

This Advent season, we have been studying selected portions of Isaiah.
And this week we are going to study Isaiah 40 where God comforts his people in their affliction.

Isaiah was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah before they went into exile.
He did not live to see the exile, but he prophesied about the issues that would lead to Jerusalem's destruction and the people being led off into captivity.

They had hard hearts.
They wouldn't listen to God.
God raised up a people for himself, and that people did not love him.

And so, God judged both Israel and Judah, using foreign nations to overrun them.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah deal with the decades leading up to the exile that began in 587 BC.
But in Isaiah 40, there is a decisive turn.
Because from chapter 40 onward, the Lord speaks to his people in exile.

Jerusalem has been sacked. The temple has been destroyed. The people are in bondage.

And Israel would be asking questions like these:
Does God even care about us anymore?
Is he finished with us? Have we out sinned his promises?

Isaiah 40-66 makes sense when we see it as a message to a suffering people.

There are so many parts of the bible- that only make sense in the midst of suffering.
As a matter of fact, we could say that all of God's word is best understood from the perspective of suffering.

Isaiah 40-66 is written for a people who have lost nearly everything that is dear to them.
Chapter 40 serves as an introduction to this part of the book
To understand it, we need to put ourselves in exiled Israel's shoes.

We need to sympathize with their pain and recognize that God also speaks to us in our pain.
Isaiah 40 gives us the case for hope in God.

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD'S hand
double for all her sins.

Isaiah 40:3 A voice cries:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah 40:6 A voice says, "Cry!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

7 The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:9 Go on up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Behold your God!”

10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?

13 Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,
or what man shows him his counsel?

14 Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,
and taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?

15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.

16 Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

17 All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

19 An idol! A craftsman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and casts for it silver chains.

20 He who is too impoverished for an offering
chooses wood that will not rot;
he seeks out a skillful craftsman
to set up an idol that will not move.

Isaiah 40:21 Do you not know? Do you not hear?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;

23 who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Isaiah 40:24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,

scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows on them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

Isaiah 40:25 To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power,
not one is missing.

Isaiah 40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;

31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

This is God’s word.
And every word of it is true.

Isaiah 40 brings us into a new section in the book where God comforts his people and gives them the case for hope.

Because in chapter 39, Isaiah promises destruction to come upon the Land of Judah.

Chapter 39 historically took place around 680 BC.

At that time Hezekiah was the king of Judah and he welcomed messengers from the king in Babylon.

And what did he do with these messengers?

He showed to them all the riches of Jerusalem- the gold, the silver, the spices, the armory.

Basically, Hezekiah showed off all the wealth of God’s people in Judah.

Now remember, the northern kingdom of Israel, had already fallen.

Yet Judah has been spared up to this point.

Yet in light of Hezekiah’s foolishness, Isaiah prophesies these words to him in chapter 39:

6 Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. **7** And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

This is undoubtedly a sad prophecy.

So how does Hezekiah respond?

In a word, he responds **selfishly**.

8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”

King Hezekiah though only of himself.

And so it happened.

Judah was overrun by the Babylonians.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed the Temple and deported the people as slaves- including the descendants of King Hezekiah.

They had it coming.

Israel's continual hard heartedness, idolatry and corruption warranted judgment.

And now, in the exile, they are mourning. They are broken.

And they have questions, like...

I. Is God Willing to Save Us? (1-11)

You have an outline and that is our first point.

Is God Willing to Save Us?

Now before we get into the details of this chapter, I want to speak to those who are in a season of particular pain and trial.

Isaiah 40 may not feel like it is the medicine you really need from God.

When we are in pain, we generally want one thing and that is fast relief.

What we most want is **on the spot deliverance**.

We don't most want the hope of salvation. We want immediate salvation.

This is what the people in exile wanted.

They wanted Jerusalem to be immediately restored.

They wanted their families and homes back.

In counseling terms, they wanted a wonder treatment that would immediately cure them of their addiction.

And yet God does not provide an immediate cure.

He provides immediate hope.

He doesn't give them 12 steps to recovery- a class they can attend one night a week.

Instead, he relocates them to a place of hardship and preaches hope to them.

And this shows us that, most of the time, what we most need in our pain is not immediate deliverance.

We need to learn how to hope in God alone.

He alone can save.

And Isaiah 40 makes sense only as we are convinced of this.

Our problems are so great, that only God can save.

And so the question is, does God want to save us?

The answer comes without warning in verse 1:

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. **2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

Verses 1 and 2 show us what Israel's real problem was.

Their problem was sin.

Now before they went into exile, what Israel thought they needed was better international alliances.

They needed a larger army, better weapons and larger farms.

But here the Lord shows Israel what they most needed was to have their sin dealt with.

Have you ever read the bible in a time of crises and it didn't make much sense or it did not really help you in that moment?

Often we come to God wanting **immediate relief** and what he offers us is the hope of eternal salvation.

At first it seems like a let down.

But like a wise parent, God knows what we really need.

We need eternal salvation and we need to learn to hope in him...alone.

So, where will this promised salvation come from?

Verse 3 gives us the answer:

Isaiah 40:3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

These words refer to the ministry of John the Baptist in Matthew 3, as he introduced people to their need for Jesus.

Jesus reveals of the glory of God.

Jesus is the deliverer.

Then in verses 6-8, the Lord wants us to consider how inconsequential our earthly lives are- especially when we regard some as mighty and able.

He says:

Isaiah 40:6 A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

7 The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

So trust not ultimately in people because they will only disappoint you.

Even the mightiest are here today and gone tomorrow.

Yet God's word stands forever.

His word is infallible. It does not fail.

In verses 9-10, we see the judgment of God, but then right after that, in verse 11, tenderness..

Isaiah 40:9 Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" **10** Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

God in his power and this is an intimidating to consider.

Especially when we think of what our sins deserve.

But then verse 11 takes us immediately to his tenderness.

11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

And this is a picture of Jesus.

In John 10, Jesus said:

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ...**14** I know my own and my own know me...

The Lord does not simply come in judgment and power.

He also comes in tenderness.

11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

In the Gospels, we see the tenderness of Jesus on nearly every page as he ministered to the most extreme cases of physical, mental and spiritual brokenness.

Jesus took the hardest cases and dealt with them with **the utmost gentleness**.

Have you ever needed God to be tender toward you?

Have you needed him to look on you in compassion?

In Christ, we have proof that God is more compassionate and tender than we can conceive.

And so to the question, “Is God willing to save?” The answer is an absolute yes.

If you need tenderness and gentleness, there is an endless supply in God.

So, God is willing to save. But is he able?

That is the next point in our outline.

II. Is God Able to Save Us? (12-26)

In verses 12-14, the Lord asks us a series of rhetorical questions in order to get us to think about his power.

And notice how God is compared to a craftsman:

Isaiah 40:12 Who has **measured** the waters in the hollow of his hand and **marked off** the heavens with a span, **enclosed** the dust of the earth **in a measure** and **weighed** the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

The answer: Only the Lord.

Then that craftsman imagery is then connected to God’s wisdom:

13 Who has **measured** the Spirit of the LORD, or what man **shows** him his counsel?

14 Whom did he **consult**, and who made him understand? Who **taught** him the path of justice, and **taught** him knowledge, and **showed** him the way of understanding?

The answer- no one has ever taught the Lord anything.

He knows all things.

Inverses 15-17, the Lord wants us to meditate on his incomparable power:

15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.

16 Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

17 All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Even though the nations are as nothing before him, he still regards them and has a plan for them.

Yet the main point here is that Israel should not regard the strength of nations as a factor in their salvation.

For their salvation will come from the Lord and not from any nation.

Then, in verses 18 -20, we are told that salvation doesn’t come from any other God as well.

Note the sarcasm in verses 18 and 19:

Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? **19 An idol!**

A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.

20 He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol **that will not move**.

That is, an idol that will not topple over.

It’s a pathetic picture of people trying to save themselves through their own actions.

In the Bible, an idol is a metaphor for any form of self-salvation.
Idols represent every kind of misplaced hope.

We can turn just about anything into an idol- from hedonistic pleasures and materialism to family and good deeds- anything we love can become an idol we hope in.

And all throughout Israel's history, they repeatedly sought idol worship of other Gods.
And when the idols did not come through, they turned to other nations for help.

And in verse 21, the Lords shows them how foolish a pursuit that is:

Isaiah 40:21 Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? **22** It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; **23 who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.**

And look at how **transient these national leaders** are:

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

In these verses, the Lord shows how faulty it is to trust in idols or other nations.
Then in verses 25-26, the Lord welcomes them to compare him to them.

Isaiah 40:25 To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. **26** Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

This is such a revolutionary verse although it is easy for us to miss it.
Because at that time, all the surrounding nations believed that the sun and moon and stars represented the gods and even were the gods.

And yet here, we see God's absolute sovereign control.
They are not Gods. They are just the heavenly lights and God calls them all by name.
He's absolutely sovereign.

And so, is God able to save?
Unquestionably yes.

Now, for many of you this is not news.
You have known for a long time that God is willing and able to save.
And so the real question for us in this moment is, are we looking to God for salvation?
Is our hope in him?
Are we waiting on him?

Or are we hoping in something else? Anything else?
Where does your hope come from?

What motivates you in life and keeps you going?
Where is your hope?
Is it in your reputation?
Is your hope in a relationship, a family, and the plans you have made?

Where is your hope?

In these verses, God gives us the strongest case to hope in him.
Because all other hopes will fail.

They will not come through.
He alone can save and he alone is worthy to be hoped in.

The final question this chapter answers is...

III. What Should We Do Now? (27-31)

In verse 27, the Lord asks his people:

Isaiah 40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”?

Israel is saying, in effect that God doesn't care about them because if he did, he would have done something by now.

And what is God's answer to them?
Does he scold them?

No, he commands them to wait.

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;

31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

The Lord commanded his people to wait on Him.

And he did not disappoint them because in the fulness of time, He came in the person of Jesus Christ. He offered himself on the cross for their sins and for ours. And through faith in his finished work we are saved.

And so what are we to do?

Our calling is to hope in Jesus Christ and wait upon him.

We are not hope in worldly comforts, worldly accomplishments, worldly pleasures- not ultimately.

We naturally have a longing in us that says “If only- if only I had this job, or this relationship or lived in this place or had a better car, house, husband or wife... of only I had that, I'd be content.”

And we need to recognize that what we really need is the Lord and his salvation.

In him we are to hope and on him we are to wait.

So are you waiting on him and hoping in him?

Or are you simply focused on having your best life now?

If our hope is not in the lord, all of our heart's investment will be in this world.

And this world will wear our. And our dreams will die with us.

31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Amen.