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Teaching: Lowell Entz

Transcribed Message

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Message: Be Not Dismayed For I am Your God

Isaiah 41:13

Well, this is sort of part B from last week, because if you recall, and if you were here with me, four out of the last six years, YouVersion has claimed that there is the most popular, downloaded, looked at, and shared verse around the world, and it's Isaiah 41, verse 10. I asked a few of you before that if you could guess, and nobody did. Nobody guessed that verse, but, you know, you look worldwide, and some 50 countries, as we mentioned last week, are under severe persecution as Christians, and so this verse really matters when your life is on the line for your faith. It really matters to say, don't fear, for I am with you. Don't be dismayed, for I am your God. That's important.

So, you know, just thinking through that, that first part of the verse, fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. You look at those, and you say, well, what is fear? It's a reaction to things that are happening in our lives. It's something we respond to. It can be a great motivator sometimes, can't it? But it can also overwhelm us, where we're almost helpless to know what to do and how to do it, even though we're looking for a way to solve the problem.

But when you look at “dismayed”, often we think with that word, it's a little more long-term and serious than that. It's kind of like, okay, I've given up on a solution. I'm just discouraged. I may be depressed. I'm downhearted. I may be thinking about a deconversion or all those things that go on through people's lives when they say God is not coming through, and He's not helping me. I've got to come up with this on my own, and in fact, I'm dismayed. There's a lot of D words that go along with that: depressed, dysfunctional in our relationships, deconversion. But Isaiah says, no, I've got an answer for you. I've got an answer for the readers back then, and he has it for us as well.

Going on to the next part of that verse, I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. And this is a verse that's been downloaded and

passed around more than any other so many times in the last years. So how do we be not dismayed? For I am your God.

A little review quickly from last week. One of the things we discovered as we looked through is the firmer your grip on God's presence, the weaker fear's grip on you. The more you and I understand who God is, the more that takes the legs and the heart and the strength out of the fears that may want to grip us. And it's not just a switch you can get up and turn off in the morning, is it? It's a little more involved than that because it's about knowing who God is and realizing because of who God is, I know who I am. When you have those two things and you have a response to those, you start to understand. As you look at the scriptures, for example, you don't look at the Bible as a self-help book, do you? You look at it as a love letter from the Lord, and we learn how to love and appreciate and understand the ways of our God even deeper and deeper. And that's so important as you and I spend time on the Word.

A second thing from review is God's actions confirm his character. We looked at that in chapter 41, especially verses 8 and 9. You Israel my servant, whom I've chosen, the offspring of Abraham my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corner, saying to you, you are my servant, I've chosen you and not cast you off. So, fear not because I am with you. We saw how God's work in the past, the things that God has done, help us confirm that his presence is important. His presence is who he is. His actions confirm his character. And there's so many ways that you can daily track that, can't you?

For some of you, it's a journal. For each of us, it should be a time of prayer where we look back and say, Lord, what did you do in my life today? At my house, I've got thanks on a sticky note above my bed on the fan blade. You know, it kind of flies off in the summer, but, you know, it's normally there. Because the boss of the house said I couldn't graffiti the ceiling, so I couldn't put it on that way. So, it's just a sticky note. But it's my way to say, what are three things at the end of the day that I'm going to thank the Lord for that happened today? Because God is the God of the present. God isn't just the God of the past. I am with you. That's what he promised. That's a current, present thing.

Well, from number two kind of follows number three. God's character assures his actions. The more you and I are sure of who God is and what he thinks about you, the more sure, Isaiah was convinced, be not dismayed for I'm your God. He was convinced of that. Are you convinced? Am I convinced?

One of our church folks, Royce Young, surveys the action about the Thunder afterwards. I don't know if it's called Royce's Reviews or what it is after the game. But when you don't know who's going to win, you're kind of in suspense and you're on edge and you're watching and you're listening to what all the action is. But here Royce has the hard job of, you already know who won. You already know who lost. Usually, it's won. We're thankful for that. But here Royce is having to review for us something you already know is true, but he's looking at the intricate details. He's courtside and can say things about the game and the flow and the statements made and the attitudes, even from the refs, that help us understand how the game went and why one won and one lost. You look at something like that and you realize that helps captivate our interest. We already know who won, but that doesn't take the air out of it because just like Isaiah, he will say, and some of you are sure of this in your own life, I already know who won. I don't fear. I don't dismay.

Well, maybe if that's true in your life, great. You know what? Isaiah can show you how you can help the next guy sitting next to you that doesn't have that sureness. We can still fear at times, still get even dismayed at times, and so that can help.

Isaiah starts with, be not dismayed, and I guess just even the way he presents that helps us understand who it is that is dismayed. Who is dismayed? Well, there's four things there, and I don't know if these are real words, but I made them up anyway. One is literally saying, and if you have the old NASB 1995, I think it is, it says, do not anxiously look about you, and that's kind of the literal way to say that Hebrew word. For some of us, and for some of the readers at that time, they would have waited, and it seemed like God disappointed them. They would have prayed, and maybe you have too, and yet God seems to have disappointed or failed the way you expected him to do. You've read your scriptures, and you haven't found the answer you're looking for. In Isaiah's reader's time, they said, well, maybe God's abandoned us. Maybe there's nothing, there's no help coming, so we've

got to look around to other opportunities and look other ways because we can't find it in the God that we thought we trusted. And so you look to the future as being dismayed often does.

Well, second, situationally, there's a German phrase that the scholars love to use. It's *sitz im Leben*. It's situation of life. What situation of life were the readers of Isaiah in that caused them to be dismayed, that caused them to fear? Isaiah brings this reminder a number of times through the book, but in this verse 10 especially.

Well, one area was politically. Politically, the readers of Isaiah's book, the people of Israel had every reason to be dismayed and to anxiously look about themselves. Because as you look at the map on the next slide there, Assyria had already conquered the northern tribes, and now they were threatening the people of Judah where the temple was, where all of the things that showed God's presence were, and they were afraid. They were realizing, God's not going to defend himself, let alone us. What's going on?

But then there's a couple little blue arrows, if you can read those. Those are ways that they looked around them, and they said, all right, we're going to get an ally. We're going to get Egypt to be allied with us so that Assyria can't attack. And there were the Cushites. There were the Cushites that were next to Ethiopia that really provided a lot of the military power that they looked to Egypt for, and they even looked to the Philistines, their arch enemy. They even looked to the Philistines to maybe end up being an ally because they didn't like Assyria either.

Do you know what that caused Isaiah to do in chapter 30? He went around naked for three years. He walked around naked for three years. Okay, dad joke. He bared his tush to say don't go to Cush. Yeah, okay, we'll get that over with. But he did that to tell them how serious that is, that you do not look around to the other nations. I am your God. Look to me. And that was a stark reminder. He did that for three years. They kind of got the message you would hope. And so, he says, don't fear, don't be dismayed, which often they were thinking, Well, we're just kind of helpless, there's nowhere else to turn at this point. And maybe you figure, oh, well, there's nobody like that here this morning. If you're showing up at church, you might not be dismayed. You might not be at that level.

But interesting use of those words, because the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of all of this, uses a word as well as the gospel writer, Matthew, uses a similar word, which I want to just spend a minute on. And he calls it distazo. Distazo. And it's literally, you can kind of see it, di-stazo, two different stances. There are two times, and Matthew's the only gospel writer that uses this word, but when Jesus calms the storms, and he says, why do you doubt, O ye of little faith? And that word for doubt there, why do you have two different stances? You think I'm a man, but I'm also God. Can you put those two together? They didn't know how. And then when it came to Matthew 28 at the Great Commission, where it says they worshipped, but some doubted, and you wonder, what on earth is going there? These are the 12 disciples. Aren't they ready to get after it? This is the Great Commission. Well, they worshipped, but they were also puzzled. There are almost two stances here, we don't know what to make of this. Jesus says he's going to be with us, and yet he's going to leave us. He says he's going to send another comforter. they were just simply puzzled.

So, whether you're dismayed to say, I am discouraged, and I almost feel like I have no hope. I'm helpless. Or whether it's more at the other end of the spectrum, you're just puzzled. You're just puzzled to say, what it is that God's doing. Why is he doing that? I don't quite understand where to go with that. Well Isaiah has kind of a two-fold answer to that.

Number four, the context contextually. First of all, we looked last week quite a bit at the I have's. The I have's. What has God done that helps us be convinced, according to Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to say, I am with you? Well verses eight and nine were where we centered: You Jacob, whom I have chosen, you Israel, the offspring of Abraham my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant. I have chosen you and not cast you off. Seeing what God has done confirms his character, that he really is with us. It's like a Royce review. It's going back to chapter 40.

He blossoms out how much God as the creator has done for us, that we can just look around at creation and say, God is with us. Look at all this. Or we can look back at the patriarchs for the Israelites. That's what they did. They looked back and said, look at what

God has done. We can look in our own lives, as we've referenced, putting that sticky note on the fan so you can remember to give God thanks at the end of the day. Well, these kinds of things give us arsenal to say: Okay, if that's true, if God is with us, then come the I wills.

The I wills that we read from the rest of Isaiah 41 verse 10. I will strengthen you. I will help you. The I wills, as they look to the future. God's character assures his action. Be not dismayed, well, okay, that's kind of the who's dismayed and that can include us at times too, can't it? But why? Why be not dismayed?

In his seminal book, *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey writes many years ago where he visited Dachau, one of the concentration camps during World War II, the Nazi death camps, where hundreds of thousands were killed because they were Jewish. Philip writes about a man that was in the Protestant chapel. His name was Christian Rieger, and Christian told his story to Philip. He says, I was here for four years. I was sure I would die, but somehow by God's provision, I did not. I was part of that confessing church that opposed Hitler, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer also, and so was my organist. I was the preacher and my organist turned me in and I got stuck in Dachau. And so there he was and he says, you know, it was discouraging. I really was convinced that God had abandoned me, he had left me alone and there's no hope. But one time he got a letter from his wife and it was all chopped up because the officers take out whatever they don't want them to read. He read what was left over from the chop up.

One of the things that his wife referred to was a statement back in Acts chapter four that, just paraphrasing, Herod and Pontius Pilate have been anointed by God to conspire against the Holy One, against the Messiah, but God, God is the one who used that, who used that to declare and to determine beforehand what would go in the death of his son. God, in the middle of those threats, will enable you to speak boldly because he was often interrogated by others to give up others who might have been part of the confessing church. And he read that statement right before he went into one of those interrogations. When he was waiting to be interrogated, another prisoner had come out who had just been there and he slipped him a piece of paper. He thought, oh it's probably matches because they're a precious commodity in Dachau. But no, he looked at it afterwards. God had given

him strength through that interrogation. He looked at it and it was the exact same scripture reference, and he said there's no way that he knew my wife wrote that to me. He says, that was a turning point for me. Nietzsche had often said, he was explaining to Philip Yancey, that you can survive torture if you know the why of your life, but I found something far greater, I found the who of my life. And that was enough. That was enough to sustain me through Dachau. That's enough to sustain me, to share my story with anybody that would come to these remains and hear what God has done.

That's exactly what Isaiah did in this prophecy with us. If you've ever read through the parts like chapter 37 to 39 right before this, he assures Hezekiah that, oh yes, though Assyria is attacking, I'm going to spare your life and I'm going to deter this conquering for a little bit. And you remember, I remember reading this in the King James first time I read through that. Well, one of the things that God shows, he had overnight 180,000 Assyrians from the army just dead the next morning. The King James said it and they all woke up dead. It's like, oh, well that's interesting. That's powerful. That's a God-thing right there. And the sundial even moved back a little bit to show to Hezekiah what I have said to you will really happen. That was a confirming that Isaiah really is a prophet of God. And we talked about last week about how he named Cyrus, who was never a God-follower, but was used by God to free the people. As the people are reading maybe 150 years later and saw that that was fulfilled through the prophet Isaiah, they realized that he must be a prophet. He knows what he's talking about.

Or we look back and say those chapters of Isaiah that are quoted so often as prophecies about the Messiah and are quoted so often in the New Testament help us realize Isaiah really was a prophet of God. He knows what he's talking about. Do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. He knows what he's talking about. That's true.

He goes to the I wills in the last part of that. I put Isaiah there up on a tower because he calls himself in chapter 62 the watchman on the wall. There's kind of two things that watchman did. One was they would look ahead to be able to see any enemy that was coming so that they could warn their people that the enemy is coming. They would be

warners. But they would also be encouragers. Let's say that they're in the fray of the battle and he sees that the allies, the help is coming. They're coming over the hill. He'd be the first one to know that. And here he's doing that with us. He's saying, I will. God will. God will strengthen you. God will help you. He brings those things to us as well as he did to the readers back then because Isaiah knew and he knew that we needed to know the who of our lives. The who. Well, be not dismayed because I am your God.

How will that look? Well, he says three things there, doesn't he? I will strengthen you. And, you know, just grammar-wise, there's a little add-on that says surely. It's like an amen or a seal or think of, that. that yes, yes, that's for sure. That's truly, truly. I will strengthen you. And also, just the tense of it is as if it's already done. I will. And I've already done it. I will strengthen you. I will help you. Same thing. Surely. Surely, I will do it. It's as if it's already done. But it even changes the tense there to say it's kind of focusing. It's right. It's bringing it from I will strengthen you to I will help you to then thirdly, I will uphold you. He gets to the point where this is a hands-on thing. God's going to be your God. And he will uphold you with his righteous right hand.

John Piper puts it in a picture saying, God is beside us when he says I am with you. God is above us when he says I am your God. God is inside of us when he says I will strengthen you. But God is around us when he says I will help you. And God is underneath us when he says I will uphold you. for some, maybe that's a better picture.

But just look at your notes on the next section that still have all those blanks. What's the word that you see all over the place there? I, I, I, I. all kinds of I's there. There's eight of them. Well, you remember from last week and those verses eight and nine, I have chosen you. I have taken you. I have called you. And because of that, you don't need to fear. Because of the I am, because of the I am, I am with you. And the second I am that God allows and God puts in these verses, I am your God. I'm your God. So, you don't have to be dismayed because in that third column, I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. He makes it very personal. And he goes on in verse 13, for I, the Lord, your God, hold your right hand. It is I who say to you, fear not, for I am the one who helps you. In that chapter, there's 14 I's. There's eight of them right here. I, I, I. It's

about God. When you and I are fearing or dismayed, it's not about you. It's about God. It's about who God is. And somehow you'll understand, you and I, that that's enough.

Well, there are two examples that I close with. First of all, Joseph. Joseph was probably the best Old Testament person to be a type or be a figure, a prefigure for us of what Jesus was like. There are 14 chapters about Joseph's life towards the end of Genesis. You remember his great slogan: you brothers meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. That's his big slogan, right? We could see that in so many parts of Joseph's life. There's not room to put all these in your notes, so don't even try. Joseph was despised having that coat of many colors being favored by his father above all the others. You meant it for evil, but you know, God meant it for good. He had dreams and he learned a skill of how to interpret those dreams. But that was something that caused Joseph's growth. Something for evil, but God meant it for good.

Secondly, he was enslaved. He was sold into slavery, taken to Egypt, but you know, we know the big picture, don't we? Because he was moved to Egypt, that became a source of deliverance for later on, that Joseph was moved. People like Potiphar saw that God blessed Joseph in everything he did, so he hired him to be head of his household. And then even while he was there, he was accused by Potiphar's wife. That seemed like, well, you meant that for evil, but you know what that did was that put him in the best jail in town. That put him in Pharaoh's jail. He endured that time. He was jailed there, that seemed evil. But God meant it for good. He was allowed to be the trustee because the warden saw that God blessed his life. It developed a caring spirit in him as a leader, as a trustee, because he had two cellies. That was the bad part. These were Pharaoh's cellies. These were the notorious guys. You don't want to cell with a notorious guy, because that gets you in trouble too.

But you know, these two guys, the cup bearer and the baker, had dreams. And Joseph knew, hey, I've got some skill in interpreting those. Tell me about it, and I'll help you understand what God is telling you. He did. He helped them. They got out. For two years, he said, hey, tell Pharaoh what I did to tell you your dream, but they didn't until two years later. So, for his own growth, he was stuck in jail for two years. Well then, Pharaoh

threatened all his seers. He says, you guys tell me the dream, and then you tell me the interpretation. Well, nobody can do that. But he knew because, was it the cup bearer or the baker? I forget which one survived, but he went back and said to Pharaoh, hey, I know this guy in jail. Bring him out. I think he can do that for you. And he did. He says, well, I can't do it, but God can. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God can do it. God can give me that. And so Pharaoh saw that he had great wisdom.

And so in that third slide, there are three more of the “you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good” situations in Joseph's own life. He had to be the enforcer of Pharaoh's plan about how to survive this famine and that included at the end even slavery of the people. He wasn't necessarily that kind of guy, but it brought the brothers so that they could have that great reunion. What a miracle of God that neither Joseph nor his brothers expected that they would ever meet up again. And here they are. He recalled, he remembered his dreams and realized that, yes, this is finally coming to pass. I was 17 years old. Now I'm almost 40. And look, that dream is coming to pass.

Well then there was the trauma of meeting these brothers. Who wants to meet these guys that had nothing but evil in mind for you? And yet that became the quotable quote, didn't it? You brothers meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. And that was a lesson in his own life because maybe the final trial he had was after their father died, they said to Joseph, hey, by the way, dad said, don't get back at us. Don't get revenge now that dad's gone. And, you know, it says in there that eight different times in his interaction with the brothers, Joseph wept. He was a softy. He wept eight different times. Scripture declares that in fact, he wept so loud that the Pharaoh's household heard about it. All of Egypt, it says, heard about it. He was a wailer.

But in all those things that happened in Joseph's life, in Acts 7 the first Christian martyr named Stephen talked about in his final speech. He knew I'm just about to go here. So, I'm going to bring it out. He spent a whole paragraph just talking about Joseph because Joseph in their minds through the Old Testament was such a pivotal person. The things that he described about them were really the same things, because he was a type of Jesus, that are true about Jesus. He was favored. He was God's Son in whom I am well pleased and yet

his own people rejected him. He was accused falsely and yet God exalted him. God used him. Just as Joseph's life saved his family from the famine and saved his people, Jesus has saved his people. Joseph was a forgiving person towards his brothers. Jesus on the cross said father forgive them for they know not what they do. His accusers were his executioners. Lord forgive them. They don't know what they do. And Joseph reconciled with his brothers in some amazing ways. 2 Corinthians 5 says about Jesus he reconciled the world to himself.

That's the offer to anybody here this morning, isn't it? It's the offer that says Jesus is the one who gives that forgiveness, gives that reconciliation. Just like those brothers of Joseph didn't deserve it yet Joseph offered it freely to them. You and I don't deserve it. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. But the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ the Lord. You can trust that. That last verse in 2 Corinthians 5 says: He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. That's what Jesus has done as well