

Thanks Be To God (Part 2) – Is 40:1-11

Is 40:1-11; This is Part 2 of a message I started last week on thanks – thanks be to God
Reminding us of some of the biggest reasons in all of life, to be thankful
In fact, without the truths of this passage, life would be pretty futile/meaninglessness
So it's a worthy passage to focus on for sure (**Review**)

- And as I mentioned last week, Isaiah begins ch40 speaking to a completely different group of God's people, in a completely different way
No longer is his message one of woe and judgment, but comfort and hope
And no longer is he addressing his contemporaries living in relative freedom, but his people living in captivity – 150 years in the future
That's the backdrop of the next 17 chapters in fact; And I want to read all 11 verses to start with, just to give you an overview

[1] *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. [2] Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and 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.*

[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, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

[6] *A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. [7] The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. [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.*

We saw last week from v1-2, that the first reason to be thankful to God, is that . . .

His discipline has an end (v1-2)

Just as God's patience has an end, so does his discipline
His discipline of his own – those who *know* him
It has an end, both in length and severity

Which is why King David could say things like – *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of LORD in the land of the living!* (Ps 27:13)
B/c he knew the difficulty he was in would come to an end

And the Apostle Peter, who said – *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you* (1 Pet 5:6)
Implying that if we humble ourselves, God's discipline has an end – *at the proper time*
That's the first reason to be thankful to God in this passage

2nd, from v3-5, is that . . .

A way has been made (3-5)

Thanks be to God, b/c a way has been made; A way for *us* to come to *God*, and *him* to come to us; Which, for the Israelites, was a message of *hope* that became a *reality*
Hope that God would somehow reveal his glory, remove the obstacles, and provide a way home; And it happened, 70 years later; It became a reality

On the other hand, for us, it's a message of *reality* that's become our *hope*
Reality, b/c the NT tells us that Jesus *is* the way that Isaiah foretold; He *is* the glory of the LORD that was revealed
Proclaimed by John the Baptist, and lifted up for all to see as the salvation of God

IOW a way has been made to be saved from our sins, and granted eternal life
And it's ours to take; It's ours to embrace; It's a reality right now

And when we take it, when we follow his way, when we put our faith in him – he gives us *hope*; As in confident assurance that we're not only saved, but secure
And hope, that one day we will see him face to face; B/c a way has been made

Those are the first 2 reasons to be thankful from v1-5; Third, from v6-8; Is that . . .

His word never fails (6-8)

[6] *A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" And then we get the answer All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. [7] The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.*

IOW they too wither and fade in the course of life – just like grass and flowers fade under the hot winds of summer; Poetically depicted here as *the breath of the LORD*
From our beauty, to our strength, to our very breath – our lives are fleeting

- But that's not the point; The point is that God's word isn't
[8] *The grass withers, the flower fades* [as in people will come and go; and so will their opinions, predictions, successes, and failures], *but the word of our God will stand forever.*
People are fleeting; And the things they say often fall short; But not the words of God
In fact (**Mt 24:35**) – *Heaven and earth will pass away* [Jesus said], *but my words will not pass away.* They'll stand forever

- But what does that mean? Does it mean they're going to be preserved in some eternal museum? A fixture that stands for all time . . .
To be gazed upon like a relic of the past? No*****
When Isaiah says that *the word of our God will stand forever*, he means that what God says is true *now*, and always will be; And what he says will never fail to come about
His intent and *promises* will never fall short of their purpose

In this case, his promise to reveal his glory from v5, and remove the obstacles to our salvation; It was true then, and it's true now
Whether it's yet to come on a world-wide scale, or right now on a personal scale
Maybe even for you; Maybe God's at work in you as I speak, to remove the obstacles in your heart and lift the veil from your eyes – so you *too* can see his glory and be saved
If God said it, you can believe it, you can trust it; B/c his word never fails

- And that word, is found in the Bible

The Bible is the written record of God's word, God's revelation of truth to us
Like **2 Pet 1:20-21** says – *No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation* [someone's own mind]. [21] *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* Which includes this passage; And all of Isaiah*****
This is the written record of God's word, that never fails

- The problem is, we revere the Bible more than we read it
It's one thing to say God's Word never fails, and even genuinely believe it – that he always does what he says
But it's another thing, to actually read it, and *know* what it says

And the statistics on this are terrible
According to one survey, only about ½ of all professing believers actually read the Bible with any kind of regularity; Only half; And I think that's generous

- And what's worse, is that even fewer memorize it; Even fewer hide it in their heart
Even fewer know it to the point of being able to recall it, even if it's not word for word
Which is bad enough in and of itself, but when you compare it to devout adherents in other religions, it's shameful
Like devout Muslims for instance, and their mastery of the Koran

For instance, did you know that one of the entrance requirements to Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt – one of the most prestigious Muslim universities in the world . . .
Is the ability to recite at least 2 sections of the Koran by heart; No matter *what* you study; Islamic science, pharmacy, philosophy, whatever
Which would be like memorizing chapters 40-45 here in Isaiah; Want to get in, recite it

And for the faculty, it's even more; In some cases the whole Koran
Which would be the equivalent of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts
Meanwhile, we struggle to even *read* the Bible; And therefore don't even *know* the promises of God's Word that will never fail

- So to spur you on in that respect, I put a little **card** in your bulletin; It's titled – *This Is My Bible*; Go ahead and take it out
It's a simple reminder of some of the benefits of actually reading God's Word on a regular basis, and some of the eternal truths contained therein
And I'd like to read it together, with our Bibles in hand (**Text**); Join with me

THIS IS MY BIBLE:

I am who it says I am. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
I can do what it says I can do. (Philippians 4:13)
I am going where it says I will go. (John 14:3)
God's Word is milk for my soul. (1 Peter 2:2)
God's Word is seed for my faith. (Luke 8:11)
God's Word is light for my path. (Psalm 119:105)
God's Word is power for my victory. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
God's Word is freedom for my life. (John 8:32)
When I read God's Word, it brings me joy. (Jeremiah 15:16)
When I study God's Word, it keeps me from shame. (2 Timothy 2:15)

When I memorize God's Word, it purifies my heart. (Psalm 119:11)
When I quote God's Word, it defeats my enemies. (Ephesians 6:10,17)
When I meditate on God's Word, it brings me success. (Joshua 1:8)
When I abide in God's Word, it gives me confidence. (John 15:7)
I AM A BIBLE-BELIEVING FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST!

Amen? Amen; So let's make sure we read it, and even memorize it from time to time*****
B/c it never fails

4th, is that . . .

He's come! (9-10)

Thanks be to God, he's come

[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.

Behold your God is a way of saying – He's here; He's come; Lift up your eyes; Check it out; *Behold* the effect of his presence; Take it in; See it for what it is
Including his unstoppable power and *might* – *Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might* it says
And behold the deliverance that accompanies his *rule* and reign – *his arm rules for him* there in v10; A phrase that conveys the salvation or *deliverance* of God on our behalf
Behold that

And behold the reward and recompense that comes with his presence – two ways of saying the same thing
In their case, the restoration of their lives – that was God's reward and recompense
In our case, it's the redemption of our souls
It's all here Isaiah is saying; *He's here – the Lord GOD comes*

- And his exhortation is to shout it from the mountain tops – *go on up to a high mountain, and lift up your voice* he says
Which is just as much for us, people of God that we are, as it was for them; Especially at this point in time

B/c 2700 years later, we've not only seen the *effect* of his presence, in his salvation and deliverance and power – but we've seen *him*; In the flesh; Dwelling among us
The glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth as John said (Jn 1:14); We've *seen* him

And it's ours to declare; Just like it was theirs to proclaim the *effect* of his presence in restoring their lives – it's ours to proclaim his *advent*, to save our souls
It's ours to lift up our voices and declare that he's *come*
To set aside our fear, and speak with strength and conviction

Kind of like the paperboys of a century ago, who would stand on the busiest corner of the city, and hawk the news; "Get your paper here! Read all about it!"
They didn't sit idly by, hoping someone would notice; Or peddle their news only to their family members; They trumpeted it to anyone within earshot

Only their news wasn't so good

- But *ours* is; In fact, it's the *best* news, isn't it? That's why we call it the gospel – meaning *good news*
And that's why we say *Merry* Christmas instead of bah humbug; B/c it's glad tidings of *great* joy that Jesus has come

And it's something we ought to proclaim not just here, but over the hills and *everywhere*
Go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born
I don't know if this Scripture inspired that song, but it sure does fit; And we sure ought to do it; B/c he's come; With power unstoppable, deliverance that's free . . .
And a reward that's out of this world; Literally

It's yet another fulfillment of this prophecy that they couldn't have imagined
But we can; B/c it's here – he's come

- The question is, have you seen him? Have *you* beheld him? Have *you* acknowledged him *yourself*; And confessed him as Lord of your life? Have you?
Have you been delivered by his mighty hand and outstretched arm? Saved from the consequences of your sin? Blessed by his presence within you?

If so, you have much for which to give thanks, and much to proclaim
If not, behold your God; He's come; And your own personal merry Christmas awaits

And then last . . .

His love is tender (11)

Thanks be to God – his discipline has an end, a way has been made, his word never fails,
his presence is at hand, and his love is tender
As if his power and deliverance and reward isn't enough, he loves us; Tenderly
[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.*

And who did that? Jesus; *The great shepherd of the sheep* Hebrews says (Heb 13:20)
And the one who looked on the crowds with *compassion*, tenderness – b/c *they were like sheep without a shepherd* (Mk 6:34)
And the one who was *born* among sheep in a manger
And the one who said of himself – *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me* (Jn 10:14)
My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (Jn 10:27-28)

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and we are the ultimate recipients – recipients of his tender, tender love
Gathering us in his arms, drawing us close, and leading us in the way everlasting with the utmost gentleness and care; Especially in times of need
And I want you to see this **video** on that note (Doyle Cone, God @ Work) – testimony of someone in our church, who experienced God's tender love firsthand

- *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.*

His love is tender; And if you haven't experienced it, if you haven't surrendered your life to him like Doyle – you're missing out
And the same is true if you *have* experienced it, but are living in sin, or walking around with a chip on your shoulder, or an attitude in your heart

Miss out no longer; B/c that's why he came
Born among sheep and surrounded by shepherds – he came, so that one day he could be yours – your Shepherd; That's what he said; And his word never fails

Prayer – Lord, hear the prayers of those who need your love; Those who are surrendering their lives; Lead us; Shepherd us; And find us wholly consecrated to you
And for those who are hurting and struggling – bind up their broken hearts, heal their open wounds, and comfort their weary souls
We trust your word to do so; And love your way
And for our offering, would you provide for all our needs? And find us obedient, and eager, and cheerful givers?