

## ***Sovereignty and Comfort 5-5-01***

### ***Isaiah 40***

We had quite a week in which everything seemed to pile up. You know those kind of weeks. I did what I could to move things – rescheduled what could be put off. With a tour coming we had to have everything else done because we have to devote 24 hours a day to the tour. The orchard had to be sprayed and the pump was throwing poison all over us – so we stopped and took it in. The timing for the spray could not be put off so we ended up spraying at night by the headlamps of the vehicle. I needed to pick up my car as I had fixed the brakes. My mom was ready for bed so I tried for an hour to hitch a ride in – no luck, but the stars were beautiful. Next morning I drove the truck in and swapped for the car, I taught two classes and had to get the overdue oil change done on my car. Got back home and my mom gave me the ride in to get the truck. Got back home just in time to leave to pick up our guest.

I asked people to pray for this tour as it was a very short one and we thought it was harder to share the Lord when you don't get to know them as well. Afterwards, Mariko and I had a good laugh at the stipulations we put on God. Hey, we already prayed for God to send us seekers. Why in the world did we think a longer visit will open the way for us to talk to them about the Lord? He brings who He wants and He prepares their heart. Silly me to think it would be more difficult - for who? God? Ha!

Needless to say the second night the Lord opened the door wide for Mariko (my wife) to share her testimony (in Japanese), and a clear presentation of the gospel. Masami had come seeking something to believe in. First she learned New Age was not it. Her previous understanding of Christianity's exclusivity had left her feeling there was something else. Let's keep praying the Lord will use what was shared about a relationship to draw her to Himself.

During this week the Lord had me in Isaiah 40. Now – I say the Lord had me there, it is where I was in my devotions through the book of Isaiah. But I believe that God has our days planned before we are born. Ps 139 "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." So I happened to be there and that is where the Lord had me. If we will open our eyes to his hand in each day I think we will see the wonder of his involvement in each of our lives.

The previous chapters are warnings of destruction to all these nations the Assyrians are going to conquer including Judah. Then starting with chapter 40 the Lord has Isaiah write words of comfort. Isaiah 40:1 (NIV)<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

The chapter begins with that Hebrew word repetition – comfort, comfort – double comfort be to the people of God with these words he is about to write.

Isaiah 40:2 (NIV)<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Because of the sharp contrast in style and tone some so called scholars thought Isaiah was a collection of three authors put together under one name. These great scholars are always coming up with some reason the Bible isn't exactly what it says it is. Then they found in the Dead Sea Scrolls one entire scroll of Isaiah. It dated to at least 150 BC. Pretty good indication that their assumptions were wrong. Isaiah is writing down the words of Almighty God who inhabits eternity. The same God that could warn them of impending captivity could also tell them the payment for their sins was complete. She had not yet gone into captivity – how could she have received (past tense) double for her sins?

To those who would turn to God in the horror of the fall of Jerusalem there was a Way made for them to have their sins paid for. It would happen in another six hundred years, yet it happened before the foundation of the world. Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved. That is comfort – double comfort in the midst of the calamities of life. The nation may be falling under the wrath and judgement of God – but for those who turn to Him – their service (all the requirements of the Law) is complete in the life of Jesus Christ. Their sin is paid for with His blood. Double complete judgement – double comfort. We are right, right, with God.

Isaiah 40:3, 4 (NIV) <sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

Prophetic of John the Baptist – but equally so of the Spirit of God in every heart. The mountains and valleys are obstacles to the Lord walking straight in to take the throne of your heart. Your mountains may be pride in who you are or what you do. They may be mountains of self-importance and image in your world, desire for respect of men. The valleys could be the hidden crevices of thoughts and contemplation that does not glorify God. You know the valley should be filled, but there is pleasure in sin for a season. Why did Christ have to say, "If you think it in your heart you've as good as done it"? If you just hate someone in that valley of your heart even without acting on it – you're a murderer. Lust, hate, and greed are deep valleys that need to be leveled to make a highway for our God. We all have rough ground and rugged places that need to be smoothed as an invitation for Jesus to be Lord of our lives.

Isaiah 40:5 (NIV)<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Consider how an occasional prophet, like Isaiah in chapter 6, might have a solitary experience of the splendor of God. But when Jesus walked through Galilee – 1000s at a time saw the glory of the LORD. He revealed himself to 1000s in the breaking of the bread and fish, not once but twice. He appeared to 500 at once after his resurrection. The glory of God walked the earth and we had a revelation of God. The author of Hebrews tells us Jesus is the radiance of the Father. We have seen Him in the word. And one day every eye will see Him together.

Isaiah 40:6-9 (NIV)<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.<sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers

fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.<sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."<sup>9</sup> You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

The life of man is indeed short and fragile, but the life of the Living Word is eternal. The glory of man is one of those mountains that need to be leveled to make way for God. The good news is we need not fear, for the very life of Christ can be in us. The Lord Jesus walked amongst them. The glory of God was revealed as opposed to the glory of man. The Apostles could say, "Here is your God!" And we can too!

Isaiah 40:10-11 (NIV)<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

He is coming again not as a meek Lamb but as a roaring lion with power and to rule. Yet those who are his will still experience his gentleness. We would often walk right over the lambs in our midst – you know them – they have a hard time keeping up – or are easily offended. But Jesus doesn't blow them away. He picks them up and carries them in his arms so they can keep up. We need to be like Him.

And now we come to those verses I so needed to hear this week: Isaiah 40:12-14 (NIV)<sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?<sup>13</sup> Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?<sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

Are you sure God got it right? Maybe He needs some instruction? Can you give Him some advice? Sometimes we pray like we believe He is missing some information. Is there anything you can tell God that He was unaware of? All our sciences are just trying to figure out some of the laws God set in place. We discover one and we think we are so great. What about the greatness of God who knew the exact amount of mass this planet needed to be set at the perfect distance from the sun so life as we know it could even exist at all?

And what about your present circumstances? Did He miss any of the factors? Did He not take into account your personality, background and genes? Did He overestimate your level of maturity? You can trust Him that He knew each of those factors to a degree that no one else, including yourself, does.

Isaiah 40:15-18 (NIV)<sup>15</sup> Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.<sup>16</sup> Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.<sup>17</sup> Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.<sup>18</sup> To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?

It is so difficult for us to keep the wonder of the greatness of God before us because He is One of kind. There is just nothing that comes remotely close.

Isaiah 40:19-24 (NIV)<sup>19</sup> As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.<sup>20</sup> A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.<sup>21</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?<sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.<sup>23</sup> He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.<sup>24</sup> No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

Some would make an image – but like the man who tried to come up with the face of Jesus – what we make ends up looking like us. How sad. You cannot make an image because He is un-image-able. Notice Isaiah was told the earth was round way before Copernicus discovered it so. Who allowed Clinton in office? God did! Who put Bush in office? God did! Sure we voted, but God is the One who sets up and takes down kings in a moments notice. Their greatness is nothing compared to Him.

Isaiah 40:25-26 (NIV)<sup>25</sup> "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.<sup>26</sup> Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

I love to look at the night sky – especially in the canyon or at Lake Powell. What a wonder! If you were to begin to count the stars we know exist today and not stop you would not finish before your death. He put each one in place and has a name for it.

Isaiah 40:27 (NIV)<sup>27</sup> Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?

Why do we think God is misinformed or forgetting something? What ever your situation God knows every detail. How self reliant to worry! We think we need to resolve things, make them work – where is our faith in Almighty, all-knowing God? This thing we consider a tragedy is the very thing that will draw us to Him. This slaughter and captivity is the very thing that will turn the hearts of complacent Judah back to God. We wonder where God is in the midst of tragedy. We try to figure out why and how. We live in a world under the curse of sin and with the affects of rebellious man and his pride and yet, God is Sovereign and using every circumstance in ways we will not fully understand until we see Him face to face. Your way is never hidden from the Lord – that is not even possible. Your cause is not disregarded by God – though He may have a higher cause that is greater than the one you have set your heart on.

Isaiah 40:28-31 (NIV)<sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his

understanding no one can fathom.<sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.<sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;<sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

It doesn't matter how strong or influential you are – you have limitations. The only ones that are more than conquerors are those who trust in God and look to Him in every situation. They are the ones that come through with a smile in what looks like the worst, for they know God is on the throne. The man that lost his wife and child when that plane was shot down demonstrated as a witness to the world the peace of knowing Jesus Christ is Sovereign.

In the previous chapters in Isaiah (38,39) – Hezekiah was informed he was going to die. He pled to God for more time and so God gave him 15 more years. He says he'll spend them in the Temple praising God on stringed instruments. He should of. He ended up making a very big error – his pride got the best of him. I wonder if he had been better off accepting what God determined as the time for his death instead of pleading for more. God knows what is best even when it looks like the worst.

That word in verse 31 'hope or wait' *qavah* - means to look eagerly for, to expect, to hope in or wait upon. Do you look eagerly for God in your daily life – especially in your struggles? Do you expect Him to come in some way and see you through? Those that do find a strength to do what they never could of done alone. We all face the consequences of living in a sin sick world. The difference between those who wait on God and those who don't is those who wait find strength. They find He carries the lambs close to his heart. You can go through difficulty without Him, but why would you want to. He has every day of your life in his loving hands. The next chapter continues on with the thought and I encourage you to read more. This chapter stops here but what God is saying in regards to this does not. He wants you to hear the comfort He would give you in knowing who He is and what He has done and is doing for you. Hear Him. Be comforted. Live in the peace of knowing we are the children of a God who is all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, and who loves you.