

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

NEEDLESS FEARS.

A Sermon

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“Who art thou that . . . hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?”—
Isaiah li. 12, 13.

OBJECTS often influence us out of proportion to their value because of their nearness. For instance, the moon is a very small insignificant body compared with the sun, yet it has far more influence over the tides and many other matters in the world than the sun has, simply because it is so much nearer to the earth than the sun is. The life that is to come is infinitely more important than the life that now is, and I hope that, in our inmost hearts, we reckon that the things that are seen and temporal are mere trifles compared with the things which are not seen and eternal; yet it often happens that the less important matters have a greater influence over us than those which are far more important, simply because the things of earth are so much nearer to us. Heaven is infinitely more to be desired than any joy of earth, yet it seems far off, and hence these fleeting joys may give us greater present comfort. The wrath of God is far more to be dreaded than the anger of man, yet sometimes a frown or a rebuke from a fellow-creature will have more effect upon our minds than the thought of the anger of God. This is because the one appears to be remote, while, being in this body, we are so near to the other. Now, beloved, it will sometimes happen that a matter, which is scarcely worthy of the thought of an immortal spirit, will fret and worry us from day to day. There is some oppressor, as the text puts it, whom we dread and fear continually, yet we forget the almighty God, who is on our side, who is stronger than all the oppressors who have ever lived, and who has all people and all things under his control. The reason

why we act thus is because we think of God as if he were far off, while we can see the oppressor with our eyes, and we can hear with our ears his threatening words. I want, at this time, to be the means in the hands of God of turning the thoughts of his people away from the distress of the present to the joy and comfort which, though more remote, ought still to be more powerful over the mind and heart because of its real intrinsic greatness.

I. And, first, I want to speak upon this point,—that **MANY FEARS, WHICH ARE ENTERTAINED BY GOOD MEN AND WOMEN, ARE REALLY GROUNDLESS.**

“Thou hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy, and where is the fury of the oppressor?” The probable meaning of this verse is that the oppressor never came, so that they never did feel the force of his fury; and, in like manner, many of God’s people are constantly under apprehensions of calamities which will never occur to them, and they suffer far more in merely dreading them than they would have to endure if they actually came upon them. In their imagination, there are rivers in their way, and they are anxious to know how they shall wade through them, or swim across them. There are no such rivers in existence, but they are agitated and distressed about them. Our old proverb says, “Don’t cross the bridge till you come to it;” but these timid people are continually crossing bridges that only exist in their foolish fancies. They stab themselves with imaginary daggers, they starve themselves in imaginary famines, and even bury themselves in imaginary graves. Such strange creatures are we that we probably smart more under blows which never fall upon us than we do under those which do actually come. The rod of God does not smite us as sharply as the rod of our own imagination does; our groundless fears are our chief tormentors; and when we are enabled to abolish our self-inflictions, all the inflictions of the world become light enough. It is a pity, however, that any who are taught of God, and who have had faith in Christ given to them, should fall into so guilty and at the same time so painful a habit as this of fearing the oppressor who does not come, and who never will come.

Some are much troubled by *the fear of man*. That is exactly the case mentioned in our text: “the fury of the oppressor.” He was a very oppressive man, hard, unfeeling, proud, strong, exacting, and they were afraid of him. In addition to this, he must have been a person of impetuous temper, one with whom you could not reason, and so passionate that they were not merely afraid of the oppressor, but of “the fury of the oppressor.” He is the kind of person whom you do not know how to meet, or how to escape from him. If you flee away from him, he will pursue you in his fury. If you remain quiet, your patience will not make him quiet; and if you resist him, his fury will be so much the greater. That appears to have been the character of the oppressor feared by those with whom the Lord was at that time reasoning; and we have known believers who have been afraid of what such-and-such a powerful man might do if they acted as their conscience told them

they ought to act. He would turn them out of their farm, or they would lose his custom from their shop. Perhaps the fearful one is some young person who has a relative who hates religion, and what this relative in power may do she cannot imagine; or the oppressor is an arbitrary employer, and if his work-people do not exactly obey his orders, even though those orders happen to be wrong, they will lose their situations. They may be for months without work, and they and their children may be reduced to starvation. They picture a long vista of trials and troubles that will come upon them because of "the fury of the oppressor." Now, sometimes, there is a foundation for this kind of fear, for men do act in a very hectoring manner to their fellow-men, and the very persons who talk most about being liberal in their views are generally the greatest persecutors. If I must have a religious enemy, let me have a professed and avowed bigot, but not one of your "free thinkers" or "broad churchmen" as they are called, for there is nobody who can hate as they do; and the lovers of liberal-mindedness who have no creed at all think it to be their special duty to be peculiarly contemptuous to those who have some degree of principle, and cannot twist and turn exactly as they can. There is no doubt that still there are trials of cruel mockings to be borne by those who are true to Christ. "The cold shoulder" is given in society; in other company, hard words are used, and coarse jests are made. Christians must expect to have to bear the opposition of man. It always was so, and it always will be so. If you turn from the way of the world, and practically accuse the world of being wrong, the world will resent it. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own."

But, after all, is there not a great deal more thought of this matter than there is any need to be, for "where is the fury of the oppressor?" I have known young Christians afraid of somebody or other, and not daring to avow their conscientious convictions, and when at last they have plucked up courage enough to do so, they have been surprised that the person they expected to oppose them has been quite favourable to them. The wife has been afraid to mention to her husband that she desires to unite with the church, but when he hears of it, he thinks that he too will go and hear the minister. I remember a man and his wife who came to join the church. They were each afraid to tell the other of what they had experienced, and when they met each other on the night that they were present with other candidates, they were greatly surprised to find that, instead of having any reason to be afraid of one another, they had the utmost cause to rejoice in one another. They said that it was like a new marriage to them when each found the other to be in Christ Jesus, yet each of them had thought the other to be so strong in opposition to religion that they had not dared to mention their conversion till thus they made their mutual discovery. Perhaps, dear friend, you have no more need to be afraid than they had. Go on, and the giant that stands in your way may turn out to be only a shadow, or if he really is a giant, God will help you to fight against him, and make you more than a conqueror.

Some have a fear of another kind,—not of any opposition to themselves, but *they are afraid of the Church and the truth being utterly destroyed by the opposition of men.* Have you not many times noticed a kind of panic going through the churches through some supposed discovery in science, or some new doctrinal error that has appeared? One Christian has met another, and begun tremblingly to talk about what was going to happen. “The old times were so much better than these;” they begin with that note; and here is a new danger, how are we to meet it? It was anxiously asked, a few years ago, “How are we to meet these discoveries of geology?” Yet we hardly ever hear about them now; or, if we do, we do not trouble about them. Then Dr. Colenso had made certain calculations which were very terrifying to timid folk, and Huxley tried to prove that we had descended or ascended from monkeys; but who cares about their theories now? Yet I have met with nervous people who greatly feared the fury of this tyrant, Science, which was utterly to destroy us; but what has it ever done against the truth?

At this time, as you are well aware, it is the belief of a great many people that, owing to the spread of Ritualism, the candle that Latimer lit will be blown out, and we shall all be in the dark, or at least shall have nothing better than candles made at Rome to light us. I constantly receive magazines that prophesy the most terrible times; according to them, some of us will no doubt be roasted alive at Smithfield. Well, I know that the devil can blow very hard, but I do not believe that he can blow out the candle that God lights; much less can he blow out the sun of the gospel which has burned on now for over eighteen hundred years. Blow away, devil, as hard as you can, but you will never be able to blow out this light, but it will still shine on to the end of time. You may blow away a cloud or two which obscure the light, but the light itself will be as bright as ever.

It may be that, in the place where you live, there has come up a new doctrinal error. Somebody has discovered that men are nothing but a species of large ape, and that only those who believe in Christ are immortal, all the rest will die out eventually; annihilation is to be their doom. Many are dreadfully frightened by that doctrine, but I believe it to be too contemptible to alarm anybody who studies the Scriptures. It is a very pretty toy, and many will play with it; after a certain time, there will come another pretty toy, and they will play with that; and so it will be till Christ himself comes, and breaks up all these toys, and brings his Church back to the grand old truth which will stand firm notwithstanding all the assaults of men or devils. But you and I need not fear, beloved, because of any of these things; what is there, after all, to cause us to tremble for the ark of God? Just nothing at all. Never let any member of this church get whining in this way, and saying that the gospel will die. The heavens and the earth will pass away, but the Word of the Lord shall endure for ever; that which the Lord hath declared in this blessed Book of his shall stand fast throughout eternity.

Another fear which sometimes comes over truly godly people is that, *perhaps, after all, they shall fall from grace, and perish.* There may come a temptation which will find out their weak point, and overthrow them. The vessel has sailed well hitherto, though not without many tossings and perils; but, mayhap, it will strike upon a rock, and be utterly broken in pieces. They know how weak and frail they are, and how many temptations surround them; how treacherous and cunning the devil is; how potent is the world with its many allurements. David feared that he would perish one day by the hand of Saul, and these fearful souls, as they pass into some fresh phase of life, or encounter some new trial, dread lest, after all, grace should not be sufficient for their needs, and they should come to a miserable end. I know this fear; who among us has not felt it? Who among us can honestly examine his own heart, and not feel it? Yet, dear friends, there is really nothing in it to trouble the true child of God. If our religion be a religion of our own getting or making, it will perish; and the sooner it goes, the better; but if our religion be a matter of God's giving, we know that he never takes back what he gives, and that, if he has commenced to work in us by his grace, he will never leave it unfinished. Were the covenant founded upon works, it would fail; if it depended upon ourselves, it would surely break down; but if it be the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure," it cannot fail. If the promise is the promise of God who cannot lie, he will surely keep it unto the end. We ought not, therefore, to be burdened with this anxiety, but simply go on in the path of daily watchfulness and humble dependence upon the preserving power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so we shall find that we shall get safely to heaven after all.

We have known some, too, who have been afflicted with *fear of want coming upon them as to pecuniary matters.* One says, "The giant of poverty will surely seize me! I have not enough laid by to furnish me with a sufficient maintenance." I have known some even dread because they had not enough for their own funeral; as if that would not be sure to be settled somehow. The living will surely take care to bury the dead. I have known others say, "If I were to be out of work; if such-and-such a thing were to happen; if So-and-so were to die, what should I do?" Ah! and if we fret over all the "ifs" that we can imagine, we shall certainly never be without fretfulness; but where is your dependence, Christian, for this world? Have you placed it upon man? Then I wonder not that you are full of fear; but why do you not trust your body where you trusted your soul? If you have trusted Jesus to be the Saviour of your immortal spirit, can you not also trust him to be the Provider for this poor flesh of the things which perish? God feeds the ravens; will he not feed you? Up till this moment, the commissariat of the universe has never failed, but the myriads of living creatures have received from his hand all they have required; then is he likely to forget you? He has never done so yet; your bread has been given you, your water has been sure, why should he change his custom, and leave his own dear child to starve? "Oh,

but!" say you, "the brook Cherith is dried up." Yes, but when the brook dried up, God sent his servant Elijah to Zarephath, where there was a widow woman who would sustain him. When one door shuts, another opens; and if one well gets dry, the water bubbles up somewhere else. The means may change, but the God of the means changes not. He will supply your needs. Stand in your proper place, do your duty, obey his will, and he will not fail you, but bring you safely to the place where fears shall never come to you any more.

Another fear (and I will mention but this one,) is *the fear of death*. Some even among God's people hardly dare think of dying. It is a dreary necessity with them that they must die, and they fret and trouble about it quite needlessly; but, beloved, if we had perfect peace with God, we should not fear dying. I have known some who have thought that they would rather be translated, but I would rather not. If I were walking out to-morrow evening, and I saw horses of fire and chariots of fire standing ready to take me up, I should feel a great deal more troubled about getting into a fiery chariot than about going home, and lying down to die. If my Lord and Master shall choose to let me live till he comes, and so prevent my death, his will be done, but the Spirit saith, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," so let us be content with that blessedness. But there is a fear of death in some good people's minds, and they cannot always shake it off; yet, beloved, there is nothing in it. If you are in Christ, you will never know anything about dying. I do not believe that Christians feel anything in death. If there are pains, as there often are, they are not the pains of dying, but of living. Death ends all their pains. They shut their eyes on earth, and open them in heaven. They have shaken off the cumbrous clay of this mortal body, and found themselves disembodied, in a moment, before the throne of the Most High, there to wait till the trumpet of the resurrection shall sound, and they shall put on their bodies once again, transformed and glorified like to the body of their Lord. Get rid of that fear of death, beloved, for it is not becoming in a Christian. The believer's heart should be so stayed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, that he should leave himself in his Heavenly Father's hands to live or die, or to wait till the Lord shall come, just as the Lord shall please.

II. My second observation is this. **THERE ARE SOME FEARS WHICH WOULD DIE AT ONCE IF WE DARED TO QUESTION THEM.**

Did you notice that the text is a question? "Who art thou that . . . hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Did you ever question your fears, my dear friends? I mean you, Miss Despondency over there, and you, Mr. Much-afraid. Did you ever question your fear? If not, catechize it now, put it through the catechism. Suppose it is the Church of God that is afraid of the oppressor, let the Church ask, *Where is the oppressor of which she needs to be afraid?* Is it a doctrinal error? Well, the Church was once over-run with

Arianism, and it did seem as if the heretics had killed the doctrine of the Deity of Christ; but the Lord was pleased to raise up his valiant servant Athanasius, and very soon Arianism was put to the rout. The Church of Christ scarcely perceives the scars of all the conflicts through which she has passed. That which threatened to destroy her has never really injured her, but she has come out of the furnace all the purer. As for persecution, has it not commonly proved that the more the saints have been persecuted the more they have prospered, and that the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church? Suppose there should again come martyr days, suppose there should again come days of heresy; well, the Church has had such days before, yet she has survived them. The grand old vessel has been in many a tornado and storm before now, yet she has not even lost a spar or split a stitch of her canvas. Why therefore should she be afraid now?

Ask the question again, "Where is the fury of the oppressor?" And the answer comes, it is under the control of God. Even Satan, your fiercest foe,—God created him, God governs him, God can do with him just as he pleases. Then as to that poverty of which you are afraid, it will not come unless God permits it; and if it does come, the Lord can alleviate it. You are afraid you will lose a very dear child; but you will not lose her unless the Lord takes her. You are fretting because you fear that a special friend of yours will soon be taken away; but he cannot be taken away till the Lord takes him. What are you afraid of? Is it your own death? Learn to sing good old John Ryland's verse,—

"Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Till he bids I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of love sees fit."

Then, again, the Lord asks, "Where is the fury of the oppressor?" as if it was so soon gone that one might look in vain for it. Some man oppresses you; well, he shall die, perhaps soon. The trouble that now frets you will be gone in the twinkling of an eye. If not soon so far as this life is concerned, yet, when you get to heaven (and that will not be long), how short a time will your trial seem to have lasted! "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment," says the apostle, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." You fret about your trouble, and worry yourself continually concerning it, but the text seems to ask you, "Where is it?" It is a meteor that flashes across the sky, and is gone. Ask your troubles such questions as these, and they will soon vanish.

I will ask you a few more questions. You have fears with regard to a great trouble that threatens you. Well, *will it separate you from the love of Christ?* If you cannot answer that question, let Paul answer it for you: "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." You say that your enemies slander you; but will Christ believe them? They are trying to take away your character; but will your Lord think any the less of you? Will HE be deceived by their falsehoods? You say that friends are forsaking you; but will they take Jesus away, and make him forsake you?

You say that your enemies are doing all that they can to destroy you, but *can they destroy the divine promises?* The Lord has promised to give unto his sheep eternal life; can they take that promise from you, or make it of no value? They may frown at you, but can they keep you out of heaven? They may threaten you, but can they make the covenant of grace to be of none effect? While eternal things are safe, we may well be content to let other things come or go just as God wills.

Again, *can anyone do anything to you which God does not permit?* And if God permits it, can any real harm come to you? "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Then how can anything work for your hurt if you are really the Lord's? Can anyone curse those whom God blesses? Are you like those foolish persons who are afraid of a witch's curse, or of some spell that the wicked may cast over you? Even Balaam said, "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." Balak might summon Balaam to his aid, and the two together might stand and look on Israel, and wish to curse them, but they could not curse those whom God had blessed. If all the devils in hell could fill your house, and seek to injure you, there is no need for you to fear or tremble more than Martin Luther did when his friends were afraid for him to go to Worms, but he said, "If there were as many devils there as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses, I would face them all in the name of God." And you may say the same. If earth were all in arms abroad, and hell, in one vast hurly-burly, had come up to join with the world against you, you might still say, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge;" and charge them in the name of the Most High, and put them all to rout, for greater is he who is with you than all those that are against you.

III. Now, lastly, dear brethren and sisters in Christ, if these fears are groundless, and if a few questions will scatter them, I appeal to you who are cast down to CRY TO GOD TO DELIVER YOU FROM THIS STATE OF BONDAGE.

If there be no ground for your fears, *what is the use of tormenting yourself for nothing at all*, and if God is indeed with you, *do you not dishonour him by your fretfulness and your fears?* What would you think of a little child, in its mother's arms, who was always afraid that it was not safe there? Would it not look as if there were some defect in the child's loving confidence in its mother?

"Safe in the arms of Jesus,"

you may well be—

"Safe from corroding care."

He is able to keep that which you have committed unto him; so, if you do not trust him, you really dishonour him. The commander of an army, who saw his soldiers turning white with fear and trembling as they marched to the conflict, would say within himself, "These soldiers of mine are no credit to their leader;" and will you, who have a Captain who is so well able to protect you, show the white feather? Shall a cowardly spirit be permitted in the service of God? Shall the Captain of our salvation have to lead a craven host to the fight with the powers of darkness? I have sometimes thought, when I have heard about the fears of God's people concerning the times in which we live, and what is going to become of us, that surely they did not know that the King is in the midst of us, that the Lord is as a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in our midst; for if they did but know that he is our Protector and Defender, they could not be so cast down as they are.

Besides, *you who are of a fretful spirit, often grieve other Christians.* There are others who are like you, and they get worse through coming into contact with you. Your complaint is one that is catching. Every now and then, I meet with Christians who like to hear sermons that make them miserable. I had a letter from one, some time ago, who said that, as soon as he came here, and saw how cheerful the people looked, he felt certain that he was not among the tried people of God, so he went away, and turned into a little place where there were only fifteen or sixteen people, and he heard a good deep-experience sermon about the corruption of the heart, and there he felt at home. For my part, I like such texts as these, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." We have plenty of troubles and trials, and if we like to fret over them, we may always be doing it; but, then, we have far more joys than troubles, so our songs should exceed our sighs. We have a good God, who has promised that, as our days, so shall our strength be.

"Why should the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?"

"Ah!" says one, "but this is a howling wilderness." Yes, if you howl in it, it will howl in response; but if you sing, it will sing too. Remember the ancient promise, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."

"Then let our songs abound,
And every tear be dry:
We're marching through Immanuel's ground
To fairer worlds on high."

And once again, do you not think that *a dull, heavy, murmuring spirit is a great hindrance to the unconverted?* If they find you in this state, they will say, "This person's religion does not appear to do him much good." Worldlings often say that Christians are the most miserable people in the world. I think that is a great mistake on their part, and that they do not really know us; for if they

knew some of us, they would find that we have cheerful spirits notwithstanding a good deal that might depress us. Do not any of you Christians let the worldling say that Christ is a hard master. I should not like to drive a horse that was all skin and bone, for people would say that it was because his master kept him short of corn. I should not like to have, in my house, a servant who was always wringing her hands, and whose eyes were usually full of tears. Visitors would say, "Her mistress is a vixen, you may be sure of that;" and if professing Christians are always seen to be in a wretched, unhappy state, people are sure to say, "Ah, they serve a hard master! The ways of Christ are ways of unpleasantness, and all his paths are misery and wretchedness." Sinner, that is not true; but it is true that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," and we earnestly wish that you would come and prove the truth of it for yourself. Believing in Jesus, you would have a perfect peace, and a bliss that nothing can destroy; you would have a little heaven below, and a great heaven above. You would be able to take your troubles to your God, and leave them there; and you would march along with songs of rejoicing till you come to that blessed place where there are pleasures for evermore.

May God bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH XLIII. 1—19.

Verse 1. *But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel,*

The Lord reminds us that he first created us, and that he afterwards moulded us; we are like Jacob by nature, but he has made us Israel by grace.

1. *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

Redemption is a deep well of comfort. If the Lord has indeed bought us with his blood, he will not think lightly of us; and if he has called us by name, and declared that we belong to him, we may rest assured that he will not lose his own property, but that he will preserve it to the end.

2. *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.**

The Lord does not promise us immunity from trial and trouble; we shall have to go through waters and rivers, and shall have to pass through fires and flames; it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God; but he does promise that no harm shall come to us from it all. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God;"—that waters, rivers, fires, and flames bring us benefits and blessings, and that they shall none of them bring a curse upon us.

3, 4. *For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, †*

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 397, "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

† See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 917, "Precious, Honourable, Beloved."