

NOT FORSAKEN Sunday School- December 12, 2010

Unifying Topic: I AM YOUR GOD

Lesson Text

I. Upheld By God (Isaiah 41:8-10)

II. Never Forsaken (Isaiah 41:17-20)

The Main Thought: 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 KJV)

Unifying Principle: People take comfort in knowing that someone is capable of helping them in their time of need. Who are people to trust for assistance? Isaiah declared that God alone creates, controls, and redeems.

Lesson Aim: To teach students appreciate how God is always there for us.

Life aim: To teach how God lovingly calls us into His service, gently comforts us when we are afraid, and graciously blesses us with refreshing renewal; and invigorating new life.

41:8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

41:9 Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

41:10 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.

41:17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them

41:18 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

41:19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together:

41:20 That they 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.

HISTORY:

Chapter 40 of Isaiah began a new section of Isaiah with God saying, "*Comfort My people.*" The chapter ended with the promise that God doesn't get tired, and those of us who do get tired can gain new strength by waiting for the Lord.

We start off in the first part of **Isaiah 41:1-7** with a challenge to the nations. Having addressed Israel in Chapter 40, Jehovah now addresses the surrounding nations. The challenge is against those who trust in idols. The nations are pictured as coming before the presence of God, and in recognition of His sovereignty they must "*keep silent before Him.*" The same idea is in Revelation 8:1, where there was "*...silence in heaven...*" before the presence of the mighty God to answer His questions. Only when people are silent can they truly hear the voice of God, i.e., in Is.40:31 for renewed strength. This time the rhetorical questions are addressed to the unbelieving Gentile kingdoms. The answers to those questions are designed to bring recognition to the True God who has brought these circumstances into existence.

41:2-4 God then makes the announcement as a question in verses 2-4: "*Who raised up the righteous man from the east... Who had wrought and done it...?*" This is a reference to Cyrus the Great of Persia (558-529 B.C.). Though he is not named until 44:28, he is introduced in this passage as one to fulfill the *Will of God*. God is in control of all world empires and politics. God is pictured by the Prophet Isaiah as the one who gave the nations unto Cyrus and his Persian Empire. Thus, it would come to pass that Israel's two greatest enemies, Assyria and Babylon, would both fall in the future. It is God Himself who has raised up righteousness toward His people in the deliverance that shall be provided by Cyrus the Great. Righteousness has summoned him to its feet... "*Righteousness*" refers to God's providential purposes. "*Summoned*" him refers to Cyrus.

41:4b Isaiah now changes the focus from the conqueror to the Creator who called him. "*I am He!*" The words stress that God started the project of bringing Cyrus from the east, and He will finish that work. God is present throughout history from one generation to another until the very end. The point is that no nation exists that does not owe its origin to God.

41:5-7 The reaction of the nations was fear. However, in response, the nations banded together to protect themselves from the Lord's wrath. The nations begin to seek comfort in building their idols; Idols that cannot move or speak. So

Isaiah gives a description of their mutual encouragement: they drew near and came; they helped everyone his neighbor; and the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith. Craftsmen of all types will work in groups to produce new idols that might spare them from the eastern conqueror. In other words, this is a picture of the unrepentant nations desperately trying to convince themselves that their self-wrought gods, made with soldering and nails, are really adequate for their needs. This verse makes the point that idolatry requires much hard work, but is ultimately futile. Idols are totally dependent on men. They must even be nailed down so they do not fall over. Isaiah want to show his people that human effort will never be sufficient; not even if people were to encourage each other; nor will new home-made idols protect them. How can such impotent and ineffective objects protect anyone from the conqueror from the east? How can Israel come against their God who is the One controlling the events?

LESSON:

Isaiah 41:8-10 Upheld By God

After threatening the other nations, God turns gently to Israel and reassures them of His love. There are three characters that Jehovah calls into His service: Cyrus, Israel, and the ideal Servant. **V8** The Israelites are reminded of the great honor that has been given them as God's chosen ones: ¹a chosen nation; chosen for servanthood; chosen as a witness to the Gentiles, and chosen by Yahweh. This choice extended back beyond Jacob/Israel for whom the nation was named. God chose Abraham, called him from his home, brought him to Canaan, and then bestowed wonderful promises upon him. "*Abraham*" in the Hebrew tongue means "*the father of many nations*". That means that all nations will be blessed by the "*Seed*", Jesus Christ that would come. Israel is identified as the Lord's servant, the descendants of Abraham who is His wonderful friend. ²Although God changed the name of Jacob to Israel, He still uses the two names frequently. Both names refer to the people of God in different phases of their salvation.

- Jacob ("*Supplanter*") –For his struggle "*with God and with men*" in which he prevailed, his name was changed to Israel.
- Israel ("*Prince of God*"; "*Governed by God*"; "*ruling with God*") –The name later applied to the descendants of Jacob.

Thus, the national heritage of the Israelites is traced to both Abraham and his grandson Jacob. Even though they are weak in and of themselves, God has chosen each of them to be His servant. There can be no doubt in this reference that God is speaking of Israel as His Servant –Nation. "*Servant*" (*'ebed*) means a slave or bondsman. God's servant means to belong to the Lord and to give allegiance only to him. The Lord's servant has no reason to fear for the Lord provides security.

41:8 Abraham, the Lord's friend is continued unbroken through history and abides currently with Abraham's descendant, Israel. ³Israel's special place before God is because of God's initiative, not because of Israel achievement. Israel is different from the idol-makers in distant lands because of God's work in them, not because of their own greatness. They will overcome all odds because it is their heritage. **41:9** They are depicted as from "*the ends of the earth*," trembled with fear because of the Lord's sovereignty. The Lord took Israel from the ends of the earth-first from Ur of the Chaldees in the case of Abraham and then from Egypt in the case of the nation. He tells them that although they have been scattered, they will be re-gathered. The Lord assures Israel that, as His servant, His choice of her is still current, and that He has not "*rejected*" her. It is a dangerous thing to reject those whom God has not rejected.

Yet, in this passage, it has the connotation that is entirely honorable and speaks of the close intimacy between the Master and His servant. Anyone who loves God is a member of God's family and God Himself considers that person to be His friend. Even though God will raise up a Deliverer from outside the nation, He has not yet forsaken the nation. In this we see ⁴a picture of the God who judges the nations, and rules the rulers of the nations, and calls the nations into being, choosing His people for Himself, calling them from their hopeless distance from Him, and taking them to be His servant. That is what God has done for us in Christ. He chose us before the foundation of the world. He called us out of darkness and death. And He took us for Himself to be His, to make Himself our God.

¹ <http://www.bibleprofessor.com/files/Isaiah.pdf>

² <http://www.teachinghearts.org/dre17hpropisaiah.html>

³ <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/2341.htm>

⁴ <http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper93/06-20-93.htm>

41:10 ⁵In order to learn this lesson of faith, Israel must pass through the humiliation of an exile and the bondage of captivity in order to see that the deliverance of God through Cyrus as God reaffirms His covenant commitment to His people. Thus He says "*Fear thou not*" and then reassures them of His love.

- I Have chosen thee v9 (He has not cast them away) – Relationship
- I Am with thee v10 (so do not fear) – His Presence
- I Am thy God v10 – Relationship
- I Will strengthen ('amats – to be strong, alert, courageous, brave, bold, solid; make firm, assure) thee v10 – His Assurance
- I Will help ('azar – to help, succour, support) thee v10 – His Assurance
- I Will uphold (tamak – to grasp, hold, support, lay hold of, hold fast; to hold up) thee v10 (with the right hand of my righteousness) – The Victory

In contrast to the nations, Israel is told not to fear and anxiously look about, for the Lord is with her and the Lord is her God. As opposed to the nations, which had to help each other to strengthen themselves; Israel will be helped and strengthened by the Lord. Do you notice the pronouns used? - "**I Have; I Am; I Will!**" The Divine Presence and Divine Aid is there to accomplish all that is needed and that all He said He'd do. Therefore, there is no need to be:

- dismayed – sha`ah – to gaze at; to look in dismay or anxiety.

By not fearing whatever arises on the earth God's people demonstrate that they are walking by faith. Stop defining and limiting your future in terms of your past; and start defining it in terms of God's promises. They will uphold you as His right hand being a symbol of strength and power.

NOT APART OF THE LESSON:

SYNOPSIS OF Isaiah 41:11-16

41:11-13 God reassures and encourages Israel that He will deal with their enemies, if they keep their trust in Him. He knows how to make our adversaries - whether they are men or devils - ashamed and disgraced. In part, an outworking of God's promise to Abraham in *Genesis 12:3*: "*I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.*" If God is with you, you don't need to be afraid. The nations that are against Israel fall into three categories: 1, those that have a burning anger against Israel, 2, those that have had verbal confrontations with Israel, and 3, those that have indeed been to war with Israel. All of these nations will have their plans frustrated by Jehovah. Jehovah stands as the guarantee of these promises of deliverance. Those who are at war with Israel will be reduced to nothing and no longer exist because they will be destroyed. Why is this? Because the Lord God will hold thy right hand, saying "*Fear not, I will help you*". The right hand is typically the strong hand. He reiterates a second time saying "*Fear not, I will help you*"(vv10, 13). God is holding all of us. God's help does not depend on us deserving it.

41:14 "Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel!" The idea of a worm is connected to the name Jacob, but the idea of men is connected with the name Israel. "*Worm*" here signifies lowliness and helplessness. Even though only a remnant will survive, that remnant still represents Jehovah. The "*Holy One of Israel*" will act as the "*Redeemer*" of His people. He will avenge them, deliver them, and return them to the home of their ancestors. The Israelites' ultimate need is for God as they yield with a broken and contrite spirit. It is the Lord who promises to be their "*Redeemer*" (*goel*). The title the "*Holy One of Israel*" is one of the Prophet Isaiah's favorite designations for the Lord Jehovah.

41:15 God will so help Israel, will so empower them, that they are able to cut down mountains as if they were a great threshing machine, removing mountains and seeing their dust blown away. The point is clear: nothing, not even a mountain, will stand in their way when God helps them. "*I don't know of any other than the Creator Himself who can take a weak worm and make it sharp with teeth! God can do that*" (*Redpath*). **41:16** The heathen nations will be scattered as Israel rejoices in its triumph. When we overcome great obstacles with the help of the Lord, we know it is His work. We rejoice in the Lord, not in ourselves. We glory in the Holy One of Israel, not in ourselves.

Isaiah 41:17-20 Never Forsaken

41:17 These verses are a promise of God's abiding concern, care, and provision for His own, regardless of the time

⁵ <http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/10550/Is41-1-29.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwn-sundayschool.html>

frame. The condition of the poor and needy seeking water, even their tongues were weakening. God says He will hear and not forsake them. These statements are of particular significance to people living in desert and arid regions. God provide a beautiful picture of provisions to abundantly supply the need of His people in response to their cry.

41:18 God opens rivers... fountains... pools of water, having resources and supplies we know nothing about, and He loves to supply us from His hidden resources. God's providence will extend to physical needs. Water will be provided where water does not naturally occur.

41:19 Because of this supply, God will also plant various trees in the wilderness: the cedar...shittah (*acacia*)...myrtle ...oil tree (*'ets shemen, possibly a wild olive*)...fir...pines...box (or boxwood). There are seven species of trees symbolizing the perfection of God's work on behalf of His people.

⁶To go over to Israel today is just a live experience in the fulfillment of prophecy, as you see these things of which Isaiah spoke actually being fulfilled. Areas that were once parched wilderness, desert areas, you will see the vast irrigation project, and the pools of water. Planting hundreds of millions of trees in those wilderness areas, and the interesting thing, the various types of trees for the various benefits that each tree gives has come to pass.

41:20 The nation has become an exporter of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. At its peak, it exported these items at the value of a billion dollars a year! These verses also, seek to remedy the exiles fears about the difficulties of the journey home. The God who had long ago supplied all the needs of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai would work even greater miracles now," that is, when the time arrived when God would bring them home. God's purposes for providing water and trees are so that the people may, (1) see, (2) know, (3) consider, and (4) understand. When it all takes place, everyone would know: "... *that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.*"

SUMMARY:

⁷What provision would God make for the restoration of His people? God answered His own question by announcing that it was He who raised up Cyrus who would play a key role in releasing His people from captivity from the ends of the earth. The Babylonian exile does not mean God has ignored the covenant with His people. They are still the offspring of Abraham; still His chosen people and He have not cast them off. He remains their God, and He will strengthen and help them in the midst of their exile. God promised to protect, care for, and give His people victory over their enemies. The Lord will not only protect them, but will provide for them as well. When the poor and needy seek water, a reference to the exiles, He will open rivers of water. He will cause the wilderness to prosper, and make provision for their needs on their journey home. These are messages of reassurance to Israel that they had been chosen by Him, and they would not be forsaken.

The lesson brings to your attention from those that were depending upon idols— fake gods – those **you** had to hold up and put together; to really depending upon the real deal, the Only True Dependable God – **the One** who uphold you and holds you together now. He hasn't forsaken Israel nor you or I, and He never will. He has showed Israel and He shows us everyday that He is the "*I Am*" God; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of all generations.

APPLICATION:

The time that you think God has forsaken you, He has not; whether you are on your bed of affliction, incarcerated in prison, in a foreign country fighting a war etc., God knows where you are at this particular moment and time of your life and rest assure, He is capable to help and uphold you. He is always speaking in a "*still small voice*" to comfort the wars going on inside. He will use anything to get your attention. "*Fear Not! For God is with you! Be not dismayed for He is your God.*" Allow God to "*strengthen and help and uphold you with his righteous right hand.*"

⁶ http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=1&contentID=6842&commInfo=25&topic=Isaiah

⁷ <http://www.bibleteachingnotes.com/templates/System/details.asp?id=29183&fetch=8162>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwn-sundayschool.html>