

Our Right Hand Held by Jehovah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 41:13
Preached on: Sunday, December 12, 2021

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Let's turn to Isaiah 41, reading the first 20 verses and then focusing our attention on verse 13. This passage was requested by Amber for tonight, a passage which means a great deal to her.

Since this is an Old Testament prophet, the line is not always easy to follow so I'll sort of give a short running commentary as we read. This chapter places us in Judah's Babylonian captivity and, as you know, the Babylonians were overrun by Cyrus and the Persians, and this chapter deals with that, the coming to power of Cyrus and the Persians. The first four verses of this chapter informs the people of God that the Lord would soon send the power from the east, that's Cyrus who is mentioned in chapter 44, and would send this Cyrus in his righteousness to overcome the nations of the Mediterranean.

So let's read the first four verses.

1 Keep silence before me, O islands [that's the nations around the Mediterranean]; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment [that's the Lord's challenge to them]. 2 Who raised up the righteous man from the east [or literally better, who raised up in righteousness this man from the east], called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? He [God] gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. [Now verse 3 talks about Cyrus,] 3 He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. [And now God is speaking again about himself,] 4 Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.

Now verses 5 through 7 speak of the islands and the nations of the Mediterranean encouraging one another and building bigger idols to keep them safe from the Persian advance.

5 The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. 6 They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. 7 So the carpenter encouraged the

goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the sodering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.

Now verses 8 through 13, the Lord assures Judah of his help as their God as this whole thing will unfold.

8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. 9 Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. 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. 11 Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. 12 Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. 13 For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

And now verses 14 through 20 expresses how the Lord is going to help them. He'll lead them to tread down their enemies and bring them to a well-watered place. So verse 14,

14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. 15 Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth [that's what I'll make you to be]: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. 16 Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel. 17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. 18 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. 19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: 20 That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

Hopefully that makes it better to understand how we did that, sort of get half my introduction here. But the verse is verse 13,

13 For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

Isaiah was a prophet of God to Judah during the reigns of Isaiah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Those last two, Ahaz and Hezekiah, were, in turn, the most ungodly king of Judah and one of the most righteous.

This prophecy is divided into two main sections. The first 39 chapters deal with a rebuke to Judah for their godlessness, their idolatry, their departure from the Lord, and for telling the judgment of God that will bring them away into captivity into Babylon. The first 39 chapters. Then chapters 40 to the end of the book, chapter 66, Isaiah prophesies the return of Judah from the Babylonian captivity and the blessings of God upon her return. And if you notice, that's where this chapter is, chapter 41, and it acts as though the thing had already taken place, it's in the past tense. That's because Isaiah is so sure of his prophecy, he views it as already having taken place but it's really prophecy.

Now as I indicated, chapter 41 looks ahead to the time of Judah's captivity in Babylon and the rising to power of the Persians under Cyrus. This would cause alarm, great alarm among the nations bordering the Mediterranean, and so what they did is to encourage each other, they built more idols and bigger idols to protect themselves, and in this chapter Isaiah emphasizes, first of all, those idols aren't going to protect them. God, in his righteousness, is sending this power from the east in judgment over Babylon. But he also assures Judah of Jehovah's help. They were a despised people in Babylon that would be no less true in the Persian invasion. But Jehovah God would stand with them as the Persians swept over Babylon and beyond, and he would lead them safely to dwell one day in a paradise rather than in a wilderness.

Now that brings us to the two verses just before our text, 11 and 12. There Isaiah speaks of Judah's enemies that were incensed with Judah, that means they were hot with anger, and they contended with her and warred against her. This is what they could expect in the future. But through Isaiah the prophet, the Lord assures them, "All your enemies will be ashamed and they will be confounded, they will be as nothing, they will ultimately perish." And now the verse that we have before us this evening tells us the reason why that will be, "For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help you." A very powerful, beautiful, comforting passage.

This passage was appropriately chosen tonight for a confession of faith because, you see, Judah's position in the Old Testament with Babylon and the threat of the Persian invasion is essentially no different than the situation of the church of every age, also of today. Who is behind Babylon? How do you explain Persia? Satan, who has the world under his spiritual control. Satan, who with the world of the ungodly are the powers of darkness that always and again seek to destroy the people of God and his covenant. That's what was behind all this in Isaiah's day and in captivity, and that devil and the powers of darkness are still at it today and will be until the very end of time.

They are incensed with the church. They contend with the covenant people of God. They war against her. But Jehovah, the Lord, is our God. He is the God of all that believe in him and believe in his Son Jesus Christ. And he is Amber's God and he is Malachi's God who tonight confess their faith in him and in Jesus the Savior and his promise to every

believer is this, "I'll hold your right hand. As you face all this, I'm holding your right hand. Don't be afraid. I'll help you. I'll help you."

I call your attention to our right hand held by Jehovah. We notice, first of all, a covenant friend; secondly, a sovereign helper; and finally, a blessed confidence. You can usually tell when I'm between points.

The Lord addresses Judah through Isaiah as her covenant friend. That's evident from the opening phrase, "I the LORD thy God." You'll notice that the term LORD is all in capital letters which means in the King James you have, in the original you have Jehovah, "I Am." And that name Jehovah or "I Am" emphasizes, first of all, that God is eternal, he's sovereign, the Creator, the owner, the ruler of all things, but also that he is faithful to his covenant people. Then there is this, "I am Jehovah your God." That's covenant language too. Go all the way back to Genesis 17:7, God came to Abraham and said, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you." "In the covenant, I'll be your God. I'm God of the whole universe, sovereign, control all things, but I'm not the God of just anybody. I am your God and the God of your seed. I will be the God who stands by your side. I'll care for you. I'll guide you. I'll save you. I'll give you all that you need. I will be your God." That's covenant language.

Now verses 8 and 9 add to that. When we read, "I the LORD thy God," that simply summarizes what we've already had before. Let me read 8 and 9 to you again. "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." When Jehovah says to Judah, "I your God," he has all that in mind and there are four things that are there to point out briefly. 1. Who the covenant people are, the chosen, the elect. 2. They are the seed of Abraham. 3. They are his friends which defines the covenant. And 4, his covenant people are servants. Let's go through that.

"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen." The covenant people are a people that God has chosen from eternity to be his. Out of a fallen human race, he has chosen some with whom he will establish his covenant. That's election, isn't it?

They are further identified as "the seed of Abraham. Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham." That's the second thing. When God came to Abraham in Genesis 17 and says, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee," well, who is that seed? It's not a natural seed because if you go natural seed, then all the Jews and all the Arabs came from Jacob, came from Ishmael are the seed of Abraham. That doesn't work. Galatians 3 makes it very clear those who have the faith of Abraham are his seed. It's a spiritual seed. Abraham believed in God. God gave him wonderful promises, "I'll make of you a great nation. One that will come from you will be a great Savior, will bring salvation to you and all whom I have chosen." And even though Abraham and Sarah were too old, they believed, he believed and he looked for the Savior and in that faith found salvation and found Jehovah to be his God. All

those who have that same faith are the seed of Abraham and, of course, that's connected to their election. All those whom God has chosen as he works that out, he gives to them faith, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then in that covenant there is friendship, that's the third thing. "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." In the covenant, Abraham found a friendship with Jehovah God and that really tells us the nature of the covenant, doesn't it? It's an intimate relationship of friendship and companionship that God establishes with his people in Jesus Christ and through their faith. That's the nature of the covenant and so in that covenant Abraham became the friend of God. Oh, not because he was born that way. He was born vile, evil, and full of hate, as we all are. But in Jesus Christ he found a salvation, in the perfect sacrifice that was to come, he found forgiveness for his sins, he found a transformed life all by faith, and that brought him into a beautiful friendship with God. That's the covenant and that's true of all who have faith in Jesus Christ, you become the friend of God. Imagine that, intimate, close friends.

Then finally, there is service, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen." Then verse 9, "Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." You know, the friendship that we have in the covenant with God is not an equal, it's not an equal. Jehovah is God, the almighty everlasting God, and when he reaches down in Christ to establish a friendship with us, he doesn't make us equal with him. We remain his servants. Human servants. But that's the nature of salvation. When we become in God's covenant the friends of God, then in gratitude for his great salvation and his friendship that he has established with us and maintains, we delight to serve him according to his law and commandments, serve him in our marriage, serve him in our family life, serve him in our schooling, serve him at work. In every part of our life, our desire is to serve him.

That's the reality of the covenant and in that way, believing in him, believing in the Savior of the covenant, in the friendship of the covenant, in the obedience of the covenant, we enjoy sweet fellowship and communion with God now and forever. That is the covenant and to that covenant of friendship all who belong to Jesus, to that covenant friendship with Jehovah we also belong as believers. As we said, God's covenant is with Abraham and his seed, not a natural seed, a spiritual one, all those who have the same faith as Abraham. In the Old Testament, that was limited to the physical seed of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Since Christ came and made the perfect sacrifice upon which the covenant is based, now God goes forth and finds his people chosen throughout the whole world of every tribe, tongue and nation, brings them to faith. They are the seed of Abraham. They belong to the covenant.

And Amber, Malachi, with your confession tonight you have acknowledged that you are numbered among that great number whom God has chosen in whom he in his grace has brought to a true faith in Jesus Christ. And you have also acknowledged that by faith you have come to find Jesus as your Savior, and I don't think that was just yesterday. I know you, you knew him as a child, and you confess tonight that Jehovah, the great God of heaven, is your friend. A close intimate friend. And you have confessed tonight that with

grateful gratitude to him for his salvation and his friendship, you desire to serve him with all your life in love now and eternally, and you have really acknowledged too that you in that way even now enjoy that rich life of friendship and fellowship with God and with all who truly belong to him and have the same joy. That's what you're saying.

And you're also acknowledging, and we as a church have now acknowledged this, that you have matured in your faith. Like I said, you didn't come to this faith last week but it's been growing, and through the training that you've received at home, in the church, in the Christian schools, you've grown up in your faith. You're no longer children in faith, just like you're no longer physically children or emotionally or mentally children. You're adults, on the threshold of adulthood, and that's how you are with your faith, mature and therefore no longer to be minor members of the church. You know, in the country when you're a minor, well, you can do certain things, when you're 16 you can get a driver's license, when you get to be, you know, but 18, you become an adult and then you can do certain things, and when you're 21, then you can buy alcohol. Don't go overboard with that. No. Anyway, you're no longer minor members. You are members in full standing and we rejoice, we rejoice greatly as parents, grandparents, friends, members of this church, that God has blessed you with a mature faith and we give thanks to him.

Now on to the second point: a sovereign helper. The church that lives in this world as God's covenant friends faces great opposition. That was true for Judah in Isaiah's day. She was in captivity in Babylon. The city of God with the temple was in ruins. The whole nation had been brought and redistributed throughout the Babylonian Empire. This was God's judgment upon her for her sins, her idol worship, her neglect of the Lord. In spite of all the warnings of the prophets, she went on stubbornly and persisted in sin and so the Lord chastened her and brought her into captivity.

Now this was not the bondage of Egypt. They weren't slaves. Egypt was a hard bondage for 400 years. In fact, from an earthly physical point of view, Judah and the 10 tribes before her actually prospered in many ways although the true people of God in Judah pined away. Where was the temple? It was all in ruins. Read Psalm 137. Nevertheless, even though life was not the harsh harsh captivity of Egypt, Isaiah speaks of those who were incensed with Judah, hot with anger, and that strove with her and warred against her, that's verses 11 and 12. And you know, that was always the way it was for the people of God throughout her history, not just now with Judah in the Babylonian captivity.

Now the pagan nations didn't get along with each other, they hated each other, and that's still going on today, isn't it? War after war after war. But when it came to Judah or Israel, that small little nation on the edge of the Mediterranean, there was a special hatred in Egypt when they were in bondage, when they came through the wilderness, when they took the land of Canaan, all the time there was a special hatred. Why? Because of their God, Jehovah, who was a righteous God, who was unlike their own idol gods, idol gods created by them to bless what they wanted to do as they carried out their sinful inclinations. But Israel's God was different. He forbade it and he had power, and he had defeated them again and again. They hated that God. They hated that people.

And of course, behind that was Satan's attempt to destroy the people of God, God's covenant with his people, and to thwart God's purpose, and the opposition that Judah would find in the captivity of Babylon and Persia, well, they experienced that there too. Remember Daniel? He rose to a high position. There were three in Persia that were of equal importance in the kingdom, second only to the Emperor, and the other two hated him. They hated him. They hated his God and so they tricked the Emperor to make a ruling, "No one may serve you or pray to you except for 30 days." And they knew they were going to get Daniel in trouble and he got thrown in the lions' den. Remember Ahasuerus of the Persian Empire in the days of Esther with her uncle Mordecai? Mordecai refused to bow and do obeisance to Haman, the right hand man of Ahasuerus. Oh, Haman hated, hated Mordecai and hated the Jews because of it, and not knowing who Esther was, convinced Ahasuerus that the Jews ought to be killed, all of them in one day. Satan was behind that, hating Jehovah, hating the covenant and it's still true today for the church of Jesus Christ. Satan is still striving to destroy God's church and covenant.

You understand, certain things have taken place with Satan since the days of Isaiah. In the battle of the ages between Satan and God, that started way in the beginning when Satan led a third of the angel world against God to overthrow him and take over the universe, well, since that began there's been a warfare but a decisive battle has been fought when Jesus died on the cross and secured the salvation of the people of God. That is the decisive battle. The war still continues but Satan is defeated and salvation of the church and God's covenant people is ensured forever.

At that point, Satan was also cast out of heaven; he couldn't go there anymore, could no longer accuse the saints as he did in the Old Testament. "You don't belong here because of your sins." Well, that's done now and he's been bound, according to Revelation 20, for a thousand years, that's symbolic of the whole New Testament era. His powers have been greatly curtailed yet, according to Revelation 12, he returns to the earth in fury and he lashes out against the church to destroy her. He's a fool. The war is lost but he thinks he can still manage it, and with great great vigor and bitter hatred, he turns again against the church and he seeks to accomplish his purpose by the rise and coming to power of the antichrist.

The book of Revelation speaks of that quite a bit, other New Testament scriptures, a worldwide kingdom under Satan's control, ruled by Satan through one or a small group of men, completely anti-Christian. No place for the church, where there will be peace for a while among the nations which Satan has deceived and those will be very hard days for the church. He's working on that. The New Testament speaks of this antichrist, that antichrist, anticipating the great antichrist. It's the work of Satan. The great empires of the Old Testament, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome according to the book of Revelation 13 were also works of Satan to accomplish the same thing only before Christ came and defeated him, and they looked ahead to the man of sin. But Satan's at work and we can see how that's developing in our own lifetime.

Well, anyway, Satan's work has resulted in many attacks on God's covenant people who works through the world of ungodly who become incensed with us and they strive against

us and they war against us. That's what they're doing and these attacks come in many different forms calculated to undermine the faith of God's people to lead them away from God, to bring them back under Satan's control, and the first thing he does is persecution. You're going to find out if you haven't, whenever you will live godly in Christ Jesus as God's covenant people, you will pay a price. The devil and the world will make sure that there's a price to pay. It may be as little as being laughed at and mocked at and excluded, but you may have to forego a career. There will come a time, as there is in other lands and other times, when you'll be arrested and beaten, imprisoned, martyred, all the attempts of Satan to get you to the point where you say, "Look, it's not worth it. The price is too high. My relationship with God and what he promises is just the price is too high." That's what you're going to face.

Then there's false doctrine. From the beginning of the New Testament church, Satan has raised up in the world and then men in the church who follow the world's example, of one false idea after another of God, basically attacking all the important doctrines of scripture in one way or another. The history of the new church is a history of combating those false doctrines which are designed to lead us away, lead us away from our Savior, lead us further away until finally Satan's got us in his power. "Don't believe it. That doctrine isn't important. It's only important how you live."

Then there are the allurements of the pleasures of sin. All sin does not appeal to who we are in Christ, the new men, the new women we are, but we've got a sinful nature, don't we, and sin appeals to that sinful nature and the devil knows how to make sin as attractive as possible. Don't ever forget there's nothing good about sin. Sin will only bring ruin and misery. It will bring a short, cheap time of pleasure and then soon turn into bitterness. But the devil knows how to lure us away if he can, make sin as pleasurable as possible. He's trying to destroy us and the covenant we have with God and our friendship, and then whenever, whenever you run into difficulties under the providence of God, the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, poverty, family problems, debilitating illness, there is Satan trying to work with us, as he did with Job, to curse God and die.

You know, the church and God's covenant people have no strength of their own to resist this, to turn Satan away. Listen to what Isaiah says in the next verse from our text, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel." That's all we are, we're worms. You see a worm on the sidewalk and you step on it. That's how the world views us and, in reality, in our own strength that's all we are, just worms. But Jehovah our God assures us, he says, "I'll hold your right hand and I will help you." That's our text for tonight. "I'm holding your right hand and I'll help you." And that has to be seen and understood in the background of what we read in verse 10, "I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." The verse we have before us, "I've got ahold of your right hand and I'll help you," but first of all, there is the right hand of God's righteousness that will uphold us.

God's right hand speaks of his power. God, of course, doesn't have a right hand or a left hand like we do, those are anthropomorphisms, speaking of God in human terms. The right hand of God speaks of his great almighty power. Throughout scriptures, one's right

hand speaks of power. You've got something to do, you have in mind to do it, most of us are right handed, and by your right hand you carry out what you intend to do. It's a sign of power to accomplish things, and that's the way here too. We're talking about Jehovah, the eternal "I Am," the sovereign God who created all things, rules all things absolutely by his power.

That's his right hand and it's the right hand of righteousness. That's important. God is a righteous God and he always deals with us in his righteousness, and as the righteous God he does two things. First of all, he destroys the wicked in their unbelief and wickedness. On account of their sin, they're destroyed. That's a matter of God's righteousness but it's also a matter of God's righteousness that he protects and saves and preserves his people, and always blesses them, and never forsakes them. And why is that? Because of themselves, they're better? No. We're no better of ourselves than those whom God by his right hand is going to squash because of their sins. We're sinners too but in his grace and mercy he has sent his Son to redeem us. In verse 14, he calls himself the redeemer and in Jesus Christ he has made the perfect sacrifice that covers our sins, punishes our sins, removes our guilt, makes us worthy of blessing, and it's a matter of righteous therefore that he does not turn against us, that he does not deal with us as he does the wicked, and it's a matter of righteousness that he stands with us and he helps us.

How does he help us? Listen to this in verse 11 and 12, "Behold, all they that were incensed," they're hot with anger, "against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them," you're not going to find your enemies because I'm going to destroy them, "even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought." That's what Jehovah does with the right hand of his power, saving and protecting his own people.

How does he accomplish that? Well, first of all, by his providence, doesn't he? He controls all things. The devil can't move an inch, can't raise a finger against us without God's permission and will. Satan tried to destroy Job. God said to him, "You may go this far and no further." No further. Again and again by his providential control, he has spared his people from being overwhelmed and destroyed, but the most important thing is this: they must contend, the people of God, the friends of God, must contend and fight against the powers of darkness. They must resist the temptation to give it up when the price is too high by the world's calculation, to serve him. There is a battle involved when you have to deny the lust of your flesh and the desires of your flesh to remain faithful to God.

That's a battle, an inner battle, and the Lord strengthens us by the power of his word. That is the tremendous power in God's covenant. It was by the power of God's word that the whole creation came into being in six days, wasn't it, and God said, "Let there be light." God said, "Let there be firmament and dry land." The power of God's word. When Jesus Christ comes again at the end of the world, all the dead will be raised both the righteous and the wicked, and Jesus said he will call them out of the graves by his word, even as he called Lazarus out of the grave by his spoken word. The word of God in Christ is all-powerful and it's by that same powerful word that God has brought you, Malachi and

Amber, to faith and all of us who know Jesus Christ. It's the power of the word that he awakened that faith in us, and it's by the same power of the word that he strengthens us to fight the good fight, to resist and to overcome the powers of darkness as we battle against them day in and day out. It's the power of the word.

And to this now in the passage we have before us, is added the idea of Jehovah with his right hand or righteousness holding our right hand and saying, "I will help you." The idea is that Jehovah takes hold of our right hand and he walks with us hand-in-hand as we live day-by-day making our earthly pilgrimage here below and having to contend day after day with the powers of darkness. He's walking right with us, holding us by his right hand, holding our right hand to strengthen us. He guides us along the way by the power of his word and Holy Spirit. Amber, Malachi, you've got ideas of what you want to do, maybe you don't, you've got some ideas, the Lord has a path for you. He's going to guide you and lead you by his right hand, holding your hand. When you are weak, he'll hold you up. When you waver and tremble, he'll encourage you and he'll prevent you from falling, to falling away. Oh, he may allow you, as he does from time to time, to allow you to fall to teach you things as he did David and Peter and many others as chastening, but he will always pick you up and lead you safely, safely day-by-day.

And he leads us to glory. Psalm 73:23-24 reads this, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee," with Jehovah God, "thou hast holden me by my right hand." There you have the same idea and then the next verse is, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel," or literally thou art guarding, you are guiding me. It's a present thing. You're doing that, you've got me by the right hand and you are guiding me with thy counsel, "and afterward receive me to glory." That's where you're guiding me as you've got ahold of my hand and your hand of power. That's God's promise to all his people.

So Jehovah through Isaiah says to Judah, says to the church of all ages, says to us tonight, "Fear not. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid." There is much that we face that could easily cause us to be very afraid. Think of Judah in captivity when they had to deal with Haman and the edict that went throughout the whole Persian Empire, making it open season on all the Jews. Think of when Judah came back and tried to rebuild the temple and the city, and there the Samaritans were in the way, even writing letters to the Persian Emperor with lies. And then there was something that took place between the Old and New Testament not recorded in scripture, when the Greek Empire broke up into four sections. Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus was his name. He thought quite highly of himself so he called himself Epiphanes, the revelation of God. He hated the Jews and he came down with his armies and went to Jerusalem and offered up sacrifices of pigs, unclean animals, in the temple, required the Jews to eat pig meat contrary to the law of God, and those who refused, and there were many, were butchered so that the streets of Jerusalem literally ran red with blood. Cause for fear.

This is also true for the church today and it comes as we witness a decline in morals. I'm one of the older ones here, not the oldest but I'm getting there. I look back from my days, your age, the '60s to today, it's not the same world today. There used to be outward morality and as God has prospered our country, this always happens in prosperity, the

morality of our nation has gone down and down so that we murder our babies, we embrace and champion homosexuality, homosexuality is being forced down our throats, and with it comes a growing hostility for the true church of God and a believer who will stand fast and live in righteousness. And it's not going to get better. And along with the decay of morals becomes a greater enticement to the pleasures of sin and access to the pleasures of sin, so that temptation you young people face temptations that we never did in my day. And apostasy is rampant in the church world. There have been times in the history of the church where the church was strong, the time of the Reformation, that's no longer the case, and it all tends to generate fear. You know, that's what the older generation has for you younger folks; we see what's happening and we shake our heads and say, "What are our kids going to have to deal with and our grandkids?" And we worry even though we shouldn't. And you young folks, you're not babies anymore, you're not little children. You've come to see what the world is getting to be. You perhaps don't see it in the same vision and perspective that your parents and grandparents do but you know what's out there and you're going to have to face it. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Jehovah your God, your covenant friend, has got ahold of your right hand with his hand of righteousness and he's leading you and guiding you and helping you and will keep you safe.

Amber, Malachi, you've already experienced that in your 18-19 years of life. I look back on almost 74 years of life and I can say with others of your grandparents here, the Lord has never been unfaithful. He's always been there with his right hand of righteousness holding onto our hand and helping us. He's never been unfaithful and that's what you can expect. Don't be afraid. And that admonition not to fear implies, then, have confidence. Have confidence for the future as Jehovah promises to be your God, to hold you by his right hand of righteousness to lead and guide you and to help you. And remember, remember how he does that primarily through his word. Be students of the word, young folks. Be in the house of God where the word is preached and be there. Study the word of God. Be part of a group that wants to talk about the word of God, that encourages you in the word of God. That's how Jehovah helps us. And then in that word, turn to him in prayer. He will not forsake you. Jehovah our God will have you by your right hand helping you. Amen.

Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy word. We thank thee, O God, for our covenant, the covenant that we have with thee. We thank thee for the promise and the faithfulness that thou hast shown us. We pray be with all of us young and old alike and give us confidence for the future. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.