

What Shall I Cry?

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Bible Text: Isaiah 40:6-11

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If you would look with me in Isaiah 40. I'm going to begin back reading with verse 1 just to give us the context but my text is taken from verses 6 through 11 and I'd like to speak with you on the voice in the wilderness. The voice. Here in verse 1, the chapter begins,

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. 6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. 9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! 10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. 11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

There are two references to a voice in this portion of Scripture. We have one in verse 3 where it says "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness"; and then in verse 6 we read, "The voice said, Cry." Those are actually two different voices. In verse 3 as we saw last time, that was with reference to John the Baptist. Here is a prophecy in the book of Isaiah written several hundred years before the coming of our Lord that spoke of one who would be a forerunner to our Lord Jesus Christ much as in the old days when a king would be coming into a particular village or town there was a crier that went before and actually rode over the highway that the king was to drive on and to make sure that

nothing in that highway would be an obstacle and so he was the forerunner. That's the language that is used here concerning John the Baptist and we looked at this last time so this is just a little bit of review where the voice, that's how John the Baptist was known, the voice crying in the wilderness, what a wilderness it was. Not just a physical wilderness but a spiritual wilderness. One that was entrenched in religiosity. One that was entrenched in self-worth and self-worship, self-righteousness being promoted, much as we would call today's congregations a wilderness. When you go in and sit down, if Christ is mentioned it is in name only. Everything else has to do with works and what man has to be doing and promoting.

But you notice John's message in verse 3 was, "Prepare ye the way of the LORD," speaking of Christ. In other words, here is this one who is coming, of whom all of the Old Testament Scriptures speak, so "make straight in the desert a highway," notice, "for our God." If there was only one verse in all of Scripture that shows that this one, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Lord and was God himself, this would be sufficient. That's who he spoke of when he said, "Behold the Lamb." This was God's Lamb. Back in Genesis 22 when Abraham said to Isaac, he called the altar there Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide. When Isaac asked of Abraham that, "Here is the wood and the fire but where is the sacrifice?" and Abraham said, "The Lord will provide himself a sacrifice." He wasn't saying that he would himself provide a sacrifice but he was saying he would provide himself as that sacrifice. So this man who walked on earth called Jesus was none other than God himself and that's the way that John the Baptist was preparing.

When it says "every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain," I don't believe that it's saying that John the Baptist would do this but rather as a result or a fruit of the work that this one who is the Lord our God would accomplish, every valley would be exalted and every mountain and hill would be made low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain. You can look at that in different senses, if you will, but I believe it just simply means that this is a work of righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ would come and accomplish and whatever mountain there was that would be an obstacle to that point of him saving his people, he would do. And every sinner that was laid low would be exalted through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, those that he came to save.

It says in verse 5, "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed." That's what John spoke of there in John 1:14, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten full of grace and truth."

"And all flesh." It is in italics, "all flesh shall see together." You know, they all visibly saw this one who was the fulfillment of all the types, pictures and prophecies and promises. There was a representation when it says, "all flesh." I'm sure there were people that lived in that day that never saw Christ physically with their eyes but "all flesh" in the sense of those from every tribe, nation and tongue that the Lord came to save saw him. Many saw him who didn't see him. They didn't even see Christ in Christ but when you think about how the word went forth even from John the Baptist on through the apostles

and it was preached throughout the nations, "all flesh would see together." In other words, as the Spirit of God reveals Christ in the heart, they see the same one whether Jew or Gentile.

Then again in verse 5, "for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." "It" is in italics. This was brought to pass because God purposed it. He determined it.

So that was the voice in verse 3 concerning John the Baptist, a very unique, a very distinct, a very clear, a very simple, a very singular voice. John the Baptist did not have multiple messages. His one message for which he was known was, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." That was all that was essential. When they tried to make something of him, John the Baptist said, "He must increase, I must decrease," and certainly I believe that's the desire of every one of the Lord's servants that he raises up.

But now in verse 6 where it says, "The voice said, Cry," clearly this is not John the Baptist, the voice, but this is the Lord, the voice. Herein is the transition from John the Baptist to any that the Lord raises up. Isaiah himself heard the voice as he saw the Lord high and lifted up in the year that Uzziah died and he said, "Woe is me for I am undone." So I believe what we have here is the message that any that are the Lord's that he has raised up that have heard his voice, not in an audible sense, but have been taught his word concerning Christ, this is what they are to cry and certainly we dare not get off of the pattern that has been set for us whether here in Isaiah or whether we go to the messages that we find in the book of Acts of the apostles.

We are constantly to be asking our Lord, "What shall I cry?" No man is to stand in a pulpit and use the name of Christ to promote his own interests. That's a dangerous thing but, "What shall I cry?" This is something that every time I stand up to preach is on my mind. "What would the Lord have me to say regardless of what people want to hear?" That's difficult. That's why the Lord told Jeremiah, "Don't look on their faces. Don't be directed by their smiles or their frowns. If you have to, stare at the clock in the back and say it." There is a message that has to be declared, that has to be repeated and it's, again, unique in the sense that other voices are not saying it. It's distinct in that when people leave they should never question what you were saying. It's clear. Even if it's a hard saying, it still needs to be set forth clearly but also simply. Don't go beyond what this word says. What kind of man thinks that he can bring clarity to the word? Let's don't darken the clear declaration of this word with our commentaries. Just declare what it's saying.

It's a singular message and I believe in this portion that I read for you in Isaiah 40:6-11 there are three particular characteristics of the message that one of the Lord's servants will declare. The very first point is here in verses 6 down through verse 8 and that is the sinfulness of sin. The sinfulness of this flesh. Unless a person is brought to see that they are nothing before a holy God and that all of their righteousnesses as it says in Isaiah 64:6, not all of our sins but all of our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags before him. If not seeing that, they have not been taught of the Lord.

This is the starting point. You can see that here in verse 6, "The voice said, Cry." And the prophet said, "What shall I cry?" And the Lord said, "Always start with this point." It's like the old preacher that said, "Make sure people understand the three 'R's': the ruin of man in the fall in his sinfulness; the redemption that comes through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the need for regeneration that the Spirit of God would take an otherwise dead heart and soul and give it life to know Christ." And that really is the message, the three "R's." Here it's put perhaps in another way: the sinfulness of the flesh. The sinfulness of sin.

"All flesh is grass." And notice, "all the goodliness thereof," and we would say, "the apparent goodliness." You think about grass, what real value does it have other than a cosmetic, it looks good? And we spend hundreds, maybe some thousands of dollars a year making sure it looks good but in the end what happens to it? Just wait for a good winter. It's just brown, dead and dry. I don't know why we don't just pour concrete and paint the concrete green and call it a day, you know. But we keep going back to it. We'll pay money to get someone out there to mow it, cut it, trim it. They call it the curb effect. What interest does the curb have in how it looks? You know, it's for people driving by. It's to make you look good but in the end what is it? It's just grass.

It's just grass and that's a good picture of religion. Fix man up, make him look good but that's all it is is appearance because it says here, "the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." You know, we say, "Ah, but flowers really add to it. It's not just how the lawn looks, let's get a good landscape. Let's put some flowers around and make this thing look good." But what do you have to do with those flowers? Do you know of any flower that blooms year round? You constantly have to dig them up and replace them.

That's what verse 7 is, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because," notice, "the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it." I figured that out a long time ago and it's one of the reasons why I know I'm not a green thumb. I've always said, "If I plant something and it can survive on its own through the winter, that's the kind of plant I want." So if you drive by our house and you see what's out there, that's what has survived. The rest, it goes the way of all flesh. I've got some banana plants in the backyard. I've got this one little section I began 15 years ago thinking I'm going to build a little tropical area back there because it reminded me a little bit of Africa. But I'll tell you, there's very little that survived the winter. But, you know, it's a reminder to me just like it says here: it's not nature affecting it, here it says, "the spirit of the LORD bloweth it." Do we really truly believe that we live and move and have our being in him to where you can look out at the most beautiful plant that's out there, no matter how you try to nurture it and keep it going, it dies. The Lord killed it because that little plant is as much dependent upon the Lord for its sustenance and existence as anyone of us in this room.

It says, "the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it," and then it makes this parallel. You see, there is nothing that is just a nature lesson when we come to Scripture. It says, "surely the people is grass." That's the lesson. Take man in his best state and he is nothing but a

withering flower. He's nothing but there is deadness in his life. I don't know if that makes sense. Whatever life is there is just temporary.

Verse 8, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth," and that's true even of anything that we think of in ourselves to be good. There is nothing in us that is good. Scripture says, "There is none righteous, no not one." And I believe that that's the very first thing that the Lord has to deal with even in our own hearts to bring us to see the urgency of our need for another. Someone outside of ourselves to be our righteousness before a holy God.

Certainly this portion could apply as well to that old dispensation of the law. You know, that tabernacle had a certain flower to it as people looked upon it. It had a certain glory to it but when you look over in 2 Corinthians 3 and there are people today that would like to take us back there in spite of what our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished. They still want to go back to the law and find some beauty in it. Find some value in man's obedience to it. But again, just like the grass, the Spirit of the Lord blows on it and it withers and it fades, surely the people is grass. Any thought of us being able to go back and think, "Well, if I was in Adam's place, I wouldn't have disobeyed. Let me try." Or, "If I was in Israel's place, I certainly wouldn't have done what they did." Any kind of thinking like that shows that there is deadness in that heart. They don't see aright.

This is what Paul said even in 2 Corinthians 3 concerning that law or any kind of preaching that would exalt man in his ability to obey the law. He says, "Do we begin again to commend ourselves?" You know, when I get accusations from people who hear me and say, "Well, you're not preaching enough standards. You've got to preach a little bit more doing. It's alright to preach Christ but we need to hear a little bit more about doing." If I let myself be affected by such people that would like to hear a little more of that type of preaching, then I would deny Christ because that is nothing but dung. It is nothing but a faded grass. A flower that fadeth.

It pulls me into having to commend myself to others and Paul said here, "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us." What is he talking about? He's talking about those hearers in whom the Lord has done a work of grace, turned their eyes to Christ and they know themselves to be nothing and Christ to be all. He says, "You are my letter of commendation." It's not, "What says the preacher?" but "What say ye?" You that are sitting here. What say ye? Can you say amen to this message that all flesh is grass and therefore let's don't promote it? Let's don't talk about it. Let's don't build it up. Let's don't give it any degree of importance in this matter of salvation before a holy God. What say ye?

He says, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." Just like it says back here in Isaiah 40 that, "the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon the grass and withereth it and causes the flower to fade," if the Lord has taught you, the Spirit of the Lord has already blown on

any thought of self-righteousness in you. It's dead. D-e-a-d, dead. A dead voice can't speak and therefore if you're trying to resurrect in me what the Lord has declared to be dead and that is anything pertaining to my own goodness or righteousness is dead, you'll not hear a peep out of me concerning any goodness or righteousness in myself.

This work or word that has been formed in the heart of such a sinner is "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone," which refers back to the Ten Commandments upon which some men hang their hope of salvation because they feel like they've done some obeying worthy of salvation, "but in fleshy tables of the heart." It says, "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of," what? "The new testament; not of the letter," in other words, again, the tables of stone, the Ten Commandments, "but of the spirit: for the letter killeth." Do you really want to go back and put yourself under that law? Do you really want to, if you're going to preach up the commandments, you'd better preach up the sacrifices. You'd better go back there and grab your lamb and start slitting its throat again as if Christ had done nothing. "For the letter killeth." It's a ministry of condemnation because the Scriptures say, "Cursed is every man that keepeth not the whole law," that if he violate it in one point, he's condemned of all. "But the spirit giveth life." Why? Because it points us to one who has fulfilled it, has accomplished it. Whatever that glory was as Paul mentions in verse 7, it was as a flower that had to fade. The tabernacle wrapped up and put away when Christ fulfilled it. That's why when he died that veil was rent in twain from top to bottom. I like the way it was put in Scripture, from top to bottom. That means man didn't rip it. It started at the top and came down. It was the Lord.

"But if the ministration of death," it says in verse 7, "written and engraven in stones, was glorious," and I'm sure it was. I'm sure when you saw the priests going in and out, you saw that fire that burnt continually, you saw this tabernacle there in the wilderness, in the middle of the wilderness and the silk, those badger skins, there was silk, there was embroidered linen. All of these things appeared to be glorious, "so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance." When he went in before the Lord and came out, his face literally shone, "which glory was to be," notice, "done away," just like a fading flower. It wasn't to be held onto. "How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?"

So all of this is designed to cause us to look away from ourselves to the one who came and fulfilled all righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ. That brings me to the second point, coming back to Isaiah 40, the message we have to declare is that of the sinfulness of sin, that any supposed righteousness that a man might be clothed with as a flower is nothing but just an appearance. It's an outward form of godliness and whatever advantages even the Jews had back there under the old covenant, none of that was permanent. It was to be done away. But the second point you see in the last part of verse 8, the contrast, "but the word of our God shall stand for ever." The word of our God shall stand forever so that the second part of this message that the voice says to cry is to speak to men concerning the word of, notice, our God that shall stand for ever. What is that word? Well, you could say it's this written word and that would be true but it's none other than the Incarnate Word.

If you look over in John 1, when you talk about the Incarnate Word, there is the declarative word of God whereby he has revealed himself through this written word but there is also the Incarnate Word of God who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. So you could read that in Isaiah 40:8, "Tell men that they're nothing. The sinfulness of their flesh is putrid before a holy God but tell them that the Word of our God," in other words Christ, "shall stand for ever." And that's what we see here in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," that shows us a distinction between the Father and the Son, but also, "the Word was God." We're talking here about the Godhead. Well, who was this Word? Go down to verse 14, "The Word was made flesh." When you hear that word "flesh" all of a sudden you think, "Ah-ha, but all flesh is as grass." But not his flesh. In comparison to the flesh of the ones that he came to save and redeem, this word shall stand for ever. There was no weakness found in him, the true man. There was no sin to be found in him. To even purport such a thought is ludicrous; it's blasphemous. He came to bear the sins of his people but he did not take their depravity. Had he taken their depravity, he would have been as all flesh. Whatever glory he had would have faded, you see.

So the contrast here is purposed between all that is flesh being grass and this one who become flesh. Notice he "was made flesh, and dwelt," that's the word "tabernacled," "among us." As glorious as that old tabernacle was even as it was changed to be a temple that Solomon built but all that was taken away and destroyed to give place to this glory. This man, the Lord Jesus Christ. He tabernacled among us and John said, "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

If you go over to 1 Peter 1:24-25, you'll see the connection clearly set forth here between what we're reading in Isaiah 40 and the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1, look at verse 24. Peter is actually quoting the verse that we're looking at in Isaiah 40:6 for purpose of contrast. "For all flesh is as grass," and notice he says, "and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away," and here it is, "But the word of the Lord endureth for ever." Still quoting from Isaiah 40 and now verse 8 and notice he says, "And this is the word," who is the word? This is Christ "which by the gospel is preached unto you." So don't look to yourself for any glory, there is none. Don't look to your righteousness as being anything before a holy God, it's nothing. Look to this one who was made flesh and dwelt among us whose glory is that of the only begotten of the Father, full of what? Grace and truth. You continue to look to your flesh for any kind of hope, there is nothing but death and condemnation but look to this one who shall stand for ever. His righteousness shall stand for ever as that righteousness alone which God has accepted on behalf of a sinful people. Are we any better, those for whom Christ has come? None. I can't look around in this world and see anybody out there that I can say I'm better than they are. That would be a foolish thought. But Christ is better and his righteousness that he came to work out in the flesh, he was tempted in all things such as we are yet without sin. Therein is my hope and therein I rest.

So we see that this is the message that is to be declared not only the sinfulness of sin but the sovereignty of the Savior. The satisfaction of the Savior that came to work out this

salvation. If there had been any hope in man working this out, then Christ would have not come. Paul wrote that in Galatians 2:21, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Perish the thought. If he came and lay down his life that he might save sinners such as we are it's because there was no other way.

Now, to whom is this good news? If you come back here to Isaiah 40:9, you know, it began really back in verse 2. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." I'm not going to stand up here and just generally declare to sinners, "Christ died for you." That would be a lie. There is a particular people to whom this is good news. Here they are described as Jerusalem. They are described here in verse 9 as, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of," what? "Judah." All of these are types or synonyms for that people that the Lord Jesus Christ came to redeem. A particular people. He's a particular Savior. He offered up a particular death for a particular people.

You say, "How do we know that?" Well, if you go over to Hebrews 12:22, the writer to the Hebrews made this contrast. We're not talking about an earthly Jerusalem here, we're talking about a spiritual people, one whom the Lord has made so and you can see it in various passages of Scripture throughout the New Testament. You're not going to tell me that that group of people living over in that physical land of Israel today, that all of them are Christ's just simply because for years the Lord preserved them to bring his Son through there. They are God-haters. They are as much God-haters as the ones they are fighting, the Palestinians. They are as much God-haters as the most religious but lost citizen here in the United States that goes to church every day and reads his Bible but confides in the flesh and works religion. They are all the same. They are all natural, dead sinners unless one of them is the Lord's that he has chosen and Christ has redeemed and in time will bring to himself.

But here in Hebrews 12:22, in contrast to the old law it says, "Ye are come unto mount Sion," notice, "unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," one born from above, "and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and," what? "Church." Church means "called out ones." "Of the firstborn." Christ is the firstborn. They have been called out by him. They have been called out unto him because his blood has bought them. "Which are written in heaven." The sense of that word is their names have always been written in heaven. "And to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." They were already made perfect. How? Through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's Jerusalem. Those are the ones that we speak comfortably to and say, "Your warfare is accomplished. Your iniquity is pardoned and you have received of the Lord's hand double for all your sins. He has paid the debt in full."

That's good news and that's why it says, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain." Christ is that high mountain. That's where we run. That's where our refuge is. "O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength." In my sin I have no right even to lift up my voice but Christ being my strength, Christ being

my Redeemer, I lift it up. And it says, "be not afraid." How can a sinner not be afraid before a holy God? If you're trying to come on any righteousness of your own, I would say be afraid. You have reason to quake. But if Christ has shed that blood and put away your sin and clothed you in the righteousness, God has clothed you, the Father in that righteousness which he worked out, you have no reason to be afraid. So it speaks very clearly of his person, who he is and what he came to accomplish.

You can see there how we're pointed to Christ in this message and what every faithful preacher and when I say faithful, it's not faithful to themselves but I was thinking of that in terms of persistent, every persistent preacher, consistent to this message of Christ and him crucified, it says, "Behold your God!" "You mean that man that walked on this earth over there in Jerusalem for 33 ½ years was God?" Yes. "You mean that the whole of my destiny, my eternal destiny is based upon him having come, lived, died and risen again, ascended on high?" Yes. If he died for me, I'm the beneficiary but it's all based upon him.

Don't behold yourself, behold your God and when we talk about him being the successful Savior, the sovereign Savior, the satisfactory Savior, you look at verse 10 of Isaiah 40, there was no question but what he would accomplish the work. It's not just saying, "Look to Jesus." Which one do we look to? We look to the one who has accomplished salvation just like here, verse 10, "Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is already with him." So certain was it that he would come and accomplish that work that it could be said his reward was with him.

You say, "What was his reward?" It was that people that he came to deliver. What kind of Savior is it that would lay down his life and yet the the majority end up lost anyway? That's the kind of Jesus that's being preached today in popular religion. He came, he lived, he died and yet if you don't do something for him you're going to end up in hell. There is no good tiding there. Now, there is a distinctive Christ that is set forth here and that is that all he set to do he did.

Notice it says, "his work before him." He came with his eye and his face set like a flint toward Jerusalem. And I say to those that argue even today and say, "Well, it was all done in eternity," why does it say his work was before him? It was all purposed in eternity but it wasn't done until it was done. It was necessary that he should lay down his life and pay the debt and that before a holy God, the Father, the one we could never satisfy. His work was before him and when he cried, "It is finished," there was a reason he cried, "It is finished," because he finished it and the Father accepted it.

That's the message. And then, I know the time is gone, but the third part of this is the sureness of the salvation that he accomplished. I love to talk of that but it is summed up there in verse 11. We'll come back to it next time. Notice the "shalls" of Scripture. I've had some say to me, "You know, the way you preach God's determined will, it sounds like you're a hard shell," s-h-e-l-l. We know that refers to a particular organization that they sort of have a stoic attitude, "Whatever will be, will be." They don't believe you even have to preach the Gospel that if the Lord determined to save sinners, they'll be saved regardless. We know God is a God of means. We know that those he purposed to

save, it took the death of his Son to accomplish. There was a work that had to be accomplished on their behalf. And even so, the preaching of the Gospel, his purpose is to call out by the Spirit. I don't know who they are but the Lord does but it doesn't negate not only the necessity but the desire to preach the Gospel. I desire to exalt Christ and preach him. I like to tell them, "Well, I'm not a hard shell," s-h-e-l-l, "but I sure am a hard shall," s-h-a-l-l. Because that's what it says, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm," the arm of his strength, the arm of his salvation, "and carry them in his bosom, and," what? "Shall gently lead those that are with young." What a great message that we have to declare to lost sinners.

We'll come back to verse 11 next time.