

A KIND WORD

A SERMON

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“Fear not, you worm Jacob.” Isaiah 41:14

JACOB was a man that God loved; and all that the Lord loves will in his time be brought into an acquaintance with that love. Hence the language of God’s love is, or the language of the Lord in that love, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore in lovingkindness have I drawn you.” So that where that love, as shown in Christ Jesus, becomes attractive, that is a proof that you are one of the seed of Jacob, loved with the same everlasting love. Jacob also was associated with the new covenant promise of the blessed God. “In you, and in your seed” meaning, of course, Christ, “shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” He saw that the promise was positive, and made to know that nothing but such a promise could reach his case, sustain his soul, or give him that grace, mercy, and standing by which he should hold out to the last. Also, Jacob stood associated with the special providences of God. All those providences and dealings of the Lord towards him were, on the one hand, to show how the Lord could, and would, and did bless him; on the other hand, to subject him to all those adversities that should cause him to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and put his trust in the Lord. And just so in the dealings of the Lord with his people now. He that knows his own heart will never trust in it; he that knows that he is what our text says, a worm, will have no confidence therein, but will look for some ground of confidence wherein he may rest with certainty; and where can that be but in the Lord? Jacob was a man associated also with God’s salvation. Hence, in his dying moment, “I have waited for your salvation.” Thus, then, you see a man may be a man loved, and know something of that love; a man may be a partaker of the promise, and know something of the blessedness of that sworn promise; a man may have reasons to believe that the Lord is on his side as a God of providence; a man may be associated with God’s salvation, and at the same time feel himself, yes, that is the man that does feel himself, to be a poor worm, and therefore subject to ten thousand fears. And so, the Lord, when he sees his children in this fearing state, in this defenseless state, in this trying state, then he steps in with “Fear not, you worm Jacob.”

Our text, then, this morning, divides itself into two parts. Here is, first, *the description*; and, secondly, *the encouragement*.

First, *the description*, observing that the term is both descriptive and comparative. I think the term has in it, besides its being descriptive, a fivefold comparison, which will come before us as we pass along. First, then, it is a term of description. It is not here intended that man is as worthless as a worm, either as to his body or as to his soul. Man is a wonderful creature, and a creature of eternal importance, because he has an immortal soul, and will, ere long, have an immortal body. You therefore observe that the term must be understood as descriptive, not of the person of the man, but of the state of the man. It is sin which has rendered us spiritually weak, spiritually worthless; so that those who are taught of God are brought to feel that in relation to eternal things their condition is such, a fallen nature, a heart that sends forth swarms, shall I say? (you know what I mean when I use the term), a heart that sends forth, as it were, swarms of locusts and caterpillars, that is to say, evil thoughts, infidelities, and rebellions; and the more you strive against them, the more they will seem to annoy you; and while you would climb the mountain of spirituality, and enter into the solemnities of Calvary's cross, or while you would rise to the mountain of transfiguration, and say, "It is good for us to be here;" or while you would, were it the Lord's will, be caught up and transformed as into the third heavens; and while you would walk in all spirituality of mind, the Lord having something else to teach you, your hardness of heart, evil thoughts, worldly-mindedness, ten thousand things within, and a great many outward circumstances, all tending to bring to light what poor creatures we are: when we come solemnly before God, and reflect, and ask ourselves what we are, we come to the conclusion that we are poor worms of the earth; and by-and-bye, when we understand the matter a little further, we shall be glad to read the delightful truth that the dear Savior took this, the weakness of this our sinful state upon himself. I think we all agree that those are the words of the Savior in the 22nd Psalm, where it is evident the Savior is the speaker. He says, "I am a worm, and no man." Does not the 8th of Romans explain that, where the apostle says that God sent forth "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"? Here, then, this experience is sure to lead us to the knowledge of Christ's substitution, when thus brought to feel what poor creatures we are; and this our worthlessness and helplessness extends to both law and gospel. We attempt to keep God's law! We attempt to be as holy, and as righteous, and as truthful as that law is! Let that law, in its real spirituality, be known, and you will come back from the attempt, and come before God, and say, Lord, I am a worm, and no man; I am a poor, unclean, earthly, sensual, devilish, helpless worm of the earth; and I see that you could, were it your solemn will, banish such a poor wretch from the earth, from your presence, and from the glory of your power. So that you will die to all hope of ever helping yourself; you will loathe yourself in your own sight. Your mouth will be stopped from boasting; and if ever you boast, it shall be in the Lord, and not in the flesh; for he has designed, in relation to his people, that no flesh among his people shall glory in his presence; he has designed to stain the pride of the glory of all flesh. And then, when you come to the gospel, a possession of the letter of the promise of the gospel may satisfy some; but the man who has this personal experience of his worthlessness, wretchedness, sinfulness, depravity, and helplessness, the letter of the promise will not satisfy such. Plenty of professors say, Well, but is there not this promise, and is not there that promise, and is not there the other promise, and does it not say so-and-so? All of which to the living soul is just like saying, Is not there plenty of corn in Egypt? True, but the question is to get at it. Are there not plenty of stores of mercy with the Lord? True, but the question is to get at those mercies. Are there not exceeding great and precious promises? True, but the question is for the Lord himself to bring those promises home, seal them home, and make them ours; for the man that is thus taught of God, he dares not say, *our* Savior; he does not dare to say that God is *his* Father; he cannot look upon any promise of the Bible, and call that promise his

own; he feels that he would be stealing the word of the Lord, and would be counted an offender and a thief, if he were to call that his which God has not made his. So that such are thus made honest, and thus in relation to the law, and in relation to the gospel, they feel that they are poor worms. And what are they afraid of? Why, they are afraid that they are too sinful for the Lord ever to look upon them; and that if they were Christians their experience would be a holy, instead of being an unholy experience; that if they were Christians, their experience would consist chiefly in prayer, and faith, and love, and praise, and all the graces of the Spirit, instead of being everything to the contrary. Yes, says one, if I were a Christian, should I be thus like an owl of the desert, like a pelican of the wilderness, like a sparrow alone on the housetop, if I were a Christian? Why, I am afraid all this tells against me. Whereas, when you were dead in sin you did not experience this; when you were dead in sin these things were not a burden to you. So that some conclude from these experiences that they cannot be Christians; whereas were they not Christians they would not have this downward experience. What knew Saul of Tarsus of his own heart? What knew Saul of Tarsus of groaning under what he was, and exclaiming, "O wretched man that I am"? what knew he of no good dwelling in his flesh? what knew he of his then degraded state, while he was in a state of nature? But when quickened into life, then it was he knew his own plague, his own sore, and his own grief; down went the creature, and he felt then that grace, and grace alone, could reach his case. And then, again, such persons generally take, if anything go against them in providence, they take that as a kind of condemnation, that God is against them, and that there is one adversity towards their eternal damnation; and if any inconsistency should overtake them, they say, Well, that is one sin towards sealing my eternal doom. And then, if an enemy should get any dominion over them, That, is another proof of God's wrath to me, and another step towards eternal damnation. What poor, doubting, trembling, fearing things they are! and they are not always favored in such a state as this to read out the evidences they do possess on their side. For with all their downward experience, and all that is against them, yet there is something in them; there are two things in them which the natural man, or the man dead in sin, does not possess; and what are those two things? First, a consciousness of need; and, secondly, a heart and soul willingness to receive the truth as it is in Jesus. There is a willingness; and just so sure as the Lord has given a sense of need, he, by-and-bye, will supply that need; and just so sure as he has thus, for he does this in this way, made us willing to be saved in his way; just so sure as he has gone thus far, he will save us. There is a constant tendency to be ashamed; there are certain professors that do not like the truth to be told concerning human nature; they think it is degrading to them. And yet the mind of the Lord is clear upon it; and if the truth be not only not told, but if the truth be not experienced, so as to be brought to feel that what the Lord says concerning the badness of our state is truthful, if that be not experienced, I am sure Jesus Christ will never be really welcome; I am sure the counsels of the Father will never be really welcome; I am sure the teachings of the Holy Ghost will never be sought. But where there is an experience of our being what the word of God says we are, oh, what depth of humility, what trembling at God's word, and what earnest seeking after that mercy which alone can pluck us as brands from the everlasting burning; and give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus! This term, then, is descriptive. So then, my hearer, if you have ten thousand evils within, you feel what a poor creature you are, loathe yourself in your own sight, you are got into a secret that God alone could let you into. The carnal professor knows nothing of it; he is a stranger to it; it is not a trouble to him; he does not groan over it; he does not tremble lest his religion should be a mere form; he is content with his profession, content with the letter of the promise, content with the name without the thing, content with the casket without the jewel, content with the form without the power. Not so with

the man that feels his sad condition; sin and sinfulness are with him realities, and salvation must be a reality too, or he must sink into black despair.

But second, the term “worm” here; I bless the Lord for it. I myself like our text very much; indeed, it just describes what I feel. I thank God, I bless that God whose I am, and whom I serve, with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might, with all my power, I bless my God that he owns me in what I feel myself to be; I bless my God that he has sent a great Savior for a great sinner; I bless my God that he owns me, and does not expect me to be anything else. He knew what a poor worm I was, and so he would not leave anything for me to do, but undertook the whole himself; perfects that which concerns us, will not forsake the work of his own hands, for his mercy endures forever. These are the poor and needy that shall praise his holy name. But second, it is a term of comparison. There is a fivefold comparison that arises in the mind almost in a moment, besides its being descriptive of what we are. First, that we are poor worms in comparison of what we were before the fall. Before the fall we were kings, before the fall we stood as the lords of creation, before the fall we had universal dominion; before the fall we were holy, just, and good; but oh, alas! by the fall sin has thus degraded us; so that, in comparison of what we were then, we are now but worms. Second, in comparison also of angels. What a contrast between a poor, corrupt, feeble, besotted, hell-born, hell-made, hell-taught, hell-governed sinner, and an angel, what a difference between the two! And the Christian is brought to feel that in comparison of angels he is a worm of the earth. They are holy angels, that excel in strength, because in them there is no sin. Third, we are worms, that I have already, in a measure, anticipated, in comparison of the law of God. That law is a just law; how holy, how just, how true, how good, how firm, how great! And yet, in comparison of the majesty of that law, what worms we are! Fourth, in comparison of God himself; yes,

“Great God, how infinite are you!
What worthless worms are we!”

He, the high and lofty One, inhabiting eternity, and we poor worms of the earth. Well might the Old as well as the New Testament saints feel on their approach to God the solemnity of this infinite disproportion. No wonder that one should say, “I, who am dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord.” No wonder that another should say, “Will God, whom the heaven, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain, in very deed dwell with man?” Well might another say, “Wherewith shall I come before the high God?” and well might another say, “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones.” Well might Saul of Tarsus, when God in his majesty appeared to him, fall to the ground, and he instantaneously stopped from all hostility against that omnipotent power “that can crush,” as Watts expresses it,

“whole worlds to death,
And make them when he please.”

Bless his holy name for implanting this reverence in our souls; forever thus making us feel what we are and enabling us to be solemnized by the discovery of the disproportion. Away goes human sovereignty then; away goes, I was going to say, human responsibility, that responsibility some people set up. Is it not a wonderful thing, if you do not in our day preach a responsibility that damns men, men are offended? What a strange thing! Men are dreadfully afraid lest a gospel should be preached that shows that all their debts are paid, dreadfully afraid it should come out

that the debts were paid without them; dreadfully afraid it should come out that the righteousness is brought in without them, that the victory is established without them, that salvation is wrought without them, and that sinners get to heaven without any help of their own. Men are dreadfully afraid of this. Go and preach a gospel that would damn them to eternity, they are all pleased with you directly, though it be, as of course it would, a false gospel, if it did so. But preach a gospel which alone can save a sinner, and they are offended with you directly; so far are men besotted; but it is because they are not taught of God, they are not led into those paths I have described this morning. So, to,

“change their will;
Turn their feet to Zion's hill;”

and as their faces and feet were turned to Zion's hill, they would see grace there savingly reigning, they would see mercy there savingly prevailing, they would see there the eternal priesthood of the dear Redeemer, having swallowed up all sin, death, and woe, shining forth in eternal perfection, and constituting the people as beautiful as Christ himself is; for they shall shine forth in the perfection of his righteousness when time shall be no more. The people of God, then, are as worms in comparison with what they were before the fall, and in comparison, with angels, and in comparison, with the law of God, and in comparison, with God himself. And then, fifth, they are worms in comparison of what they are to be. Bless the Lord, we shall lose our degradation by-and-by; we shall lose all our earthliness, we shall lose all our corruptions, we shall lose all our mortality, we shall lose all our troubles. “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” Well may we then hasten unto the coming of the day of God; well may we press forward; well may we look forward; well may we view the prize; well may we view the glories that are yet to be revealed, when we shall be like him, when he shall change our poor, worm-like, earthly nature, and fashion it like unto his glorious body, incorruptible, immortal, spiritual, heavenly, infallible, happy, glorious, eternal. Thus, then, “fear not, you worm Jacob.” Thus, I have given, in my feeble way, the description and the comparison.

We will now go into the next department, and there I shall stay just as long as time permits; for if I were to speak upon the next part for two hours, I should not be able to express one half of what is implied in this “Fear not.” But in order to be concise, I will notice some of the reasons, one after the other, why we are to fear not. The first is, that although earthly, worthless, helpless, and degraded in ourselves, and have lost our manhood, for, as I have often said, and repeat it, true manhood consists in the image of God. That we lost; but in Christ Jesus we have true manhood restored; shall I say a better manhood? That we lost; but the manhood we have in Christ can never be lost. There is the image of God; Christ is the image of God, and we live by his life, and see in his light, and are made holy by his holiness, righteous by his righteousness, and are made to know God by the knowledge of Christ; for what the Father reveals to him, he reveals to us. “All things that my Father has revealed to me I made known unto you.” Here, then, this verse goes on, “Fear not, you worm Jacob, *and* you men of Israel.” The word *and* is not in the original; it is a question whether it ought to be there. It is a matter of taste; it does not make a material difference in the meaning. “You men of Israel.” There they are men; you see the transition from the worm to the

man. Then the margin reads it, "You *few* men." Well, if the marginal reading be preferable, "You *few* men;" the meaning is substantially the same. Here, then, is a beautiful transition from the worm to the man. Now, says the apostle Paul, "I knew a man in Christ;" so that true manhood is to be found nowhere else; true life, true knowledge, true holiness, true righteousness, the true image of God, is to be found nowhere else but in Christ Jesus. So, then, Christian, "fear not;" for though you are a worm in yourself, you are a man in Christ; though you are a sinner in yourself, you are a saint in Christ; though your nature is full of unrighteousness, your Christ is full of righteousness; and though you feel yourself to be altogether an unclean thing, and do fade as a leaf, yet in Christ you have a holiness and a standing there that can never fail. So, then, "fear not." You are not to appear in heaven, or before God, as you are in yourself, but you are to appear before God as you are in Christ Jesus; you believe in him, "fear not." But for the truth I am now stating, I should fear. Oh, how can I be in heaven without the best robe! where shall I get it? How can I be there without the shoes and the ring, and without all the essentials to make me like the place, as it were? And the dear Savior answers to it all. Hence the order of the Scriptures, "Grace be multiplied;" and the close of the Scriptures, "Grace be with you all; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." So, then, "fear not," if we are now partakers of this manhood. Every revival you have of life and liveliness is nothing else but a participation in the true manhood you have in Christ; every season you have of holy enjoyment is nothing else but a revival of the manhood you have in Christ; and every drop, shall I say, of peace, tranquility, that drops into your soul, to soothe down your fears, and bring you into that view of the Lord, to give you to see his love, this is nothing else but being partaker of that manhood that is in Christ. An infant you are, spiritually, born of God, and partaker, yet only in part, and that in a very small part; but when that which is in part is done away, that which is perfect shall come; then shall we know even as we are known. The second reason why we are to fear not is because of the gospel of the new covenant. By the gospel of the new covenant everything against us shall be brought to nothing; sin is to be brought to nothing. Hear me! say you, I am glad to hear that. It is a truth, friends. Jesus Christ has made an end of it, and if that does not make an end of it, I do not know what will. Satan brought to nothing, the curse brought to nothing, tribulation brought to nothing, death brought to nothing, the grave brought to nothing, hell brought to nothing, by the gospel of the new covenant. Hence it goes on, "I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth;" and what is this new instrument but the gospel? The old covenant, the Jews thrashed with that, and did wonders; but that waxed old, and failed, and they could not thrash with it any longer, came to an end. And therefore the Lord says, I will make a new covenant, I will give you another gospel, an unconditional gospel, a gospel that shall be mighty through God; and if the gospel is mighty through God, then it must be almighty; if the gospel be mighty through God, then it must be eternally mighty; if the gospel be mighty through God, then it must be infallibly mighty. So "I will make you a now sharp threshing instrument, having teeth." And I know not such an instrument to work with but the gospel, and it is new to us all, and will never grow old. And "you shall thresh the mountains." You must work, you see; you must pray. Thrashing is hard work, I can tell you, though it is not so hard to thrash as to be thrashed; but still thrashing is hard work. And the Christian must work; he is a working man; his thrashing instrument is brought to bear upon the object in a way it shall achieve the end. So, you will find it hard work, to bring the promises of God, stand by them, work with them, not without thorn. Our old acquaintances, the Wesleyan's, say, "Are we not co-workers together with God?" "Yes, of course we are." That is what the Wesleyan's say, and that is what we say; but they in reality mean we are workers together without God, for, according to their account, we are to do something of ourselves; so that while you Wesleyan's are saying, "Are we not workers together with God?"

why, the fact is, you are working without him; that is your doctrine, in reality. And you say, Ah, you Calvinists deny that we are workers together with God. We deny that we can work without him, but we do not deny that we can work with him; certainly not; and the Savior has said, "Without me you can do nothing;" and one of his servants has said, "With Christ I can do all things." That is just where it stands, that we are workers together with God. Let God be with us, and we shall work; let God be with us, and we will stretch out the thrashing instrument over the sea, God being with us, and the sea shall part hither and thither; but if Moses had stood there to this day with the rod, without the power of God there, the sea would have laughed at him. Let the Lord be with us, and we smite the rock, and out flows the water whence we should not have expected it to come; but if God be not with us we may smite the rock long enough; we may thrash long enough; without him we can do nothing. But when we are workers together with God, we are sure to work with effect then, sure to work well, sure to attain the end. "You shall thresh the mountains;" must work, yes; we do not wish to leave off praying, it is our grief we do not pray more; we do not wish to leave off the assembling of ourselves together, for we are sure the Lord will make the assembling of ourselves together more and more profitable; we do not wish to leave off ministering to the poor and to the necessitous, or ministering to the cause of God; our desire is to have grace to go on, to plough in hope and to thrash in hope, and there is the Lord's promise that he will be with us: "You shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff. You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them." And then, when these mountainous sins, and mountainous difficulties, and mountainous enemies, and mountainous adversities are brought to nothing, now mark the language, "And you shall rejoice in the Lord, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel." When? When you see, by this new sharp thrashing instrument, this new covenant, the gospel of the new covenant, that all these adversities are brought to nothing, sin turned into chaff, tribulation turned into chaff, adversities fly like chaff, enemies, for the wicked shall be driven away like chaff. "Fear not, you worm Jacob;" the victory depends not upon you, but upon your God; the conquest depends not upon the worm, but upon him that makes use of the worm, for the Lord has chosen the weak things to confound the things that are mighty. "Fear not." Well now, come, here is true manhood in Christ; here is that gospel by which everything against us is brought to nothing. Now, really, what can I say more? I shall say a little more; but it is really very pleasing; it does my soul good; it does me good altogether.

"Through these dear promises I range,
And blessed be his name
That I, though a feeble mortal change,
His love is still the same,"

these rivers of consolation will rise when all others shall run dry.

But, third, if you are an earnest seeker after God, after eternal life, after God's mercy, after an acquaintance with him, then the "Fear not" belongs to you also. Mark the language: "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none" cannot find any as yet, "I Jehovah will hear them: I the God of Israel will not forsake them." The Lord knows whether we have in our souls a thirst for the water of life, whether we have a thirst for his mercy, whether we have a hunger and a thirst for his mediatorial perfection, which mediatorial perfection is called righteousness; "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." And therefore "fear not," though you may be a feeble seeker, yet if you are a decided one, and brought to feel that the Lord alone

can save you, and that you are that poor piece of dry ground, that you are that piece of barren land, that you are that thirsty earth, that you do long to drink in the rain of heaven, if you are thus a seeker, then “fear not,” for “you, Lord, have not forsaken them that seek you.” But then you must wait, you know; you must not suppose the Lord has forsaken you because the well of salvation does not yet spring up; you must not suppose the Lord has forsaken you because you have gone forty days and forty nights in the strength, as it were, of the last help that you had; no, still tarry, still seek, still look:

“The lord whom you seek will not tarry long,
To him the weakest is as dear as the strong.”

“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.” The southern part of Canaan has always been a place of waters. There never was a mountainous country yet, and never will be, without there being rivers; the thing is impossible in nature, because mountains always produce rivers: the larger the mountains, the greater the rivers. The southern part of Canaan was very mountainous, and therefore there were many waters there. Some old women divines, old women! nay, they are a discredit to old women, tell us there is not water enough in the land of Canaan to immerse a few thousand people in water. How far that may be the case now; how far that land has been dried up, having been under the curse for eighteen hundred years, I cannot say; but there was a time when it was a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing out of valleys and hills. So that when men tell me there is not water enough, I have nothing to do with what the land is now, it is under the curse, but with what it was when the Lord was there; and there is a wonderful difference between things and persons and places when the Lord is there and, when he is not there; a very great difference, we all know that. And therefore, this promised land is a type of the gospel. I say, therefore, to the seeker, Remain near to Mount Zion, remain near to Mount Calvary, remain near to the Mount of Transfiguration, remain among the mountains of mediatorial perfection, remain in this mountainous country, this hill country; remain as close as you can; do not be afraid of going too close, of getting too high, the mountain of election, the mountain of God’s love, the mountain of God’s promise. Ah, people tell me I am too high. Never mind that; you stay in the hill country. “I will open rivers in high places springing out of his love, and out of his choice, and out of mediatorial perfection, and out of yea and amen promises. And these waters shall concentrate; not only water your soul, but I was going to say, all your estate, and make your soul like a watered garden, even as a garden whose waters fail not. So, then, “Fear not, you worm;” poor thirsty worm; I have made you thirsty; I have the supply; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

One word more, and then I close, and that is, the ultimate state of things to which this manhood in Christ, this gospel, this supplying us with living water, the end to which this shall lead. Hence the Lord says in this same chapter, he describes a paradisiacal plantation, to denote that that is the end to which they shall be brought, “There shall be no sign of a desert; no ravenous beast, no lion shall be there, no evil, no adversary occurrent, everything paradisiacal. And also, in this ultimate state of things, there shall be beautiful harmony between the people and the Lord. And I think we are blessed at the Surrey Tabernacle in a very remarkable degree with that harmony which the Lord declares shall be the end. He says here, in the 20th verse, “That they may see.” Well, now, we do see that it is all of grace from first to last.