

Behold Your God!

Isaiah 40

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC August 22, 2021

Please turn in the Word of our great God to Isaiah 40. This is a great chapter that starts with these words *‘Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.’*

This week we planned for Tuesday a small graveside for the Foltz family, a memorial service Friday for the Griffin family, and another Saturday for the Owen family (rescheduled TBD, Haller family yesterday). This week we need a word of comfort on another front as well: several in our church who had to evacuate their homes, others I know lost their homes and their church

TALK GRIZZLY FLATS CONNECTION – SLIDES
Bob W 10 years ago, Bill B intern, C4C, Johnston’s

Isa 40 is written to people who would be grieving the loss of their people and the loss of their homes in exile and seeing their beloved land destroyed.

The first chapter of Isaiah says to Israel *‘your towns are burned’* (1:7 NLT).

Isaiah 9 says a *‘fire ... sets the thickets of the forest aflame And they roll upward in a column of smoke ...’* (v. 18 NASB). We’ve seen that in EDC.

Isa 33 asks *‘Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire?’* (v. 14).

In Isa 64 they mourn their beautiful house burned down and in ruins (v. 11).

One of the messages of fire in Isaiah is we can’t save ourselves.

Isa 47:14: *‘They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame’* (NIV).

God alone saves and uses calamity to make His name known so we’ll trust Him.

30:27 *‘Behold, the name of the LORD comes...in thick rising smoke’* (ESV).

Isaiah 64:1-2: *‘Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! ... As fire burns brushwood ... To make Your name known’* (NKJV).

As we see thick rising smoke and uncontained fires burning brushwood, we need to pray that God’s name would be made known, that His character be on display, and His saving power as people realize we can’t save ourselves.

God provides for His people in times like those. Isa 14 promises *‘Those who are most helpless will eat, And the needy will lie down in security ... smoke comes from the north... How then will one answer the messengers of the nation?...the afflicted of His people will seek refuge...’* (v. 30-32 NASB)

God says in Isa 43 *‘flame shall not consume you... you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you...Fear not, for I am with you’* v. 2-5 ESV.

In Isa 61 the Lord promises *‘to heal the brokenhearted ... To comfort all who mourn ... To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for*

the spirit of heaviness...' (v. 1-3 NKJV). Let's pray the Lord does that in the communities around us even this very week.

That's all part of the context of Isaiah. Isa 40 begins with comfort for God's people, let me read v. 8-11 then pray: ⁸ *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.* 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.*

PRAY

1st point: Behold the Greatness of God (end of v. 9: *behold your God!*)

v. 10 calls us to behold the greatness of God's might and arm as He rules.

v. 15 uses the word *Behold* again to see God's greatness over the nations.

v. 26 calls us to behold or see His greatness over creation, the stars.

Let me read v. 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.*'

I've said before I have a hard time finding my missing keys! Once I had 3 daughters, I've been calling them by the wrong name! But what comfort to behold our God who created, controls and keeps track of every single star! He numbers them and names them and numbers the hairs on our head, too.

The **context** is **Israel in the Babylonian exile**. In v. 27 they felt forgotten by God, or wondered if God knew all they're going through in Babylon, or questioned if God lacked care or control. But God tells Israel in v. 26 'look at the stars,' those stars Babylonian astrology made gods out of and thought determined man's destiny. The one true God is greater than the stars, and as Creator of the stars He is the Maker of our destiny. He never loses track of or forgets a single star, He numbers and knows them all by name----and us!

You placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name...

You see the depths of my heart and you love me the same...¹

When we behold what He's made, whether the stars or rolling thunder, His power throughout the universe is displayed. Behold the greatness of God!

He never loses track of stars or in v. 11 **His sheep. His people** He gently leads. Isaiah is writing this for Israel when they would be displaced from their homes and homeland in their time of exile. It was in that time that their people were actually sent into the fire if they wouldn't bow to Babylonian idols (**Shadrach and friends**, but the Lord was with them through the fire).

They literally experienced the promise of Isaiah as they passed through the fire, flames didn't consume, they didn't fear because they beheld our God

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...* The heavens are the universe, but to God it's like a curtain He can open or close (and one day will roll up the skies like a scroll). He setup the galaxies easier than you setup your tent at family camp.

When it says He sits above the earth, the idea is He's large and in charge. He's over the earth. He sits as the sovereign. He's on His throne even as man is off His rocker. He's a big God and we're tiny puny bugs before Him

LAWSON ILLUSTRATION OF LION BRITISH EMPIRE

Let me read v. 12-15 and behold the greatness of God over creation and all nations. We don't have time for every verse in this chapter but I want us to see the big idea of how big God is: 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* [big idea: behold the greatness of God]

All we are is dust or a little drip. That's not flattering, it's pride-shattering.

All nations on earth put together are like a drop of water to God, and look at v. 12: all the waters of all the oceans put together fit in the hollow of His hand. v. 12 adds even the heavens by His hand's span.

A span is the hand from the thumb to the pinky. His hand is bigger than the heavens! That's a figure of speech to say He's way bigger than the universe.

Implication: God is bigger and greater than anything you face

This chapter would comfort Israel's exiles in Babylon where pagan worship of the heavens was all around them. The God of Israel is bigger and greater than those heavens. Babylon itself only makes up a part of a water drop to the God who holds all the water in the world in a part of His hand. In v. 12b God also measures the dust of the earth and weighs its mountains and hills like a balance scale. Daniel in Babylon saw God's hand writing on the wall. Daniel told the pagan King what it meant: *'the God who holds your breath in **His hand** and owns all your ways, you have not glorified... This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has **numbered** your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been **weighed** in the **balances**, and found wanting...'* (Dan 5:23, 27 NKJV). NAS *'weighed on the **scales** and found deficient'* by *'God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways.'*

These words would be a great comfort to later Jews: 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?*

Lutzer: 'it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?'²

Who has held the oceans in His hands?

Who has numbered every grain of sand?...

Who has given counsel to the Lord?

Who can question any of His Words?

Who can teach the One who knows all things?

Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds?

Behold our God seated on His throne...

Don't behold the King of Babylon who needed wise men like Daniel to give him counsel. Nebuchadnezzar had to consult with Daniel to understand his dream and what it meant. But Isaiah says behold our God, behold our King. He never needs a counselor. He's not like our president. He's not like the Babylonian God Marduk who couldn't create without first consulting *Ea*.

40:15 *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.*

You know what fine dust is? Fine dust is a sub-category of dust. It's even smaller than regular dust on a scale. You don't dust off a speck on a scale because it doesn't matter. The coastlands or continents are like tiny specks of dust particles that are inconsequential and infinitesimal compared to God.

¹⁷ *All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.* If you thought dust was next to nothing, this goes even lower: 'less than nothing'! But don't miss the next verse, in v. 18 this is about trying to compare them to God. There's no comparison. He cares for nations, but you can't compare nations or creation to Him. The idea of emptiness is like Ecclesiastes, all is vanity, meaningless, worthless apart from God. They're such lightweights they don't even fall, they float like a dandelion when you blow it into the wind and it flies up, weightless.

²³ *who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.* 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.* ²⁵ *To whom then will you compare*

... **Application: don't fear man or trust man or his governments**

Again there's no comparison. Not just with nations, but with the leaders of nations, princes or rulers of the earth. Whether the King of Babylon or the Taliban, or the Governor of California or the President of the United States, God can bring them to nothingness and emptiness when He decides to blow.

v. 12 talks about the hollow of His hand. There's another verse that says He holds the hearts of kings like water in the hollow of His hand and He turns it whatever way He wishes. This is for comfort, v. 1, if we're in that hand.

Hidden in the hollow Of His blessed hand, Never foe can follow, Never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry...Not a blast of hurry...Stayed upon Jehovah...³
Another hymn: I am weak, but Thou art mighty, Hold me with Thy powerful hand
...Bid my anxious fears subside...Strong Deliverer, be Thou still my strength...⁴

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.* [Key is waiting, trusting in God's power]

Behold the greatness of God, that's #1.

#2. Behold the glories of Christ

TALK ABOUT CONTEXT OV V. 1-5: "THEN THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE REVEALED AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE" (JOHN 1)

The God who stretched out the heavens as a tabernacle, the gospel says He '*became flesh and dwelt* [lit. tabernacled] *among us...*' The big God whose hand spans the universe became a baby with tiny hands wrapped in cloths. Behold your God, the Creator in the manger! Infinite God is intimate Jesus.

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.* Shepherds in a field tending their flocks by night first heard of the birth of Him who later said '*I am the good shepherd...*[Jesus said he] *calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them...*' What Isaiah says the Lord does with the stars, the Lord Jesus says He does for His people, leading, calling them by name.

He adds in Jn 10 to those who follow Him '*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*' That hand in Isa 40 big enough to hold 7 the seas is the same hand big enough to hold me

That assurance is for His sheep, those who know and follow His voice

Behold the greatness of God in Christ who Heb 13 calls *the Great Shepherd of the sheep* (13:20). See Jesus caring for His flock in the gospels, rescuing a wayward sheep and carrying it on His shoulder back to the flock. See Him gather up lambs, the babes in His arms, blessing all the dear children in His tender care. It says He gently leads those who are with young. He has a care for moms of little ones. He holds His own safe on His bosom, on His heart.

Do you know this Shepherd? Do you follow His voice in His Word?

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes... That was Isaiah's day, in our day we look back to say *the Lord Jesus has come*. He accomplished a mighty victory on the cross where the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep. I take His sheep as the reward with Him in v. 10. And notice the arm that rules in sovereignty is also the arm that gives security in v. 11. His hand holds fast.

Behold the greatness of God and behold the glories of Christ's love and kindness! He came to walk dusty roads with high-maintenance disciples and washed the dust off their feet while they argued about who was the greatest! Behold the greatness of His incarnation, Jesus dropping with a bucket to the dust, laying aside His outer garment, a towel around His waist like a slave. As high as the heavens are, so great is His love for us dusty sinners on earth

'Who has held the oceans in His hands [and] numbered every grain of sand?'
He 'Who has felt the nails upon His hands, Bearing all the guilt of sinful man?'⁵

v. 26 asked who created the heavens and all their host? Col 1 says by Christ '*all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...all things were created by him and for him...in him all things hold together...so that in everything [Christ] might have the supremacy*' (v. 16-18 NIV). Isa 40 ends with power to the weak. 2 Cor 12 says it's Christ's power that does that.

Christ calls out to us in the gospel: '*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you...*' (Mt 11:28-29)

GIVE GOSPEL

Heb 12 says we can run our race with endurance, fixing our eyes on Jesus. Paul ran his race striving forward to know Him and His resurrection power so he could do all things through Him who strengthened.⁶ Like in Isa 40:31 He strengthens us to run and not faint. Waiting on God is praying like Col 1 '*be strengthened with all his...power [for] all the endurance and patience you need...depending on Christ's mighty power that works within...*'⁷

BEHOLD THE GREATNESS OF GOD
BEHOLD THE GLORIES OF CHRIST

#3. BE HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

In v. 9 is a call to do just that: 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!"* In the context of v. 3, a prophecy of John the Baptist who called men to behold the Messiah, this good news, the gospel calls us to behold our God in Christ

REVIEW V. 1-2

'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.' The last phrase doesn't mean double payment, it comes after it mentions pardon, possibly it means double grace, for sin a double cure: save from wrath and make pure?⁸

The spiritual hard service is over, Jesus won the war at the cross, heaven's Commander is for you, not at war with you, and He pardons all who repent and come home (and by v. 5 this is revealed to all flesh, not just the Jews)

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 ... [i.e., all of humanity]*

That's language of kings coming in Bible times. Forerunners cry out 'make ready the way for the king, clear a path for the king!' Those in his kingdom would need to prepare if he was coming their way, making a straight way so he could come. Don't think physical geography or civil engineers like those who designed highways here in CA through mountains, valleys, or the foot-hills. This is spiritual preparation for us, our rough edges reshaped, our lofty thoughts brought low, and the rocky soil in our heart broken up. Let earth receive her King, and every heart prepare Him room by humble repentance.

Isa 40:5 says then the glory of God would be revealed for all people to see.

John 1: *'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have **seen his glory**...For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace [that may be the sense of Isa 40:2, receiving double for sin, a double grace? John the Baptist] said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said..."* (v. 14, 16, 23).

John 'fulfilled these words by preaching powerful messages of repentance for sin...The leveling of mountains was done by the blasting away at the self-righteous Pharisees and Sadducees who felt no need of a Savior. The raising of valleys was done by giving hope to wretched sinners who felt no Savior was possible. So...today [we] must do the same leveling and raising [evangelism] 'Disturb the comfortable...comfort the disturbed'⁹

This is the command for us: 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!"* If you're part of the 'my people' in v. 1, if you have Christ's gospel comfort, you're to be a herald of that good news, too. We're to announce to others their warfare is ended, their sin is pardoned, there's double comfort in Him.

This prophecy looks ahead to the time of Christ who commands us to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and to the ends of the earth. You may not be in Zion or on a mountain but you can go through the foothills and say 'Behold your God in Christ!' You can speak up for Christ and not fear. Be strengthened to open your mouth and your eyes to opportunities this month.

¹ Chris Tomlin, "Indescribable."

² Andrew Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, p. 232.

³ Frances Havergal, "Stayed Upon Jehovah."

⁴ William Williams, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah."

⁵ "Behold Our God," Sovereign Grace Music.

⁶ Philippians 3:10-14, 4:13.

⁷ Colossians 1:11, 29 NLT.

⁸ Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages."

⁹ Andrew Davis, *Christ Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, p. 229-30.