

Isaiah 41

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] I'm sure that we've all been horrified by the atrocity that was perpetrated on the beaches of the Mediterranean in Tunisia just in these last couple of days. Men and women had gone for a holiday and found themselves cruelly gunned down in an orgy of violence and bloodshed.

And we have already, and we would continue to pray for those who mourn in such awful circumstances. Just imagine. It's good that all we can do is imagine, and even imagining may seem a strange thing to do. But just for a moment, imagine if you had been there and you had fled from the beach. I'm sure you've seen the reports of how the events panned out. You'd fled from the beach into the hotel lobby, and you'd be met there by a travel rep who was urging all and sundry with the words, don't be afraid. I think that would be a very bizarre piece of advice in the circumstances. How could you be anything other than afraid?

Most of us, thank God, will have been spared experiencing fear in such horrific circumstances, but we all know something of what it is to be afraid. Indeed, I'm sure all of us in some way or in some circumstances know something of what it is to be very afraid. What causes us fear will vary greatly depending on who we are, but I'm sure we all know what it is. Without doubt, we all know what it is to be afraid, but even perhaps to be very afraid. For some, maybe there's fear of that hospital appointment, those tests that the doctor has told you that you have to have taken, and you're waiting maybe for the results of that, maybe fear of an exam result on which hinges a great deal what you're going to do in the year that follows what work you'd be able to secure. Maybe today in Aberdeen, in the circumstances that we're living with, the plunging oil prices, a fear of that letter on your desk that you're sure, that you're sure what the contents of it are. Perhaps fear of losing a loved one to death, or perhaps a relationship that is breaking down, and there's fear that the damage seems to be irreparable. And no doubt we could go on giving examples of those things that cause us fear.

But looking beyond our own personal fears, there's the bigger picture of the world we live in. We made mention of that already, but it is a scary world out there. And when we think of ourselves as believers, as Christians, we observe with some dismay and possibly even fear how things are changing, how the moral foundations of our own nation are being shaken. Not only shaken, but being replaced, it would seem.

[3 : 41] And what will tomorrow bring? We think of the changes, the rapid changes, even in ten years, and they seem to be accelerating. So, what will five years bring? What will ten years bring? And we can be afraid of such things. Is there a word from God for us in the face of fear? Well, there is a word from God, and it is a word that is repeated by God time and time again in the Scriptures. And the word is, don't be, don't be afraid. In the passage that we've read in Isaiah chapter 41 and in verse 10, we read, so do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

How do we respond to these words, this command of God to not fear? Is it unreasonable of God to so command us? A bit like our hypothetical travel rep in the hotel lobby in Tunisia, just don't be afraid.

But the thing about God is that when He makes what appears to be an unreasonable demand, and God often makes demands upon us that at first sight appear unreasonable.

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