

Fear Not

A sermon preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, by Dr Matthew J. Hyde, on
Lord's Day morning, 3rd September, 2017

'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.' Isaiah 43:1

'But now!' That is how the text begins, and these words refer us back to the previous chapter. In order to understand the depth of meaning in the words of our text, we must set them in context. 'Now.' When? When God had appeared in judgement. When he had gone out against his people and made them to be 'a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore.' (Isaiah 42:22) He goes on to rebuke them, because they would not hear him in this, neither would they turn to walk in his ways, neither would they obey his law, 'Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger.' God cannot pass by sin. He must deal with sin. He will deal with sinners.

When God begins to work in the heart of a sinner he brings them to his holy law, and reveals to them their sin. What do they come to expect? Judgement. Well-deserved judgement. The Lord brings his people to the place where they acknowledge that his law would be just if they were condemned to hell. But when they are brought there, what do they find? In looking for judgement, they find mercy!

Have you been brought there? Have you come to the touchstone of his Word – God's holy law – and when you are weighed in the balances you are found wanting? Wanting not just in one point, but lacking in all? Guilty, guilty, guilty! Have you come to the place where you have cut yourself off? You felt there was no hope for a guilty soul like you. You realised that the wages of sin is death. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. And that is what you find yourself justly condemned to. But while you are in that low place God comes and says, 'But now!' 'But now, ... fear not: ... thou art mine!' And we find ourselves entering into the experience described by John Berridge:

Amazed to feel myself so vile,
Yet Jesus smiling all the while.

We look to him, feeling sin within us, and expecting his wrath and anger, but he looks on us in love, and in mercy he says to us, 'But now, ... fear not: ... thou art mine!' This is how the Lord deals with his people. He appears to them in the midst of what they themselves perceive as his righteous, just and holy indignation, and in the judgements that they feel are rightly due to them, and while they are in that place, he reveals to them his love and his mercy. 'But now...!' says the Lord.

I want to just emphasise that this 'But now...!' is not a one off experience in the life of the Lord's children. It is a mercy, underserved mercy, that he doesn't only say 'But now!' at the beginning of the Christian's experience, when we are first convinced of sin, but as we go on, he brings us again and again into this experience. He visits us time and time again with his love. Again and again we discover we still have an old covenant heart, an old nature which will always try to work; an old nature which is prone to wander from the God we love, an old nature which still brings forth sin. Is there a soul here wrestling with their old nature this morning? Is the Lord slowly blasting your gourds and laying you low? Is he teaching you again that there is no help or hope in self? It is not a once in a lifetime experience that Berridge describes,

No help in self I find,
And yet have sought it well;
The native treasure of my mind
Is sin, and death, and hell.

It may be a once in a life time experience for some who claim that their sin is put away and now they have nothing to worry about. But not for the Lord's tried and exercised people. Again and again the Lord brings us to that place where we have to find no hope in ourselves. But when he brings us there, he then says again to us, 'But now!' When we backslide, and turn aside, in his mercy he doesn't leave us. Henry Baker has it right when he says we often stray.

Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me;
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

When he finds us, we expect his wrath and his anger, but what does he say? 'But now, fear not!' The prodigal, who was brought to feel his want and made to return to his father's house, did not feel worthy to be called a son, but hoped he might be taken on as a hired servant. Low expectations! That is what we have when our perversity and sin confront us – low expectations of God's dealings with us. But when we go again to him, look again to him, what do we find? He always meets us with his mercy. He says, 'But now, ... fear not: ... thou art mine!' 'Thou art my son.' 'Thou art my daughter.' We can never fall from the state of blessed adoption. Even though we ourselves, perverse and foolish, may often wander from our heavenly Father, the truth stands:

None *can* pluck thee
From the strength of Israel's hands. (Berridge)

'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:38-39)

'But now.' This is the context: God's righteous indignation. And in such a situation, in the face of his righteous judgements, the Lord speaks with love and mercy and says: 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.' (Isaiah 43:1)

This is how the Lord sanctifies his judgements to his people. This is what marks out his dealings with us as gracious and merciful. They are done in such a way that they confirm to his people that the judgements which come on them do not come with the anger that the holy law has against a sinner, but rather are the chastisements of a loving father. 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' (Psalm 103:13) How does the Lord pity us? He brings us back to himself. He seeks and saves us when we are going wrong, straying from him. 'Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.' (Psalm 23:4) When is it they comfort us? When his judgements are mixed with his abundant mercy. When the chastising hand of God is sanctified to the good of our souls. And when are God's judgements sanctified? When they speak to our souls and say, 'But now.' 'For a little while I have forsaken thee, but because I am slow to anger and of great mercy, I will gather you again.' That is what these things speak to the Lord's people. That

is what this, 'But now,' is saying here. 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not.'

Now, in opening these words this morning I want to notice,

I. Who it is that speaks and says, 'Fear not'

II. Who he says 'Fear not' to.

III. The grounds he gives to faith to 'Fear not'.

I. Firstly, who it is that speaks.

We judge the words that are spoken to us by what we know of the person who speaks them. If you come into some grief, perhaps if you have lost a loved one by death, many people may say, 'I know just how you feel.' 'I sympathise with you.' Well, if the person that is speaking to you has walked the same pathway, then those words come with some reality. But if somebody says that to you, who you know has had no experience of that pathway, then the words have little meaning. The words seem vain and empty, even though we may believe they were well intended by the speaker.

Take another illustration – imagine if you were in some financial trouble, and somebody comes and says, 'Don't worry, I will pay for you.' You would look at that person and weigh them up, before you accepted their help. If you know they are a millionaire, or have the means, then their words carry some relief. But if they are said by somebody who you know has not got two pennies to rub together, their words are empty and of no comfort to you.

Now who is it that speaks here? Why is this an important question? It is important because the Lord often speaks to his people and says, 'Fear not,' yet because we think small thoughts of him, we don't obtain the comfort from those words that we should. We count these words as idle tales.

The Lord has left many blessed promises in the Word of God. It is true that we cannot appropriate them to ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit to apply them to us. But sometimes the Lord speaks a word of promise to his people, and then later they start doubting it. Why do you doubt his promise? Why do you doubt the things he has spoken to you? Often the problem is because you have forgotten or lost sight of who it is that has spoken them to you. If only we could always see, always remember, who it is that speaks, what comfort there would be in his words.

So who is it that speaks here? We should know who it is who speaks because he declares his name to us, 'But now *thus saith the LORD.*' The use of capital letters here (in the King James Version of the Bible) show that in the original it is that precious name of God, JEHOVAH. This was his name which he revealed to his people for their comfort. We think of the revelation of his name that he gave to Moses at the burning bush. He declared his name as 'THE I AM THAT I AM.' 'The I will be what I will be, the I was that I was,' the self-existent, eternal, unchangeable LORD GOD.

What does he remind his people of when he uses his name, Jehovah?

(a) *Firstly*, that he is the only true God.

If only we knew more of this precious God! and had more faith's sight of him! You see, left to ourselves, we judge God as we judge other people. We fear he is going to act the way that other people act. We forget that people, and everything else we have experience about, proceed from this God, and are subservient to this God. We only have our origins because he created us. We are only spared as he spares us. We only live as he gives us life. You see,

He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be. (Isaac Watts)

He is the self-existent God. God is the only self-existent being. He depends on nothing else.

What a comfort it is when we can see this! Our friends, our supporters may fail; the Lord's servants may be taken from us; the public means of grace might be closed to us; but we need to remember that God does not change. God uses his servants; he uses means; he sends ravens as he did to Elijah. He uses our friends and supporters sometimes to be strength to us and to comfort us. At other times, he turns our enemies to our help. But he is not dependent on any of those things. Not on *any* of them. Why? Because he is the self-existent God. He is the Creator of the ends of the earth. He holds all things in his hand. All power is in him, and he gives this power to his Son: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' (Matthew 28:18) That is the power of this one who speaks. 'But now thus saith the Lord.' JEHOVAH.

(b) Secondly, *this blessed name, Jehovah*, speaks of a covenant keeping God. It speaks of a God who is gracious to his people. This name is so often joined with

other names, such as Sabaoth. Jehovah Sabaoth means the Lord of Hosts. This name reveals him to be the God of his people. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Word of God, the person and character of God has been opened up to his people in an ever-increasing way. When God created the world he refers to himself as the great Elohim, the God of gods. Then slowly through the Old Testament he teaches his people about himself in greater fullness and depth as he reveals his various names to them. He shows them more and more of himself. He begins to teach them his name Jehovah as he reveals his covenant love.

You see, God is not abstract to his people. Philosophers may consider God in the abstract. They discourse on the science or 'theology' of his attributes. They go into deep intellectual speculations about God as an object of study. But that is not the knowledge that the Lord's own people have with him. The Lord's people have the knowledge that comes from a relationship with him. A warm, loving, personal relationship. He doesn't deal with us simply as creatures, just as part of his creation, but he deals with us as objects of his love. That is when we come to realise something of the blessings that are in this God. God always will be beyond us. We will never be able to comprehend him in all his fullness. But when he calls a sinner by grace and begins to teach them of himself, he reveals himself in the person of the Son, in the face of Jesus Christ, and his people are able to *know* him.

Jesus said: 'All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.' (Matthew 11:27) In Jesus we know Jehovah! As Gadsby calls him, 'Jehovah Jesus.' Remember what the name of Jesus means. In simplest terms, the first part of the name, 'Je,' comes from the name, 'Jehovah.' The second part, 'sus', is from the Hebrew word which means 'salvation.' The name Jesus literally means, 'Jehovah saves.' Just as he said, 'Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.' (Matthew 1:21) As we come to find mercy in Jesus, as we come to see in him all our hope, we come to know something of Jehovah, as he is revealed by the Son. 'My God, my Father, blissful name!'

Is your exercise this morning:

O may I call thee mine?
May I with sweet assurance claim
A portion so divine? (Anne Steele)

Perhaps, friends, this is your exercise, but you feel your religion never seems to get beyond that. But can I just say to you in passing, why do you desire to know him as your Father? Why do you want to know him as your God? Why do you long to know him as Jehovah? Was there a time in your life when you couldn't care less about these things? You had no desire for them then. If so, then what has made the difference? The small desire to have him as our own God is a small evidence of grace. Left to ourselves we will shove these little evidences of the workings of grace within us to one side. But we should not pass by the Lord's gracious dealings with us when he makes a change in our soul. We must note when he makes us seek after him in a way we have never sought after him before. Or when he brings us to those places where we cannot be satisfied with anything less than him. These are precious evidences of his love towards us and his Spirit's work within us. If we see them, we should seek all the more eagerly after the one thing needful, and to have more and more sweet assurance that we can claim him as our own.

So we see it is God that speaks here, the Lord, the self-existent Jehovah. This is the one who enters into covenant with his people, the one who shows not only his wrath, anger, holy justice, and his holy infinity in all its fullness, but also reveals his superabundant mercy, grace and love, in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the one that speaks.

(c) Thirdly, the name Jehovah reminds us that the speaker is one who has authority to say, 'Fear not!'

Jehovah knows the end from the beginning. He knows all about you. He knows more about you than you know about yourself. From time to time he brings us to realise that. Sometimes we have to come to the Lord and confess we don't know who we are, we don't know what we are about, we don't know where we are, we feel like lost sheep, utterly lost, but we are drawn to him who knows everything.

Well, the one who speaks here knows all about your state this morning. Therefore, he has a right to say to you, 'Fear not,' because he knows the end from the beginning. As part of knowing the end from the beginning, he knows what he was prepared for you tomorrow. He knows what you have been through yesterday.

He knows what you are going through today. He knows all about you, not only in the outward things of life, but also in grace.

That's the important thing. He knows the sin that you stand convicted of, he knows the confession of sin your soul has had to make this morning. But he sees and accepts the precious blood of the Lamb of God shed on behalf of sinners and he has prepared a place which he will bring his people to. He knows every throne prepared in heaven above. We lose sight of the fact that,

In heaven there's ne'er a vacant throne;
He hates to put away. (John Kent)

But he knows that, and he is bringing his people safely to the place prepared for them. Nothing is hidden from him. He knows everything. He ordains everything. And he says, 'Fear not!'

II. Now, who does God speak to?

We find out who he speaks to by what he says to them. He must be speaking to a fearful people, because he says, 'Fear not.'

I want to notice briefly that there are two types of fear that the Lord's people experience.

(a) One type of fear is very solemn because it is a sinful fear. Left to ourselves we sadly have a great deal of it. Why is it a sinful fear? Because the Word declares, 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.' (Romans 14:23) If our fears arise because of a lack of faith, or perhaps we should more accurately say, a lack of exercise of faith, these fears are sinful. If they arise because of unbelief, our fears are sinful. They are the fears that Rozzell speaks of.

Creatures of fear, we drag along,
And fear where no fear is;
Our griefs we labour to prolong,
Our joys in haste dismiss.

This is the fear that arises in spite of the promise that God has spoken to us. It is the unbelief that wells up and questions all the past evidences of grace and suggests that everything we have experienced is sham. It is the unbelief that arises and asks:

If I love, why am I thus?
Why this dull and lifeless frame?

Hardly, sure, can they be worse
Who have never heard his name. (John Newton)

We are prone to these fears, aren't we? We look within ourselves and look for some evidences of grace, but all we find is darkness. So we cut ourselves off. We forget the promise. We forget the gracious one who speaks. I often go back to what Mr Fred Windridge (pastor at Ponsard Road, London) records. One evening standing outside Gower Street Chapel when Mr Robert Moxon had been preaching, he was telling Mr Moxon all his concerns, his doubts and his fears. Mr Moxon put his hand on his shoulder and said, 'Friend Windridge, why are you so willing to magnify everything old nature says, and everything the devil says, and so ready to minimise everything God says, all that he speaks in his Word, and all he has confirmed to you?' That is what we do, isn't it? We lose sight of the one who speaks, 'Thus saith the Lord ... Fear not.' Instead we listen to ourselves. We examine our case and because we cannot find what we want in ourselves, unbelieving fears rise up and we cut ourselves off. If only we had a true sight more often of the wretchedness of unbelief. Joseph Hart calls it:

... that sin accursed,
Abhorred by God above,
Because, of all opposers worst,
It fights against his love.

It is the chief sin, which has its origin in the very beginning. 'Hath God said?' Sin entered in the form of unbelief on the part of our mother Eve. This is the hideous monster which brought in the curse. The sin which is at the centre of all our sin. Why is it so heinous? Because it casts Jesus from his throne and denies the divinity of God. That is what unbelief does. That is what we do when we magnify what the devil says and listen to what our fellow creatures say, and what our old heart whispers – we make ourselves God. And when God speaks we shut our ears, we won't believe, unbelief rises up within us, we doubt, and we fear. What are we doing? We are saying to God that he has no right to speak, no place to speak, we don't believe what he says. That is the dreadful sinfulness of unbelieving fears. These things are solemn; we must not try to cover them up. We need a greater realisation of the blackness of these sins. But I would speak lovingly to you, because I am not immune from these fears. 'O that I had not a myself,' said Rutherford. O to be free from unbelief and fears.

(b) But then the other type of fear is a righteous fear. This is a fear that proceeds from faith.

When do we find this? It is found in the conviction of sin. It begins when God convinces us of his righteousness, his holiness, and the perfection of his law. He brings us to feel our sin, and causes us to tremble before him. This kind of trembling is a good fear. It is a blessed fear. It springs from faith, rather than opposing faith. Faith believes God and accepts him for what he is. Faith receives his righteousness, his holiness and the perfection of God, and before him it fears. This righteous fear is exercised when the Lord's hand goes out against us and visits us with his righteous rod and makes us tremble. That is good fear. This fear is also produced in response to the love and mercy of God. It is sometimes called filial fear, the fear of a devoted and respectful child for their parent. The fear of love. That is a sweet fear.

The one fear, sinful fear, springs from the old nature within us; the righteous fear is a product of the new man of grace, which cannot sin, nor even think sinful thoughts. So there are two opposites within our heart, and therefore a constant warfare.

Now both the Lord's people and the people of the world have unbelieving fears. But this is one of the things that distinguishes the Lord's people. When the Lord sends his judgements (or when his judgments are sanctified to his people), they produce righteous fear in the hearts of the Lord's people. Yet even the Lord's people can be slow to show this righteous fear. Here in our text, the Lord's people had been brought into a low state because of those sins of unbelief, yet when he visited them with his judgement, they did not recognise it or take it to heart. As it says, 'Therefore he (the Lord) hath poured upon him (Israel) the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.' (Isaiah 42:25) The Lord's righteous judgments do not have their perfect work in his people until the old nature, the lofty heart, the proud look is brought down. When Israel was brought to realise they had no strength in themselves, and taken into captivity, their sinful fears of unbelief were turned into righteous fears. Then the Lord returned to deliver them. By contrast, when God's judgements go abroad, the world only become hardened in their unbelief, and doubt that God can exist otherwise trouble would not be known in the earth. But to pass on.

When God says in our text, 'Fear not,' what kind of fearful people was he addressing? We can conclude two things about them. For one thing, they were sinners. Undoubtedly they had been filled with sinful fears, as we read of them in the previous chapter. But for another thing, under God's judgements, as they were sanctified to them, they were filled with righteous fear. And to these fearful ones God comes and says, 'Fear not.'

The mercy is that God does not deal with us according to what our sins so richly deserve. You say, 'But he did, he sent them into captivity.' But while using his rod, and sending them into captivity, he still speaks to them in mercy. He says, 'But now, fear not.' 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.' (Jeremiah 29:11) What had brought them into captivity? What was the reason they were in Babylon? Unbelieving fears! But over all those unbelieving fears was mercy. 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.' He does not cut off his people, though they are sinful, but says to them, 'Fear not.'

I want to emphasise this. He does not just say, 'Fear not,' in response to our attempts to put things right. He deals with us as sinners in our sin and comes just where we are. Have you had to prove that? Whether you enter into the house of God or go about your daily jobs, you are bowed down by unbelieving fears. You cannot rise above them by yourself. We are so unbelieving at times that we feel we cannot even pray in the time of trouble. Our fears rise so high, we cut ourselves off, and believe ourselves to be beyond hope, beyond mercy's reach. But the Lord comes just where we are. In our sin, in our doubt, in our unbelief, in our limiting of God, he comes and says, 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.'

What a gracious God we have! A God who comes just where we are, and condescends to speak to us as we are. He deals with us as sinners. Is that the Saviour, is that the God you need this morning? Not a God who is saying, 'When you get better you can come to me. When you have put your house in order, then I will visit you with salvation.' No! But a God who receives us exactly as we are. A God who welcomes us empty handed. A God who loves us despite our sin. A God who has mercy on us *because* of our sin and *in* our sins. This is the God who speaks

here! ‘But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not.’

III. Now I want to come to notice God doesn’t just say, ‘Fear not.’ He gives several grounds for their faith to assure them there is no need to fear.

What a blessing it is that God never calls us to believe things that are unbelievable! He lays foundations for our faith. Faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith takes hold on something that it sees and is persuaded of, and it embraces it. When God speaks here and says, ‘Fear not,’ he gives grounds to his people for faith. He tells them why they should not fear. He gives strong consolation. In the verse of our text he lays reason upon reason why we should fear. Just to notice them briefly with you.

(a) *Firstly, he reminds us that he is our Creator.* ‘But now thus saith *the Lord that created thee, ... Fear not.*’ Before we were brought into this world, he existed. The Creator must exist before he creates. He is reminding us that he knows all about us. He is telling us that he controls all things around us. The day of adversity does not spring out of nowhere. It comes about in providence and so is subject to his most holy will, and under the control of his hand. He is calling us to remember that the cattle upon a thousand hills are his. That he holds the whole earth in his hands. He will not leave his children starving but he *can* and *will* provide for them.

That is what he is reminding them, when he says, ‘But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob.’ ‘I created thee. I put you in the path you are found in. I control everything that concerns you. I laid out your life before me. I know exactly where you are. I know precisely where you are going. I know what tomorrow is bringing. I created it. I prepared it. I created you for that path.’ ‘But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob.’ What comfort is taken from the people of this world when they deny the creating hand of God! Some profess still to be the Lord’s people but deny this: what comfort they lose! Has the Lord ever cheered you with the fact that because he created you, he knows just how to provide for you – and he can provide everything.

The Lord knows just what you need. God is the best teacher. Why? Because he knows all about his pupils. It is a poor teacher who goes into the classroom believing that every pupil is the same and that they can all be taught in the same way. The best teachers look round the class. They know which pupils are slow and need things repeating, and which ones are quick and need holding back. They know

the ones who are practical and those who tend to be theoretical. So they amend their teaching methods to teach each child well. Well, natural teachers have to learn about their pupils. Each new school year brings new pupils. The first thing they do if they are to succeed is to learn about their pupils.

But the Lord, our heavenly teacher, who leads us in the way that we should go, and who causes us to profit in the way appointed for us, doesn't need to learn about us. Why? Because he is our creator. He knows the souls that need gently leading. He knows the lambs that need carrying, and gently leads those that are with young. He puts the crook out for the wayward ones, and gently breaks their hard and stubborn streak. He knows our infirmity. He remembers we are but dust. He deals individually, gently and proportionately with each of his children, just as they need. 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob.' He knows all about us. This is the first reason he lays for our faith in saying 'Fear not.'

(b) But he doesn't leave it there. He comes on and calls himself, 'he that formed thee, O Israel.' To us it may seem a repetition of creation and forming. Perhaps they mean the same thing? But according to the lexicon, the word translated here 'forming' has a reference to reforming, regeneration, forming in election, such as in, 'This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.' (Isaiah 43:21) And another thing that suggests we should understand this word 'forming' in this light is the difference in the way God addresses his people. God names himself to Jacob, 'The Lord that created thee, O Jacob,' and he names himself to Israel, 'the Lord that formed thee, O Israel.' Jacob was given that name as he was born on this earth, a natural man. He was called Jacob. But when the Lord had called Jacob by grace, when God blessed Jacob, he gave him a new name, Israel. This is a new name. The name that is given to faithful Jacob. The name Israel is given to the people of God in the Old Testament as a people called out from the nations of the world, separated and made holy by God. Israel was the name of his people, his chosen. So it would seem that the meaning here is, 'The Lord that created thee, O Jacob' – I am thy Creator, by birth – 'and he that formed thee, O Israel' – I am the one that has been gracious to worm Jacob, that has passed by thee and said 'Live! I am the one that has regenerated thee, called thee by grace, imparted new life – spiritual life – to thee, and given thee a new name. Therefore, fear not.

You see what comfort there is here then! If there is comfort for the creature in God being our Creator, how much more comfort is there for the child of God in

the knowledge that the Lord who created them has also redeemed them, and new-created them in grace. And if the Lord is good and merciful and gracious to his creatures in providence, as creatures of his creation, how much more will he be gracious to the recipients of his grace – his people – who he has created for himself?

This is what he is saying here, and what he is reminding backsliding Israel of. It is not only that I have created you, but that I have called you and separated you from all the nations of the earth. In his sovereign love and mercy he didn't choose Israel because they were better than any other nation, but simply because he loved them. And because of his love, he sought them, 'He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness,' and separated them to himself, 'he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.' (Deuteronomy 32:10) This is the reason why we should not fear, because he not only thinks merciful thoughts towards them in providence, but he has a purpose of grace towards them, thoughts of redeeming love.

(c) But God goes on and continues to add reasons for faith to take hold on, why we should not fear. The next ground he gives to remove our fears is, 'I have redeemed thee.' Fear not because I have redeemed thee.

There may be some here this morning who find many fears because they cannot pinpoint the moment God 'formed' them, regenerated them, or called them by his grace. You know, I feel the Lord's people generally cannot say when they were regenerated. Those things are hidden from us, in the same way as the moment of natural conception is also hidden from us. The moment when the Lord puts new life within us is difficult to pinpoint. We must have been living when we first heard his voice, because the dead cannot hear. Whether we began to live in that moment we first heard his voice, we cannot really say. But we do know this: if we have tasted anything of redemption, then we are amongst his Israel; we have been regenerated, we have been renewed. The evidences of regeneration are in the fact that he reveals himself to us as both a just God and a Saviour. He reveals to us mercy in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. So here is comfort for the Lord's people to allay their fears.

'I have redeemed thee.' What precious ground there is here for saying, 'Fear not.' Remember, when God is going to deal with sin and take away our sin, he doesn't just shove our sin under the carpet. He doesn't just say, 'Let bygones be

bygones.’ He doesn’t just forget our sin. If you are a debtor, your creditor can just wipe off the debt and forget all about it. But if God had dealt with our sin just like that, there would have been cause for lifelong fear. Fear that one day God would remember our sin and demand payment. Fear that he would visit us in wrath and say, ‘I know I forgot them, but all your ongoing sins continually vex me and have reminded me of all your past sins.’ Somebody might cancel your debt once, but if you got into debt again, they might say, ‘Well, I forgot your previous debt, but you haven’t learned and here you are back in debt again, so this time I am going to charge it all to your account.’

God doesn’t deal with sin in such a way. Instead, he redeems us. Our sin is fully paid for, it is fully dealt with, not just swept under the carpet. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came and stood in our place and paid the price for us. There is now nothing to pay. Not because the debt has been written off, but because the debt has been paid in full. What precious truth it is that Toplady brings out:

Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
And then again at mine.

Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty;
Trust in his efficacious blood,
Nor *fear* thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

Now is your old nature dredging up past sin? Is the devil reminding you of your sins? Is the sight of your sins filling you with fear? Well, the Lord speaks and says, ‘Fear not!’ Why not? ‘For I have redeemed thee!’ ‘I cannot, I will not, demand payment again.’ That is what the Lord is saying here. ‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.’ (Isaiah 44:22) Your sins are taken away, fear not. Past offences which pain your heart this morning, from these he says, ‘I have redeemed thee.’ And what right has he got to speak? He is the one who appointed the sacrifice. He was the one who was satisfied with the offering. He loved the suffering one. God loved his Son in that moment when the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world. ‘Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience.’ (Hebrews 5:8) What a

precious comfort the Lord brings before us here! What a safe and sure reason to forbid all fear, ‘I have redeemed thee!’ I have redeemed thee with a full and free salvation, therefore there is no ground to fear.

Zion’s mourners, cease your fear;
For lo! the dying Lamb
Utterly forbids despair
To all that love his name. (Joseph Hart)

(d) Then he says, ‘I have called thee by thy name.’ Here we see a blessed standing place, a great ground for faith. Salvation doesn’t only proclaim that we are forgiven, that our sin is dealt with, that the wages of sin are paid, and the sting of death is taken away, but it means a new relationship with God.

Justice would have been satisfied if our sins had been forgiven and nothing more. But there is more than justice involved in our salvation. In redeeming us God says to us, ‘You are my children.’ Not only judicially pardoned, but also brought into my family. My son. My daughter. In redemption we are made partakers of the blessing of adoption. No longer strangers and foreigners, we become citizens of heaven. We are made heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus. Jesus becomes a brother to us. This is the relationship that is set before us in the gospel. We are not just beggars taken from the dunghill and washed down, but we are set among princes. And not just among princes as a stranger among them, but made princes. We are appointed to sit on a throne of judgement with our elder brother, Jesus Christ. This is what God brings his people to: ‘I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.’

He sets his name upon us. He is not ashamed of us. ‘He is not ashamed to call them brethren.’ (Hebrews 2:11) No! He takes us as his own; he makes us his own; we are his own; we are the vessels of his choice; the sheep of his pasture. We are brought into this relationship through grace. The strength of grace is this:

None shall pluck thee
From the strength of Israel’s hands. (Berridge)

It is a relationship we can never fall from. ‘I have called thee by thy name.’ I have set my name upon thee, it can never be erased. We see it in Abraham – he gave Abraham a new name instead of Abram. We have already mentioned the change of Jacob’s name to Israel. We see it concerning the Lord’s people a little later in

this prophecy, ‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.’ (Isaiah 62:4) ‘I have called thee by thy name.’

(e) *Now for the last reason why his people should fear not – ‘thou art mine.’*

I must conclude with this. Here in the closing of this verse we have yet another profound reason to encourage the Lord’s people not to be afraid. This closing clause says it all. It sums up everything. It is as though we have ascended to the top of the peak. Here is the *single* reason why the child of God has no need to fear, ‘Thou art mine.’ Rev. J. R. MacDuff, a well-known minister in the Church of Scotland during the nineteenth century, says somewhere about this chapter ‘It is comfort upon comfort’ (I believe in his book on this prophecy, *Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye*). I feel to have set it out poorly this morning, but in this verse the Lord gives reason upon reason, comfort upon comfort, why the Lord’s people should not fear, and at last he brings us up to this comfort – ‘Thou art mine.’ *Eternally mine.*

What a fullness is found in this word! This statement – ‘Thou art mine’ – sums up the entire covenant. In the passage in Jeremiah 31, where the Lord speaks of a new covenant, what it comes down to at heart is this: ‘But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; *and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*’ (Verse 33) This is what the Lord lays underneath his fearful, sinking people – the arms of the everlasting covenant. Arms which can never be broken, and from which we can never fall.

What from Christ that soul can sever,
Bound by everlasting bands?
Once in him, in him for ever;
Thus the eternal covenant stands.
None shall pluck thee
From the strength of Israel’s hands. (John Kent)

‘Thou art mine,’ therefore, ‘Fear not.’ This is what the Lord says so graciously to his people. They are his backsliding people, his fearful people, his people drowning in unbelief and sin, yet he still passes by in love and mercy and says, ‘But now...!’ ‘But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that

formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; *thou art mine.*'

Amen