

The Incomparable God

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Bible Text: Isaiah 40:12-26

Preached on: Sunday, August 10, 2008

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Well, let's turn together in our Bibles to Isaiah chapter 40. It has been a delight to be able to look together at this chapter these two Sundays. We are coming to pick up chapter 40 verse 12. Isaiah chapter 40 verse 12.

And after the great announcement of the gospel in verses one to 11 God now speaks about himself and his character and his ability.

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?

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

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?

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.

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

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

To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

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

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.
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?
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;
who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.
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.
To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
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.

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”?
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.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
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.¹

Perhaps no piece of music has made such a lasting impression than Handel's oratorio *The Messiah*. First performed in Dublin in 1742, it has survived its greatest critics and a

¹ Isaiah 40:12-31.

number of incompetent choirs many of whom have sung in churches of which I have been the pastor, I have to say.

It is a classic example of gospel music. It marries biblical text to an appropriate musical score. But Handel's *Messiah* opens with these words of Isaiah 40, the words of comfort that we looked at last time, words that capture the prophet's great theme which is the messianic hope, the hope of salvation and redemption in Jesus the Messiah.

The oratorio captures something of the pathos and the drama for here we find Isaiah at his literary best. His language is majestic and exalted as under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit along with his own gifts given to him by God he passes on this great message of comfort from God for God's people.

Let's be in no doubt that this message is a gospel message. That is, it is the message of good news of comfort for the people of God. It is a proclamation of the gospel as we saw. In these opening verses there is the proclamation that the hostility between God and his people is at an end, that her iniquity is pardoned, that there is double the blessing that she could ever have hoped for expected.

Apart from that we have the announcement of the arrival of God himself who has shown up. God has visited his people. The glory of God will be revealed. And, as we saw last time, the New Testament makes it very clear that all this language points forward to the coming of Christ.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist talks, echoes the language here when he says that God has come to visit and redeem his people when he says to his boy or about this boy, "You my child will go before the Lord."

And John the Baptist learned from his father to look at these words of Isaiah and to define his own ministry when he describes himself as the voice crying in the wilderness, "Behold your God."

So here is this great good news message and it exalts the soul and lifts up the hearts of God's people.

But it raises questions in the minds of God's people. If God is going to do all of this, if God is going to accomplish this great work that is going to be the salvation of Zion, you can imagine the people who are reading this, the people that Isaiah is thinking about, perhaps primarily are the people who will go into exile, 100 years plus in the future from the time that he is prophesying going to exile into Babylon and they will be devastated by their experience.

But the omission of historical detail in the chapter, I think, is meant to signal to us that Isaiah is speaking, as we saw for the ages here, because his message is the gospel message for us today in this place at this time, that in spite of all of our experiences and in spite of all of our history, in spite of all of the arguments of the world against what we

believe, God's message is still a message of comfort to his people. But it still raises questions. And the questions that are raised in the latter part of this chapter are questions that still press in upon the mind of God's people.

They are two fold, I think. First of all, is God able, is God able to fulfill his promises? Is he able to keep his Word? The Bible is full of many great and precious promises. We go to them for comfort. We recite them. We have them framed in our hymns and we sing them, these great promises of God.

Some of us have little promise boxes. I remember my old aunt used to have a promise box and in that promise box were rolled up bits of paper and you could pick out the promise of God and read it. I don't know whether that was good theology to do that, but there they were and the people of God have found in the promises of God the comfort that they need.

But experience raises the question. Is God able to accomplish what he has said? Is he able to do what he promises to his people? That is the first question. And then the second question I suppose emerges or is a development of that and we find that answered in the latter part of the chapter and it is this. Does God care? Is he able? Does he care? Is he able to fulfill his promises and, in particular, does he care about me? Given my experience and my life, my behavior, does he care for me?

We ask the first question when we look at what we see on the news and the television screens and hear of wars and natural disasters and atrocities and murders and rape or we hear about the cause of Christ suffering in parts of the world and we wonder: Is God able to accomplish this great gospel work.

We ask the second question. Does he care? For we are most conscious of our own sin and unworthiness, conscious of our weakness, conscious of our inability whether physical, emotional or spiritual. Can he keep his Word to me?

Let me look at those questions. And there is a third that we will see, but it is disguised, I think, in the passage, but we need to ask it towards the end.

First of all, is he able? And you see how from verse 12 God sets about this great disputation. It is as if he is calling everyone to attention and calling them into the argument. He graciously bends down, he accommodates himself to use Calvin's phrase. He accommodates himself to our size and to our hearing in order that he might discuss with us and debate with us and he asks us a whole series of questions, you notice, in the passage. It is as if he has got us there in the dock and he is bombarding us with these questions.

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?”²

² Isaiah 40:2.

And the language that he uses, the phrases that are used there that are piled up by the prophet point to the craftsmanship of God. The word to measure, to mark off, to enclose, to weigh in the scales and the balance, here is the craftsman at work. And the question is: Who could do this? Who can make a universe? Who can construct this magnificent, enormity in which we live and move and have our being? He talks about the dust on the mountains and the waters and the earth and the heavens as if to embrace everything that we can conceive of, everything in the space time continuum in which we live. Everything he says has been placed there by meticulous, with meticulous care by the maker of all things.

There is in his language exact workmanship, easy competence and effortless power. He is urging us to look at the natural world and be amazed by what we see, to lie on your back and look up at the heavens, the stars on a clear, starlit night and be amazed by the canopy of beauty that God has put in its place, to study your physics at school and discover the enormity of the universe in which we live, but also the intricate balance within the universe in which we live.

And he is saying, “Who did this? Who measured it? Who merely spread out his hand and thought, well, I will make the universe that size? Who could do that but God himself?”

And you see the personal implications of what he is saying is this. If God can do that, remind yourself when you are looking at this great gospel business and your own personal salvation and the ultimate salvation of the universe or transformation of the universe at the end of history, the new heavens and the new earth that will be created. Consider that God has made this universe and that these things are easy for him. Nothing is impossible for God.

So there is his craftsmanship and there is his wisdom. You see how he comforts his people by reminding them of his wisdom, verse 13.

“Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?”³

Here is the Spirit, the executive of the godhead who both knows and implements the mind of God.

And in verse 14 whom did he consult? Who did God go to when he was working out this business of making the universe? Which architect’s office did he go to and say, “Do you have plans lying there that tell me how to build a universe?”

Who did God go to when he was planning to do his own will and accomplish this great purpose of justice in the world? When God was working out how to be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus? How he could justify unjust people and remain just himself and how he could do that in a way that was fitting? This great plan of God, to whom God go, says Isaiah the prophet.

³ Isaiah 40:13.

It is interesting in the New Testament that this very language is picked up by the apostle Paul in Romans 11 and he applies it to the gospel when he is saying those great words, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”⁴

He quotes at that point from Isaiah, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”⁵

What he is saying is this. This great plan of salvation which involves the incarnation of the Son of God, the glory of the Lord being revealed and all flesh seeing it together. This great plan of salvation by which God forgives the iniquity of an iniquitous people, pardons it fully. This great plan of salvation that takes an individual like you and I and brings us into the family of God and adopts us as his children and gives us the hope of glory, this great plan of salvation that involves the miracle of a baby born to a virgin mother, this plan of salvation that involves so many impossible things, how can God do it?

Well, says the gospel, it is because God has the wisdom to do it and the power to do it. his wisdom is beyond our understanding.

The same language is used by Paul writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter two when he talks about the natural person who doesn't accept the things of the Spirit of God. The world thinks Christianity is foolishness. The world thinks it is irrational and unreasonable. The idea of a crucified God was foolishness to the Greeks of Paul's day. And the preaching of the apostles apparently seemed to be lacking in style and polish in comparison to the rhetoricians of that day. We talk about the resurrection. People mock us as they mocked Paul in his day saying, “Who has heard of such a thing?”

But, you see, what Isaiah is doing here is putting us on notice that the God who has introduced us to the gospel, the God who has made these great promises, gospel promises to his people is the God who created the universe.

He asks us the question. Are we listening? Verse 21.

“Do you not know? Do you not hear?”⁶

Are you listening? Are you listening to the book of nature? Are you listening to the book of nature that God has put into the hands of every boy and girl and man and woman as they live in this world, the book of nature that proclaims to us the attributes of God, his divinity and his power and his grandeur and his greatness?

⁴ Romans 11:33.

⁵ Romans 11:34.

⁶ Isaiah 40:21.

You see, if there is a God who is behind this has brought order and form and meaning and substance to this universe, then this God is bigger than this universe. And the more we learn of it the bigger the universe gets.

And God has made it. Goad has made it. And he is saying to us, “Do you not see this? Do you not know? Do you not hear? Are you not listening to the book of nature? Are you not listening and hearing the book of Scripture, the book of Scripture that interprets the book of nature, the book of Scripture that takes us deeper than the book of nature into the character and the nature of God? Listen. Hear. Know.”

“Has it not been told you from the beginning?” says Isaiah, “Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”⁷

What Isaiah is doing here is this. He is saying to the whole human race, “All of you are responsible for this information. But what you do with it, you are all held accountable for this. No one is with excuse here. We are all without excuse, because the knowledge has been built into the very fabric of the universe.”

Well, here is the issue. Is God able? Well, says Isaiah, “God is able because God is the Creator of the universe and he is immense. Everything else, the nations, for example, are inconsequential. They are like a drop from a bucket.”

He says, “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket.”⁸

The great people of the world, the great powers of the world, they are inconsequential. Not only that, but the worship the world could give to God is inadequate.

Verse 16.

“Lebanon would not suffice for fuel.”⁹

You could burn all of the cedars of Lebanon and they would never fuel enough sacrifices for God. You could take all of their beasts and kill them and offer them as burnt offerings as the Levitical law describe and demands and still it would be inadequate.

In other words, bring all of human beings in all of history and bring everything they can bring in terms of worship to this God and it would all be inadequate because nothing is adequate to worship this great God that we serve.

And the nations, the nations are impotent, verse 17. They are “as nothing before him.”¹⁰ They are considered less than nothing before him. That is where they got the idols of the nations. They are nothing. He mocks at them.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Isaiah 40:15.

⁹ Isaiah 40:16.

¹⁰ Isaiah 40:17.

Look at the question he puts in verse 18.

“To whom then will like God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol!”¹¹

And then he mocks them.

“A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. 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.”¹² One that is nailed down or screwed down so that it will not move.

It is ridiculous. Is there anything like God?

Well, Isaiah underlines the sovereignty of God over the whole universe. And behind it all what he is saying is, you see, is the gospel was conceived of and accomplished by this God. The whole gospel message is conceived of and accomplished by this God who is his own architect, his own interior designer, his own master craftsman. This God who is in charge of history who raises up nations and casts them down, who is the alone ruler of the princes of this world in the language of the prayer book. He is the alone ruler of the princes of this world. He is immense and transcendent and he is our God.

Now, you see, most of our problems as God’s people come from the fact that our thoughts of God are too small. They are too limited. And so God comes to us and he challenges our unbelief by setting before us this great display, this panoply of his glory and transcendence in the material universe. But then he goes further. For not only does he challenge our unbelief, but he confronts our doubts. He addresses this issue how we feel about God in verse 27.

Here is how the complaint is framed.

“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’?”¹³

He captures the mood of the moment. He is speaking to people in the future, perhaps, to someone here this morning. And the tone of this complaint can be one of two. It can be a tone of self righteousness. It can be the tone of someone who is saying to themselves, “God is changed and I haven’t,” and that is the way we sometimes speak after you have been married for more than 10 years. You say that about your spouse. She has changed. I haven’t. And they feel exactly the same about you. That is the way life is.

But some of us feel that about God. he has changed. I haven’t. Or perhaps the tone is one of bewilderment. How can God let these things happen to me?

¹¹ Isaiah 40:18-19.

¹² Isaiah 40:19-20.

¹³ Isaiah 40:27.

If you look at the charge it is quite specific. Their way was hidden, shut up so that he could not see.

And because he could not see, then their case, that is to do with their rights, their case was being disregarded, dismissed out of hand. They felt they had a right to be heard and defended and that God wasn't measuring up.

The first question is theological. It touches the nature of God. He cannot see. The second question is experimental. It touches the experience of God's people. My prayer are not answered. God does not care for me.

John Knox who was a great Scottish reformer put it like this. "By what means Satan first drew mankind from the obedience of God, the Scripture bears witness, to wit, by pouring into their hearts that poison that God did not love them."

What he is saying is, what Knox is saying is that the very heart of that first assault of the devil into the mind of our first parents as this question that God did not love them. And it is always there. It is that subterranean feeling that comes into our hearts when something in our lives that means a lot to us is affected by our circumstances.

And what Isaiah shows us here is that this fundamental doubting of God stems from our unwillingness to believe that God means what he says. It is our wrong thoughts of God that invariably affect our judgment of him.

Whenever we entertain inadequate thoughts of God we start to wobble spiritually. At the root of most of our spiritual wobbling is this inadequate understanding or thinking about God. In this passage just earlier do you notice this reference to idolatry? This is something that Isaiah is going to develop in the chapters that follow, but I want to say something about idolatry. Idolatry is not simply taking a metal image and putting it up and worshipping it. Idolatry is also having a mental image of God that is inadequate, thinking thoughts about God that are inadequate of him or unworthy of him. And that leads us to doubting his fairness and his goodness.

If God is true, why doesn't he show himself? Why isn't God there when life is tough? Or if the gospel is true, why aren't there more people believing it. Why does God allow war? Why does God allow natural disaster? And when we explain the Bible to our friends, why is it they never believe the message? Why isn't everyone a Christian?

All of these questions bombard the mind.

"Where is the promise of his coming?"¹⁴ the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

Now these doubts that we have, they probably fall into two possible departments. One is simply that they are questions that we want an answer for. Some of us pour out our

¹⁴ 2 Peter 3:4.

complaints to God and that is good and we look for a resolution and that is a good thing. Others, however, doubt and question as a means of justifying their own belief.

We don't really want an answer at all, actually. We want to dig our heels in and we want to be cross with God, angry at God.

Most of us inhabit a never land, a kind of in between world between both positions. We swing sometimes daily, sometimes several times in an hour struggling to believe on the one hand or stamping our feet in defiance on the other. We swing from one side to the other. And we are just like Israel here. We say, we speak, "My way is hidden from God. My right is disregarded."¹⁵

Why isn't God shaping up, coming to my aid?

But you notice the language that God uses here in verse 27. He says:

"Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel..."¹⁶

He is not just drawing words out of the air here. He is being quite deliberate. He reminds them of their forefather Jacob who was renamed Israel. And by virtue of using his name here he is reminding them of their history.

You see, you remember the story of Jacob when he was renamed Israel. You remember his experience when he was once far from home actually. Those of you who are exiles in Mesopotamia he was in Mesopotamia, similar region to you are in in Babylon. He was in that area. He was far away from his home, but God wasn't far away from him. Even there in the midst of his loneliness God came. God turned up. God wrestled with him. God even disabled him by the experience, but left him with a new name and with a new nature, Israel.

So why are you complaining that your way is hidden from God? Haven't I just said, God says earlier in chapter 40 verse three, that I am going to make a highway in the desert? You are saying that your way is being disregarded. I have promised a highway so that I will visit you. I am coming to visit you. You say that your right is disregarded, but don't you know that I am coming, verse 10, and I am bringing my recompense with me, reward with me and my right arm will rule for me, says God.

You see, for every complaint there is a Word of God. There is a promise that he will act. For every time we fell disregarded by God we have to go back to the great promises he has made and fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to see that God is turned up. He has taken the medicine by taking on our flesh, by becoming God with skin on and by enduring the sufferings of this world and ultimately these sufferings of the cross on behalf of his people. We are to see that God has kept every promise that he has made in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Isaiah 40:27.

¹⁶ Ibid.

So why do you say, oh Israel, “My way is disregarded by my God?”

Well, he jogs their memory, verse 28.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard?”¹⁷

Here is something known only by the book, not of nature, but of Scripture.

“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.”¹⁸

This knowledge, this hearing comes from the truth revealed in the revelation of God to those people through Isaiah and to us through all of Scripture. He is questioning their slowness to believe the revelation of God’s majesty in the Bible in Scripture, in Christ.

Many of our problems start when we don’t listen to his Word. We hear it, but it doesn’t meet with faith in our hearts. We come and we listen to its proclamation, its explanation and it doesn’t go in any further than our eardrums. It seems it never penetrates our mind. We don’t know what we hear.

Isaiah challenges our hearing. He reminds us or he wants us to remember the words that we have heard, the proclamation we have listened to, the sermons we have heard over the years. Remember the glory of God, he says. Remember that he is the everlasting God. You may only be a creature locked space time continuum in which you live, living within the narrow limits of the now. Through this brief and uncertain earthly life and pilgrimage that is evaporating, but this God that you know is the everlasting God, the Creator, he says, “The Creator of the ends of the earth.”¹⁹

Because he is the Creator he is not limited either by time, because he is everlasting, or by space, because he is the Creator. He is over time and over creation. He is not locked into the limitations of what he has made and as modern sciences pushes the boundaries of our knowledge of the universe, so our knowledge of God gets bigger as we understand more and more of his greatness and his majesty and his might.

And this God is, therefore, not limited by an expenditure of energy or effort. The effort it took God to create the universe took nothing away from him, didn’t tire him at all, didn’t leave in him any way with a deficit of strength. He does not faint or grow weary.

Apparently grandpas faint and grow weary. We were over visiting our family here and our two American granddaughters are very energetic. It seems to be a feature of American children. And yesterday I was abandoned for three hours—it grows longer

¹⁷ Isaiah 40:28.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

every time I tell it—by the parents and by the grandma and I had to entertain these two little children. And what a joy that was.

And we came up with this amazing game whereby grandpa became the horse and the tricycle became the carriage and grandpa's job was to pull the carriage round the yard which seemed to be a very big and hilly yard for several hours which I did.

I have to tell you this morning I came here really for a rest today. Just I thought being with you would be a rest after that. I am aching in places that I didn't even know existed as a result.

Apparently grandpas grow tired and weary. This one had to go and lie down afterwards to recuperate. But here we are told that God does not faint or grow weary. There is no expenditure of effort that leaves anything exhausted in God, whether creating or the gospel. Nothing tires him. He is always there and he is God the all wise, "his understanding is unsearchable,"²⁰ because his ways belong to eternity. And our ways belong time. His perspective is global while ours is local. His grasp is infinite. Ours is finite. His eternity means he is always head of us. He gives us to understand something of his ways in his Word, but that is not the totality of his wisdom.

There is more to God than is being revealed. There is not more to God than we need to know than has been revealed, but there is more to God than what is being revealed is sufficient for us. But you can be sure there is more to God than is being revealed. But what has been revealed which is for us blows our minds.

Remember the greatness and the glory of God.

And what does God do in his graciousness?

"He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength."²¹

It is the history of God's people. There is no lack in him, but he provides for us who do lack. He is able to give to his frail creatures the strength they need. This has been the testimony of God's people. In history if you read Hebrews chapter 11 about Barack and Gideon and Samson and others we are told they were made strong out of weakness. They were like us. We are not perfect. We will not be perfect till we get to heaven, but we can be made stronger. And God does that. God did it for Paul, you remember his experience recorded in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 when he was suffering illness and persecution and he pleads that God would deliver him from the pain. And you remember the Word of God to him.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."²²

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Isaiah 40:29.

²² 2 Corinthians 12:9.

God says, "I am in the business of giving power to the faint and to him who has no might I increase strength."

He jogs our memories. It is in our thoughts of God that we are most likely to go astray. Our thoughts of God are simply not great enough. They never are. We fail to reckon on his limitless power and wisdom.

Listen. When your back is against the wall and your circumstances are crashing in on you and you are wondering to yourself, this doesn't make sense. What is God up to as if somehow or other it didn't make sense to God, you got it all wrong. It always makes sense to God. He declares the end from the beginning.

This language of Isaiah, the book of Isaiah describes or demonstrates that God is a transcendent majesty. We need to believe in God as God. And it blows away the kind of thinking that is known as process theology or open theism because it says that this God not only knows the future, not only plans the future, he accomplishes the future by the power of his will.

Well, I said there were two questions. Is God able? Well, creation shows that he is able for anything. Therefore the gospel will happen and it did because we look back and we see how all these miracles, the miracle of the incarnation came about. We saw or we see in the hindsight of the New Testament how it is that God can be just and justify unjust people. That is the great gospel message.

So God is able. Secondly, God does care. He demonstrates that, not only in the history of Israel, but in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He demonstrates "his love for us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."²³

But there is a third question that is in the background which it has been in the background of all of Isaiah up to this point and it is this question about what can I do. What can I do? It is like you are invited around to somebody's home for supper and you ask your host, "What can I bring a dessert or whatever?"

And there is that sense in which whenever we discover something new about God there is that built into our hearts that wants to ask the question, "What can I do? What can I contribute to this business?"

Isaiah's great message in the first part of this book has been to demolish the confidence of God's people in anything other than God alone. The message of the first part of Isaiah in preparation for the second part is that salvation doesn't come from God plus, but God alone. It is a message of salvation by faith alone, alone.

And here at the end of Isaiah chapter 40 we have the same emphasis made. What can I bring to the party? What can I do? Nothing.

²³ Romans 5:8.

“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.”²⁴

Those with the greatest energy, those with the greatest capacity, the young men ready to do military service, they shall fall exhausted. In other words, we can only appreciate this great salvation when we are prepared to admit our utter inability to help ourselves, when we are prepared to say, “I can do nothing.”

The best of us can do nothing to achieve this great work. There is nothing I can contribute to my salvation, nothing I can do to achieve this great business that God has set about in Christ Jesus, nothing. I am left utterly helpless.

What is the thing that we have to do? We have to wait on the Lord. We are to look to him and wait. Waiting involves patience, dependence and confidence. Patience as we wait for his action in the future. That is what Simeon was doing. He was waiting for the consummation of Israel.

This word “waiting” coming from the end of the chapter, the word “consolation” picking up the very first word of the chapter, waiting for the comfort that God was going to send. There were people in Israel who understood the message of Isaiah 40. They understood that the ultimate salvation was not their return from exile in Babylon back to Jerusalem, but the final salvation was still to come and they were waiting. And when Anna that old lady saw the Christ child she goes and she tells everybody who was waiting for the consolation, the redemption of Israel. She tells them, “It is come. It is come. God has come. He has visited his people. The glory of the Lord has been revealed.”

Waiting involves the patience of waiting God’s timing. It involves confidence, trust in God’s promises. It involves receiving his Word, meditating on his majesty, reflecting on his glory, pondering his power, wondering at his wisdom and casting ourselves on him in complete confidence in him and in him alone.

And only then do we discover, only then do we discover when we have let go of every other confidence, when we have cast ourselves utterly upon God for his mercy, only then do we discover that our strength is renewed like the eagles, that all of the diminishing power of our false confidences is swept away and we discover that we are able to cast ourselves on this great God who is able for whom nothing is impossible, this great God who cares for us and has demonstrated it to us in his Son, this great God who expects nothing of us but trusting him. This great God is for us and “If God is for us, who can be against us?”²⁵

Let’s pray together.

Father, we thank you for your great Word of truth to which no human voice could do justice. We bow before your magnificent majesty. We acknowledge your utter authority

²⁴ Isaiah 40:30.

²⁵ Romans 8:31.

over our lives. We are amazed at your inscrutable wisdom. We wonder at your amazing grace. We delight in your demonstrated love for us in Christ. And we cast ourselves utterly on your mercy in Jesus' strong name. Amen.