

Encouraging Words to deal with Fears
Isaiah 41:9-10

Brothers and sisters, I'm old enough – and perhaps you may be as well – to remember the debut of “reality television” shows.

It truly was a novel concept back in the late 90's and early 2000's. A TV show that featured ordinary people, picked of the streets, who were put into some sort of unscripted situation with the results broadcast for us to watch. It was a fascinating idea – and we ate it up! Do you remember?? Watching the first few seasons of Survivor, Big Brother, American Idol and so on.

Now, personally... my favorite reality TV show was Fear Factor. Hosted by the now infamous pod-castor Joe Rogan, Fear Factor featured ordinary everyday contestants who would have to face their fears in a series of dangerous or disgusting challenges or risk being eliminated. If they successfully faced their fears and completed the challenges then they would be

rewarded by winning the prize money – and of course the bragging rights of being a Fear Factor champion!

Now this was a fun and entertaining way to deal with the issue of fear; watching other people having to face the fear of heights on a high ropes course, or going sky-diving; walking through a room filled with snakes, or bugs or scorpions or letting a spider crawl on them to face fears of creepy-crawly things or having to eat something raw and disgusting – but still edible... to get past fears of gross things,

Now truth be told brothers and sisters, there is a very slim chance you would have to face any of these kinds of fear factor challenges in your day-to-day life at all. As it turns out, reality TV is anything but realistic.

It would have been far more realistic to have the challenges deal with actual fears that are factors in daily life: Like having to give a speech in public; becoming a new mother, being the new kid at school; having to deal with nasty gossip about you spreading on social media; trying to figure out how to pay

your bills, afford rent, buy groceries, and put gas in the car when costs keep going up – but your paycheck isn't; or having the doctor call you back in to discuss the test results.

These are the kinds of situations and challenges in our daily lives where fear starts to well up in our hearts, we feel a pit in the bottom of our stomach, our mouth goes dry, we feel weak – and we are going to have to face such situations whether we want to or not.

And maybe this morning you are facing some sort of situation like this, and you're experiencing fear... well brothers and sisters, the Lord has a word for you this morning, to encourage you. What we read from Isaiah 41:10 is for you... *"Do not fear, I am with you!"*

Whatever situation you are going to have to face in the coming week, or month, or in months ahead brothers and sisters – know and trust that the Lord is with you, you will not face this alone.

Once, when I was a teenager, my family was away on vacation and I was staying home alone by myself and something startled me awake in the middle of the night, and I woke up afraid, I was scared!

But, as I shifted in my bed my leg brushed up against my dog who was sleeping on my bed and suddenly, I could feel all the fear just drain out of my body as I realized I was not alone, my dog was with me – and I just went back to sleep.

Brothers and sisters, when you are facing challenges and situations where fear is a factor knowing that you are not alone can bring some relief! And knowing that the one who is with you is your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God himself incarnate! That's a game changer.

And its not only the reassurance of His presence with you, it's the fact that He can address whatever situation you are afraid of - regardless of whether it is quite serious or perhaps seems trivial.

Do you in fact have to give a speech, make a presentation? Is something important riding on what you have to say to others? Do not fear. Remember, Jesus told his disciples *"The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."* (Luke 12:12) That's for you as well.

Are you dealing with gossip and rumors on social media? Remember, Jesus knows exactly what its like to deal with that sort of thing... and so He taught us *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."* (Matt 5:11)

The Lord's presence will help you endure and keep a clear conscience in choosing to take the higher road in this situation so that eventually as 1 Peter 3:16 says *"those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."* Do not fear!

Or...do you have to see the Doctor about a health issue? Concerning test results? Have you received a disturbing diagnosis? Do not fear. Remember - Jesus is the one who says

"Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." (Luke 8:50) That's for you - Jesus is the great physician who heals the sick and can do so with a simple command.

And Brothers and sisters, Jesus can handle whatever situation you are facing where fear is a factor. Just talk to Him about it – He's with you after all, tell Him about it in prayer.

Remember Jesus taught us to pray *"give us this day our daily bread, deliver us from evil, lead us not into temptation..."* (Matt 6:11) and He reminds us *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."* (John 15:7)

Whatever it is that has you facing fear brothers and sisters – Jesus says encourages us with these words *"do not fear – I am with you!"* Accept these words of Jesus this morning so that they remain in you and thus you remain in him. Amen?!

Now – let's take this deeper, brothers and sisters. Maybe you are not just facing fear from one particular situation or

circumstance that is looming large in your life right now, perhaps you are living with fear... Fear is a constant factor for you, and living with fear is debilitating, isn't it?!

It will affect how you live your life; it will affect your schoolwork and your job, and it will affect your relationships with other people and your family.

You see when you are facing your fear you are dealing with the pressure of **external** factors. But when you are living with fear you are dealing with the turmoil of **internal** factors.

It doesn't feel like you are in control of your life, it doesn't feel like Jesus is in control of your life – because your fear is in control instead; influencing how you feel and think, determining which decisions you make.

And when we are controlled by fear it holds us back from growing and maturing - both emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

It prevents us from taking the kinds of risks that are needed in order to get rewards, we become envious of others who move forward, and we fall into self-pity and playing the victim becoming dependent on others to do what we should do for ourselves.

Or we overcompensate, we adopt a braggadocio persona, extra gregarious and outgoing, to cover up and mask and hide our fear from others and from ourselves. If something or someone pokes through that defense and exposes our fear, we will withdraw or lash out - flight or fight!

When we live with fear we are unable to let go of something - or someone, and this is not just about holding on to our emotional baggage – we will also keep others around us from growing and maturing as they ought to, it doesn't affect only ourselves.

Because living with fear means that you can not distinguish between rational healthy fear that protects you from danger

and unhealthy irrational fear that smothers and suffocates others.

So, there is nothing positive or helpful or beneficial about living with fear brothers and sisters – and I’m sure that if this is something that you struggle with, you already know this.

Furthermore, if you are a believer – living with fear is contradictory to the Christian life isn’t it?! As we experience the perfect love of God in our lives 1 John 4:18 says that *“perfect love drives out fear...”* and 1 Tim 1:7 says *“God has NOT given us a Spirit of fear...”* and again, if you are afflicted by living with fear as a believer – you probably already know this.

And yet... in spite of knowing this reality and these biblical truths – fear still has a hold on us, we are living with fear and its affects on our lives.

But this morning – the Lord Jesus wants to do something about this. He wants to speak directly to the fears that you are

living with, and He wants to break their power over your life, and set you free from fear. Now that sounds good – amen?

So, brothers and sisters, believe and receive with open hearts, the proclamation of our Lord Jesus this morning – freedom from the captivity of living with fear. Amen?!

So, first of all Jesus speaks to the fear of being far away and the unfamiliar.

Do you know that fear? I’m sure many of us do. Many of us have left our home country, the proximity of our family and friends, the familiarity of our favorite places, knowing where to find all the services and amenities we need – and we’ve moved here to Canada, to Calgary – and we have to start all over again.

For some that’s exciting – but for others it is a fearful experience.

So - are you still living with that fear?

Well brothers and sisters, Jesus says to you; *“I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you,”* He speaks that to your fear this morning to break it!

You might think it was your own good decision to come here, or someone else’s bad decision that dragged you over here... But in truth it was Jesus who took you and brought you here.

Maybe its hard to see His plan for your life right now but rest assured if Jesus has brought you here, it is going to be a part of His plans for your life. Remember Psalm 139:9-10 *“If I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”* Do not fear.

Secondly, Jesus wants to speak to any Fear of Insignificance, the fear that you don’t matter.

Brothers and sisters, this can be tied to low-self esteem, because you’re not very attractive or good at whatever makes people important. It can come from trying to make a difference in this world in the face of overwhelming forces

that simply roll right over you. Or perhaps in reflecting on your life - you realize it didn’t really amount to all that much in the big scheme of things.

In response to this fear, brothers and sisters, Jesus says: *“You are my servant!”* He breaks that fear of insignificance by giving you an identity, and a purpose, and an eternal legacy. Jesus says in John 15:16 *“I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last”* Do not fear.

Which leads us to the third Fear that Jesus speaks to, the Fear of Rejection.

And if you are dealing with this fear brothers and sisters, its likely because someone significant in your life – like your parent or your peers or your spouse – took the flight option in dealing with their own fears and left you, closed off to you, pushed you away... and thus you fear that something is deficient in you.

Rejection is really all about this other person's failure, but you internalize it to be all about you, so it becomes a double fear – being rejected AND deficient.

So, Jesus speaks first to our fear that rejection is about us – and He breaks it with these words *“I have chosen you and have not rejected you.”* Then - to fully set us free He must speak to the fear of deficiency – the fear that something is wrong with us – and break that.

And this is so important brothers and sisters because if that secondary fear is not broken, we will never be able to receive the conviction and face the truth that we are sinners in need of salvation, for the fear of being deficient. We'll just think Jesus is rejecting us...

So, Jesus speaks to break that fear of deficiency saying *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Mark 2:17)

And then Jesus summarizes His one-two punch that breaks the fear of rejection and deficiency, and give us this truth instead. Romans 8:39 nothing *“will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

And that leads us to the fourth fear Jesus speaks to in our scripture passage, Fear of the Future.

Are you fearful of what may come in the future? Brothers and sisters, the future is supposed to be about hopes and dreams isn't it – but so much of what we see these days seems hopeless. We want to look forward to something better, but we don't see much evidence that will be the case – in fact if we're honest it looks like it is getting worse. We're not hopeful for the future – we're afraid...

But Jesus speaks to this fear as well, He breaks its power over us saying *“do not be dismayed, for I am your God!”* Brothers and sisters, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the End. He is the one who was, who is, and who is yet to

come. He doesn't just hold the future in His hands as we like to say – He IS the future.

Jesus isn't caught off guard by what's happening, it's not interrupting His plans – or His ultimate plans for you – He says to us in Matt 24:6 *"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."*

The great and glorious end when He returns and brings in the New Creation – God's Kingdom on earth. Do not fear!

Now the fifth fear Jesus speaks to is the Fear of Weakness. Do you fear being weak brothers and sisters? Is it something that you are afraid of on a very practical level, losing your strength and vitality as you grow older and no longer being able to care for yourself?

Or are you afraid that you lack the strength and ability that is required of you to meet a challenge, move to the next phase of life, or complete something that you started and finish

well? Jesus speaks to that fear and He says to you *"I will strengthen you and help you!"*

I know it's become cliché as of late for lack of proper application, but this would be correct circumstances to trust and believe Phil 4:13 in response to Jesus breaking the fear of weakness in your life. *"I can do all these things through Him who strengthens me!"* Do not fear!

And finally, Jesus speaks to the Fear of Failure.

Are you afraid of failing? Do you fear what will happen if you do not succeed at something you are attempting? Are you afraid of crushing disappointment, going through the embarrassment or humiliation?

Maybe there are financial implications, loss of status, respect, moral implications, a loss of trust, friendship, intimacy... Do you fear failing as a follower of Jesus?

In some respects – all of our other fears, real and serious as they are in our experience of them, may seem a bit more abstract and emotion based in comparison.

Fear of Failure is where the rubber meets the road, we're talking about real life consequences and impacts here, esp if we're talking moral and spiritual failure as a Christian... so this fear has a bit more power over us. Nevertheless, it cannot stand against Jesus' words. He says to this fear; *"I will uphold you with my righteous right hand!"*

Now please note brothers and sisters that Jesus doesn't free us from the fear of failure by promising us we will always have success. Instead, He says *"I will uphold you."* In other words, even if you do fail... I will bring you through whatever consequences come from that failure.

And He does so by "His righteous right hand," which means that even if a failure is our fault, even if we deserve the consequences that come, Jesus will still uphold us because it is His righteousness that causes Him to act for us.

Thus, the only promise of success we have is not ours, but His, as it pertains to our salvation. Phil 1:6 *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion"* Jesus doesn't fail, He will uphold you with His righteous right hand. Do not fear.

So brothers and sisters, these are Jesus' words to us this morning – to me, to you – encouraging us if we are facing our fears, delivering us if we are living with fears. Receive it, believe it and trust that Jesus indeed is with you. Amen?!

And you can be confident as you go from here this morning that Jesus is truly with you. Even though Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven, He is also with you... because the Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit – and the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us and He lives in us.

And sometimes just hearing the reminder that we are filled with the Holy Spirit is enough to assure us that Jesus is with us, and we are filled with courage and faith and joy, and we'll

walk into the coming week with a spring in our step, full of confidence and trust.

But sometimes... we need a little something tangible to help make the invisible visible.

So this morning as we respond to Jesus' Word in song – and I'll ask the band to come up now - if you need that extra assurance that you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you can come down to remember your baptism – the sign that God gives us that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on us.

Come down, dip your hand in the water – and if you want to, take shell with you...

Or maybe you would like to be prayed for to receive the Holy Spirit – we'll have people on the sides who can pray with you and anoint you in assurance that the Holy Spirit connects you to Jesus Christ – and His salvation and His presence and His Words.

So - may His words remain in you and may you remain in His Word brothers and sisters. Do Not fear – I am with you.
Amen.