

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR? LISTEN TO THE VOICES (Isaiah 40:1-31)

Let me ask you a personal question. Do you ever hear voices when no one else is around? I do. They're not audible voices; they are louder than that.

- Sometimes I hear the voice of temptation whispering, "Go ahead. You know you want to."
- Then, I hear the voice of conscience warning, "That's not a good idea."
- At times I hear the voice of experience saying, "You remember what happened last time you did that?"
- There are times I hear the voice of our enemy, the adversary. He speaks dispiriting words, discouraging words. I try not to listen to him, but often he is hard to ignore.
- But when I am still and read the Bible prayerfully and carefully, I hear the voice of God. His words are always timely. He speaks words I need to hear, words that are fit for the moment. It might be a word of **conviction**, or a word of **commendation**, or a word of **correction**, or a word of **challenge**.

In the verses we read today from Isaiah 40, we hear God speaking words of **comfort**, but God's voice is not the only voice heard in this chapter. As we work our way through this portion of Isaiah, I call upon you to listen to the voices.

My goal is to cover the entirety of Isaiah 40, but I want you to know that time will not permit me to say something about every verse. This is an incredible passage. It is arguably one of the greatest chapters of the OT. Since one sermon will hardly do it justice, I encourage you to read this chapter on your own. Meditate upon it. Soak in it for a while. Let these words sink into your soul.

I have divided the chapter into three sections to help you get the sweep of its message. It is worth noting that the Book of Isaiah can be divided into at least two sections. Some say there are three, but it can at least be divided into two. Chapters 1-39 comprise the first section. This initial section is a rather dark one. It covers rebellion, judgment, and woe. It concerns mainly what was going on in Isaiah's day and the judgment that he foresaw.

The second major section of Isaiah is chapters 40-66. It is all prophecy. It takes place far after Isaiah's day and some of it after our own. It is a far sunnier section. God's people are shown a bright future following judgment. This second major section is about deliverance, pardon, and blessing. Whereas chapters 1-39 speak words of judgment, chapters 40-66 carry a message of grace. The prophet goes from confrontation to consolation.

Are you familiar with the story of Rip Van Winkle? It is set in America prior to the American Revolution. Rip is a hen-pecked husband. He goes into the woods to get away from his wife. He meets a group of dwarves. They offer him a drink. As soon as he drinks whatever they gave him, he goes to sleep. He wakes up 20 years later. By this time, he has a long, white beard. His wife has since died. His little girl has grown up and is happily married. The biggest change is that George Washington is now the President of the United States of America. Rip Van Winkle slept through a revolution.

There is a sense in which Isaiah went to sleep at the end of Isaiah 39. In chapter 40 he

wakes up. He hasn't been asleep for 20 years. It has been 140 to 160 years. His nation has been defeated by Babylon. They have been in exile almost 70 years, and they are about to be released

Let me begin by reading the first 11 verses of Isaiah 40. As I do, listen to the voices.

Listen to the Voice That Assures Us of God's Long-Standing Purpose

Just as God's word stands forever, so does His purpose for His people. Judgment does not have the last word; grace does.

Verses 1-2 are addressed to a people who have gone into exile. Their nation and their capital, Jerusalem, have been destroyed. The people have been taken captive and carried off to Babylon, 700 miles from their homeland.

To give you some perspective, it is about 700 miles from this church building to El Paso, Texas. Have you ever been to El Paso? I have been there twice in my lifetime. El Paso is not the end of the world, but you can see it from there.

That is how far God's people were from their home, and God says, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem."

Ray Ortlund wrote, "Even when we don't act like the people of God, He still identifies with us: ' . . . My people . . . your God.' He still calls us *Jerusalem* even when we're far away in exile."

Was there any time this past week or yesterday or this morning when you didn't act like a child of God? Even if that is so, because of His grace, you are still His child, and He is still your God.

God wants those who would speak to His people to speak tenderly to them.

My friend Wade Burleson says that preachers are guilty of a terrible error. When we get people into the church, we hammer them with the law. He says, instead, we should preach the law to the culture. Let them know they have offended a holy God. Let them know that the just judgment of God is on the way. Then, when they repent and come to church, we should preach grace and the love of God.

God wants us to speak tenderly to His people.

There are some things God wants us to know. He wants us to know that the King is Coming. That is the message of vv. 3-4. In the ancient world, before the King came to visit a city, there were those who preceded him. They would make sure the chuck holes were filled in, that the road was smoothed and leveled.

In chapter 3 of his gospel, Luke quotes from this passage in Isaiah and claims that John the Baptist was the one who prepared the way for Jesus to come.

I believe the Church is now to take on the role that John once filled. We are to prepare the way for the return of the King. Quoting again from Ortlund:

Isaiah is not talking about literal, topographical change. He is talking about the upheaval of true repentance. He is talking about a moral topography, a new social landscape . . . He is talking about depression being relieved, pride being flattened, troubled personalities becoming placid, and difficult people becoming easy to get along with.

I believe God wants to use His Church, He want to use you and me, to prepare the way for the entrance of our King. He wants us to make a positive difference in the lives of those among whom we live. Is Enid, OK better because Liberty Southern exists? Would Enid be any different or worse off if this church ceased to be?

Look at the encouraging announcement of v. 5. God's purpose for us will be realized. No Nebuchadnezzar, no Alexander the Great, no Roman Emperor, no Hitler, no Mao Tse-Tung, no Saddam Hussein, no Ayatollah, no Kim Jong-un, no Putin is going to keep the true King from coming.

And in our own country, no liberal press, no leftist agenda, no political party on either side of the aisle, no social media giant, no elected or unelected official will keep King Jesus from assuming His throne and bringing final and complete deliverance for His people. His purpose for His people will prevail.

A nameless voice speaks to Isaiah with the instruction, "Cry!" Isaiah asks, "What? What shall I cry?" Look again at vv. 6-8. The point is that we cannot nor should we put our trust in people because they will fade away sooner than we realize, and their intentions whether good or bad will wither as quickly as flowers fade. Instead, we are to put our trust in God because both He and His word eternal, and both alone are worthy of our trust.

Isaiah is given further instructions in vv. 9-11. Again, I like how Orlund puts it:

He is saying in v. 9, "Get way up on a conspicuous location, turn up the volume, don't let your fears keep you silent, and draw attention to God. Say to everyone around, 'Look! It's your God!'"

Our great need is to behold our God. We need to get our eyes off of ourselves, and off of other, and off of the allurements of this world, and see our God for who He is.

In these verses, Isaiah presents God as a conquering king, a wealthy benefactor, and a tender shepherd. Our God is worthy of our trust.

When you hear a politician tell you of his plan to go to Washington to clean up the mess, that he is going to get Congress work together for the American people, you might believe that he is sincere. You might conclude that he means what he says. But how much stock do you put in his ability to bring about his plan? How surprised are you when 2 years later he is asking for your vote again because he needs more time to make his plan succeed?

In the next portion of this chapter, we are going to see that God has what it takes to bring about His purposes.

Listen to the Voice That Reminds Us of God's Over-Arching Power

In vv. 12-26 we find numerous questions that are meant to illustrate that God and God alone has the power needed to do what He says and achieve what He intends.

Look at the beginning of v. 12. How much water is in the world? I did a little research. I read that 97% of the world's water is found in the oceans. About 2% of the world's water is contained in glaciers, ice caps, and frozen mountain ranges. That leaves just 1% for us to bathe, do our laundry, fill water bottles, water our lawns, and Ruth Ann

uses about half of that 1% to make coffee. If Enid ever has to ration water usage, she might quit watering her tomatoes, but she is not going to quit making coffee. Let's just be clear about that.

Scientists estimate that there are over 321 million cubic miles of water in the oceans for a total of 352 quintillion gallons of water. That is 352 followed by 18 zeroes.

God says He measures the waters of the earth in the hallow of His hand. **We serve a big God.**

The *span* mentioned in v. 12 was the length from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger. God uses His span to measure the heavens.

We live in the Milky Way Galaxy. It is just one of billions, maybe trillions of galaxies. Astronomers say that our galaxy is a spiral galaxy and that it would take light, travelling at 186,000 miles per second, 104,000 years to get from one end of our galaxy to the other.

We use light years to measure the heavens. God uses His span. **We have a big God.**

How much do the mountains weigh? I can't answer that. If you can trust the internet, I can tell you there are 1,187,049 mountains in the world, and most mountains number in the billions of pounds. Mt. Everest, the largest mountain in the world is estimated to weigh 350 trillion pounds. We don't have any scales to weigh the mountains or the hills, but God does. **We pray to a big God.**

When God chooses to do something, He doesn't consult with us. He doesn't seek our advice or counsel (v. 14).

Compared to God, we are insignificant. When I was born, there were 4 billion people in the world. In my lifetime, the population of the world has doubled to 8 billion people. To God, that is a drop in the bucket. We are but mere dust on His great scales (v. 15).

Beginning in v. 18 the prophet uses sarcasm to describe the foolishness of trying to fashion on idol to capture God's likeness. It simply can't be done. An idol falls over unless it is secured to a sturdy base, but our God sits upon the circle of the earth. From His vantage point, we appear as grasshoppers.

Maybe you've heard the joke: "From where God sits, my uncles look like ants."

The power wielded by the rulers, kings, and titans of this world are no match for God. Look at vv. 23-24.

Notice vv. 25-26. I have read various estimates as to how many stars there are in the universe. Some say 70 sextillion up to 200 sextillion. That is 200 billion times a trillion. It has something like 21 zeroes. God calls each star by name.

My mom raised four children and a dog: Martha, Martin, Marshall, Matt, and the dog's name was Mannford. More than once I heard my mom call the dog Matt.

God never gets confused.

It is not enough for us to see God through our eyes. Isaiah wants us to see God through God's eyes. God can bring about His purposes for us because God is big, really, really big. He is powerful, really, really powerful.

Because God is so big and powerful, we can trust Him to accomplish both His purpose and His promises.

Listen to the Voice That Informs Us of God's Ever-Certain Promises

Let's read vv. 27-31. Be encouraged by this quote from Ray Ortlund: "God is not too great to bother with us; He's too great to overlook us."

Look at what we are told in v.28. ***God is eternal.*** There was never a time when God was not. ***God is the Creator.*** The fingerprints of God are found everywhere and on everything. ***God is always at work.*** God never has to take a nap or a coffee break. ***God is wise.*** There is no limit to His wisdom.

Quite often when bad things happen, we want to know why. We want an explanation. I have often said God never feels obliged to explain Himself to us or anyone else. We need to remember, we don't live by explanations, we live by promises. Trust the promises. Claim the promises.

I read that in the Hebrew text, the words for *faint* and *weak* are used nine times between verses 27 and 31. You and I are familiar with weakness. We are all too often weak in faith and weak in courage, as well as weak in body and even weak in mind.

What are we to do? Are we to read self-help books? Are we to take empowerment courses and go to the gym more often? God's word tells us to wait—wait on Him.

Waiting, by the way, is not sitting on a park bench twiddling your thumbs. Biblical waiting is active not passive. We are to wait on tip-toe, looking to God, expecting Him to act. Waiting is living with expectancy in God.

What does God promise to do? Look at v. 29. And if we wait on YHWH looking to Him with expectancy, what will happen? According to v. 31, our strength will be renewed. We will mount up with wings like eagles.

Eagles are incredible creatures. Have you ever seen an eagle take flight? It is a beautiful sight to behold. It seems as if they crouch, and then they lift their great pinions. Next, they swoosh those wings downward. With a couple of up and down movements of the wings, the eagle is off and flying. When migrating, an eagle can fly up to 250 miles a day and can fly continuously, without stopping for four to six hours. I can't drive a car for four to six hours without stopping. While eagles fly at a speed of 40 to 70 mph, they have been clocked at 200 mph when diving. Can you imagine being a little mouse scurrying for cover while an eagle is coming at you at 200 mph?

If we will wait on YHWH, we will mount up with wings like eagles. We will run and not be weary. We will walk and not faint.

The Jewish exiles would need that strength to make that 700-mile trek back to their homeland. You and I will need that strength as we journey with our God through this wearying world. We can be wearied by worries, wearied by work, wearied by people, and wearied by problems. So, let us wait expectantly on our God and then rise to be who He has called us to be and to do what He has called us to do.

I was a freshman in college 40 years ago. When I arrived on Bison Hill which is what we affectionately call the campus of Oklahoma Baptist University, we had a new college president. President Bob Agee and I started OBU the same year, but I got out in four years, and he stayed for 16.

After Dr. Agee retired, the next two presidents at OBU each served a little over a decade. The current president, Dr. Heath Thomas, was installed in January of 2020, and two months later, COVID hit. It has been quite a ride for him, but I think he is doing a great job.

I have heard President Thomas speak a few times in the last several years. Each time

he says something I have noted and think is profound. He says the job of OBU is to prepare students to live all of life, all for Jesus. Our calling—your calling and mine—is to live all of life, all for Jesus.

We tend to divide life into the secular and the sacred. On the secular side we might put our work life, our home life, our leisure time, our hobbies, and interests. On the sacred side, we put our church life, our friendship with other believers, our service to God.

Jesus is not interested in being Lord over part of your life or even most of your life. He intends to be Lord over all of it.

In life we hear a multitude of voices. We hear parental voices. We hear political voices. We hear the voices of friends, and neighbors, and co-workers, and teachers. We hear the voices of marketers and salesmen and popular culture. They are urging us to wear this, buy this, do this, become this.

As best as we can, we need to silence those voices and ignore those voices and listen for God's voice. What is He saying? Through today's text, He is telling us about

**His long-standing Purpose,
His over-arching Power, and
His ever-certain Promises.**

He is saying:

I am your God. You are My child. I have a purpose for you, and that purpose is good.

I have promises for you. I promise to strengthen and empower you.

My purposes for you will prevail, and My promises to you will come true because I alone have the power to bring them about in your life.

Dear Friend, listen to His voice and follow Him.