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Sermon preached by Mr F L Gosden at Galeed, Brighton
on Lord's day morning, January 7th 1962.

"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

Last Wednesday, the first preaching service in this year, we attempted to consider that great prayer of David for the church of God: "Save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance; feed them also, and lift them up for ever." I have been considering the adversities and afflictions that abound among us as we commence the services on the Lord's day, and I have desired that the Lord would by His Spirit graciously speak in the hearts of those who tremble at His Word, and tremble as they look forward to the future - and some may have these things before them and wonder how they will stand the trying day. This word came into our mind, together with that in Deuteronomy: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, thy strength shall be." They are exceeding great and precious promises, and those promises are unconditional. They are absolute as being "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus;" and those promises are the iron and brass that are under those shoes. Those shoes represent the Gospel. It was a part of the whole armour of God: "Shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace;" and the invincible 'shalls' and 'wills' of Jehovah are the iron and brass under those shoes, as it is in the margin there - 'Under thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days thy strength shall be.'

It expressos the text, "As thy days, so" and the 'so' and the 'as' are connected. The days will not be the same. There may be bright summer days in your experience, days of prosperity; there may be days of tempests and clouds, days of darkness and calamity, days a of conflict with the devil; but as thy days thy strength shall be. That promise covers the whole of life, and most mercifully enters into every day of your life. For again in the 37th Psalm we read, "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be for ever." Blessed word! You put the two together "As thy day so shall thy strength be; for the Lord knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be for ever." It covers the whole journey. The Lord not only knows the way that you take, but He knows the particular day that you are in. Oh some are days of extremity, where we wonder where the scene will end: Therefore it seems to me to embrace the whole of the 107th Psalm which had been read.

'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' A promise is really only of that force and value according to the ability, and circumstances, and conditions of the one that promises. All human promises are uncertain and weak, but these are definite promises. They are absolutely unconditional and depend upon no circumstances at all, because divine sovereignty is in them. But there is another thing - these great promises will be fulfilled, but the point is whether they belong to us. Therefore these pronouns in the text are very important: 'Fear Thou not, for I am with thee for I am Thy God.' Neither the promises, nor the blessings of God are cast about promiscuously. They are intended for His people, and His people are manifested by their characters in the Bible.

Well, let us look then to whom these exhortations and promises are made. They are made to those that fear, to those that are dismayed, to those that are weak, to those that are helpless. It is a very encouraging word. The character to whom these words and this chapter are addressed is "worm Jacob", and he represents the church of God in her wilderness afflicted condition. "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord", because they are poor and afflicted spiritually. So that it is, very clearly inferred that if these exhortations and promises are to be effectual and have any meaning in them, there must be those who fear and are dismayed. It is worthy of consideration that the characters which the eternal God the Son condescended to assume would have neither use nor meaning, unless there were those brought into a condition to need them. Therefore the very offices and characters that the Lord Jesus sustained made the other necessary. He is the Good Shepherd, and a shepherd must have a flock. He is King in Zion, and a king must have his subjects. He is the great High Priest, and the duty of a high priest was to offer sacrifices for sins, and therefore there must be sinners. He came to be a Refuge, and therefore there must be those who are pursued, those who are in the midst of the tempest. He came to be a glorious Leader, and there must be those that follow Him. It may perhaps gather up some who have concluded they are completely outside altogether. I believe we made a remark something like this lately, that our condition of self-destruction, and self-ruin, and death, and corruption does not make any necessity in God to save us, neither can we plead our ruin for salvation. But you turn that round the other way. The very fact that God's dear Son, sent by the Father and ordained in the covenant of grace to be a Saviour and a Redeemer -there in the covenant there is a necessity, and the Lord Jesus as a Saviour, His work, and His sufferings, and His death would be completely abortive if there were no sinners to save and so I feel that this wisdom and goodness of God is inside of this promise.

'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' It is by these promises that His people are made partakers of the divine nature, as Peter declares; "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, by which we are made partakers of the divine nature." That is a very important and instructive point, for how can promises made over and given by the Spirit to a sinner, make that sinner a partaker of the divine nature? Well, as I view it, in this way. If you look at the promises of the Gospel, you will find it is impossible for a promise to be given you, without your receiving the Promiser in it. You look at these promises and see whether they could really be made ours, without being made a partaker of Christ. 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.'

It is a wonderful thing, my friends, those of you who are exercised in your souls and want something more than notion. Look for the fulfilment of the promise in your own experience. Look and seek for the accomplishment of salvation in your own experience. I have been thankful that vital godliness is experimental. You cannot really learn it. I know theology is considered the prince of sciences and is a very blessed science; but if it remains a science it is of no use to us. 'There is no life in science or in a correct theory. A man may sit down and study a book on gardening and never touch a fork or spade, but that won't do the garden nor produce fruit. Oh to have an experimental religion! It enters into the vole of the Word of God. This is experience – 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' This is not spoken to a person that has no fear. There is not a single occasion where the Lord says, 'Fear not,' that a reason is given that there is nothing to fear. There is everything to fear, there is everything to cause us dismay. The whole world is in a state of peril, a state of danger. It is corrupt. Murderers, thieves, lurk around every corner. Nations are rising up against nations, suspicions and jealousies are

rife, and that is in the wilderness. There are greater things to fear inside of us. Some things you may feel to be assured of; you know I can truly say before God that I more fear myself than I do all the calamities that can come upon this earth. And I would say this, I fear myself more than I fear the devil. The devil could not damn me. There is only one thing that can damn us, my friends, and that is our own personal sins, that's all. So that you may be full of fear looking at yourself, at your past life when the Lord set your secret sins before you in the light of His countenance. Oh how He does bring them into solemn relief: as when the sun shines through the window, you see myriads of specks of dust that you did not see before and you fear your terrible self. Yet this 'fear not' takes that in.

'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' Oh how we need it at the beginning of this year: How Joshua needed it when he took command of the people from Moses! The Lord said unto Him, "As I was with hoes, so will I be with thee. Be of good courage, for I am with thee." You must fill in for yourselves about your own case. You may have many fears relative to circumstances and providence, but if the Lord is in it, you will live to praise Him for His wonderful works. Oh look at the fears of those pilgrims through the 107th Psalm! They are brought to their wit's end; they fell down, there was none to help. That precious immortal Psalm has described the pathway of many a pilgrim and given them heart. Being compassed about with that cloud of witnesses enabled them to run with patience the race set before them. The Lord will bring us to impossibilities in our circumstances. I know what it is. I am looking back now to a period that I shall never forget it. Every door locked and barred, mountains impassable, fiery furnaces, and deep waters. 'Fear thou not.'

And oh the reason of it: 'I am with thee.' Not some great earthly scientists, who ridiculously send men up into space, and yet cannot do the simplest thing, to disperse fog so that men can get about. Oh that man knew himself as man by a sight of an infinite incomprehensible God: You will feel a love to that God in Christ. Look who it is with you, Not a great scientist, no great man of this world, But He who created it out of nothing; I the high and holy One; I to whom the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers, the nations as the drop of a bucket: 'Fear not, I am with thee.'

My wisdom is perfect; supreme is My power. (Gadsby's 993)

'Fear thou not.' We shall need it through this year, my friends! I feel it. It was not easy for me to begin to preach, but it is ever so much more difficult to continue, I know more about myself now than then but I trust in proportion that I know something more about God. This will happen: "He must increase; I must decrease." This is how He will do it. He will bring you into a place and cover you with confusion, as He did poor Job. 'Fear thou not,' He knows no conditions. He brought His people to the Red Sea, and the Egyptians pursued; hedged up on each side. "Fear thou not; command the people that they go forward."

You will notice that that command was before the waters were divided. That is a trial of faith. The Lord will bring you to a complete standstill so that you see no way of escape, and command you to go forward. If you read that in Exodus and take notice of it, the Lord said unto Moses, "Why criest thou unto Me? Command the people that they go forward, and take thy staff and divide the waters." "Oh trust in Him at all times; ye people our out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us."

'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' This too will be a word of comfort with respect to our souls. Do you fear, and feel that you have cause to fear, that your beginning was wrong? Do you fear that you have made a great fundamental mistake somewhere? Do you fear that the powers of sin within will cause you shipwreck before you get to the end? Do you fear that you will outlive your religion? Do you fear that if persecution should come, you will never stand? Well, it isn't everybody that fears that, but if you do, 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' The Lord says "If thine heart condemn thee, God is greater than thy heart." But what we need, my friends, is for the Holy Spirit to reveal the Lord Jesus in all that He is and has condescended to become. His majesty is great; His mercy is no less. Oh hear the Shepherd's voice: "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You may be labouring to enter into it, striving to take the kingdom of heaven by force - and a mercy to have that amount of faith. But says He, "Fear not, little flock." You fear that you will never enter in, but "it is your Father's good pleasure" to give it to you. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is all contained in "I". There is the ground of confidence and hope, and the strength of faith.

'Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed.' Dismay is a greater degree of fear. David speaks of these two degrees of fear in the 42nd Psalm: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul: and why art thou disquieted within me?" To be cast down is one thing; to be disquieted is more. To be disquieted and dismayed are the same thing. You may fear things, but now you say, "The things that I feared are come. I feared them, but they are here." 'h what a good word this is: You think of it through the year, my troubled friends, and remember this, that God is omnipotent, and immutable, and the sovereign Lord of all.

'Be not dismayed, for I am thy God.' This is stronger. He suits His mercy and manifestations to what we need. 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.' But this – 'be not dismayed 'when things come. You may think: 'Well, why does the Lord, who could prevent it, allow it?' "Thou hast shown Thy people hard things, and made them to drink the wine of astonishment." Oh said Martha and Mary, "If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Why was not He there? He knew it. But He says, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that ye might believe." He may let you die, or bring a death upon the promise. He did upon the promise made to Joseph. Then he was in a pit, and then in prison. Fear thou not, Joseph. Fear thou not, worm Jacob. Fear not, Daniel, in the lions' den.

'For I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God.' To my mind, that is even something stronger than, 'I am with thee.' 'I am thy God;' here is a relationship.

*Oh could I say, 'the Lord is mine,'
'Tis all my soul desires. (Gadsby's 1079)*

This relationship is made a song, as in Zephaniah: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save; He will rejoice over thee with singing; He will rest in His love." There is a real ground for the people of God to rejoice always. I know what it is to be brought into a set-fast trial, my feet in the stocks, unable to move. But there is no place or condition where this text is not full of authority. You haven't to wait until you get out of a dungeon. It will take effect there.

'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee.' Therefore the subject of the promise must be weak, and the Lord will see to it that we are. "He weakened my strength in the way", said David. You may of course be physically weak. You may be weak with respect to your circumstances and conditions; but the Lord will make you weak in this sense, that you will be utterly dependent upon Him. Nothing else to depend upon.

*Few, if any, come to Jesus,
Till reduced to self-despair (Gadsby's 396)*

Oh what a mercy self-despair is! Have you been brought there? I can speak from experience upon this point. I have been brought to self-despair. If you were to be brought into a state and condition suitable for the blessed, rich, living, full Gospel, then you must know the truth in experience,

'I will strengthen thee.' See how He speaks of it in the preceding chapter. There His people complained and said: "Our way is hid from the Lord, and our judgment is passed over from our God." You may know what that is. He takes no notice. Things get worse rather than better, and "my judgment is passed over from my God." That is to say, 'He has dismissed my case and takes no notice of it; gives no judgment of it, no direction.' But the Lord comes and remonstrates with them: "Why do you say it, Jacob? Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding." When the blessed Spirit brings that into a troubled heart, oh how it does strengthen! 'I will strengthen thee.' "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

There is another way He strengthens His people, and that is by revealing His glory. "The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel. They shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God." And what will that do? "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not; your God will come with recompense; He will come and save you." 'I will strengthen thee.' Nobody else can. Are you in a position of soul, in all your weakness, and that weakness not innocent, unable to pray, unable to think, unable to read the Word of God? And do you know what it is to have that helplessness that not even your best friends can help or strengthen you? I am persuaded of this, that the Lord will have His people lean upon Him and trust in Him. "He will not give His glory to another, not His praise to graven images."

'I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee.' These things appear similar, but they are not the same. To be strengthened is good. Oh but you need help, and "help is laid upon One that is mighty." And there are so many different kinds of help. On slippery ground, some who are feeble need the help of others to keep them from falling. David proved this: "When my foot slippeth, then Thy mercy held me up." 'I will help thee.' Or in natural things, a poor man may get into difficulties and need financial help and that is so with respect to the soul. To know our bankruptcy and that we have nothing but faith, no righteousness, no merit, nothing to commend us to God. We are helpless relative to salvation. But says the Lord, 'I will help thee.' He has ability to help. He has unsearchable riches to help. He has omnipotence to help, to deliver us from the ditch and the miry clay and He has infinite wisdom to help in a way of guiding His people. He knows the end from the beginning. So that

in this help there is divine power and infinite wisdom and ability, and what is above all, there is love, divine love. The help that love gives is different from any other help.

'I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee.' How full is the promise! But do we need it? You look at the text and at yourself, your soul exercises and conflicts, your pathway through the wilderness, your fears because of the past and the present, and what are your fears with regard to the future and your dying day. And then look at the text, do you need this blessed One? 'I will uphold thee.' The only way we shall ever get through. Why does He do it? Because of the covenant of grace; because it is the will of God that "none which Thou hast given Me shall be lost." Because it is Christ's responsibility that every one of His pilgrims shall appear in Zion, not one missing, not a vacant throne. Oh look at the glorious prospect! But it is through much tribulation, not a little.

*Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation or pain? He told me no less; (Gadsby's 232)*

Amen.