The Promise of God’s Presence - Isaiah 41:10

Welcome once again to the Summer of Promise! What a joy we have had being grounded in some of the most powerful promises God makes in His Word! We have claimed the promise of His eternal life. We have been encouraged by His promise of answered prayer. We have been calmed by His promise of peace. Today I want us to experience the Promise of His Presence.

I’m speaking on a topic today that most of us really need to hear because we struggle with fear. My guess is that many of you struggle with fear. What are some of your fears? Anyone care to share with the class? No! Never mind!

Last Sunday we learned that the antidote to anxiety is the peace of God. Our text today teaches that the solution to fear is the presence of God.

Here’s our main point: The Lord will never leave those who belong to Him. We could also say it like this: Because God is here, we should have no fear.

The text for today is from Isaiah 41:10 (NIV). “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

This verse gives us two commands to obey:

• Do not fear
• Do not be dismayed

And two reasons to obey:

• For I am with you
• For I am your God

We also see three promises that God will keep:

• I will strengthen you
• I will help you
• I will uphold you with my righteous right hand

He tells us what not to do – don’t fear or be dismayed. Then He tells us why – because He is with us and because He is our God. And then He tells us three things He will do – God will strengthen, help, and uphold us.

So, Because God is here, we will have no fear.

The context here is that God is promising to bring His people back from captivity. The crazy thing is that Isaiah is writing about what will happen 180 years in the future. Even before God’s people sinned and were judged and were sent to Babylon for 70 years, God is telling them that they will return and He will bless them once again. He is such a gracious God!

Isaiah has been referred to as the Bible in miniature because it has 66 chapters and the Bible has 66 books. The first 39 chapters correspond with the Old Testament as they speak of judgment and the final 27 echo the New Testament’s emphasis on grace and comfort and restoration.

These chapters were written to people who were filled with fear. Check out the tone in this section as found in Isaiah 40:1-2: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for...” God still speaks tenderly to those going through trials and He offers comfort to the discouraged and dismayed, the hurting and the helpless.

God promises His presence in order to free us from fear in our families, in our jobs (or lack of jobs), in the middle of our marriage messes, with our school stresses, with our health situations, with our friendships, with our finances, problems from our past, worries about the future, or in any other situation.
The word “fear” comes from the Greek word “phobos,” which initially had the meaning of “flight” or “fleeing.” That flight was because of fear, and hence the eventual translation, “fear.”

Instead of fleeing from our fears, Isaiah 41:10 gives us a **five-part formula** to help us face our fears. Let’s be reminded of our text for today. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

What that means to us is, **because God is here, we will have no fear.**

**1. I will not live in fear because God is here.**

Notice that it doesn’t say God was with me, or that He will be with me but that He **is** with me. This can be translated as, “There is nothing to fear because I am with you.”

I have read that the phrase, “Fear not” or “Be not afraid” is found 365 times in the Bible, one for each day of the year. That’s about how many times I need to be reminded! Once each day!

Friend, in order to face your fears, the first thing to remember is that God is with you. Moses needed this reminder in Exodus 33:14: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Psalm 23:4 says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...”

After giving the Great Commission, which involved going and making disciples and teaching and baptizing, Jesus promised His presence in Matthew 28:20: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

When you’re filled with fear, remember this truth and declare it out loud: I will not live in fear because He is here!

During the tumultuous days of the Protestant Reformation, many dissenters were martyred. Hugh Latimer was one among many voices of formerly devout papists who began to cry out for a translation of the Bible into the common language. In those days, even a casual word could be used as a means of having you imprisoned or executed.

When Hugh Latimer was preaching one day in the presence of King Henry VIII, he reports that he said to himself, “Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the king is here; be careful what you say.”

Then he said to himself, “Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the King of kings is here; be careful what you do not say.”

For such unflinching faithfulness Latimer was eventually burned at the stake. But He feared failing God more than he feared offending men. His strength was found in the abiding presence of Jesus in his heart and mind.

The problem for most of us is that we are not aware of His presence. We stumble through life oblivious to the fact that He is with us and will never leave those who belong to Him.

If you’re filled with fear today it may be because you’re acting like Jesus is not here. Declare this first truth: **I will not live in fear because He is here!**

Let’s look at the second part of the formula for overcoming fear.

**2. I will not be dismayed because He is my God.**

To be “dismayed” means “to be broken and filled with fear.” It literally means, “To look around anxiously as one does in a state of alarm.”

Tony Campolo tells a story about being in a church in Oregon where he was asked to pray for a man who had cancer. Campolo prayed boldly for the man’s healing.

That next week he got a telephone call from the man’s wife. She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer." Campolo thought when he heard her use the past tense verb that his cancer had been eradicated! But before he could think much about it she said, "He died." Compolo felt terrible.
But she continued, "Don’t feel bad. When he came into that church that Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn’t take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence."

But the lady told Compolo, "After you prayed for him, a peace had come over him and a joy had come into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We’ve experienced God’s presence. We’ve sung. We’ve laughed. We’ve read Scripture. We prayed. Oh, they’ve been wonderful days. I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for healing."

And then she said something incredibly profound. She said, "He wasn’t cured, but he was healed."

Would you notice that the key to not being dismayed is to make sure that He is your God? 1 Samuel 30:6 says that David was distressed because the men were talking about stoning him but that changed when he “found strength in the Lord his God.” HIS God!

Is He your God? This promise becomes activated when you personalize your relationship with Him by trusting in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Can you say, “He is my God today?”

I’m convinced if each of us would see God as big and grand as He really is, most of our fears would go away because when we fear God, we won’t fear other things.

- I will not live in fear because He is here!
- I will not be dismayed because He is my God.

These two promises give us confidence to make the next proclamation...

3. I will lean on God to strengthen me.

I love what Corrie ten Boom once said: “In times of fear I don’t wrestle, I nestle.” Psalm 29:11: “The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.”

On June 18, 1999 Gary and Gloria Sloan, Southern Baptist missionaries, who had been on the field of Mexico only six months, were enjoying a birthday celebration for their daughter, Carla, at a popular swimming spot on Mexico’s Pacific coast. With them were two other young missionaries from the United States, Joy Murphy and John Weems.

Due to a strong undertow, Carla began to be pulled out to sea. Gary Sloan and the other two missionaries rushed to save eleven-year-old Carla, but were overcome and drowned, as did she.

When Carla's body was brought to shore, Gloria doubled over in agony, unable to breathe. But it was then that she felt the physical presence of Jesus. Gloria said, "I felt such a strength and power and control. I looked down at my daughter, and I had such a peace" (The Commission, a publication of the International Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, pg. 29).

A large group of people gathered to watch this unfolding tragedy. And before long, four bodies lay in the sand. But what happened next is truly amazing. Gloria stood over the bodies of her dead loved ones and gave witness to the saving power of Christ. She told the people, "The pain I felt because of the loss of my husband and daughter was not as much pain as I felt for the true lostness of those standing around me" (Ibid, pg. 29).

Gloria Sloan then told the people that her daughter and husband were standing in the presence of God. And then she said, "What if you were the ones laying here? Would you know you would be in God's presence" (Ibid, pg. 31)?

Gloria's husband and daughter were buried in Mexico. After their funerals, she went home to Texas to heal. And believe it or not, after almost six months, Gloria packed up her remaining three children and went back to Mexico to finish the work that she and her husband had begun.
I find great comfort in Isaiah 42:3. Because He is with us, He will supernaturally strengthen us for all He calls us to do.

This passage is quoted in Matthew 12:20 when referring to Jesus: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” Jesus does not break us when we’re broken nor does He smash us when we’re smoldering.
- I will not live in fear because He is here!
- I will not be dismayed because He is my God.
- I will lean on God to strengthen me.

4. I will trust God to help me.

Because God is always present, He promises His strength and He promises to help us. Probably the most beloved of all scripture passages regarding this promise is from Hebrews. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (13:5) Then immediately after that, the Lord promises, “So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”

This is the promise of His presence. He will never abandon us! He will always be with us. And not in just a benign manner, but to help us! Why? Because in His great grace He has chosen to love us!

I am reminded of the story of a Preacher who asked a boy about the presence of God. The Preacher said to him, "Son, I will give you an apple if you can tell me where God is." The boy looked at the Preacher, then he looked at the apple, he said, "Preacher, I will give you a barrel of apples if you can tell me where he isn’t." Amen? Amen!

God will never “unfriend” us when we do something stupid or when we sin or when we’re stressed out but instead He promises to help us.
- I will not live in fear because He is here!
- I will not be dismayed because He is my God.
- I will lean on God to strengthen me.
- I will trust God to help me.

5. I believe that God will uphold me with His righteous right hand.

The word “uphold” means “to hold up or grasp, to support.” The idea is similar to the word “undergird” which means “to make secure underneath.” We are upheld by His “righteous right hand.” This is His hand of promise.

Do you feel like you’ve failed? Do you wonder why you fall so many times? Hold on to the truth that He upholds you when you feel like you’re barely holding on. Psalm 145:13-14: “The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.” He helps us and He holds us when we’re shaking like a leaf.

Thomas Dorsey was a black jazz musician from Atlanta who was known in the early 1920’s for the suggestive lyrics he combined with original music. Then God touched his life and in 1926 he began to write music that honored the Lord.

In 1932 times were hard for Dorsey as they were for nearly everyone trying to survive the depression. Perhaps it was because of his past music and his also his musical style some said his music was too worldly.

The most difficult night of his life came one night right here in St. Louis when he received a telegram telling him that his pregnant wife had suddenly died. Dorsey was filled with grief and his faith was shaken, but instead of wallowing in self-pity, he expressed his agony the only way he knew how. He wrote this song. . .

1) Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, Lead me on to the light; Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.
2) When my way grows drear, Precious Lord linger near. When my life is almost gone; Hear my cry, hear my call, Hold my hand lest I fall. Take my hand Precious Lord, lead me home.

In spite of Dorsey’s checkered past he experienced God’s presence during that crises. That song which came out of his pain and grief has comforted and challenged thousands of people since then because if we are honest, most of us have had a moment, or two or three when God’s presence was all that could get us through.

The Lord will never leave those who belong to Him. Because God is here, we should have no fear. God upholds the hurting and He also reveals His presence through His people who reach out with His love.

Let’s look one last time at Isaiah 41:10 (NIV). “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

- I will not live in fear because He is here!
- I will not be dismayed because He is my God.
- I will lean on God to strengthen me.
- I will trust God to help me.
- I will believe that God will uphold me.

Friends, I have to level with you today. If you are not in Christ, you have not been made righteous and you have every reason to be fearful.

In the Old Testament God’s presence was demonstrated in the tabernacle. That’s where people would go to meet with God. When Jesus came, John 1:14 says that He “tabernacled” among us: “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us...” He was sent from the presence of the Father and He is the presence...and He takes us into the presence of the Father when we put our faith in Him for forgiveness of sins.

If you have not yet been born again, that is the decision you need to make. Profess Him as your Lord and Savior and then the promise of His presence will be fulfilled in your life.

Fear not...

- God is with you
- He is your God
- He will strengthen you
- He will help you
- He will uphold you

I like how John Piper restates these promises using five different prepositions...

- I am your God – over you.
- I am with you – by your side.
- I will strengthen you – from inside of you.
- I will help you – all around you.
- I will uphold you – from underneath you.

God is over you, by you, inside you, around you, and underneath you.

The presence of God is a fact of life. Paul rightly said of God, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you."

We may, by defying the purpose of God, insulate ourselves from that presence.
We may, by un-repented sin, cut off the sense of God because we are clouded by a sense of guilt.
We may, through no fault of our own, be unable to sense the God who is all about us.
But the fact remains that He is with us all the time. J. B. Phillips
"Character will be developed in our lives when we stop seeking the PRESENTS (What we can get from Him) of God and start seeking the PRESENCE of God"