

Facing 18
Facing Our Future

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Text Introduction: What's going to happen in 2018? It's always something. It's always something to worry about? In my lifetime we have moved from year to year collectively worried about one thing or the other. Perhaps the greatest example of this collective worry involving moving from one year to the next was 1999-2000 (Y2K as people began to call it). I never will forget the phone call that I got from a well-meaning member of my church. He advised me to take all of my money out of the bank and just operate on cash until everything settled down.

All of this worry reminds me of the story of a man named J. Arthur Rank—an early pioneer in the film industry in Great Britain and also a Christian. He spoke of a time that he was so worried about so many things. He decided it was occupying too much of his attention, so he promised himself that he would give himself to worry only one day a week—Wednesday. So, as the week progressed and he found himself worried about something, he would write it down and put it in a box he called his “Wednesday Worry Box.” He concluded after some time that only 1/3 of the things that he wrote down still needed to be worried about by the time Wednesday came.

There's got to be a better way to all of our fears and worry. There's got to be a better way than even worrying on Wednesday. In this one verse of Isaiah, I see a better way. It's a good verse to hang our hearts and hopes on as we move from one year to the next. But, let's read a few verses of background to get to verse 10.

Text: “Be silent before me, coasts and islands!

And let peoples renew their strength.

Let them approach; let them testify;

let's come together for the trial.

²Who has stirred up someone from the east?

In righteousness he calls him to serve.

The LORD hands nations over to him,

and he subdues kings.

He makes them like dust with his sword,

like wind-driven stubble with his bow.

³He pursues them, going on safely,

hardly touching the path with his feet.

⁴Who has performed and done this,

calling the generations from the beginning?

I am the LORD, the first

and with the last—I am he.”

⁵The coasts and islands see and are afraid,

the whole earth trembles.

They approach and arrive.

⁶Each one helps the other,

and says to another, “Take courage!”

⁷The craftsman encourages the metalworker;
the one who flattens with the hammer
encourages the one who strikes the anvil,
saying of the soldering, "It is good."
He fastens it with nails so that it will not fall over.

⁸But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
descendant of Abraham, my friend—

⁹I brought you from the ends of the earth
and called you from its farthest corners.
I said to you: You are my servant;
I have chosen you; I haven't rejected you.

¹⁰Do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you; I will help you;
I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.

Introduction: Isaiah faced much more unsettling times than we do. Isaiah 1:1 indicates that Isaiah preached these prophetic messages contained in the book during the reigns of Uzziah (also called Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Second Kings 15-20 gives us a reference point for the time of Isaiah's prophecy. The years covered are 740 B.C. to at least 701 B.C. Some would say that there is evidence that Isaiah's prophetic ministry lasted until nearly 680 B.C. We must remind ourselves that this time frame puts us in the midst of the divided kingdom (Israel in the North, Judah in the South). In fact, even though Isaiah's prophecy is focused on Judah in the South, the fall of the Northern kingdom would have happened during his ministry. As one commentator put it, "Judah faces extinction at the hands of the cruel Assyrians. In this crucial hour of national emergency, God sends Isaiah—a unique man with an unpleasant message. The nation of Judah is rotten to the core and ripe for judgment. Her habitual sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, injustice and corruption have not escaped the notice of her holy God. His righteous wrath will soon fall upon king and commoner alike, that all might learn that the Lord Almighty cannot and will not be mocked."¹

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are given to this prophetic message of God's judgment against sin. Interestingly, though, a shift occurs at chapter 40. In chapters 40 through the rest of the book, God comforts the people. Just from this two fold outline of the book, we get a balanced view of our God. On the one hand, He demands righteousness; but on the other hand, He is a God of grace and mercy.

But, back to Isaiah...God gave Isaiah a word of certain truth that would carry him through the uncertain days. I pray that it is a verse that will guide us in any uncertain days that we might encounter. In this one verse of Scripture, we see 2 statements of "Do not fear," 2 statements of "I am," and 3 statements of "I will." From this sequence we can identify 5 promises for our future.

1. God's Presence with us!

"I am with you"

¹ *The Daily Walk Bible*, p. 809.

Our perspective ought to change when we begin to acknowledge God's presence in our lives. Isaiah 6 can serve as an example. Isaiah came to the Temple with fear, but he left with faith. What made the difference? The difference was the acknowledgement of God's presence.

God's promise of His presence has always been God's way of helping us deal with our fear. When Moses questioned what he should say and do in going before Pharaoh, God simply said, "I will be with you." When the disciples were afraid, Jesus promised His spirit would remain with them.

2. God's Personal Position to us!

"I am your God"

God's position with us is very personal. He knows us exactly. He knows us personally. He is God, but He is our God. We learn in this phrase that not only is God with us, but He is for us. And, as the Apostle Paul said in Romans, "if God is for us, who can be against us?"

Why should we pray? Because God alone is God.

3. God's Power available to us!

"I will strengthen you"

Isaiah 40:18-26 reveals God's power. How dare we say that our future is uncertain!

4. God's Provision available to us!

"I will help you"

Hudson Taylor was a great pioneer in missions, living between 1832 and 1905. His missionary organization was called the China Inland Mission. It is believed that at one time 1/5 of all missionaries to China were in the China Inland Mission. Taylor's life was wrought with great difficulty. He struggled with poor health and depression. His wife died at age 33 and 4 of their 8 children died before they were 10 years old. In addition to these personal crises, there was the constant strain of finances being dependent upon others. But, Taylor trusted in God as his provider in a most radical way. At one point in the ministry, Taylor believed that God was leading him to grow the organization and invite other missionaries to China. In a letter to a friend, Taylor wrote, "We have 27 cents and all of the promises of God."

5. God's Ultimate Promise to us!

"I will uphold you"

The Gospels give us a story of an occasion of Jesus saying to His disciples, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." They left and soon Jesus fell asleep. While he was sleeping, a storm arose, and the disciples feared for their lives. They woke Jesus up with the words, "Master, we're going to die." Jesus woke up rebuked the wind and then rebuked the disciples with the words, "Where is your faith." As Pastor Fred Luter says about that story: "When Jesus says 'Let's go to the other side, you're going to the other side.'"

So What?

Don't be afraid!

We are right back to where we started. I don't know what is going to happen in 2018, but I have lived long enough to know this—some of what will happen will not be pleasant. For some, things will happen that will unsettle us and shake us at the very core of our faith. When that happens what are you going to do? Panic? Run? Be afraid? Or trust, knowing that God's presence is with us. Trust, knowing that God's position is with us. His power is with us. His provision is for us. And He will preserve us.

A children's Sunday School class was working on memorizing the 23rd Psalm. One little boy was having a particularly difficult time learning the Psalm, but perhaps he got the essence of the Psalm right when he said:

"The Lord is my shepherd and that's all I need to know."

Will you trust your future, which you cannot know, to the God you can know?