

Isaiah 41:1–7

God's Sovereignly Gracious Invitation and Man's Unitedly Grievous Innovation

Wednesday, January 24, 2024 • Read Isaiah 41:1–7

Questions from the Scripture text: What does the Lord command whom in v1a? And what does He invite the inhabitants to do (v1b, cf. 40:31b)? To what sort of gathering does He call them (v1b–c)? From what direction is the person in the question of v2a raised up? What do v2a–b ask about him? In what did the Lord call him (v2b)? What did He call him to do (v2c–d)? With what effect upon them (v2e–f)? And what effect upon himself (v3)? What else has the One Who called him ordained (v4a–b)? What answer do v4c–d give to these questions? What does He remind us about Himself, that should have made this obvious? Who see the summons and answer in v5? But with what attitude? In whom do they try to find comfort (v6)? What solution do they come up with for this courage (v7)? But whose skills make it? And how does the last line mock this?

What are we to think when great powers arise? Isaiah 41:1–7 prepares us for the first serial reading in public worship on the Lord's Day. In these seven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **we must remember that the Lord is sovereign over all and praise Him Who is our hope.**

Divine Invitation. Many believers memorize Isa 40:28–31, or even just v31, and well do they do so, for it is full of the comfort of faith in such a God as we have! But let them respond to it by heeding the invitation that we find now in the very next verse (v1). Isaiah often uses “coastlands” to refer to the farthest reaches (cf. v5a–b); the Lord is inviting the people of all the earth to enjoy the renewed strength of those who wait upon Him (v1c).

Divine Initiative. But men do not like God's way of salvation. For He raises up a great king to rule over all others (v2a–d). From where Israel sat, “one from the east” was generally bad news. That's the direction from which Mesopotamian conquerors come—most recently Assyria, and soon Babylon.

In the near history of this passage, however, the Lord would raise up Cyrus the Persian from the east, and he would act as deliverer for Israel and executioner of Babylon (chs. 45–46). Ultimately, Cyrus is a type (forerunner, foreshadowing) of Christ; but, his conquest would be frightful (much as the Lord's second coming will be)!

The conquests described are devastating: sword and bow bringing enemies to dust and stubble (v2e–f). But the conqueror is untouched: passing safely (v3a), seeming not even to leave footprints (v3b). This is reminiscent not so much of Cyrus's victories, great as they were, but of the One on the white horse, Who slaughters all the hordes of the enemy by Himself, with just the sword which proceeds from His mouth (cf. Rev 19:21).

At that time, the Lord will glorify Himself in His Son. At this time, He glorifies Himself as the sovereign God of history. The big question is: who has raised him up (v2a)? v2b has a dead giveaway (similar to the clue “in hope” in Rom 8:20), for this conqueror has been called “in righteousness.” There is only One who could have done that!

But the Lord adds to the “whodunnit” question (v4a), including now not only Cyrus but all the generations of history from the beginning (v4b). It can only be YHWH: Alpha and Omega. There (and sovereign, of course!) at the beginning (v4c), and there (and sovereign!) at the end (v4d), and there-and-sovereign everywhere in between. What a God! And what an invitation to wait upon Him and have strength renewed! Wonderfully, Jesus identifies Himself as YHWH God from Isaiah 41 (cf. Rev 22:13).

Human Innovation. But the response of the nations is to tremble at this conqueror (v5a–b) and draw near (v5c)—not to God but to each other (v6)?! How dreadful is the sin and folly of the unbelieving world, that they hope in each other rather than God, Who has invited them to have Him as their hope! Unity for unity's sake is worse than worthless; it is wicked. True unity comes from that true reconciliation in which men are brought near to each other by being brought near to God in Christ (cf. Eph 2:11–18). In a season in the church in which much nonsense and evil parades itself as a virtue in the name of “reconciliation,” we desperately need to learn the lesson of Isaiah 41:6, in context.

And it is weak. Pathetically, ridiculously weak. For help, they go to what they can construct. It's a group effort: craftsman and goldsmith (v7a), hammering smoother and anvil striker (v7b), rounded out by the fifth man: soldering man who fastens it with pegs (v7c–d). The worthlessness of the wickedness is completed with the comical “that it might not totter.” Dear reader, are the days of such idolatry ended? Behold how now, more than ever, men trust in their togetherness and look to the work of their hands for help! But the Lord continues, even now, to beckon to the people to come to Him, even from the ends of the earth. Come, and renew your strength!

In what ways do you need your strength renewed? What has the Lord invited you to do for that? What powers have arisen in the world that threaten to terrify? What does this passage remind you about their rise? What is wrong with unity for unity's sake?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for the glorious invitation to have You alone as our strength. And thank You for the reminder that You are Alpha and Omega and rule over all of history and this moment of history. But forgive us, O Lord, for we much more easily draw near to each other than to You. And we much more easily trust in the work of our hands than in Your almighty hand. Turn us from such worthless wickedness, we pray, through Christ, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP18A “I Love You, LORD” or TPH228 “Hast Thou Not Known, Hast Thou Not Heard”

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Isaiah 41 verses 1 through 7. These are God's words. Keep silence before me, o coastlands and let the people renew their strength. Let them come near then, let them speak. Let us come near together for judgment. Who raised up one from the East? Who in righteousness called him to his feet, who gave the Nations before him.

And made him rule over the Kings. Who gave them as the dust to his sword as driven stubble to his bow. Who pursued them and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet. Who has performed and done it. Calling the generations from the beginning ah Yahweh and the first.

And with the last, I am, he The coastland, saw it, and feared. The ends of the Earth were afraid. They drew near. And, Everyone helped his neighbor. And said to his brother be of good courage. So the Craftsman encouraged the Goldsmith. He who Smooths with the hammer. Inspired him.

Who strikes. The Anvil saying it is ready for the soldering. Then he fastened it with pegs. That it might not totter. So far, the reading of gods inspired. And Aaron twerked. I think most of the time when someone reads Isaiah 41, Uh, verses one through seven. It's quite obvious.

The silliness the foolishness. Of the idolatry. Because of the way verse 7 is worded. But one thing that might be missed, is the invitation of God at the beginning of the chapter. And I think the chapter divisions are one of the reasons that we do that. Because And when we read, keep silence before Mia, costumes, and let the people renew their strength.

Let them come near then, let them speak. Let us come near together for judgment. It sounds like a challenge. Uh, when you just read it all by itself because it's a judgment scene, and God is saying come near Although the word judgment is here, not condemnation or verdict or sentence.

It means it means decision. Maybe a verdict is close. Um, Uh, but when he says, let the people renew their strength Uh, taken by itself. It sounds like you're saying, let's see how strong they are when they come near me for judgment, but it is not by itself. It is the very next verse after, Those who wait on Yahweh, shall renew their strength.

And it's using the same language. We've already seen it a couple of times. In the book of Isaiah where even Assyria and Egypt. And the coastlands as they are mentioned twice in this passage. Uh, even Assyria and Egypt are invited to come, and participate with and belong to the people of God, and to God himself.

And so this is continuing a theme that we're going to see again several times. By the time we get to the end of the book. God is saying the invitation to be one who waits upon him and renews your strength is not just for the Israelites, it's not just for the Jews.

In fact, it's for you. And we know now because he has revealed himself finally and fully in his son. That this is an invitation to belong to him through Union with Jesus Christ. To believe into Jesus and be adopted by the father as his own dear child, and to be indwelt by the spirit of the father, and the spirit of the son, who communicates to our hearts, who the father is to us, and who the son is to us.

And even that by itself, renews our strength. Just to remember Who the Triune God is and how he has revealed himself to us in assignment. How he has redeemed us for himself in the son and that's what is, that's what the invitation is. To become even if you're at the coast from the coastlands and coastlands, we've seen a few times and um it's one of the ways that Isaiah and not just Isaiah other parts of the Old Testament as well coastlands is metaphorically used or representatively used for the farthest ends of the Earth.

In fact, he's going to say that, isn't he? Uh, the coastland saw it and feared, the ends of the Earth were afraid in verse 5. So anyone Uh, one who sinned in Adam and fell with him, in his first transgression is invited now, To leave off being an atom and wait, upon the Lord belong, to the Lord, and be in the Lord.

Even before, we knew specifically, that it was in the son, and his name would be Jesus. Although we already do know, don't we from earlier in this book that his name would be Emmanuel which is what the angel told Joseph, it's the reason for naming him Jesus but even before, The sun became flesh, the word became flesh.

In order to redeem us. There is this invitation to wait upon the Lord and instead of dying and decaying like we do in Adam, To inwardly at first, in our soul, Uh, be renewed and strengthened and to be given whatever strength we need for whatever God has appointed to us.

And also Uh, an inherent implicit Pro promise here of the Resurrection. And so this, uh, this wonderful Divine invitation. But then, the divine initiative. Now, one of the things the Lord sometimes does Uh, in time. Is he raises up those who create Terror and trouble, so that when we find ourselves, in the midst of the terror and trouble, we will cry out to him.

And we will come to him in faith. Another thing he does and one of the ways. Sorry. One of the ways that he does that in time is even to those who are persecuting his people, he'll raise somebody up who delivers his people. And that one will destroy others.

And the Lord will make known. Even like we're singing in the end of Psalm 109 this week, the Lord will make known that it is his hand Uh, who does this? And that it is. Uh, who does this and he will bring people to Faith in him. In that way.

Now, we're going to hear very specifically about, Cyrus the Persian by whom the Lord, is going to deliver his people out of their Babylonian captivity. And And who is going to be very successful and more. We're going to hear him prophesied by name at the beginning of chapter 45 and we're going to hear about his exploits in chapters 45 and 46.

In fact, this is one of the reasons why as the church declined and people ceased to believe in God and submit to him. They started saying well this part of Isaiah couldn't actually be written by Isaiah. I mean, how could he know, uh, Uh what someone over a hundred years after he died was going to be named, and what he was what, uh, what he was going to do well because Uh, no one prophesied of themselves, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, that's how he knows.

And so Cyrus is this one from the East and one from the East is bad news. Uh, if you are Uh, if you are in Palestine, if you are in Israel. All that ever comes out of the East are these Mesopotamian Warrior tyrants. Friends. And and he asks, who raised up one from the East who in righteousness?

Called him to his feet. Now, there's a typo that is sort of, not of, not a typo here, in the new King James very, very rare. In a major Bible translation to find a typo but they capitalize the his here. Um, in verse 2. Maybe. Uh, Maybe. Because they think well, I guess it's not a typo, it's interpretive.

Well, they called him to his feet. Uh, he called him to his feet, that's making it sound like Um, We summoned him to God. So that's what they mean. So, never mind not a typo. Uh, but the called him to his feet as not so much a bestowal Uh, ceremony or a coronation ceremony, as it looks like, who gave the Nations before him and made him rule over, the Kings is actually calling him to take the Nations that are in front of him.

And whatever Nations he takes, he rules over them. It's very similar to. In Psalm 2, when God. Tells the, Uh has only begotten, son has anointed which he's actually going to call Cyrus as a picture of Jesus. His anointed in chapter, 45 and 46. And, And he sends him to destroy in the case of Psalm 2.

It's a rod of iron dashing. The Nations to pieces and the other Kings to peace is very similar here in Psalm 41. He gives the Kings and the Nations as dust to his sword and driven stubble uh to his bow. Uh, and in verse 3, The Hebrew is even a little bit more difficult, but he pursues them and passes, uh, safely.

And then, by the way, that he had not gone with his feet, The picture is, That the victory is so complete. And so total That as far as Cyrus is experiencing or as far as the person Armory is experiencing, it's almost like peacetime. In fact, if you look for his feet, if you look for his Footprints, You can't find them.

Uh, the the image there is he is walking so lightly that he is that he's not even looking for at Footprints. The only reason you know that he's going through is because the nations and the kings are made like dust and stubble. That's the that's the whole word picture there in verses two and three so who called this Warrior King.

Over over all the kings from the East. And we have a clue in verse. Uh, be the second line there, who in righteousness called him to his feet. Well, there's only one who calls in righteousness. Just like, If we were to wonder in Romans 8, when it says he who subjected it and hope, well, it can't be the devil and it can't be any man.

The the one who subjects in in Hope An expectation of what he's going to do. That's God there in Romans 8. And here, in righteousness, he called him. That, of course is God. And so there is here, the Divine initiative. In fact, Cyrus is a picture. Of our Lord Jesus and and Jesus's Victory is actually going to be even more complete.

Uh, you remember. Revelation 19, when you have all of the hosts of Heaven, the holy Warrior angels in their ten, thousands of ten thousands, so an army of hundreds of millions and you have The innumerable multitude of the redeemed Saints, and then on the other side, Are the beasts and And Satan and all all of his

armies.

And, The Lord Jesus binds. Uh, binds the leaders, casts them into hell, and the rest are slaughtered with the sword that comes out of his mouth. So that Army of hundreds of millions. Didn't get to do anything. Because of how easily and completely and entirely. The battle is won.

And so, So the Lord's Divine initiative, then. Uh it is with this conqueror who has raised up and is conquering is complete but for he himself um it is done in peace. And then he asks again he repeats the question, once he's given all these details. Uh, in verse 4, he repeats the question.

But now he adds An even bigger clue. Who has performed and done it. Calling the generations from the beginning. Well, there's only one who's there in the beginning. And so it says, oh, you're in the first. And with the last, I am, he Uh, it was wonderful. Uh, statement of some someone that can only be your way.

Because there are no. Angelic creatures. However, Who can call themselves Alpha and Omega? There's no creature at all. Only the Creator calls himself Alpha and Omega. So that when Jesus Takes Isaiah 41:4, as a title for himself in Revelation, 22:13 it is crystal clear whom he is claiming to be, isn't it?

He is claiming to be Yahweh. The one true God. And so, Uh he says, who has performed and done it, calling the generations, so that reminds us that it wasn't just one slice of time and what Cyrus was going to do. Um, several Several decades more than a century from the time that this was written.

The Lord is Sovereign over every generation of History. He is the first and he is the last, he's Sovereign in the first generation he's Sovereign in the last generation and he's Sovereign in all of the generations in between. And so, when you say who has done this, Yeah. Um, Whatever happens with this election.

That is coming up for president and uh, for however many seats in the Senate. And the house and all of the local elections. You say who has done this, who has raised these people up. Well, there are human instruments by which it occurs. You know, Cyrus didn't materialize out of thin air with no political or military.

Circumstances surrounding it. But all the ultimate answer to who has done this Is the Lord? And even the Lord Jesus. The alpha the Omega. And how has he done it? He's done it in righteousness. And so there's this Divine initiative. And whatever we see him, raise up, we run to the Lord.

Jesus, whenever We are, uh, when whenever we are overrun whenever Uh, whenever something Dreadful comes in the wise and righteous and good Providence of God, Now, there's a response in verse 5 and it sounds like it's going good. So, you have Divine initial, Divine invitation, and then the Divine initiative, And then the human response.

Sadly. The human response turns out not to be. Human accepting the Divine invitation. Or humans submitting to and trusting the Lord in the Divine initiative. But instead you get human, Innovation. So, verse 1. Keep science. Before me o coastlands. Let the people renew their strength, let them come near.

Let them let us come near together for judgment. And then you have this response. In verse 5, the coastlands saw it and feared The ends of the Earth were afraid, so now, Uh, they have fear, which is a right response but it doesn't turn out to be Godly fear.

Which produces repentance? It turns out to be fleshly fear. Which produces Terror and destruction, they drew near and came just like he had said. Let them come near. Let us come near they drew near and came. And then verse 6, Does not say and they waited upon the Lord.

And they renewed their strength. Instead it said everyone helped his neighbor. And said to his brother, Be of good courage. And so, rather than renewing strength. And trusting in the Lord, they found Unity in the Of the worldly. Unity for Unity's sick. Our unity for Mutual reinforcement without the Lord.

Is not just worthless. Without the Lord, it is wicked. It is unity like unto Babel. And so rather than renewing their strength with the Lord they told each other be of good courage. But what was there? What did they apply their courage to do? So, the Craftsman encouraged The Goldsmith.

So, you've got the Craftsman and the Goldsmith. He who Smooths with the hammer. So you got the, the hammering smoother. Inspired him. Who strikes? The Anvil? So you've got the end at the Anvil Striker. Saying it is ready for soldering. Then he fastened it with pegs. That it might not totter men trusting in the works of that, their hands.

But even the finest work that they could provide needed to be stabilized and fixed in place, so that it wouldn't succumb to the Dagon problem. Uh, and In its face. On its face later in the Isaiah 45, 46 section where Cyrus is destroying Babylonians. One of the things that is going to happen to people who have fallen into the Babylonian religion as they're going to have these.

These really well made Bell statues and Nebo statues. But they're too heavy and when they put them in the, in the cart, the ox, can't pull it. And Ox, and cart and gods, all go into captivity together. Uh, to Cyrus. Uh, the Persian Uh, but here just the Folly.

Of trusting in the works of our hands and pulling all together. And to trust and encourage one another, in the works of our hands. And, Uh, last, we think that the age of trusting in the works of our hands is over because We don't bow down. Uh, gold and silver statues.

Uh, which Give us a few years, we'll get there. Um, but we do, don't we? Live in a world where the whole world is kind of connected together now, And encouraging one another. There are some outlier countries. Um, but generally speaking, the world comes together and does what they can with the work of their hands.

And we trust in the works of our hands to save us. But it needs our help just to get smoothed. It needs our help. Just to be formed. It needs our help, just to be maintained so that it doesn't crash. Uh, and anyone in I.T has suffered a crash of Uh of something we made now.

It's not wrong to make things. With our hands that are useful, it's wrong to make Idols, of course. But it definitely is wrong. To take our courage and our help and trust in the works of our hands. And We have an epidemic of that. In fact. The pandemic just showed how bad the idolatry epidemic has become as we trusted in ourselves and suffered even the temporal consequences for it.

So what a worthless and wicked response when God himself. Has welcomed the ends of the Earth. To come and be those who wait upon him. And renew their strength. Lord help you. My dear family. To wait upon him and trust in him. And not trust in the works of your hands.

Thank you, Father for How you have? Called us to yourself. Even. Uh, you will say later. In this book of Israel all day long. I stretched out my hands. Disobedient and contrary people. Oh Lord, don't let us be these disobedient and contrary people. We thank you for those whom you have appointed to us in our life that Um, we may walk with you together.

And for the fellowship that you give us, That we enjoy in being drawn near to you. Um, and so draw near to one another. But oh Lord help us not to trust in man. Help us not to put our trust to Our Hope. Even in the dear ones that you Given to be our helpers in the earth.

And Uh, to spend our life with Help us to trust only in you Grant that we would not put confidence in princess. Or depend on a son of man. Uh, we pray Lord that you would indeed renew our strength. We pray that. Whoever and you raise up and whatever you do in your righteousness, You would not let our hearts falter.

But grant that, our fear of you would be greater than any fear of Providence. And that it would be a reverence reverential fear, like dutiful children. Who know that we are. Dear to you. Help us O, Lord to Experience the Providence in our life, in this way. That we may rest only upon you and rejoice in you.

Thank you for revealing yourself as Alpha and Omega especially in our Lord Jesus. And so stir our hearts up Evermore to Faith in him. Even as we ask these things in his name, amen.