

## ‘Silence! In My courtroom!’ Part 2

Now remember that **Isaiah 41** is a courtroom scene where God has called for silence from the Gentile nations of the Earth. At the end of **Isaiah 40:31**, Isaiah told Israel that **“those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.”** And it appeared as though Israel have been waiting and are asking the question, **how and when will the Lord renew our strength?** And so, God says in **Isaiah 41:1** **“Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength!**

We looked at **Isaiah 41:1-7** last week, where we found God speaking to the nations of the Earth about the impending doom which will happen through Cyrus, 150 years from the time He said it. We saw how God was going to raise up and use Cyrus to utterly destroy all the enemies of Israel.

It was lunchtime at the Christian nursery school and all the children were lined up by the teachers. Then, as usual, they were led into the canteen. Little Caroline quickly noticed that at one end of the dining table was a large pile of apples with the message, **‘Take only one apple each, God is watching.’** At the other end he noticed was a large pile of chocolate chip biscuits. Caroline then whispered to his friend Sarah, **‘We can take all the chocolate biscuits we want. God is watching the apples.’**

As we begin **Isaiah 41:8-20** we’re going to see God turning His attention from the nations of the Earth, to speak to Israel because God is watching and has His eyes on all things. **Isaiah 41:8+9** **“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.”**

We can imagine Israel being very afraid about what was going to happen to them when Cyrus came on the scene. And so, what we have here, are words of comfort from God to Israel. God is saying, I chose you Israel, you’re all descendants of my friend Abraham. I was the one who brought you together and made you into a nation, I was the one who chose you to be My servant here on Earth.

And God says, you have absolutely no reason to be scared when Cyrus comes, **why?** Because He is The God, the great I AM and He’s not like those gods the Gentiles worship. The God who is responsible for raising up this undisputable King Cyrus, with his invincible armies, that will walk all over the nations of the Gentiles. The God who has brought that king to power is also the God who has chosen Israel as His own possession out of all the nations of the earth. In other words, God is saying, **‘Cyrus and the Medes are mine, and you are mine. Everything is mine. But I am your God! And for that very reason, you, Israel, have nothing to fear.’**

When Funmi and I went on holiday to **the island of Jersey** we visited the war tunnels and you could listen to a commentary about people’s experiences during the war. Now I found it interesting but because I wasn’t around back then, when the second world war broke out, I didn’t really appreciate what life would have been like. So, I pulled this elderly lady to the side to ask her about her experience of the war and she said, **‘we had to just get on with life as much as possible but it was a very scary time, especially when we heard the noise of the German aircraft flying above us’.**

Now make no mistake about it love ones, when Cyrus comes, it was going to be a world war, it was going to be a very frightening time for everyone. And so, God the judge, knowing that Israel was going to be scared goes on to comfort and reassure them again.

**Isaiah 41:10-16** **“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. “All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. “See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel.”**

Notice that God tells them three times **‘Do not fear’** and He tells them, **‘Do not be dismayed’** and He tells them, **‘Do not be afraid’**. God basically says, **‘yes, things are going to get really scary for everyone because what is coming is a world war.’** Cyrus will be unstoppable, unbeatable, he will be a great and conquering king, he will conquer the world.

But! God is the God over the Medes and the Persians. And He tells Israel, **‘I will help you, I will strengthen you, I will sustain you’**. **‘I AM God! I’m in control and you have nothing to be frightened about’**. Now when we look at our world today and the tensions rising between different countries and nations, there are times when the world seems like a very scary place.

In the Bible the phrase, **‘do not worry’** or **‘do not be afraid’** appears **365 times**, that’s a verse for every day of the year for us to remember, Who’s in control. But let me ask you what does this word say, **‘FEARLESS’**. Now you can read that word and think, yes, it means to be brave, heroic and courageous and so we think, yes Christians are to be the same, we’re to be fearless.

But loved ones, if Joshua was so courageous and fearless, **why did God say to him over and over again in Joshua 1, ‘be strong and courageous and do not be afraid’?** If the apostle Paul was so bold is sharing the good news, **why did God tell him in a vision whilst he was in Corinth in Acts 18, ‘do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent’?**

The answer is simple, God told Joshua and Paul not to be afraid because they were afraid. In other words, before we can become **‘fearless’** as Christians, we first need to learn how to **‘fear less’**. Fear which stands for **False Expectations Appearing Real**, actually helps us to remember to simply trust God more but **‘fear less’**.

There was a young boy who was trapped in his room because the family home caught fire. There were flames shooting up everywhere and smoke filled the whole house. The young boy opened his bedroom window and was shouting **‘dad, dad, where are you.’** His father heard him and said, **‘son, I’m here, just jump out of the window and I’ll catch you.’** But the young boy was so scared he shouted, **‘but dad, I can’t see you’**, to which his father replied, **‘it doesn’t matter son, I can see you’**.

Yes, things can get scary sometimes, and yes fear can make us lose sight of God. But to be fearless, we must understand that God sees, and we should trust Him at His word. And the more we trust God, the more we trust that He is in control, the more we learn how to fear less. And that’s what God tells Israel to do next by reminding them of what He’s done in the past.

**Isaiah 41:17-20 “The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set junipers in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.”**

God continues to speak to Israel in words that are reminiscent of the days of Moses when Israel wandered in the wilderness. When they are thirsty and parched and in need of water, God will supply for them as He always has. Now remember when Israel was in the wilderness after God delivered them out of Egypt. The people grumbled about not having enough food or not having enough to drink and so God made bread fall from heaven and gave them water to drink from a rock.

Now think about this for a moment, there were roughly around three million people in that desert and God supplied every one of their needs for forty years. In other words, here in Isaiah, God wants them to remember His faithfulness in the past. He looked after them in the desert, He’ll look after them when Cyrus comes and there’s a world war. He looked after Israel’s future in the desert and He’ll look after Israel’s future again when Cyrus comes.

If they will wait upon the Lord, and rely upon Him, they will renew their strength and He will sustain them even in the worst of circumstances. God is in control, even when it looks like He isn’t.

Now God has finished talking to Israel and we return to the courtroom scene again. **Isaiah 41:21-23 “Present your case,” says the LORD. “Set forth your arguments,” says Jacob’s King. “Tell us, you idols, what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear.”**

As we find in any courtroom, the judge always allows others to have their say.

And so, God turns His attention back to the Gentiles, especially to those who are making little gods as fast as they can to defend themselves from the onslaught of Cyrus's armies. Now it's their turn to make their case and speak and judge the situation. So, God calls them and says, **"Bring out your gods, so they can now have their say!"**

Now don't miss what God is doing here, this is divine ridicule, this is God being sarcastic. He's basically saying, **'OK, now that you've had a chance to gain your strength and build your case, step up to the podium and let's hear what your gods have to say.'** And then God says, **'oops wait a minute, I forgot you have to carry your gods to the podium because they can't walk by themselves.'**

In fact, **'even if they could walk up to the podium, they can't speak because they don't have mouths, they can't hear because they don't have ears.'** **'Oh, it doesn't matter, we all know that they don't work anyway but let them tell us what will take place in the future.'**

And then God says, **'No, let's make it easy for them. Instead of telling us the future, let's have your wooden and golden gods, that have to be strengthened with nails so they don't fall over, let's have them simply tell us what has already happened!'**

This reminds of **1 Kings 18:22-29** when Elijah sets out the challenge for the prophets of Baal to bring down fire from heaven. And I love **1 Kings 18:27** where Elijah is being sarcastic with them and says, **"Yell louder! After all, he is a god; he may be deep in thought, or perhaps he stepped out for a moment or has taken a trip. Perhaps he is sleeping and needs to be awakened."** You know what, **'stepped out for a moment'** is referring to, **don't know?** He's on a toilet break!

Like Elijah, God is ridiculing these god manufacturers and asks them, **can they tell the future, can they tell us what happened in the past? Can they do anything?** Bring out your gods and have them do something, anything! God says, **'it doesn't matter what it is they do, whether it's good, bad or indifferent, it doesn't matter.'** **'Let's just see them do something, so that we may be dismayed and terrified.'**

Now loved ones, God's sarcasm towards these so-called gods makes us laugh at those who trust in them, but it really isn't a laughing matter. Because God's assessment of idols and of those who worship them is seen in **Isaiah 41:24** **"But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; whoever chooses you is detestable."** You see, Godless people choose to worship something which is actually no god at all.

Their gods can't predict the future, they can't explain the past, they can't do good or evil, they can't hear, they can't speak, they can't see, they can't do anything! And if anyone chooses to worship the thing created, rather than the Creator, God says that's **'detestable'** to Him or **'abominable'** to Him as some translations have it.

In **Deuteronomy 7**, Moses instructs Israel in their mission to go into the Promised Land and take it over and he tells the people. The Message translation says in **Deuteronomy 7:25+26** **"Make sure you set fire to their carved gods. Don't get greedy for the veneer of silver and gold on them and take it for yourselves—you'll get trapped by it for sure. God hates it; it's an abomination to God, your God. And don't dare bring one of these abominations home or you'll end up just like it, burned up as a holy destruction. No: It is forbidden! Hate it. Abominate it. Destroy it and preserve God's holiness."**

Loved ones, not only are idols an abomination to God, but here in **Isaiah 41:24**, we read that the idolater is as much of an abomination as the idols they create and worship. And notice what **Deuteronomy 7:26** says, **'And don't dare bring one of these abominations home or you'll end up just like it'**. God says, people will become like the things they worship. Idolaters become as spiritually blind and deaf and powerless as the gods they bow down to. You see, anyone who trusts in anything other than the Holy One of Israel to save them from the wrath to come, is an abomination in the sight of God.

**Isaiah 41:25-29** **"I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes—one from the rising sun who calls on my name. He treads on rulers as if they were mortar, as if he were a potter treading the clay. Who told of this from the beginning, so we could know, or beforehand, so we could say, 'He was right'? No one told of this, no one foretold it, no one heard any words from you. I was the first to tell Zion, 'Look, here they are!' I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good news. I look but there is no one—no one among the gods to give counsel, no one to give answer when I ask them. See, they are all false! Their deeds amount to nothing; their images are but wind and confusion."**

In these final verses we read God's final word in this courtroom scene where the gods of the Gentiles are being called out and judged. And notice that once again, God answers His own original question. God says, **'the day is coming when every word that He has spoken will be understood by all men everywhere to be absolutely and infallibly true'**.

We know that Israel over and over again committed idolatry, we know that Israel preferred the idols of the Gentiles over God's revelation to them. That's why they were taken into captivity in the first place because of their idolatry, but the good news was that Israel never committed idolatry again when they eventually returned.

Now let me bring all this a little closer to home. We're living in times where idolatry is widespread, we read about it in our newspapers and we see it on our television screens. We have people spending most of their lives, making a career out of trying to disprove the existence of God and ridiculing His Word. They are idolaters because they've made idols of their own intellect and their own imagination.

They tell us that **'the Bible is full of holes', 'the Bible is full of errors'. 'The Bible is ancient and irrelevant' 'the Bible is simply a book like every other book written by men and filled with fictitious stories and fables and myths and legends'**. 'Surely', they tell us, **'we can't really believe the Bible is the Word of God!'**

Loved ones, one day, all men everywhere will discover their mental and emotional and psychological idols of rebellion which they have created in their own hearts are nothing. They are nothing, they are full of wind, just like the metal objects the Gentiles created in the days of Isaiah. The day is coming when God's Word will suddenly be found to be everything they said it wasn't.

**And did you know that idolatry is also widespread within the Lord's church?** The problem is we simply don't recognise them as idols. Paul describes it to us in **Colossians 3:5** **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."**

You see, idolatry is putting our own selfish desires before God's desire for us in our lives. Paul says if any of these sins are being practiced in the Christians lives, they are committing idolatry. And he says, they need to put them to death, in other words, stop committing idolatry. Now the world may not recognise these sins as idolatry but God certainly does.

Paul says in **Romans 1:22-25** **"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen."**

Loved ones, idolatry is still rampant even within the Lord's church and we need to recognise it. **How many Christians do you know read their daily horoscopes, to find out what the future holds for them?** God and God alone, knows your future and if you read your daily horoscope or get involved with tarot cards or go to see a so-called fortune teller, for guidance in life, then that's idolatry.

When we worked with the church in Birmingham, we used to make our yearly plans and ask God to bless our efforts in reaching the lost and edifying the church. But one brother at the end of those meetings would always, say, **'I like our plans and 'touch wood' they will come together'**. Or if someone was asking for prayers for a job, he would always say, **'fingers crossed', you'll get the job.'** **'Touching wood'** was what these idols makers did, **'fingers crossed'** was what they were doing, they built these idols, which became some kind of lucky charm for good luck.

If working is our main priority in life, and our physical treasures are more important to us than our spiritual treasures, then that's idolatry. If watching your favourite TV programme is more important to you than having fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ, then that's idolatry.

Let me bring it even closer to home. **Who do we idolise? Whose posters are on our walls? Whose autobiographies are we reading? Whose films do we want to check out and watch? Who or what do we write about on Facebook and Twitter? Who or what are we telling the world is the most important person in our lives.**

**Could it be that we're committing idolatry without even knowing it? Could it be that we're lifting up things and people more than we lift up Christ?**

Paul says, please don't 'exchange the truth about God for a lie, and worship and serve created things rather than the Creator'. We need to see that idolatry is our enemy, we need to see that anything which is idolatrous can't save us or help us in our time of need. Oh, they might give us a little pretend relief from our daily struggles but they can't provide permanent relief.

The world says, trust in your addictions and anything which makes you happy to help you through life when life gets difficult. But Isaiah says, that "those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31.

Those who wait and trust God, know that He will carry them as though on eagle's wings. Christians who put God first in their lives, know that He will carry them through every storm, every heartache, every calamity, every disaster, every attack and every onslaught of every enemy, always.

God has spoken, the nations have listened, court dismissed.