

**Isaiah 51:9-16 (NKJV)**

**<sup>9</sup> Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, In the generations of old. *Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart, And wounded the serpent?***

**<sup>10</sup> *Are You not the One who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; That made the depths of the sea a road For the redeemed to cross over?***

**<sup>11</sup> So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

**<sup>12</sup> "I, *even I, am* He who comforts you. Who *are* you that you should be afraid Of a man *who* will die, And of the son of a man *who* will be made like grass?**

**<sup>13</sup> And you forget the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth; You have feared continually every day Because of the fury of the oppressor, When *he has* prepared to destroy. And where *is* the fury of the oppressor?**

**<sup>14</sup> The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, That he should not die in the pit, And that his bread should not fail.**

**<sup>15</sup> But I *am* the LORD your God, Who divided the sea whose waves roared-- The LORD of hosts *is* His name.**

**<sup>16</sup> And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the heavens, Lay the foundations of the earth, And say to Zion, '*You are My people.*' "**

Outline-

51:9-16 Awake God's comfort is invincible

Then Lord willing in future weeks will be

51:17-23 Awake God's wrath is past

52:1-10 Awake God's salvation is spreading

52:11,12 Depart- the life of pilgrimage has begun

Isaiah's message here could pretty much be summed up in Eph 5:14 "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you"

Our extended text uses the word Awake 3 times. It is like last week's text that compelled us to listen.

**<sup>9</sup> Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD!** Have you ever wanted God to wake up? Have you ever appealed to him in such a way that

you project your own weaknesses upon Him? Have you ever felt like God really was not understanding the seriousness of the situation we were facing? Because if He God did understand He would surely **do** something. So we cried out to God for Him to wake up, to pay attention, to get with the program. We cried out to Him because we were sure He was the only one who could help us. But we just could not imagine why He would have **allowed some things** if He was really paying attention to our lives.

Well we are not alone. David did the same thing in some of his prayers. Jesus even told us to ask boldly and confidently. Remember what He said in Luke 11:5-10? He spoke of being the person who shows up at your friend's house after hours and being such a nuisance that your friend gives you what you ask, not because he is your friend, but because he is tired of you keeping him awake asking. The point is not that God is like our friend. The point is that persistence is often needed and useful in prayer. It is the faith that will not take "no" for an answer when we know God has promised His "Yes".

So some of our asking will look almost unreasonable, not technically accurate even. That is the prayer being offered in our text. God wake up, because if you would **get involved** this problem would be solved.

Does God need to wake up, technically? Obviously no. Does God need to put on strength? He never changes. He is all powerful all the time. But does He always act in every circumstance? Well, depending upon what we mean, no. So to call upon Him in this way is not a problem. It is not exhibiting faithlessness. It can be exhibiting faith.

**Awake as in the ancient days, In the generations of old. Are You not *the arm that cut Rahab apart, And wounded the serpent?***

This is one of those places that studying the Bible alone would not produce understanding. We need to know something about the culture **this was written to** in order to understand the meaning.

Have you ever seen some evil that a human is doing and you instantly perceive that there are demons driving the behavior? This is **that** kind of insight. If we were looking on the Exodus as one of the Egyptian slaves, we may have concluded that Pharaoh is just a very selfish and proud individual. Isaiah gives us the inside scoop from God's perspective.

Rahab is Egypt. Isaiah sees Egypt for what it is. The Canaanites told tales of a sea dragon. This was a beast that evilly stirred up the seas. And this dragon was killed by a hero-god. Isaiah uses that imagery that his audience would be aware of, like we would be aware of **little red riding hood's big bad wolf**. He was telling his listeners that Egypt was not merely a product of man's

selfishness. It had a spiritual driving force. And the hero-god God slayed that dragon.

This is not a new thought by any means, but it is always good to be reminded because it is so easy to forget what we cannot see. We are surrounded by angelic and demonic forces. We should never reduce life down to what we can see and touch, what can be explained by science alone. There are spiritual forces. And we can rest assured that demons have incentive plans, mostly made up of **pain they can avoid**, for causing our fall. That is what they are up to all day long. The devil does not want us to consider this truth. He does not want us to be aware. Now we know that the devil does not have any ultimate power over us. But he still has the power of influence, of advertising. He and his demons are free to watch our lives and, as they see weaknesses, they are sometimes given freedom to test us, to exploit our weaknesses. The world around us can laugh at these concepts. But we as Christians should see through the worldly realities to their spiritual origins.

### **1 Peter 5:8 (NKJV)**

**<sup>8</sup> Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.**

We are told to live our lives being aware of these spiritual realities, these spiritual dangers.

Then Isaiah says “Awake as in the ancient days”. Isaiah is saying, awake and do the kinds of things you used to do, the kinds of things that would protect Jerusalem and not punish them.

Let’s go on to verse 10.

**<sup>10</sup> Are You not *the One* who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; That made the depths of the sea a road For the redeemed to cross over?**

We need to use our imaginations this morning in a good way. Imagine that you had been in slavery all your life in Egypt. You had no power over your life. You were told what you were going to do and you had to do it. No tantrums or dramatics or arguments would get you out of this obligation. Nothing you could do would change your miserable plight. Sometimes we think our life conditions are bad. But mostly because we have never had it **this** bad. We have no idea what a slaves life would be like.

Then Moses shows up representing God and things get worse for you. But Moses does not take a vote. He just keeps pressing on. Then you start seeing horrible things happening to your captors. But the Pharaoh still won’t let you go. Now you might be getting your hopes up. You might start thinking, you

know what? God might do a miracle and get us out of this mess. And then finally He does. You are free, for the first time in your life.

We might think, at this point, that all the struggles are over. God is going to take care of us by giving us everything good in an easy sort of process. Then just as we get to the Red Sea we look behind us and see dust clouds. We know what it means. Pharaoh changed his mind. We look around. There are no weapons. We might have a few rakes and shovels. But they will not help us with the chariots and the swords and spears and arrows of the enemy.

There is **one word** that describes their position as far as the eye could see, as far a reason could go. Their position was hopeless. Imagine if you were there. The dust clouds would have added up logically to your doom.

Now, given what you know now, how smart would have it been to believe that God would come through for you? We know **now** it would have been absolutely safe to trust God completely. We know **now** that the Israelites were not in danger, no matter how bad it looked. We know **now** that faith in God would have freed these people from all the worry and turmoil they felt in their souls. It would have freed them from all the wrong thinking they did.

The question for us this morning is, why do we **need to see the future** before we can **depend upon God**? What is God supposed to do to free us from our mistrust in Him? That is what worry is, is it not? When are we going to believe in Him **ahead of time** because of what we know of Him **in time past**?

This prayer in our text is one made in grave circumstances. Things **looked** very bad. But they were **not** very bad. Because God had made a promise. God has made promises to us. Maybe we want them to be, I will never allow you to face loss. I will never allow you to face pain, physical or psychological. I will never allow terribly hurtful things to happen to you. He has not promised that. But He has promised that He will work good in every circumstance for His beloved. We can assume, by that, that no circumstance is meaningless or arbitrary. It has passed through our Father's permission before it happens to us. Can we not trust this God who has proven faithful in **all human history** and who has proven faithful in **our history**? Can we not trust Him? This is the same God that delivered the Israelites from an absolutely impossible position. Can He not be trusted in to do the same for us?

**11 So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

Isaiah is saying here that the captives of Babylon will return to Zion just like the Israelites went through the Red Sea.

We at Ferndale have good theology. We tend to think deeply about things, don't we? But I have a question for us.

When we come to situations where the Red Seas stare us in the face, when we come to spots when our Babylonian captors abuse us, when we come to spots in our lives that it looks like only bad things are going to happen to us.... This is real life now. This is the stuff we face in day to day existence. This is not some **theoretical** test we can pass. In those times, do we have a rock solid, no wavering, total expectation that **what comes from God's hand is the absolute best that this life can offer to us for our eternal welfare?** If that is not what our theology produces, we might as well scrap it because it is doing us no good. It is only puffing us up. True knowledge of God, true experiential epignosis of God must result in a supernatural trust in God that no psychiatrist can explain. That is what belief does. It looks through the turmoil to the other end. And for the joy that sets before us we endure, knowing that it is worth whatever we pay.

What is wrong with those statements? What is wrong with that reasoning? I would argue that there is nothing wrong with it. And if not, we have no excuse not to trust God in whatever situation we are facing. If I am wrong, let me know. I want to know. I do not want to lead people astray. But if I am right, if God deserves to be trusted, let's go after any of the strongholds in our lives that display distrust in God instead of trust. That exude a belief in a God that **will not come through for us** instead of a belief in a God **that will** come through for us.

The ransomed of the Lord have a tremendous future. We will make it to our glorious destination singing. There is singing in store for us. Do we act that way? Do the people around us say that about us? Do we have that kind of optimism toward God? Do we act as if facing **the hard times** we face will result in **everlasting joy** on our heads? That is the promise of God.

What you and I have in store for us, if we are believers in Christ, is eternal joy and gladness. Another translation is that gladness and joy will overtake us. They will catch up to us and overcome us. That is the truth, if God is not a liar. That is what we have to look forward to. Is that not absolutely amazing? Do you like joy? Do you like gladness? I know I do. The word promises that is our destination. Do you want something better than that? Do you want temporary bliss? Would you prefer temporary comfort in exchange for that? I don't think any one of us would rationally make that trade. Christ can be trusted to come through for us. Whatever you face, I don't care what it is, you can face it faithfully. And the reward for doing so will be worth a million times more than what it costs you now.

Are you tired of sorrow and sighing? We have plenty of that here and it is called for. There are lots of reason for sorrow and sighing. But you know what. One day they will flee away. They will make a hasty retreat. Why? They will simply have no home in the bliss that God has prepared for us. We need to remember every day we wake up, along with the fact that God wants to communicate with us, that we are headed toward a wonderful eternal existence that will make every cost we pay seem like a minor pittance of a price.

<sup>12</sup> **"I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who *are* you that you should be afraid Of a man *who* will die, And of the son of a man *who* will be made like grass?**

<sup>13</sup> **And you forget the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth; You have feared continually every day Because of the fury of the oppressor, When *he has* prepared to destroy. And where *is* the fury of the oppressor?**

Remember how we started with Awake awake. Here is God's response. I, I. You and I can usually make a laundry list of everything **we think we need** when we face something hard. Maybe we can convince those around us that we need these things too. But God is not convinced because **He knows what we need**. And the very most important thing we need is Him.

Look at this closely. How many times do we fear the results about **what people around us can decide to do to us**? What if they eliminate Medicare? What if they make it illegal to school our own children? What if they make it illegal to tell the truth about what God says about sexuality? What do we need? We think we need that stuff to change. But what we really need is God. God is the one who comforts us. Why be afraid of men that die. Why be afraid of the temporary?

The reasoning here is radical. Look at these verses closely. Have there not been countless humans who have put believers to death because of their belief in Christ? Yes. There have. Yet the reasoning still holds. Men, no matter how much power they may have, never hold our fate in their hands. Never.

Look at the contrast. In all of our focus, there is that which **we remember** and there is that which **we forget**. We can make all kinds of excuses that we are free to believe if we want to. But God reveals crystal clarity on the topic. He has no confusion, no angst. There is that which we remember and there is that which we forget.

The multiple choice test here about theology is seen to be useless. What this is talking about is what we believe in daily life, what we display with our words and actions.

Here is one belief- **Who are you that you should be afraid Of a man who will die.** Notice how this is phrased. Who do you think you are? There is no sympathy here because no sympathy is called for. God might as well say, how arrogant can you be? Look at what you are fearing. You are fearing the creation. You are fearing human beings who are just like you. You are fearing the consequences of what human beings can do. You are allowing your regard of them to take the place of your trust in me. Who do you think you are. You might expect to get some compassion from God at this point. But we don't. We might expect God would say something soothing like, "Come on now. You know that these people really cannot do anything contrary to my plan. Please think about that some more." But that is not the response at all. Who do you think you are to fear anyone but me? That is the attitude. Does that make us rethink our fearful responses and attitudes? It should. This is God's word. This is God's attitude. He isn't showing sympathy here. So maybe we shouldn't show ourselves sympathy when we fear what He says He is offended by. Why is He offended?

**<sup>13</sup> And you forget the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth;**

That is why. You cannot live in fear of what time and chance can do to you without forgetting the sovereign God. Either God determines what will happen to you, or time and chance determines it apart from Gods control. If this is wrong, feel free to say so. Show me afterward and I will gladly correct it next week. But if this is true, we have got to do business with it. We can have trust in God or we can have fear of events, but we cannot have both at the same time. We **forget God** to fear what men can do. If we **trust God** we **do not fear** what men can do. Do you see any other alternative here? Do you see any other way out?

Look one more time at this:

**You have feared continually every day Because of the fury of the oppressor, When *he has* prepared to destroy. And where *is* the fury of the oppressor?**

Is this a statement of existence that God accepts? You have feared continually every day because of what people can do. I would submit that it is not. If we are living in fear, this fear must be addressed. It must be dealt with. We must be helped with it. This state cannot be accepted as part of the normal Christian life. If it can be said of us that we have feared continually every day because of what can happen to us in the world of people, we need to seek change. We need to do whatever we can to learn how to trust God in the midst of our circumstances.

The fear of what man can do is the denial of God. God's promises and His track record should make us bold. Our brother Ortlund quotes a story that is very fitting here.

**Armando Valladares was a prisoner of Castro for twenty-two years. In prison his faith in Christ came alive.**

**I had come to prison with some religious feeling; my beliefs were genuine but no doubt superficial at that time, since they had never been submitted to hard trial. I held to the religion I had learned at home and at school, but it was very much like a man who has acquired good manners or who carries along the lessons of the things he first learns to read, without examining them. But very quickly I began to experience a substantial change in the nature of my beliefs.... There came a moment when, seeing those young men full of courage depart to die before the firing squad and shout "*Viva Cristo Rey!*" at the fateful instant, I not only understood instantly, as though by a sudden revelation, that Christ was indeed there for me at the moments when I prayed not to be killed, but realized as well that he served to give my life, and my death if it came to that, ethical meaning. Both my life and my death would be dignified by my belief in him.... Because of my situation, it seemed my life would necessarily be a life of resistance, but I would be sustained in it by a soul filled with love and hope.**

**Those cries of the executed patriots—"Long live Christ the King! Down with Communism!"—had wakened me to a new life as they echoed through the two-hundred-year-old moats of the fortress. The cries became such a potent and stirring symbol that by 1963 the men condemned to death were gagged before being carried down to be shot. The jailers feared those shouts.<sup>[3]</sup>**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

This is what it looks like when our trust in God becomes greater than our love for our own safety and comfort and life. This is the kind of life Christ called us to, whether or not we ever face a firing squad. This is the kind of life that looks at the dust clouds of the coming army of Egypt and does not waste time worrying. Instead it trusts what God has in mind for us.

Next verse.

**<sup>14</sup> The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, That he should not die in the pit, And that his bread should not fail.**

Look here. God is paying attention to what is happening to us in the bad spots. Even when it looks like the evil men have the upper hand, they do not. God will come through for us at just the right time. Oh it may not be for the exact

same purpose we would think. He may want us to learn things we really did not want to learn. But he will not allow our destruction at the hands of men. He might allow our death, but He will not allow our destruction. He will always intervene at just the right time.

**15 But I am the LORD your God, Who divided the sea whose waves roared-- The LORD of hosts is His name.**

**16 And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the heavens, Lay the foundations of the earth, And say to Zion, 'You are My people.' "**

I like how brother Ortland puts this. He takes the first 7 words of verse 15 and the last 7 of verse 16. "I am the Lord your God...saying to Zion, 'You are my people.'"

Then he says this:

**God forms an unbreakable bond with his people and gives them firm promises. The conversation goes like this. God: "I am your God. You are my people. I will bless you." Sinners: "But at our best, we barely believe you." God: "True. But I will bless you." Sinners: "But we don't deserve you." God: "More than you know! But I will bless you." Sinners: "But we don't live up to this. We're cowards." God: "You are. But I will bless you." Sinners: "But we're so entrenched in this world, we'll never change." God: "Not true. You are Zion, the eternal city of God. I will bless you accordingly, and everything will change."**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

Verses 15 and 16 are so encouraging. When we face the hard situations that seem to show no signs of changing, when we face the hard challenges in ourselves that show no signs of changing, we are left with a truth from God. He is the eternal "But" in our lives. We have life situations, **but God**. We have patterns of failure in our own lives, **but God**. But I am the Lord your God, God says. That is the contradiction to every other counter evidence in our lives. He is the one that made a path through the very middle of the sea. **He** did the impossible so the **people of God** could do the impossible. And He has done all kinds of impossible works so that at the end of the day He can say **You are My people**, and we will **be** His people.

It always comes back to God. The salvation of God's people always comes back to God. You and I can't seem to help it. There is something in us that wants to say, what about me? I was smart wasn't I? Didn't I make a great decision? Look at how I obeyed God and followed God. And our record just laughs in our faces. The facts are the cosmic joke. There is only one

explanation for why you and I are sitting in these seats this morning. And they are found in the words, "**But God**".

I hope that we are encouraged this morning to look at how we trust God this week. If your children trusted **your promises to them** like we trust **God's promises to us**, would we be pleased with our children or angry at them? If they were continually afraid of things you have told them that you can and will take care of, how would you take it? If they went on and on about how much they love and trust you, but they can never seem to actually believe what you say, how would you respond?

All of us need to do business with this. Do we really trust God? Do we really think that He will give us everything we need, even if what we need is the courage to face a very difficult situation? Do we really think that God will protect us from every harm that would destroy us? Do we really think that His wisdom concerning what is good for us is greater than our wisdom of what is good for us? And do we really believe that the end He has for us is worth everything He might put us through? How do our lives answer that question?