

Rick Miller - Isaiah 40 (Part 2) -April 2, 2023

Let's open our Bibles to Isaiah chapter 40.

Thank you for those who were able to come to Anne Stanford's funeral yesterday. Cindy, Anne's sister, is here this morning. We want to be praying for her. We will pray for you and encourage you in your grieving and for the family. But also be praying that the seeds that were sown in the ministry that was done toward the family, that especially those who aren't walking with the Lord, that they would really come to a point of decision.

Lord, we do continue to pray for all of Ann's family, her sons, Lord, her siblings, the extended family. Lord, we know Ann is with you and we don't feel sorry for her, Lord. It's those left behind who are grieving. We pray for Cindy, Lord. Give her strength and comfort going forward that she cannot only receive your comfort knowing that Anne is in a much better place, but she can also comfort those who are grieving in the family.

And so Lord we thank you for the hope of heaven, that in times like this where someone we know and love has gone to be with you, it is a fresh reminder of priorities in our lives and where we're headed and the glory that we have to look forward to. Strengthen each one. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So Isaiah chapter 40. Last week we got about halfway through the chapter. So we're going to continue on with our study and as we've discussed, chapter 40 is really a transitional chapter. As we've talked about, Isaiah is kind of like a mini Bible where you have 66 books in the Bible. You have 66 books in Isaiah. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are more judgment-oriented, similar to the 39 books of the Old Testament which are judgment-oriented. Then the last 27 chapters of Isaiah have this transition into more of a grace theme as similar to the gospels, the 27 books of the New Testament.

So a lot of interesting similarities there. You see this transition now at chapter 40:1, where the Lord says,

1"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"

Says your God.

2"Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,

That her warfare is ended,

That her iniquity is pardoned;

So coming out of chapter 39 where we're seeing King Hezekiah, really we're seeing his pride and his selfishness that I think kind of summarizes the Old Testament. It summarizes God giving the law to mankind, that we would see the depth of our sinfulness.

That's really the purpose of the law. And in chapter 39, just as we focus in on King Hezekiah, we see his faults. If we were to focus in on our lives and make it public like God is making King Hezekiah's sins public, we would see the same thing, our pride, our selfishness.

And even though King Hezekiah was considered a good king, we see his flaws. It's just like us, those of us who are trying to follow the Lord. We have many flaws and yet we're trying to follow the Lord and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

So if you're a person who has allowed the law to have its work in your life where it's brought you to a point of repentance and humility and to say, yes God, I see I'm a sinner, I want to accept Jesus as my savior, I'm born again, I want to walk with you now - of course, when that moment comes, God gives you a new heart, a new spirit, you're transformed, and then obviously it's a complete transformation in your life.

It's a transition into a new life. Rather than God trying to chase you down and to convict you of your sin and to get you to turn from your sin, now you're in a place that, hey, I'm born again. I'm at peace with God. Now what you're going to get from the Lord is comfort.

He's saying, look you've responded to me. I want to comfort you. I know life as a Christian is difficult on this fallen planet. It's getting increasingly difficult, right? As we're in the last days, and the Lord wants to give us comfort.

He wants to speak to his people. Comfort, that we remember our warfare is ended, our iniquity is pardoned. We're not at war with God. We're at peace with God. So that's kind of the foundation to this chapter and really the rest of the book of Isaiah. God's saying, look, I've won your heart. You're my child. You're my people. Notice that it says there "Comfort, comfort my people." You're my people. I want to bless you. I want to minister to you. I want to remind you that you're forgiven. That's always a very important foundation of our walk with God - to recognize you're forgiven.

The enemy, what is he called? The accuser of the brethren. He wants to bring up your past sins. He wants to torment you with it. We have to have that strong foundation just to say ‘No, I’m forgiven, my sins are under the blood of Christ and I’m at peace with God. I’m still growing. I’m still learning to overcome sin.’

My intention is not to sin, but I’m human. I still fall and stumble. So Lord, I receive your forgiveness and I’m not going to let the devil torment me. Then we’re going to move through this quickly because a lot of this we covered last week. The next section, verses three through five, is really a heart preparation for the Messiah.

These were the scriptures that John the Baptist quoted in his ministry. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.” He was preparing the way for the Messiah. Then verses six through eight, we see the Lord acknowledging the brevity of life, the futility of life without God.

*“All flesh is grass,
And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.
7 The grass withers, the flower fades,
Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people are grass.
8 The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.”*

So this proclamation by God, that, I’m God, I’m in control. There’s no human that is going to control your destiny my people. When you look back on the context, this is written to Judah 700 years before Christ and the situation they were in, they had the Assyrian empire threatening them. They had this prophecy, in chapter 39, that they were going to go into captivity in Babylon, and it would be some years down the road.

But they’re kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place. They got the Assyrian empire wanting to take them into captivity. The Assyrian empire had already taken the Northern Kingdom into captivity. Now Judah is being threatened and so basically I think what God is saying to his people is, Look, I know it looks bad on the surface. These evil dominating empires seem like they’re in control of your life and your destiny, but ultimately they’re not. It just

seems like that, and the Lord is reminding his people “the grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it.”

And I think he's speaking more in context here of those who are opposed to the things of God, what God is saying. It's no big deal. You have to trust me. I'm on the throne. I want you to keep your eyes on me and that's the next section we get into, verse nine, where he says;

9 O Zion,

You who bring good tidings,

Get up into the high mountain;

O Jerusalem,

You who bring good tidings,

Lift up your voice with strength,

Lift it up, be not afraid;

Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”

Now, those three words are really the foundation for the rest of this chapter, the rest of the book of Isaiah, really the message of the scripture, right? Look upon God, behold God, don't lose sight of who God is and he's in control.

Notice even this statement. Behold your God, kind of the buildup to it. The Lord's saying, hey, this is good news. I want you to get up on a high mountain. I want you to shout this with strength. Don't be afraid. This is the message I want to give to my people. Behold your God.

Now some of us struggle with memory verses, you know, memorizing the Bible. I think we can all memorize that, right? Behold your God. Meditate on that when you're struggling and the pressures of life. Darkness, depression might be coming in upon you and difficulties, and you just say, no, I'm going to behold my God.

The rest of the chapter, we're seeing now, the different aspects of who God is as we behold him, right? God has many faceted parts of his character. That's really what the glory of God is. You look at the glory of God and I've heard it explained, it's almost like you're seeing all of him, the aspects of who God is, all his characteristics at once, and it's overwhelming. Some of the things I wrote

down here that we'll get into as we go through the chapter. We should behold our God as our ruler. Behold God as our shepherd. Behold God. He's powerful, he's wise, and it just goes on and on. We're meditating on the different aspects of who God is and as his people, that should bring us peace that God is in charge.

Certainly just as Judah in their time saw a dark world, we're seeing it in our day and age. The world seems to be getting darker and darker as we're in the last days. The target seems to be put on the back of Christians more and more. Literally, this week that happened right in this school shooting. This person who I believe must have had to be demonically possessed to kill young children, was targeting Christians. So it's not even theoretical anymore or spiritual. Of course this is nothing new. The first century Christians were literally killed by the thousands for their faith.

Yet in the midst of that darkness of that persecution, we are beholding our God. He is in control. We look at what's happening in the political world and it can be very upsetting. Some of the policies and decisions and those of us who may follow that closer, it can be very upsetting.

But when we realize God's in control, and if we will pray, if we'll just trust the Lord with these things and say, Lord, look at the evil this person's doing. You know, the most recent one of going to arrest Trump for, you know, trumped up charges. Anybody can see that this is like a banana republic that our country has gotten so low that this is what it's come to.

And yet we cannot let that overly distress us and get our focus off of each of our callings to where we're just taking these things to the Lord and saying, Lord, this thing is upsetting to me. I'm asking you, God, to work and to speak into this situation and we're giving it to the Lord and realizing he's on the throne.

So we're beholding our God. In verse 10, we see God, and we're beholding our God as ruler. So it says;

10 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand,

And His arm shall rule for Him;

Behold, His reward is with Him,

And His work before Him.

We're beholding the Lord. We're told there again to behold the Lord, he's coming with a strong hand. He's going to rule, he's in charge. Let's not forget that as believers. Verse 11;

*11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.*

If you're an unbeliever living in this world, this seems like a harsh world. It's like a, dog eat dog, kind of world, right? And people say, look out for number one and it is survival of the fittest, right? But to Christians, we shouldn't view the world like that at all because we know our God is in charge and we know God is not some harsh ruler who is always demanding things of his people and so hard on us.

He's the shepherd. He gathers his lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom. Some people can think, well, yeah, the God of the Old Testament, he's this kind of harsh judgmental person. And then in the New Testament he's Jesus carrying these lambs around. No, it's the same God.

He's saying, if you'll respond to my calling and give your life to me, you're my sheep and I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to gather you in my arms. Sometimes our circumstances may not seem like it, but that's where it's important we get before the Lord, we wait upon him. At the end of the chapter we're going to talk about that, waiting on the Lord, beholding the Lord. Keep silent before the Lord.

Chapter 41:1 says that. It's the same idea. We're beholding God. We're waiting on him. We're silent before him. Our eyes are on him. We're saying, Lord, I'm, struggling right now. I need you as my shepherd. And the Holy Spirit reveals Christ as our shepherd. And then verse 12, we see as we behold our God that he's powerful.

*12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
Measured heaven with a span
And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?*

Weighed the mountains in scales

And the hills in a balance?

Isn't that amazing? That one verse packs so much power. Who else can you say that about? Except God Almighty.

He holds the oceans in the palm of his hand. He weighs the mountains. Heaven, he measures with the span. That's the distance between your first finger and your thumb. God is mighty and we need to meditate on that. We need to think about that. And as we behold our God, you are awesome, you're powerful. You see this new telescope they sent out? James Webb telescope. That's fascinating to me. They're looking deeper and deeper into space and of course, they're seeing things that we already knew, because the further they looked, they saw into the past, because to them the universe is billions of years old.

So if we're looking billions of years into the past because we can see way farther than we could ever see before, we're going to see galaxies that are newly formed and they're coming out and saying, oh, we don't understand because these galaxies are fully formed. We could have told you that as Christians.

Because that's a lie. The Big Bang theory is a lie. You're not looking back billions of years in time. This universe is, I believe, 6,000 years old, just clearly as the Bible teaches us. So as we meditate on these things it just glorifies God that the Bible is true. Now they're going to have to come up with a new theory.

They will never accept the Bible's truth on how the world was created. So they're going to now have to come up with another theory of, well, this Big Bang thing isn't working. But yeah, our God, he just measures heaven with the span of his hand. That's the kind of God I want to behold. And when we see verses 13 and 14, we are beholding our God that he is wise. Not only is he powerful, but he's wise.

13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,

Or as His counselor has taught Him?

14 With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,

And taught Him in the path of justice?

Who taught Him knowledge,

And showed Him the way of understanding?

So we're trying to navigate our way through life. We're trying to get direction. We're trying to make decisions. We can behold our God. He is wise. He has all knowledge. The last couple days I've been meditating on that verse where it says Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Sometimes we've heard those verses so often. It's like, oh yeah, I know what that verse means. Do you really? Have you meditated on that? So I've been challenged and okay, I'm going to behold Jesus. He's the way, he's the truth and the life. He is the way. I was thinking of it as if, say you were lost in a jungle and you had no idea how to get back to safety. You're floundering around and you come across someone who's very familiar with the jungle and, oh, can you lead me out or, yeah, I'll show you the way.

So you're going to keep your eyes on that person. They're leading you in the correct way. I think that's a picture of God's wisdom. We're lost without beholding Jesus, keeping our eyes on Jesus and following him in the way. We're going to be lost. He's the truth. He's not only the way, he's the truth.

A lot of times in our thinking, we assume we're thinking truth or maybe we've kind of gotten into a rut in a certain way. We're thinking about ourselves or God or others and it's so freeing to throw all that out and say, God, I can't assume anything I'm thinking is true unless it's filtered through the Holy Spirit, through the person of Jesus Christ.

Lord, am I thinking about myself correctly? I've noticed with myself lately where I'll start to feel discouraged about something, maybe in ministry, and then the Lord will stop me. Is what you're even thinking about yourself or that situation even true? I'm like, oh yeah, I don't know. I just assumed it was true.

Then I wait on the Lord for a minute. Oh yeah, that's right. That was a complete lie I was believing. I believed that lie, so then I felt discouraged. Or you believe that lie and you feel depressed or you believe that lie and you feel anxious. So we're not walking into this.

It's so beautiful. Just say, Jesus, you're the way. You're the truth. Jesus, I'm reaching out to you. I feel depressed, I feel anxious, and I feel discouraged. But should I even be thinking these thoughts right now about myself? Is that true? And the Lord says, no, this is the truth. Oh, thank you. He clears it up.

It's beautiful. I love it. He's the way, the truth and the life and then the life that we need to live this Christian life, it flows from Jesus into us. His very righteousness is very alive. So wisdom, we behold our God. He shows us the way to walk in. He shows us the truth. Verse 15 through 17; we're beholding our God, that he's greater than our enemies. He's greater than Israel's enemies.

15 Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket,

And are counted as the small dust on the scales;

Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.

16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn,

Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.

17 All nations before Him are as nothing,

And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

So I think the idea here is not, God's not looking at the world saying, oh, you're all just worthless to me, I don't care about you. No, he's saying those enemies, Assyria, Babylon, that God's people are so afraid of, God is saying that's no big deal to me. I don't value their view of me; they're godless.

And you, as my people, need to understand that I value you. I value your worship of me, your acknowledgement of my work. There's nothing in Lebanon that can be offered as a burnt sacrifice to me.

Think of this when God looks at his people and you're just a simple believer, trusting in Jesus, like we talked about in communion. I'm just valuing the cross. Yes, God, I see what you've done through Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit, illuminate that for me. I want to live in that place of that sacrifice of Christ, that coming to the Father. I'm cleansed, I'm forgiven, and I have fellowship. You don't think God values that?

Oh yeah, he values that. Can't you just sense his pleasure when you're in that place and it's beautiful and it's not performance based. It's just me coming by faith to that sacrifice. Just like in the Old Testament they would come to the temple. You had to bring a flawless sacrifice. They would inspect it. Okay? There are no blemishes, pointing to the sinlessness of Jesus. I put my hand on the head of that animal; they sacrifice it. That's how I approach God with a sacrifice.

But of course with the new covenant it's due to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God values that. He rejoices that you value the sacrifice, and that's where you meet him.

The world doesn't value these things at all. The Bible says it's foolishness to the world but to us, who are being saved, it's the power of God. It's the wisdom of God. So, rejoice in the fact that God values you and your faith. The world system that seems so powerful, it's going to be judged, it's going to be dealt with. You can be at peace with that. Verses 18 through 20, we're beholding God is greater than the false gods.

18 To whom then will you liken God?

Or what likeness will you compare to Him?

19 The workman molds an image,

The goldsmith overspreads it with gold,

And the silversmith casts silver chains.

20 Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution

Chooses a tree that will not rot;

He seeks for himself a skillful workman

To prepare a carved image that will not totter.

So God is comparing himself to the worldly idols where they're fashioning these idols in their own image, in an image of their sin, the thing that they worship.

And yet God's saying, you can't compare me to those. Those are false gods. And of course, we see the world does that, right? They fashion God in who they want him to be, not according to the true revelation of scripture. So we are to behold God as the true God. He's not threatened by these false idols. He's above them.

He's greater than them. So then verse 21 through 22, we see as we behold God, that he's greater than all creation.

21 Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

*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 out like a tent to dwell in.*

So again, we're beholding God that he has a different perspective, right? The Jews at that time again felt overwhelmed by these evil empires that were threatening them and God saying, look, I sit above the earth. I'm over all of this. I'm in control. I have a different perspective than you. The inhabitants are like insects to me. I've stretched the heavens like a curtain.

Interesting that it says he sits above the circle of the earth. Back then men didn't understand the earth was round. And yet 700 years before Christ, Isaiah wrote that down. So it's important that we remember as we behold God, he's in control. He has a perspective that we don't have.

You're just seeing an earthly perspective. God's seen it from heaven, from above. He's in control. You can be at peace as you lay your burdens at his feet. And then verses 23 and 24 reveal God is greater than princes as we behold him.

*23 He brings the princes to nothing;
He makes the judges of the earth useless.
24 Scarcely shall they be planted,
Scarcely shall they be sown,
Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth,
When He will also blow on them,
And they will wither,
And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.*

Again, it can be very upsetting when we see what's happening in our country with the rulers, but don't focus on that. Focus on your God, behold your God.

We can just say, Lord, can you deal with that evil ruler in your perfect time? Lord, I can trust you that you're in control. God is judging our nation. You remember we read earlier in Isaiah, where part of the judgment that God was bringing back at that time, he said, I will give you children to rule you.

And isn't that what we have now? A president who has pretty much a mind of a child? I hate to say that but he does. And it's a judgment on our country which God is using for his purposes to draw people to him so we can be at peace with that. Don't get confused. Don't feel like it's all spinning out of control.

The Lord is going to use these things to draw people to himself. In other words, he's letting evil show its true face. That is what is really happening. We're seeing this more and more. We were talking about this in the prayer time this morning. You know, how can a person with a conscience say it's okay to have partial birth abortion or to mutilate a child or to transition them. How can anybody with a conscience be thinking these things are okay and it grieves us deeply. We need to take these things to the Lord in prayer and trust him and continue to run the race God's put before us. Then we see that in verses 25 and 26, as we behold our God that he numbers and names the stars.

*25 "To whom then will you liken Me,
Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.*

*26 Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these things,
Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name,
By the greatness of His might
And the strength of His power;
Not one is missing.*

Now again, we're beholding God, how mighty is he! He's trying to explain it to us, how awesome he is and why are you worried? Why are you upset? I am God almighty. Look up at the stars. Lift up your eyes on high. Who is creating things? He brings out their hosts by number. You know it's interesting because if you study astronomy (I've studied a little bit of it), where you look up at the stars, they don't really look like they're moving, right?

We know that as the earth rotates, that if you look at a fast-forward camera on it, the stars are moving across the sky slowly because the Earth is rotating. But if you study, they say our whole galaxy is moving many millions of miles per second.

It's ridiculous how we don't even realize our whole galaxy is moving. And then how our solar system is spinning around our galaxy at such tremendous speeds. How the earth is rotating around the sun. I think we go like 40,000 miles an hour. You can't feel the speed, but it's interesting how the Lord says I call them all by name. Or he brings out their host by number.

It gives you a sense that there's movement there. Yet the number of stars, they say, when you look at all the galaxies and every galaxy has so many billion stars and you do the math, billions of galaxies, billions of stars, they say it probably numbers the same number of grains of sand on the earth.

There's so many it's without number. Yet, God numbers them. He numbers every one of them, and on top of that, he gives them a name. So this is the God we serve. He's in control. He's powerful. By the greatness of his might and the strength of his power, not one is missing.

He does not miss one star that he formed. It would be like naming all the grains of sand and giving them a number. This is our God.

So we're going to go ahead and end there and next week we'll do an Easter message. But this next section, I do want to take a little more time. It's meant so much to me over the years about waiting on the Lord and renewing your strength.

But again, as we behold our God in all these different aspects through this chapter, as it says in verse 31, that we wait on the Lord, chapter 41:1, we keep silence before the Lord; we behold the Lord and let him teach us about who he is.

So Lord, as we go today we can live in that place of worship of you. Some of these descriptions are mind boggling of how great you are. And yet, why would we fear, why would we be overwhelmed, as the questions are asked here? "Do you not know?" "Have you not heard?"

The Lord must look at us sometimes and ask those questions. The angels look at us and say, haven't they heard about how almighty God is? Why are they freaking out?

Lord, may those questions be asked over us. May we ask those questions ourselves as we go and face this week and the different challenges, like, oh, haven't I heard that God's almighty, that he numbers and names the stars, that he's over every ruler, that he has a different perspective than we do, that he sees from above?

Lord, that we might just focus on worshiping you, valuing the things you value. You don't value what the world values, Lord. You value your people who know how to worship you and come with a sacrifice. Come to you your way, Lord. Not a way that we make up and make God in our own image.

And so, Lord, we thank you as we go today, we pray the Holy Spirit would bring us to a new level of understanding of the greatness and the wonder and the glory of God. Lord, we thank you and commit this day to you in Jesus' name. Amen.