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From typescript.

FEAR THOU NOT

by

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SERMON

*preached on Sunday morning, June 5th 1955,
at Ebenezer Chapel, Broad Oak, Heathfield.*

Text: Isaiah 41 v. 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.

This chapter is written for troubled people. Of course, everybody is troubled, but there are those who are troubled in soul, troubled in spirit, troubled in their minds.

Perhaps some of you have noticed that the people were about to go into captivity, and so the Lord says to Hezekiah at the conclusion of the 39th chapter, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. 39 v. 6 - 7). Very heavy tidings – the Lord's people going into captivity! And therefore the next chapter opens with comfort; they needed it: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God" (Isa. 40 v. 1). God only comforts *His people*; the gospel can only comfort spiritual people; true ministers can only comfort troubled consciences; so that it is a mercy if we have that peculiar kind of trouble *out of which* none but God can deliver, and *in which* none but God can comfort.

But you will notice that this chapter is referred to Jacob. God expostulates with His people, but more particularly under the name of Jacob, and wherever you find the name of Jacob in the Old Testament it is as he represents the church of God in a poor, low, destitute, desolated, despised condition. So we have in the eighth chapter: "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him" (Isa. 8 v. 17), said Jacob under the hiding of God's face; that is what faith said in his heart. Yesterday, being exceedingly tossed with tempest with respect to my own case (and our own cases are the most important, because it will be our own state, our own case, when we stand before God), I felt that I should be relieved indeed if I could be assured, in the midst of all my own darkness and sinking, of three things – and you see whether it is so with you.

In the first place, I should be thankful to have the persuasion of the Spirit in my dark moments that God is hiding His face from me. What do you think about that? Because He never hides His face from the world – they have never seen Him. His face never shines upon the world; He never shines upon the world, and, as far as hypocrites and false professors are concerned, He does not *hide his face* from them; He *departs*. Wouldn't you be thankful if, in your darkness, when with dear Job you look forward and backward, on the right hand and on the left, you could have the assurance that the Lord is hiding His face and not gone for ever, not departed?

Well, that was one thing. Another thing I felt would be a comfort was, if I had the assurance that the Lord's chastenings were a rod and not a sword, a Father's hand to correct and not a sword to destroy. Wouldn't that be a comfort to some of you?

A third thing I felt, in all the conflict within, was this: I should be thankful to know that the fiery trials through which we pass are not that oven spoken of in Malachi: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4 v. 1). Oh to be assured that, in the many fires and fiery trials through which we pass, rather than being in an oven to consume and leave neither root nor branch, it is a refiner's fire to refine and purge and make us more like Him.

This chapter opens, "Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength." Sometimes the Lord mercifully does stay His hand and allow His people to renew their strength, and he speaks to Jacob in the 14th verse and says, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." Of course, He speaks to Joseph and to David, but when he needs to comfort His dear people, He comes to the lowest. But of course it won't have much meaning to us unless we are brought there. Whatever meaning can this chapter have to those who are like the "youths," the "young men," in the preceding chapter: "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall" (v. 30). They are those professors who can manage for themselves – their own strength, their own self-confidence, their own wisdom. Then the Lord speaks to Jacob: "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend" (v. 8). There is one thing we shall prove – that whatever condition we are in, we shall not find relief by just going to this chapter and reading these verses; it will not allay your fears or bring you any comfort to read the text; there is an increasing need to seek for and to press upon the people the need of application. What we need is for the blessed Spirit who inspired the Scriptures, who moved holy men of old to write them,¹ to *apply* them, so that the very things spoken of in the Word of God may have effect in our souls and accomplish just the very thing the word says. But that was a kind word: "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." If the Lord should speak that to you heart, oh, it would both humble you and strengthen you, if the Lord should tell you who you are, your spiritual pedigree, that you are one of the children of Abraham, one of the sons of Jacob.

"Fear thou not ... be not dismayed." Those are the two exhortations in the text: "fear thou not;" "be not dismayed." And the remainder of the text is a ground for this confidence, and the ground of this confidence is God Himself. You will notice that all through that long, blessed 40th chapter, for the comfort of these troubled people, the Lord holds out before them who He is, His infinity, His Divine sovereignty, His omnipotence, His immutability, His wisdom, His understanding, of which there is no searching. *It is God Himself* - the same in the text; and you will need the same in your experience. And it will give such a meaning to some of our hymns. You will sing them with your heart and understanding also. You will know what you sing, when you sing

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee."

(C Wesley, Gadsby's 303)

"Fear thou not ... be not *dismayed*" – which is something rather more than fear. David, in the same path, expresses these two degrees of distress. He says, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou *disquieted* within me?" (Ps. 42 v. 5 & 11). To be cast down is

¹ "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1 v. 21).

one degree of fear; to be disquieted is something more than to be cast down. So “fear thou not ... be not dismayed.”

Let us look at a few of the fears only known to the people of God. It is not, indeed, altogether a fear of hell; they deserve it, and we would speak soberly about that. Oh, it is very distasteful to hear people speak lightly and glibly of hell. I know we sing that hymn,

“And if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well,”

(Watts; Gadsby’s 761)

but we do well to consider those words, because I would venture to say this, and very likely a good many people would open their eyes to hear me say it, but I *will* say it: I could not interpret these lines with respect to myself like this: ‘If my soul were sent to hell, I *myself* would approve it well.’ Do you think I ought to? I could say this; ‘I deserve it,’ but you will never be *willing* to go there. I don’t mean only because of punishment, but to be eternally separated from Him whom you both need and desire. A child of God will never be willing to go to hell, but the hymn is correct:

“Thy *righteous law* approves it well.”

If a person was to tell me that they were willing and approved it well that they should go to hell, I should conclude that that person knew nothing of what hell is in their conscience and knew nothing of what the love of God is in their soul. But you say that ‘that holy law of God approves it well; it is just; I deserve it.’ But says the hymn, even in this,

“Should I go mourning to the grave,
'Twere just ...”

Are you willing? Ah, says the good man,

“Yet, Lord, from darkness save.”

(Gadsby’s 942; from *Gospel Magazine*, 1777)

But these fears ... “Fear thou not.” One great fear of some of you may be that you have never had a beginning, that there has never been a work of grace begun in your soul. I know what that fear is. And what will relieve you? For some minister to tell you that he is sure that there is? If that could satisfy you, then I should say you *need* a beginning. Oh my friends, we need something infinitely more infallible and indubitable than our fellow-creatures’ verdict on our case! But are there some here who really fear that a work of grace has never been begun in their hearts? Well, I wouldn’t try and relieve you on that point, except for this; can you give up? Would you, under the test of Orpah and Ruth, when Naomi said unto Ruth, “Thy sister-in-law has gone back unto her people, and unto her gods.” (Ruth 1 v. 15), go back with her? Can you give up? I would not speak a word that would influence you wrongly; I would not say to you, ‘Give up if you can,’ but I do say this, that if a work of grace is begun in your heart, this will be true of you:

“He will never, never leave *you*,
Nor will let *you* quite leave Him.”

(J Hart; Gadsby’s 746, *adapted to context*)

Now, what is the secret of that? That wonderful word in Jeremiah, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good.” ‘Whatever condition they may be in, however they may backslide, however low they may sink, “I will not turn away from them, to do them good.”’

That’s one thing, “but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer. 32 v. 40). So that it is secured both ends. Then, if any of you are full of fears that a work of grace is not begun, I would say this to you, “Whereto ye have already attained, walk

by the same rule, mind the same thing.”² And that is this: if you have only attained to just an inkling of the all-sufficiency of Christ if you might but possess Him, and of His fulness, well, follow on – “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord” (Hos. 6 v. 3). Oh, it is a blessed evidence of true discipleship to continue in His word, to continue in the gospel, to continue in prayer, even if praying is so reduced with you, because of your weakness and fears, to looking, looking. If you *look* in the right direction, my friends, if it is toward His holy temple, it is an act of faith, an evidence that a work of grace is begun in your soul.

“Fear thou not.” You may be full of fears in your present experience, as was Asaph. Oh, these inward examinations, when you commune with your own heart upon your bed, and are still! Asaph did in the 77th Psalm. He says there, “I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search” (Ps. 77 v. 6). Oh, he had many fears, and when you search your heart and the Spirit shines, and discovers to you your life, and you live your life over again, he says, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” (Ps. 77 v. 3. 6-9). The world knows nothing of this. It is a language, a *language*. Do you know it? Are you strangers and foreigners to it? What an amazing thing if you were to go down on the sea front today, amongst the multitudes, and one there would suddenly receive an arrow of conviction in his heart, and you could hear one solitary individual amongst that crowd with such language in their heart. The contrast sometimes is very blessed, very sacred. It is the language of faith – And “they that say such things” – such things as David says, Asaph says, Job says, Jeremiah says – “declare plainly that they seek a country” (Heb. 11 v. 14).

“Fear thou not.” A great fear that you will have – and, speaking for myself, the greatest fear that I have – is oneself. Oh the capability of my depraved nature! It is unlimited, except for that limitation that God puts upon it. Are you afraid of yourself? I have said sometimes, and I believe it to the very last letter, that there is nobody that can do you any real harm but yourself. It is a solemn truth. There is nothing and nobody outside of yourself that can damn you. The devil cannot. Have you ever thought of it? There is only one person that can sink you lower than the grave, and that is yourself, *your* sins, *your* heart, deceitful and desperately wicked – your whole powers depraved, your whole being saturated, impregnated with poison, with sin. Are you afraid of it? And can this word come in to such a case as that – “Fear thou not”? Can there be such a wonder? There *is!* Why? Because there is One bigger than you, oh poor trembling, fearing sinner; because Christ is greater than Adam. We should not be condemned for Adam’s transgression but that we are in him by generation; we are in him as our federal head.

We should never partake of the divine benefits of Emmanuel, God’s dear incarnate Son, unless we are in Him by regeneration, and He is our glorious Head, but, if such is the case, then Christ is greater than Adam, His precious blood infinitely more than our deep, black, corrupt sins and ruin. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself” (Heb. 9 v. 14) – not the world, not the Bank of England! “Offered Himself,” blessed be His name! He could not offer more. Infinite glory! In these chapters here He is spoken of as the “Holy One of Israel” – blessed title! – where Israel gets all her holiness from.

“Offered Himself.” “Who His own self ...” - not an angel, not Michael, not the apostles, not kings of the earth, not riches - “offered *Himself*” – “who His own self bare our sins in His own body” (1 Pet. 2 v. 24). There is His divine Person and His sacred humanity. “Fear thou not,” sinner.

² “Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (Phil. 3 v. 16).

“Thus, though a sinner, I am safe;
He pleads, before the throne.”

(Newton; Gadsby's 119)

“Fear thou not.” Oh, blessed gospel! I know this – I have had a sight of myself, and, when you cannot see the Lord nor feel Him, you will sink nearly into despair, but

“The gospel bears my spirit up;
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation of my hope.”

(Watts; Gadsby's 83)

“Fear thou not.” You will fear the devil. He goes “about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5 v. 8).

“Fiery darts of fierce temptations...”

(Hart; Gadsby's 270)

And he has plenty to work upon. The prince of this world came to the dear Redeemer but could find nothing to work on. Oh, blessed Substitute! Blessed people who belong to Him! The devil could find nothing in *Him*; he finds everything in *us* to work on: unbelief, scepticism, atheism, depravity, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life. I am afraid of the devil. Oh, but the promise is, the Lord “shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16 v. 20). Tempted soul, He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4 v. 15). “He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb. 2 v. 18).

“Fear thou not.” You may have fears about your dying day, and you will if you cannot see your beginning, if the Lord hides His face, and if you are in the night when the beasts of the field creep forth, when the lions roar. To look then at your latter end, at the day of your death – you will have many fears. I have. You can't dismiss them – a good thing, too. I know we sing

“Christians, dismiss your fear,”

(Hart; Gadsby's 487)

but they need to be dismissed *aright*. If you have fears you can dismiss, then it is not the secret of the close of the text. We may well look at ourselves and see whether we have these evidences, whether we have that kind of soul trouble so that we are compelled with Job to say to all, even to the Lord's people, when we are in that trouble, “Miserable comforters are ye all” (Job 16 v. 2), and when we have only one door of hope, one source of comfort, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” (Job 23 v. 3). And when we are in darkness, it is a mercy if it is such darkness that we can find no light, a darkness which you cannot sing away, you cannot read away. In His dealings with His people in these many fears He makes known who He is and this is why “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4 v. 18).

“Fear thou not” with respect to the end. These fears are sanctified to give new life to prayer. Oh, look at the many prayers in the Scriptures in view of our mortality, our end. “O spare me,” said David, “that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more” (Ps. 39 v. 13). He did not intend that he might recover physical strength, but that he might be confirmed in his soul, his faith in Christ, his hope strengthened, his house set in order. “Fear thou not” with respect to the end. Oh, with what sacred majesty Paul concludes that most blessed chapter on the resurrection. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory” (1 Cor. 15 v. 55, 57). “Fear thou not.” The death of Christ was the death of deaths. He hath “the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1 v. 17). You fear them both, but He has the key of death and of hell, and, blessed be His name, He has the key of salvation. He opens. He has the key to the Scriptures, the key to a sinner's heart, the key into the church of God. “Fear thou not” with respect to the end.

“In that dread moment, O to hide
Beneath His sheltering blood!
‘Twill Jordan’s icy waves divide,
And land my soul with God.

(Kent; Gadsby’s 1093)

What would allay your fears with respect to your end? Oh, not to read the Bible only; thousands read the Bible who know nothing about God. But *this*, what dear Mr Hart says – for the Holy Ghost to repeat that word,³ “It is finished.” In a general sense it is true of the whole church of God, but generalities even in a true sense will not comfort your heart; you will want the blessed Spirit to bring the whole of the gospel, the whole of Christ, the whole of the infinite glory of His person, His life, His work, His blessed death and glorious resurrection, to you and into your heart, as though you were the only one that He came to save, and you will want the Holy Spirit to repeat that word for *you*, “It is finished” – everything finished: the law fulfilled, the devil vanquished, the works of the devil in you and for you destroyed.

“Fear thou not.” Of course, it takes in the pathway of life, too, for the pilgrimage of God’s people, constitutes them wayfaring men, and they “wander in the wilderness,” where it is but a “solitary way” (Ps. 107 v. 4). And oh, the obstacles! I have had many fears that I should stand, no, not another day. I have had many fears that I have preached my last sermon, and many fears that the greatest sin against me when I come to die will be my preaching. Many fears – but what a mercy if these things in the hand of the blessed Spirit are used to keep us awake, alive, and to break up our fallow ground and to deliver us from cold formality.

But we shall fear many things in the pathway of life, many enemies. His people are a weak, dependent people; no wit or will of theirs⁴ can get them through. The fear of the Lord forbids that they should do as others; they are at a disadvantage and handicapped in competition with the world. They have many fears, and, in these days, when we are come to that condition that men can hardly buy and sell unless they have the mark of the beast in their hand or in their forehead, many fears. Oh, but, says David (how you can trace these people through the Scriptures!), are they your *companions*? Do you understand them? Yet they come to the Lord; these weak people are the strongest people on earth; these poor people are the richest in the world. David says, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.” Many things concern me: my soul, my salvation, the glory of God, the church of God, my beginning, my continuing, my latter end, and I have many concerns in this life – my family, my business, many trials; but he “will perfect that which concerneth me.” He had a good reason for it: “Thy mercy endureth for ever.” He commits the whole to the Lord, and says, “Forsake not the work of Thy own hands” (Ps. 138 v. 8).

“Fear thou not” whatever pathway you are in. “Commit thy way unto the Lord,” and don’t trust in yourself when you have committed it to Him. Plenty of people pray, and then go and carry out their own devices, but “commit thy way unto the Lord; *trust also*.” Have you noticed the connection? Oh my friends, you may be offended in me, but I speak to myself, and you can listen if you like. I have proved that in my nature, and even in my life now, I have no lack of evidences that I am a practical atheist. But “commit thy way unto the

³ “It is finished,” said the Lord,
In his dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the word.
Full salvation’s in it.” (J. Hart: Gadsby’s 306)

⁴ “No wit or will of man,
Or learning he may boast,
Nor power of reason can
Draw sinners unto Christ” (Berridge: Gadsby’s 888).

Lord; trust also," as well as commit thy way there, "and He will bring it to pass" (Ps. 37 v. 5), and, as we have said, that is one of the many things that are indefinite in the word of God. It does not describe the "it," and a good thing it doesn't. It is *your* 'it;' it is *my* 'it;' it is every 'it' that His dear people have to trouble them. "He will bring *it* to pass." And as Job says, "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him" (Job 23 v. 14). Ah, you may come into disaster, into affliction, and into trouble, but, when this blessed One is an Interpreter in your heart, you will say with Job, right down in the very ditch, you will say when you are laid upon a bed of pain or affliction, when you come into loss or distress, 'The dear Lord is performing the very thing He has appointed for me, and many such things are with Him.'

"Fear thou not, for I am with thee."

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