

“Feeble Hands and Knocking Knees?”—Isaiah 35:3-4

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Feeble Hands and Knocking Knees?”, is Isaiah 35:3-4 → *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How does your body react in fearful situations? In the midst of danger you may feel adrenaline rush through your system with a force that even empowers you to protect yourself from danger. If the fear is a result of an unknown future in the midst of a present affliction you may find your stomach “knotting up,” start sweating profusely, your hands quivering and knees literally shaking or “knocking.” Being overcome by fear extends beyond an emotional reaction as we literally feel it physically.

The picture which the prophet Isaiah “draws” in our text for the people in his day is one of great hope, joy, courage and new life in the LORD. It was a very needed encouragement to God’s people who were living under the oppressing captivity of the Assyrians.

Notice the picture language Isaiah used in the context to give hope to people living in what appeared to be a hopeless situation. New life is described as *waters breaking forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert* (cf. Isaiah 35:6-7)—the desert picturing people who feel like they are “dried up” spiritually and physically in captivity. They *shall be glad . . . and rejoice with joy and singing!* (cf. Isaiah 35:1-2) Yahweh’s new life would be evidenced in healings of all kinds! (cf. Isaiah 35:5-6) Even the places mentioned—*Lebanon . . . Carmel and Sharon* (cf. Isaiah 35:2) were all well noted for their fertility. **This was definitely a message meant to produce hope in God’s afflicted people as they would experience His new life!**

There was also another action which would work on behalf of God’s people with the coming of His salvation. While promising salvation to His redeemed He also promised *vengeance, with the recompense* upon those who do not follow Him. Verse 4 of our text says: *Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”*

While these words were meant to create hope and courage in the hearts of God’s people they may have been very “hard to swallow” in the midst of their affliction. When’s the last time you said to someone who had an *anxious heart*, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come . . . and save you.”

Their response might have been (either verbally or in thought): “That’s easy for you to say! You’re not suffering through my affliction!” Or “That’s easier said than done!” The words may be very easy to hear and yet so hard to heed.

However, as difficult as such optimistic words are to hear in the midst of the apparent hopeless situations, **they are still said!** God speaks these words of hope through the prophet Isaiah in the promise of new life with His salvation because Yahweh will accomplish it! As “unrealistic” as they may seem . . . even if fear may taint the reception of them . . . and no matter how hopeless the people may feel, **they still need to hear these words spoken to them!**

Notice the command in verse 3 of our text: *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.* It gives us a picture of “knocking knees” and quivering hands in the midst of fear, despair and a broken spirit. This is exactly how we feel whenever fear of an unknown future overtakes us, leading us to the sin of worry which can eventually lead us to despair. How does such a weak condition happen to people who have the LORD as their Almighty God?

Actually, fear is a very natural human emotion which affects every area of our lives, sometimes positively and sometime negatively. In fact, it seems that the behavioral sciences have a “phobia” label for most everything. For example, *claustrophobia* which is the fear of close spaces; *acrophobia* which is the fear of heights; *zoophobia* which is the fear of animals; and so forth.

Fear can be a positive dynamic in our lives. It can produce caution to keep us safe in the midst of dangerous situations and even help us to respond properly to protect ourselves. However, fear can also be a negative dynamic in our lives, disabling us or causing us to run and hide. The sinful affects of fear were displayed immediately after Adam and Eve's fall into sin. In Genesis 3:8 it says that they *heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and . . . hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden* because of a guilty conscience.

Too often satan uses the sinful world around us as a catalyst for our sinful nature to get a foothold in the midst of fear, in an effort to destroy our faith in Christ and cause us to lose heart. The devil, the world and our sinful nature try to take advantage of our "knocking knees" to make us fall into the sin of worry and despair so our focus is taken off of Christ and placed on our own inabilities and powerlessness.

Isaiah promised God's people that they would experience this new life and hope when they would see the glory of Yahweh revealed. This message of hope was not restricted to their physical deliverance from Assyria and their return to the physical Promised Land. It looked much further into the future when God would reveal His glory in the Person & Work of Jesus! Referring to Jesus as *the Word*, John 1:14 says: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among*

*us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **The glory of the LORD has appeared in our Savior Jesus Christ!*** Jesus even referred to the fulfillment of this prophecy by pointing to His healing works during His earthly ministry. (cf. Matthew 11:3-6)

However, even in the presence of Jesus it is easy to lose focus, becoming fearful and doubt God's ability to take care of us. We see many examples of this in Jesus' disciples. Recall Jesus coming to His disciples on the water as they were battling a storm in the boat. Upon hearing His words,—*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*—Peter began walking to Jesus on the water at His command. Matthew 14:30-31 says: *But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"* He doubted because there was a shift in his focus.

This is the challenge of the Christian faith—to trust God in the midst of affliction, suffering, disappointment, persecution, danger and fear. God often brought His Word of salvation and deliverance to His people **in the midst of their captivity and affliction**. Some might say: "Why didn't the LORD just deliver them? Why all the anticipation of a future event of deliverance?"

Remember that God's desire is for us to simply trust Him **at His Word**. It was the peoples' disobedience **to His Word** by which they brought this

captivity upon themselves in the first place. Now they needed to place their faith completely in Him **on the basis of His Word of promise**. Hope grows out of the word of promise in affliction. Even for us who have the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation in Jesus Christ hope is very important as we look forward to the ultimate restoration of all things and the *everlasting joy* promised to us! (cf. Isaiah 35:10)

Romans 8:23-25 says that *we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies on the Last Day. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* Jesus put it this way in John 20:28 → *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

The message of hope needs to be spoken to those with “feeble hands and knocking knees” in the midst of the afflictions in their lives. Maybe it will be just the word of encouragement they need to hear at that moment. It will certainly be the focus they need! They may not immediately be strengthened by the words. However, the Holy Spirit will work through the promise of God's salvation, grace and deliverance in Christ to bring strength to those people as they trust in God to bring about His deliverance in His way and in His time!

When your fearful feelings are directed to the LORD in faith they can

become a constructive tool in your life, producing hope and courage in the midst of struggles. *Fear not!* was a constant message from God throughout the Old Testament, proclaimed by angels and Jesus in the New Testament. God calls upon us to proclaim the same message to so many with “feeble hands and knocking knees” in our world. Many are fearful of the day when Christ will come back, whether or not they will admit it. God’s gracious promise fulfilled in Jesus is for them as well! Just as Jesus came and put us on *the Way of Holiness* that leads to Mount Zion in the heavenly Jerusalem, (cf. Isaiah 35:8) so we lead others to Jesus so they can have great hope, joy, courage and new life in the LORD. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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