, that he should lie.” “All the promises of God in Christ Jesus are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God.”

God’s word to you and me is this - “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.” Let me make five statements that I trust the Holy Spirit will graciously apply to our hearts.

First,

WE ARE ALL WEAK AND HELPLESS WORMS BEFORE GOD.

What can be more loathsome than a worm? The word worm might be more properly translated “maggot”. No one wants to touch a maggot. The very thought of those vile, dirty, disease-ridden, disease-spreading creatures makes our skin crawl. Yet this is the word God uses to describe us! And it is an accurate description!

The humanist, the rationalist, and the self-righteous religionist considers this a great insult. He says, “I am not a worm. I am a man. And I am somebody!” In our churches, we love to sing that great old hymn written by Isaac Watts over 300 years ago –

“Alas! And did my Savior bleed,
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?”

But, if you look in most modern hymnals published by the various denominations, you will find that the word worm has been changed. The word “worm” is just too offensive to human pride. We are worms nonetheless! And what is a worm?

A worm is a dirty despicable thing. A worm is a weak and helpless creature, incapable of defending itself. A worm belongs to and is at home in the muck and mire of the earth. A worm, being easily trampled to death, is always exposed to danger. A worm is a creature of no value or concern. Who ever wept over stepping on a worm? Who ever missed a worm that was killed? Who ever took notice of a worm? When God declares that man is a worm, he means for us to understand that we are all by nature wretched, weak, and worthless! Take your rightful place in the dust as a worm. It will help you to get along with one another. Who ever heard of worms fighting? You cannot claim the promises of this chapter unless you meet the character of the one to whom the promises were made. And these promises were made to worms.

THERE IS HOPE FOR WORMS

I am a worm. That I acknowledge. But, secondly, I want you to see that THERE IS HOPE FOR WORMS. God’s people are men and women who by the grace of God, have been made to know that they are wretched, weak, worthless worms. For us to be called worms, maggots, is to insult those lofty creatures who never sinned against God and compliment us! Yet, vile, base, and disgusting as we are, we take our proper place in the dunghill before the holy Lord God as worms, knowing that there is hope for worms.

Christ became a worm that he might save worms like us (Psa. 22:6). When the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was made to be sin for us and hung upon the cursed tree as our Substitute, he became a worm, so that he might lift worms from the dung heap of fallen humanity and transform us into the sons of God! In ancient times, the crimson, or scarlet grub, would be crushed to death and its blood used to dye the garments men wore. The Lord Jesus Christ was crushed to death under the wrath of God, and his blood has purged away our sins. It has made the garments of salvation pure and white. He was abased that we might be exalted. He was crushed that we might be blessed. He was made to be sin, a despicable thing, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, a delight to God! He was crushed to death under the penalty of sin that we might be raised up to life and freed from sin.

The worm has no hands with which to labor; but he does have a mouth by which he is able to bore his way into the strongest tree and penetrate to its very heart, finding there both food and safety. These worms, whom God calls by the name ,”Jacob”, his own elect, with the mouth of prayer and supplication, crying unto God, are able to penetrate the very heart of Almighty God, finding in him both food and safety for their souls. Our Lord Jesus says, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Lk. 11:9-10). “Let us therefore come boldly,” with ease and freedom of speech, “unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Do not refuse to take the name “worm”. Being a worm identifies you with the Son of God in his most glorious character as the sinners’ Substitute. There is hope for worms. God promises to help worms. As a worm you may call upon the Lord God to pity you and to help you.

Christ came to save worms! Christ died for worms! Christ has mercy on worms!

“Not the righteous, not the righteous,
Sinners (worms) Jesus came to save!”

Are you a worm? Worms are not proud creatures. No matter where they are found, no matter how they are used, they are just worms. We have nothing to be proud of. “For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why doest thou glory, as if thou hast not received it?” (I Cor. 4:7).

WE ARE THE WORMS OF GOD’S CHOICE

Sons of Jacob we are. That makes us worms. But, thirdly, WE ARE THE WORMS OF GOD’S CHOICE. God says, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.” He speaks as though he were talking to one man; but he is addressing all his people collectively. God calls his elect “Jacob”. Jacob was a man wretched, weak, and worthless in himself. But he was a man loved, chosen, called, and blessed by God. Jacob was a man to whom God almighty had bound and obligated himself by a covenant!

Gladly, I own I am a worm
Weak, wretched, and worthless,
If God might take me as His own
And tell me I am His!

Fourthly,

THOUGH WE ARE BUT WORMS, WE HAVE NO CAUSE FOR FEAR.

Notice in verse 14 that all three Persons in the Triune Godhead have avowed themselves to help this wretched, weak, worthless worm, Jacob. “I will help thee, saith the LORD” - Jehovah. That is God our Father speaking. “I will help thee, saith...thy Redeemer.” That is God the Son, the Second Person of the blessed Trinity, speaking. “I will help thee, saith...the Holy One of Israel.” That is God the Holy Spirit speaking. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” In verses 10 through 17, the holy Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, makes eleven promises by which he would both remove our fears and encourage us to trust him. Mark them and lay them to heart.

Are you alone? God says, (1) “Fear thou not; for I am with thee,” not only within reach, but in you! Are you dismayed by the power of your enemies or the greatness of your trial? The Lord says, (2) “Be not dismayed; for I am thy God.” Read again the eighth chapter of Romans, verses 28 through 39, and understand that God is for you, for you in his sovereign providence, special love, saving purpose, substitutionary provision, and steadfast power. Are you weak? Your God says, (3) “I will strengthen thee!” Are you destitute? God says three times, (4) “I will help thee.” Are you about to fall, or already fallen? The Lord says, (5) “I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness!” Are your enemies a terror to you? Your God says (6) he will confound them, bring them to nothing, and slay them everyone. That is the meaning of verses 11 and 12.

“Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as

nothing, and as a thing of nought.”

Are you fearful of failure? The Lord your God says, (7) “I will hold thy right hand” (v. 13). That means...I will walk hand in hand with you as your Father and your Friend...I will guide you and lead you in your way...I will hold you up when you are weak, wavering, and trembling...I will pick you up when you fall...God will silence your fears as you walk with him, “Saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.” He will say to you, to your heart, by his Spirit, “Fear not,” and make you hear his assuring promise, “I will help thee.” He will help you in times of trial. He will help you through all your temptations. He will help you in every path of duty. He will help you in the performance of every service done for him.

Are you made to weep? (8) “Thou shalt rejoice in the Lord” (v. 16). He will make you triumphant at last. Are you now abased? (9) “Thou shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel” (v. 17). Glory awaits you! You will enter glory with your Lord. You will enter by his power and by his grace. And you will possess all the inheritance of glory unto which you were predestinated by God. Once there, you will glory in the Lord forever. You will glory in your interest in the Lord, glory in your relation to him, and glory in all that he has done for you. Read the Book of Revelation. You will see that in heaven all the saints of God glory in election, redemption, grace, and preservation! Not one word is uttered to the praise of human works or to the praise of man’s imaginary “freewill”.

Do the heavens appear to be as brass to you? God says, (10) “I the Lord will hear them” (v. 17). Does it sometimes seem that God has forsaken you? He has not! He says, (11) “I the God of Israel will not forsake them” (v. 17).

Do you need more? Listen to this - “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou was precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee and people for thy life. Fear not, for I am with thee!” (Isa. 43:1-5).

Mark these promises and realize that though you are a worm you have a great and mighty God. You have no reason to fear anything or anyone ever!

“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,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”
Be sure you get this last thing revealed in our text.

IT IS GOD’S GREAT GLORY AND PLEASURE TO USE INSIGNIFICANT WORMS LIKE US FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS PURPOSES (vv. 15-19).

These verses describe God’s servant as a man who has gone to war, but nothing is in jeopardy. Total victory is assured in verses 15 and 16. And every provision for our refreshment, comfort, and success is promised in verses 17, 18, and 19. God declares that he will use chosen worms, saved by his grace, to plant his trees, trees of righteousness, in the Gentile world. That is the meaning of verse 19. It is God’s good pleasure to use saved sinners for the salvation of other

sinners. The Lord God delights to take wretched, weak, worthless worms and make them instruments in his hands. By using such useless things as we are, he magnifies the holy, omnipotent power of his grace and gets glory to himself. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:26-29).

What power a worm has when God is with him! Samson, a worm, slew a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, when the Spirit of God was upon him (Jud. 15:15-17). David, a worm, killed Goliath with a rock and a slingshot (I Sam. 16). Peter, a worm, was the instrument by which God saved 3000 men and women on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This is what I want you to see - **THOUGH WE ARE MERE WORMS, IF THE LORD GOD IS WITH US, THERE IS NOTHING WE CANNOT DO.** We can do all things through Christ, who is our Strength (Phil. 4:13). No work is too great for us to accomplish. No trial is too hard for us to endure. No enemy is too powerful for us to overcome. No obstacle is too big for us to move. No burden is too heavy for us to bear - If God is with us!

The reason why God is pleased to use such worms as we are for the accomplishment of his purposes is that in this way, everyone will know that God did it. Any good that is done by us is, most assuredly and most manifestly, God's work! God uses such worms as we are that the whole world "May see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it" (v. 20). Amen.