

Fear Not (1857)

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true Christian strength comes from recognizing our own weakness and trusting wholly in God's promised help, enabling believers to overcome fear and discouragement.

Scripture: Isaiah 41:14, Zechariah 4:6, Psalm 8:4, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Topics: "Faith and Trust"

Description

In this 1857 sermon, C.H. Spurgeon addresses Christians burdened by discouragement and spiritual weakness, reminding them of God's powerful promise to help and strengthen His people. He emphasizes the necessity of humility and dependence on divine strength rather than human effort. Through vivid illustrations and biblical truths, Spurgeon encourages believers to cast away fear and persevere in their Christian journey, trusting fully in the Lord's sustaining grace.

Transcript

"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."—Isaiah 41:14.

I SHALL SPEAK this morning to those that are discouraged, depressed in spirit, and sore troubled in the Christian life. There are certain nights of exceeding great darkness, through which the spirit has to grope in much pain and misery, and during which much of the comfort of the Word is particularly needed. Those seasons occur in this manner. Frequently they occur at the outset of a religious life. A young man, deeply impressed under the ministry, has been led to feel the weight of sin; he trusts also he has been led to look for salvation to the Christ who is preached in the gospel. In the young ardor of his spirit he devotes himself wholly to Christ; with the most solemn vows he dedicates body, soul, time, talents, all that he has, to the great work of serving God; he thinks it easy to fulfill his vow; he doth not count the cost; he reckons it will be easy to forsake gay companions, to renounce old established habits, and to become a Christian. Alas! before many days he finds out his mistake, if he did not reckon without his host he certainly reckoned without his heart, for his evil heart of unbelief had deceived him, he knew not how hard would be the struggle, and how desperate the wrestling between his old evil nature and the new-born principle of grace within him. He finds it to be like the rending off of right arms to give up old and cherished habits; he discovers it to be painful to renounce his former pursuits, as painful as it would be to pluck out his right eye. He sits down then, and he says, "If this be the trouble at the outset what may I expect as I proceed. O my soul, thou wast too fast in dedicating thyself to God; thou hast undertaken a warfare which thy prowess

can never accomplish; thou hast started on a journey for which thy strength is not adequate; let me again return unto the world;" and if the Spirit saith, "Nay, thou canst not," then the poor soul sits itself down in deep misery, and cries, "I can not go back and I can not go forward; what must I do? I am exceedingly discouraged because of the way." The same feeling often overcomes the most valiant Christian veteran. He who has been long experienced in the things of the divine life will sometimes be over taken with a dark night and a stormy tempest; so dark will be the night, that he will not know his right hand from his left, and so horrible the tempest, that he can not hear the sweet words of his Master, saying, "Fear not, I am with thee." Periodical tornadoes and hurricanes will sweep o'er the Christian; he will be subjected to as many trials in his spirit as trials in his flesh. This much I know, if it be not so with all of you it is so with me. I have to speak to-day to myself; and whilst I shall be endeavoring to encourage those who are distressed and down-hearted, I shall be preaching, I trust to myself, for I need something which shall cheer my heart—Why I can not tell, wherefore I do not know, but I have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me; my soul is cast down within me, I feel as if I had rather die than live; all that God hath done by me seems to be forgotten, and my spirit flags and my courage breaks down with the thought of that which is to come. I need your prayers; I need God's Holy Spirit; and I felt that I could not preach to-day, unless I should preach in such a way as to encourage you and to encourage myself in the good work and labor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a precious promise to the young Christian, or to the old Christian attacked by lowness of spirits and distress of mind! "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. Christian brethren, there are some in this congregation, I hope many, who have solemnly devoted themselves to the cause and service of the Lord Jesus Christ: let them hear, then, the preparation which is necessary for this service set forth in the word of our text. First, before we can do any great things for Christ there must be a sense of weakness: "Worm Jacob." Secondly, there must be trust in promised strength; and thirdly, there must be fear removed by that promise: "Fear not, for I will help thee."

I. In the first place, the first qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God's work well and triumphantly, is A SENSE OF OUR OWN WEAKNESS. When God's warrior marches forth to battle with plumed helmet, and with mail about his loins, strong in his own majesty— when he says, "I know that I shall conquer, my own right arm and my mighty sword shall get unto me the victory, defeat is not far distant. God will not go forth with that man who goeth forth in his own strength. He who reckoneth on victory having first calculated his own might, has reckoned wrongly, for "it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." They that go forth to fight, boasting that they can do it, shall return with their banners trailed in the dust, and with their armor stained with defeat; for God will not go forth with the man who goeth forth in his own strength. God hath said it; men must serve him, they must serve him in his own way, and they must serve him in his own strength too, or he will never accept their service. That which man doth, unaided by divine strength, God never can accept. The mere fruits of the earth he casteth away; he will only have that, the seed of which was sown from heaven, sprinkled in the heart, and harvested by the sun of grace. There must be a consciousness of weakness, before there can be any victory.

I think I hear many saying to-day, "Well, sir, if that be a qualification for doing much, I have it to a very large extent." Well, do not marvel, do not wonder. Depend on this: God will empty out all that thou hast before he will ever put his own into thee; he will first empty out all thy granaries, before he will fill them with the finest of the wheat. The river of God is full of water; but there is not one drop of it that takes its rise in

earthly springs. God will have no strength used in his own battles but the strength which he himself imparts, and I would not have you that are now distressed in the least discouraged by it. Your emptiness is but the preparation for your being filled, and your casting down is but the making ready for your lifting up.

Are there others of you that would almost desire to be cast down that they might be prepared to serve God? Let me tell you, then, how you can promote in yourself a sense of your own nothingness. The text addresses us as worms. Now, the mere rationalist, the man who boasts of the dignity of human nature, will never subscribe his name to such a title as this. "Worm," says he, "I am no worm: I am a man; a man is the most glorious thing that God has made; I am not going to be called a worm; I am a man—I can do anything; I want not your revelations; they may be fit for children, for men of childish minds that only learn by believing: I am a man: I can think out truth; I will make my own Bible, fashion my own ladder, and mount on it to heaven, if there be a heaven, or make a heaven, if that be all, and dwell in it myself." Not so, however, he who is wise and understandeth; he knows that he is a worm, and he knows it in this way:

First, he knows it by contemplation. He that thinks, will always think himself little. Men who have no brains are always great men; but those who think, must think their pride down—if God is with them in their thinking. Lift up now your eyes, behold the heavens, the work of God's fingers; behold the sun guided in his daily march; go ye forth at midnight, and behold the heavens; consider the stars and the moon; look ye upon these works of God's hands, and if ye be men of sense, and your souls are attuned to the high music of the spheres, ye will say, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" My God! when I survey the boundless fields of ether, and see those ponderous orbs rolling therein—when I consider how vast are thy dominions—so wide that an angel's wing might flap to all eternity and never reach a boundary—I marvel that thou shouldst look on insects so obscure as man. I have taken to myself the microscope and seen the ephemera upon the leaf, and I have called him small. I will not call him so again; with me he is great, if I put myself in comparison with God. I am so little that I shrink into nothingness when I behold the Almightyness of Jehovah—so little, that the difference between the animalculae and man dwindles into nothing, when compared with the infinite chasm between God and man. Let your mind rove upon the great doctrines of the Godhead; consider the existence of God from before the foundations of the world; behold Him who is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty; let your soul comprehend as much as it can of the Infinite, and grasp as much as possible of the Eternal, and I am sure if you have minds at all, they will shrink with awe. The tall archangel bows himself before his Master's throne, and we shall cast ourselves into the lowest dust when we feel what base nothings, what insignificant specks we are when compared with our all-adorable Creator. Labor, O soul, to know thy nothingness, and learn it by contemplating God's greatness.

Again, if you want to know your own nothingness, consider what you are in suffering. I was thinking, the other evening, how small a matter it must be with God to cast any man into the most unutterable agony. We are well and in good spirits; we know not why, but it seems as if God's finger had touched one nerve, but one poor nerve, and we are so miserable that we could sit down and weep; we do not know how to bear ourselves. But half an hour ago we could have "smiled at Satan's rage, and faced a frowning world;" and God does but put his hand on our hearts, and just let one of the strings run loose, and what discord there is in our spirits; we are annoyed at the slightest matter; we wish to be continually alone; the very promises yield us no comfort; our days are nights, and our nights are black as Gehenna. We know not how to endure ourselves. How easily, then, can God cast us into misery! O man, what a little thing thou art, if so little a thing can overthrow thee. Ye have heard men talk big words when they have been prosperous; did you ever hear them talk so when they were in deep distress, and great anguish and

sorrow? No, then they say, "Am I a seal or a whale, that thou settest a watch upon me? What am I, that thou shouldst visit me every morning, and chasten me every night? Let me alone, until I swallow down my spittle. Why am I sore vexed? What am I, that thou shouldst make me a butt for thine arrows, and a target for thy wrath? Spare me, O my God, for I am less than nothing; I am but a shadow that passeth away and declineth. Oh deal not hardly with thy servant, for thy mercies' sake." Great sorrow will always make a man think little of himself, if God blesseth it to him.

Again: if you would know your own weakness, try some great labor for Christ. I can understand how some minister who preaches to his hundred-and-fifty on a Sabbath-day, and regards himself as having a large congregation, should be very precise about the color of his cravat, and about the respect that is paid to his dignity in his little church; I can well comprehend how he should be as big as my Lord Archbishop—because he does nothing; he has nothing at all to try him; but I can not imagine Martin Luther standing before the Diet at Worms, being proud because he had to do such a deed as that. I can not conceive John Calvin, in his incessant labors for Christ, leading on the reformation, and teaching the truth of God with power, saying to himself, "Lo! this great Babylon that I have builded." I can suppose the man that has nothing to do and that is doing nothing, sitting down in devout complacency with his own adorable self; but I can not conceive, if you nerve yourselves to great labors, but what you will have to say, "Lord, what a worm am I that thou shouldst call me to such work as this!" Turn, if you please, to the history of all men who have done great deeds for God, and you will find them saying, "I marvel that God should use me thus!" "This day my mind was exceedingly cast down," says one of them, "for God had called me to a great labor, and I never felt so much of my own insufficiency as I did to-day." Says another, "I have to-morrow to do such-and-such an eminent service for my Master, and I can say that when I was in my low estate, I was often exalted above measure, but this day my God has cast me into the lowest depths at the recollection of the work for which he has engaged me." Go and do something, some of you, and I will be bound to say it will be the means of pricking that fair bubble of your pride, and letting some of it blow away. If you would understand what is meant by being a worm, go and do what the 15th verse says the worm should do—go and thrash the mountains, and beat them small; make the hills as chaff fanned by the wind, scatter them, and then rejoice in God: and if you can do that,

"The more God's glories strike your eyes,

The humbler you will lie."

Devout contemplation, sharp suffering, hard labor—all these will teach us what little creatures we are. Oh! may God by all means and every means keep us, well understanding and knowing that we are nothing more and nothing better than worms!

How easy it is, my brethren, for you and I to fly up! How hard to keep down! That demon of pride was born with us, and it will not die one hour before us. It is so woven into the very warp and woof of our nature, that till we are wrapped in our winding-sheets we shall never hear the last of it. If any man telleth me that he is humble, I know him to be profoundly proud; and if any man will not acknowledge this truth, that he is desperately inclined to self-exaltation, let him know that his denial of this truth is the best proof of it. Do you know what is the sweetest flattery in all the world? It is that flattery that Caesar's courtiers of old gave to him, when they said Caesar hated flattery, being then most highly flattered. We do not hate flattery, any one of us; we all like it. We do not like it if it is labeled flattery; but we like it if it is given in a little underhand fashion, We all love praise.

"The proud to gain it toils on toils endure,

The modest shun it, but to make it sure."

We all love it, every soul of us, and it is right and meet that we should all bow before God, and acknowledge that pride which is woven into our nature, and ask him to teach us what little things we are, that we may claim this promise—"Fear not, thou worm Jacob."

II. Now the next point. Before devoting ourselves to Christ, or doing any great labor for the Saviour, it is necessary THERE SHOULD BE TRUST IN THE PROMISED STRENGTH. "I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." It is a certain fact, that though men be worms, they do what worms never could do; although men be nothing they do accomplish deeds which need even the power of the Infinite to rival them. How shall we account for this? Certainly it is not the worms; it must be some secret energy which gives them might. The mystery is unravelled in the text. "I will help thee, saith the Lord." In ancient history there is a story told of a valiant captain whose banner was always foremost in the fight, whose sword was dreaded by his enemies, for it was the herald of slaughter and of victory. His monarch once demanded of him that he should send this potent sword to him to be examined. The monarch took the sword, quietly criticised it, and sent it back with this message—"I see nothing wonderful in the sword; I can not understand why any man should be afraid of it." The captain sent back in the most respectful manner a message of this kind: "Your Majesty has been pleased to examine the sword, but I did not send the arm that wielded it; if you had examined that, and the heart that guided the arm, you would have understood the mystery." And now we look at men, and see what men have done, and we say, "I can not understand this; how was it done?" "Why, we are only seeing the sword; if we could see the heart of infinite love that guided that man in his onward course, we should not wonder that he, as God's sword, gained the victory. Now, the Christian may remember, that little though he be, God is with him; God will help him, and that right early. Brethren, I like a man who, when he begins to do anything, is afraid of himself, and says, "It is of no use; I can not do it." Let him alone: he will do it. He is all right. The man who says, "Oh there is nothing in it, I can do it," will break down to a dead certainty. But let him begin, by saying, "I know what I am at, and I feel confident I can not do it unless I have something more given to me than I feel to-day;" that man will come back with flying banners, the trumpets proclaiming that he has been victorious. But it must be because he puts reliance upon help promised. Now, Christian, I see you this morning ready to run away from the battle; you have been so dispirited this last week, through divers adverse circumstances, that you are ready to give up your religion. Now, man, here is a brother comrade that is passing through just the same; he comes here this morning, half inclined to run off to Tarshish, like Jonah did of old, only he could not find a boat, or else he might have sailed away; and he has come here to pat you on the shoulder and say, "Brother, do not let you and I play deserters, after all; let us up to arms, and still fight for our Master; for the promise says, "I will help thee, Brother, what an all-sufficient promise that is—"I will help thee." Why, it matters not what God has given us to do; if he helps us we can do it. Give me God to help me, and I will split the world in halves, and shiver it till it shall be smaller than the dust of the threshing floor; ay, and if God be with me, this breath could blow whole worlds about, as the child bloweth a bubble. There is no saying what man can do when God is with him. Give God to a man, and he can do all things. Put God into a man's arm, and he may have only the jawbone of an ass to fight with, but he will lay the Philistines in heaps: put God into a man's hand, and he may have a giant to deal with, and nothing hut a sling and a stone; but he will lodge the stone in the giant's brow before long; put God into a man's eye, and he will flash defiance on kings and princes; put God into a man's lip, and he will speak right honestly, though his death should be the wages of his speech. There is no fear of a man

who has got God with him, he is all-sufficient; there is nothing beyond his power. And my brethren, what an opportune help God's is! God's help always comes in at the right time. We are often making a fuss because God does not help us when we do not want to be helped. "O!" says one, "I do not think that I could die for Christ; I feel I could not; I wish I felt that I had strength enough to die." Well, you just won't feel that, because you are not going to die, and God will not give you strength to die with, to lay up till the dying time comes. Wait till ye are dying, and then he will give you strength to die. "O!" says another, "I wish I felt as strong in prayer as so-and-so." But you do not want much strength in prayer, and you shall not have it. You shall have what you want, and you shall have it when you want it; but you shall not have it before. Ah, I have often cried to God and desired that I might feel happy before I began to preach—that I might feel I could preach to the people. I could never get it at all. And yet sometimes God hath been pleased to cheer me as I have gone along, and given me strength that has been equal to my day. So it must be with you. God will come in when you want him—not one minute before, nor yet one minute later. "I will help thee." I will help thee when thou needest help! And oh! brethren, what an ennobling thing it is to be helped by God! To be helped by a fellow man is no disgrace, but it is no honor; but to be helped by God, what an honor that is! When the Christian prophet preacheth his Master's word, and feels that he has girded about his loins the belt of the Almighty, to strengthen him for his days work, that he may not fear the people, what a noble being he is then! When the Christian philanthropist goes into the prison, in the midst of reeking disease and death, and feels that God has put the wing of the angel over him, to shield him in the day of pestilence, how it ennoble and honors him to have God with him! To have his strength girding his loins and nerving his arm, is just the highest thing to which man can attain. I thought but yesterday, "O, if I were a cherub I would stand with wings outstretched, and I would bless God for opportunities for serving him;" but I thought within myself, "I have an opportunity of serving God, but I am too weak for it. O my God, I wish thou hadst not put the load on me." And then it struck me, "Do the cherubim and seraphim ever say that?" Do they ever for a moment say, 'I have not strength enough to do it!'" No, if a cherub had a work to do which was beyond his might, he would meekly bow his head and say, "My Lord; I fly, I fly! He that commanded the deed will enable me to perform it." And so must the Christian say; "My God, dost thou command? It is enough: 'tis done. Thou never didst send us to a warfare at our own charges, and thou wilt never do so; thou wilt help us, and be with us to the end."

Before we can do much, then, we must know our own weakness; and believe God's strength.

III. And now comes the last point, upon which I shall be brief. We must, then, LABOR TO GET RID, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, OF FEAR. The prophet says, "Fear not;" thou art a worm, but do not fear; God will help thee; why shouldst thou fear? Let us labor to get rid of fear, when we are not certain we are serving our Master. And let these be our reasons:

Get rid of fear, because fear is painful. How it torments the spirit! When the Christian trusts, he is happy; when he doubts, he is miserable. When the believer looks to his Master and relies upon him, he can sing; when he doubts his Master, he can only groan. What miserable wretches the most faithful Christians are when they once begin doubting and fearing! It is a trade I never like to meddle with, because it never pays the expenses, and never brings in any profit—the trade of doubting. Why, the soul is broken in pieces, lanced, pricked with knives, dissolved, racked, pained. It knoweth not how to exist when it gives way to fear. Up, Christian! thou art of a sorrowful countenance; up, and chase thy fears. Why wouldst thou be for ever groaning in thy dungeon? Why should the Giant Despair for ever beat thee with his crabtree cudgel? Up! drive him away! touch the key of the promises; be of good cheer! Fear never helped thee yet, and it never will.

Fear, too, is weakening. Make a man afraid—he will run at his own shadow; make a man brave, and he will stand before an army and overcome them. He will never do much good in the world who is afraid of men. The fear of God bringeth blessings, but the fear of men bringeth a snare, and such a snare that many feet have been tripped by it. No man shall be faithful to God, if he is fearful of man; no man shall find his arm sufficient for him, and his might equal to his emergencies unless he can confidently believe, and quietly wait. We must not fear; for fear is weakening.

Again; we must not fear; for fear dishonors God. Doubt the Eternal, distrust the Omnipotent? O, traitorous fear! thickest thou that the arm which piled the heavens, and sustains the pillars of the earth shall ever be palsied? Shall the brow which eternal ages have rolled over without scathing it, at last be furrowed by old age? What! shall the Eternal fail thee? Shall the faithful Promiser break his oath? Thou dishonorest God, O unbelief! Get thee hence! God is too wise to err, too good to be unkind; leave off doubting him, and begin to trust him, for in so doing, thou wilt put a crown on his head, but in doubting him thou dost trample his crown beneath thy feet.

And lastly, doubt not the Lord, O Christian; for in so doing thou dost lower thyself. The more thou believest, the greater thou art; but the more thou doubtest, the less thou becomest. It was said of the worlds conqueror, that when he was sick, he puled like a child. "Give me some drink," cried one, like a sick girl, it was said to his dishonor. And is it not to the dishonor of a Christian, who lives in secret on his God, and professes to trust alone in him, that he can not trust him; that a little child will overcome his faith? O, poor cockle-shell boat, that is upset by a rain-drop! O poor puny Christian that is overcome by every straw, that stumbles at every stone! Then, Christian men, behave like men! It is childish to doubt; it is manhood glory to trust. Plant your foot upon the immoveable Rock of Ages; lift your eye to heaven; scorn the world; never play craven; bend your fist in the world's face, and bid defiance to it and hell, and you are a man, and noble. But crouch, and cringe, and dread, and doubt, and you have lost your Christian dignity and are no longer what you should be. You do not honor God. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will help thee, saith the Lord." Then why shouldst thou fear?

I feel that my voice fails me, and with it my very powers of thought too, and therefore I can only turn to my comrades in arms, in the good war of Christ, and I say to them, brethren, you and I can do nothing of ourselves; we are poor puny things; but let us attempt great things, for God is with us; let us dare great things, for God will not leave us. Remember what he has done aforetime; and remember what he has done of old he will do again. Remember David the shepherd-boy. Think ye well of Shamgar, with his ox-goad. Forget ye not the jawbone of the ass, and the stone from the sling. If these worked wonders, why should not we? If little things have done great things, let us try to do great things also. You know not, ye atoms, but that your destiny is sublime. Try and make it so by faith; and the least of you may be mighty through the strength of God. O for grace to trust God, and there is no telling what ye can do. Worms, ye are nothing, but ye have eaten princes; worms ye are nothing, but ye have devoured the roots of cedars, and laid them level with the earth; worms, ye are nothing, but ye have piled rocks in the deep, deep sea, and wrecked mighty navies; worms, ye have eaten through the keel of the proudest ship that ever sailed the ocean. If ye have done this yourselves, what can not we do? your strength lies in your mouths; our strength lies in ours too. We will use our mouths in prayer, and in constant adoration, and we shall conquer yet, for God is with us, and victory is sure.

Ye trembling souls! dismiss your fears;

Be mercy all your theme:

Mercy, which, like a river, flows
In one continued stream.
Fear not the powers of earth and hell;
God will these powers restrain;
His mighty arm their rage repel,
And make their efforts vain.
Fear not the want of outward good;
He will for his provide,
Grant them supplies of daily food,
And all they need beside.
Fear not that he will e'er forsake,
Or leave his work undone;
He's faithful to his promises—
And faithful to his Son.
Fear not the terrors of the grave,
Or death's tremendous sting;
He will from endless wrath preserve—
To endless glory bring.

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