

Announcements

1. No Bible study Monday
2. Men's study 2nd & 4th Sunday
3. Painting sanctuary—service in FH Jan 3
4. Time change for service (fill out paper)
5. Xmas Eve service @ 4:30pm
6. Dec 31—New Year's Eve—Evan and games

Verses to be read: Psalm 121

For I am with you
Isaiah 41:10

“I can't do that.” “I don't know how to do that.” “Someone else is better at that.” “I don't have the energy for that.” I have heard that throughout my years in ministry. But, if I were honest, I would have to admit I have said the same. Are these statements true? At times, absolutely. But, if God is stirring in your heart, it may just be that He isn't wanting someone who can do it on their own strength and seems best for the job, but someone who needs to rely upon Him because God wants to reveal who He is and He wants you to experience the joy that comes from having to trust Him.

Are there some really big things in life we are afraid of? Yes! At work, standing up to the boss when he wants us to do something that lacks integrity...we might lose our job. Telling someone we don't want to hear the gossip. Telling a child 'NO', they can't do something or have something. Being honest with a spouse about something. Speaking up for others that can't speak for themselves. Having to stand ground for a good reason. The list goes on.

There was a time in German history in the late 1920's and early 30's that the pastors sermons began to be censored. As time went on before the Nazi party really took over the pastors had to turn their sermons in and there were certain things they were allowed to preach and certain things they could't speak against. A few years ago, there was a movement to lobby for legislation to make speaking against homosexuality from a pulpit a hate crime. That meant that as a pastor if you were to speak about and read certain parts of scripture you would commit a crime punishable by jail. That created some fear. There has been a push to make it

punishable to counsel a child away from being transgender or even genderless.

But, let's take it a stop further. What if it becomes saying anything is a sin becomes a hate crime? What if it becomes acknowledging, reading, or sharing parts of scripture becomes legally punishable? What if going to church becomes an offense punishable by jail? What if persecution begins to take root even more so in this country?

Will you stand? Can you stand? Scripture tells me that those who trust in Him can...because we have the Spirit of God with us. And, it tells me we should because this isn't our home, this is not living my best life.

Scripture tells me that God will be by our side. Scripture tells me that He empowers us to keep moving forward. Scripture tells me that He never leaves us, but is always working. Scripture tells me He doesn't forsake us but gives us what we need to accomplish what He wants for us to accomplish according to a better plan. Scripture tells me that we will have the words to say when needed, and ability to do when needed. The key is trusting and leaning upon the Holy Spirit. As we looked at last week, God is sovereign and He works within His permissive will to accomplish His sovereign will.

How do we follow the Spirit's lead? How do we hear God's voice? First, by putting oneself into a posture of hearing. Hearing and reading God's word, but then choosing to put it into action. Second, being willing and even looking for areas God is asking you to be uncomfortable in. Those places He is wanting you to take a step of faith. Third, stop waiting for your faith to grow, but put it into action now because that is what grows your faith. Fourth, give of yourself-time, resources, finances. Fifth, wrap your life in prayer. Don't worry about how good your prayers are, just talk to God about the good, the bad, and the ugly. Sixth, continue in the meeting with other believers and learning together and carrying each others burdens. As you work in this process, God will begin revealing Himself. You'll begin to feel His nudge. He will stir in your heart. He will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 is so true, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take."

For us control freaks, we need to understand that sometimes God doesn't reveal that next step until you are right up against the need to take the next step. Is God toying with us or getting back at us or just making it harder to follow Him? Not at all! He is teaching us a valuable, life-changing, good-for-us lesson—to trust in Him and not ourselves. He wants all the glory and deserves all the glory. When we try to get our piece of the glory by leaning on our own understanding, it doesn't turn out as well. It puts the human element to high up and begins to take away at the supernatural working of God. But Greg, didn't God give us abilities and talents? YES! Use those. Use them well. Let them be like clothes you are wearing though. Continue to soak them in the water of God. Let the water affect the clothes and as they begin to dry out and you feel the freedom to move, drench them again with the things of God so that it is God's presence that affects all you do. God gave you those talents and abilities, but for His glory and for you good.

There was a guy named Brother Lawrence who has a book that shares what he learned and his teachings called, "Practicing the Presence of God." I have not read it, but a friend of mine has and it transformed him. The point of the book is the development of an awareness of the presence of God upon His life.

It records that when he was 18 what he saw challenged his faith, "...in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time, the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the Providence and Power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul." He realized that God was at work. God grows us. God is about restoring and redeeming.

"That he had always been governed by love, without selfish views; and that having resolved to make the love of GOD the end of all his actions, he had found reasons to be well satisfied with his method. That he was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of GOD, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts."

"That in order to form a habit of conversing with GOD continually, and referring all we do to Him; we must at first apply to Him with some diligence: but that after a little care we should find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty."

Brother Lawrence wanted every thought, move, breath to be filled with and because of God's presence in His life, so that he would fulfill Ephesians 5:1 which says, "Be imitators of God." As James 1:19-25 would say in a little different way,

"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."

In other words, put your faith into action. We are commanded by God to do so. In the next chapter of James, James tells us that faith that isn't put into action really isn't faith.

The question we have to wrestle with is God greater than all the things that surround us and challenge our beliefs and actions? Is God greater than the government? Is He greater than our needs? Is He greater than our shortcomings? Is He greater than _____ (you fill in the blank)?

Something I was reading by John Piper says, "As always in the Bible, there are reasons for the commands. Commands don't hang in the air with no basis in reality. If God commands us to do something, there are good reasons to do it. And power comes from understanding and believing those reasons."

Scripture gives us a lot of commands. But, like Piper says, they aren't given to us without reasons—they are given to us for and with good reasons. And where does the power come? In our understanding and believing. When we put our faith in action, the door is open to God moving in us and through us.

Our theme verse this morning is Isaiah 41:10. Apparently this was the 3rd most looked at verse in 2018 according to YouVersion Bible app. It says, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your

God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.”

Listen to the power of that verse. Listen to the promises in that verse. This is one of those verses that clearly speaks to everyone. We are humans. We have fears, struggles, hardships, challenges.

The challenge for some of these verses in the Old Testament though is not to take a message, command, or promise that God is directly given to the Israelites and translate it over to being literally and directly for me. However, this is God’s Word and it “is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” And what we definitely don’t want to do is look at scripture and interpret it through the lens of our western culture. Instead, we want it to interpret our western culture thinking into a worldview thinking that is biblical. So, what we do want to look for is the principle behind these truths and apply them.

I say that because some scripture is easily seen through our eyes as promises that get filtered through our western or earthly mindset. Jeremiah 29:11 is one of those verses. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” It becomes real easy to see that as speaking about wealth and health. Does it displease God to have wealth? Not at all. That often times is a blessing of God. Does it displease God to seek out a healthy life and to stray from what may kill you? Not at all. But this verse is pointing to something so much greater! It is pointing towards spiritual prosperity and the presence of God and eternal life. Otherwise, we have to start asking questions about the people who come to know Christ in some of these third world cultures that live in utter poverty and unhealthy conditions and die in utter poverty and from poor health, but die filled with joy and peace.

So, what about our verse. The principle surrounding this verse isn’t about God keeping us from death. The principle in this verse is that God will be with us to death, through death, and beyond death. Death won’t have a power over us to the point of destroying us. Death is part of life. Death is a result of living in a sin-filled world. When Jesus went to the cross for us He died. But, He rose again three days later. He did not stay in the grave.

Death did not have power over Him. He would be resurrected to the right hand of God the Father. For those in Christ, for those who have received God's forgiveness found in Christ, we will be resurrected. Paul tells us this in 1 Corinthians 15.

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said."

"And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died."

"The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory. It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

"What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever."

"For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, my dear brothers

and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.”

We don't have anything to fear. Our God is greater. What God offers is greater. What God gives is greater. So, “Be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.”

Let's read Isaiah 41:10 again, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with My victorious right hand.”

For I am with you

Do not be afraid. What is it that moves us from fear to courage? ‘For I am with you.’ What is God saying to us here? I give you my presence.

It's the Christmas season. We are celebrating a virgin's birth. We are celebrating what Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 pointed towards. Let's read them. 7:14 says, “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’). And, 9:6 says, “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be call: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.” God in flesh, Jesus, walk amongst mankind, suffered, breathed, was tempted, bled as a human. God came down and was with mankind. He died and rose from the dead and went to sit at the right hand of God, in the place of authority and victory. But, He didn't just go and leave us to ourselves saying, ‘good luck. I'll be here when you get here.’” No. He gave us His Holy Spirit to be the seal on us that we are His. He have us the Holy Spirit to remind us of what Jesus has said, to counsel us in how we should live, to reveal Truth to us, to continue pointing us to Jesus, to convict and transform us into His likeness, and to make real in our hearts the promises He gave.

What is our part? Do not be afraid. In other words, don't let fear grip you and paralyze you. Take courage, and move forward, putting your hope and trust in God alone.

For I am your God

Do not be discouraged. Other translations say, “Do not anxiously look around you, dismayed, terrified, frightened, intimidated”, for I am your God.

What is it that moves us from being anxious about what is going on? For I am **YOUR** God. Did you catch that? He is personal. Your God. God is our God. God is involved with His creation. God cares for, protects, loves His creation. He is not just about the overall picture of creation, but intimately involved in our lives. He is leading us towards good. He transforms us. He loves. He forgives. He meets needs. He listens and answers prayer. While we were sinners Christ died for us according to Romans 5:8. Matthew 10:31 says, “So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” Psalm 139 speaks of God knowing us in our mother’s womb, knowing the days of your life, the hairs on your head. Ephesians 2:10 speaks of God creating us for good works and that we are His masterpiece. Philippians 4:9 says, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6 tells us, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;”.

Our role is to not be discouraged by what is going on or what we don’t have. How we do that is to fix our eyes upon Christ and the things of Christ and the promises of Christ and then put feet to them in our lives.

The next part of the verse tells us what God will do as we walk in trust, as we lean into Him, as we embrace the commands of God. He will give us strength to walk through the fire. Look at the life of Daniel, Shadrach Meshach and Abednego. How were they able to stand the pressure, the fear, the fire, the lions? The strength of God was imparted upon them because their faith was in God. His presence was with them. He was their God. No one else was. Their trust was not in Nebuchadnezzar, and it was not in the idol, nor was it in their ability to get away.

I will hold you up with My victorious right hand.

1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Ephesians 6:13 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

1 John 5:4 says, "For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith."

Proverbs 21:31 says, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD."

1 Corinthians 15:57 says, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."