

Isaiah 40:1-8 (When God Saves You)

Good morning everyone! So glad that you are here this morning. My name is Jesse Slinkman and it's my joy to be able to fill in for Pastor Rob as he gets some time away. I serve here at our church as our College and residency Pastor. In our college ministry this ministry year we have been going through the book of Isaiah and looking at some of its key moments. I want to share it with you.

So let's continue in worship by opening up our bibles to Isaiah chapter 40. If you need a copy of God's Word, just raise your hand and one of our ushers will get one to you. If you're joining us via the live stream we are glad to connect this way, but also pray that we can see you in person soon.

We will be in verses 1-8 this morning. But before we do, I have to give you the context of what is happening here. For the first 39 chapters of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah is writing to Israel who was going to be sent into the babylonian captivity - wanting them to turn from sin and return to God so that captivity wouldn't happen. Exile was going to be their judgement, and that is the theme of chapters 1-39.

But Chapter 40 is a massive turning point in the book of Isaiah. At this point in the book Isaiah realizes that Israel and Judah are not going to turn back to God and the exile is going to happen. So he changes his audience and starts writing words of encouragement to those who are in exile in the future, 150 years. Writing to the next generation who are in the babylonian captivity and are on the brink of returning to Jerusalem. Like if I wrote a letter of hope to my grandchildren.

Bottom line, Isaiah is not writing to his contemporaries; he is writing to those in the future who will return from captivity and need a reminder of what happens when God saves his people. And he says this... I'm going to read all 8 verses.

[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. (ESV)

Isaiah is outlining here God's promise to save Israel. He's going to free them from captivity, caused by their sin. That's the immediate context.

But if we look closely at the principles in this text, we see the realities that happen when God saves his people. These words apply to us also. You can see from the title "When God Saves You". It's not just when God saved Israel. It applies to you. This text shows us what happens when God saves his people.

And that includes you personally. If you are a believer in Jesus my intent is to help you remember and recall all that God did when he saved your soul; that is what I mean by "saved". And if you are not a believer, or if you are unsure if you are, I pray these things cause conviction within your heart so that you might place your faith in Christ for what he can do in you. The first is this...when God saves you...

- **You receive God's comfort (v1-2)**

[1] Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. It's God telling Isaiah that the message that is about to come is one of comfort. God is saying that the salvation he offers to them (freedom from exile and captivity) is a source of relief. It's a message that is meant to lift the soul. Because judgement and discipline are done. *[1] Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

It's something that all of us are looking for. Especially in terms of salvation. We feel the weight of our sin and our rebellion against God - just like Israel did - and we want to know how to be saved. That's why religions exist. Only Christianity has the answer. How to have eternal security and comfort. How to be free from the pain of sin and the punishment that it brings. You can search the world for that comfort, but only find it in the Lord.

Only find it when you receive and understand the words of verse 2: *[2] Speak tenderly to Jerusalem* (God's people), *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.* God is telling Israel that he is going to end their suffering and judgement.

The judgement that Israel, and you, and I experience from breaking God's commands, the suffering because of sin, God speaks tenderly and says "I have a better plan for you. Your suffering and judgement can be over. Receive comfort".

Look at the text. Notice how the comfort in verse 1 is connected to his forgiveness in verse 2. *comfort my people* - why? The reason for the comfort in v1 is because your iniquity, your sin, is pardoned in v2. That is true comfort and relief. It's like being able to take a breath of air for the first time.

When I was a kid we had a pool in our backyard. I remember I would try to swim back and forth as many times as I could without taking a breath. I would go to the end and back underwater and then I'd try to do it again. The longer I was underwater the more my lungs would just burn with pain. I would feel like my ribcage was going to collapse and explode at the same time. Finally I would give up and come up and take that big breath of warm summer air. Pretty sure I almost passed out a few times.

That's what salvation is like. It's like coming up for a breath of spiritual air. It's like breathing for the first time. All that burning and aching from sin and shame goes away instantly when you breathe in the air of God's grace and salvation. You feel the relief immediately. You receive his comfort.

So, Christian, remember that feeling. Remember the joy and relief of forgiveness from sin. The air of God's grace as salvation filled your lungs and you lived for the first time. When you got saved, you received God's comfort.

And if you don't know that comfort - it's because you haven't made the choice. The choice to come up out of the waters of God's judgement and trust in him. Once you do, you'll receive his comfort. It's what happens when God saves you. Along with:

- **You surrender your life to God's work (v3-4)**

[3] A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

A voice cries out. The command is given. "God is coming! He is on his way! Prepare for his arrival". Isaiah is telling the exiles to surrender to God. Prepare for God to work. He is coming. He is going to do something. His salvation is right here and it's going to change everything in your life. He is going to work. Surrender to it.

That's what it means to make a straight highway. It's not a physical thing that we do. Although I wish Davenport would level out our stinking roads. It's a spiritual reality; that we are preparing our hearts for God to change our lives. *[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.* These are metaphors of God's people surrendering our lives to him.

The ESV study bible note says **"These are metaphors—based on the rough terrain as one approaches Jerusalem from the east—for personal repentance and social reformation, remaking the world as a place fit for the coming King."**

The operative phrase there is "personal repentance". Repentance starts in your heart. It's a surrender to God's work in your life. Make a straight highway.

It's made even more clear by verse 3's connection to the NT; because John the Baptist is connected to verse 3 in all 4 of the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and **John 1:23** all record John the Baptist as the fulfillment of these words.

***[23] He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."* (ESV)**

John the Baptist's role was to go ahead of Jesus' ministry. Calling people to prepare to repent and surrender to the Lord. It had that meaning in Isaiah's time, it was the same in John the Baptist time. And it's the same truth in our time.

Here's the point: When God saves you, you completely surrender to him. To his will. To the work that he wants to do in your life. Prepare the wilderness of your heart for God. Make straight the desert of your soul for the Lord. Give you life to him, if you haven't already. Let the king come in and surrender to the work of salvation that he gives.

And if God has already saved you, I trust that you instantly started the process of letting him work in your life. Starting with repentance and turning from sin when you became a Christian and followed by a myriad of other ways that he wants to work in you. Like obedience, evangelism, fruit of the Spirit, prayer, hunger for his Word, generosity, church membership. Things you may never have wanted before, but now you do because you surrendered to him when he saved you. Stay in the place of surrender. Prepare the way, make straight the highway. Surrender to his work.

Let's continue in verse 5...*[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."*

When God saves you, you receive his comfort, you surrender your life, and...

- **You behold God's glory (v5)**

[5] And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed. God's glory is very significant in Isaiah's mind as he writes, because he saw God's glory personally back in chapter 6. Isaiah had a vision of the throne room of God and he saw the angels flying around the throne saying "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory". Isaiah saw God's glory.

God's glory, to try to explain it, is the radiating out of his intrinsic beauty. It's the brightness that shines from him because of his perfection. His glory is the Scriptures way of describing how he radiates greatness and it causes us to worship. He emits perfection. He shines forth majesty.

Last weekend we went to a bonfire with some friends from church. And they built a great fire. Right in the middle of the fire pit. Just a perfect teepee style, burning hot. And the heat was just radiating off of it. Just pouring out of this perfect fire that we had. That's like God's glory. Wherever there's fire, there's heat. Wherever God is, his glory is felt. His radiance. His greatness. We feel worthiness to be praised.

So when verse 5 says *[5] And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together*, it means that when he brings his salvation, we behold his greatness and we see his deservingness to be worshipped.

Here's the point: When God gives his salvation, when he saves people - the goal is his own glory being shown. Have you considered that? The goal of salvation, in God's mind, isn't primarily about being a king, or having a people, or even showing love - although all those things are true and right. God's primary reason for saving sinners like you and me is to show his own glory. His own deservingness to be praised. The shining radiance of who he is.

The purpose of God creating the world and saving us from sin is so that all people would see who he is. That all people would see how good he is. How great he is. How kind he is. How loving he is. How just he is. How merciful he is. How holy he is.

Even the purpose of saving Israel from their exile was so that people would see his glory. How much more for us? On this side of the cross, who know the true fulfillment of OT passages like this - how much more should we behold his glory. How much more should we treasure it in our hearts?

Are you beholding his glory? Is it your passion in life to see God's glory shine out into all the earth because of the salvation that he offers? Are you living for that? Do you love when he gets credit and praise? Are you quick to give it to him?

[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." Isaiah is telling Israel - this is going to happen. God will save you. God will restore you.

When God makes a promise with his words, he makes good on that promise. When God opens his mouth, when he speaks something - it happens. It comes to pass no matter what. That theme in Verse 5 takes us right into verse 6.

[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. (ESV)
When God saves you, in that moment and every moment after...

- **You are assured of God's promises (v6-8)**

Verse 6 says *All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field*. These are things that don't stay around long. You know if you're a gardener of any kind. Grass comes and goes every year. Flowers come and go with the seasons. And Isaiah is saying that is us. All flesh. We are as fragile and mortal as the grass and the flowers. Verse 7 reinforces the same thing *[7] The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass*.

Telling us that our lives, our existence, the things we achieve in this life, they don't last. They fade and we fade. Everything about us fades into history and only a few people will be remembered and written down in history books. *surely the people are grass*.

But then God says this: *[8] The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever*. When God says something, when he gives a command, when he speaks, it will come to pass.

God's Word here doesn't just mean the Bible, although it certainly does include it. The "words of our God" here are the immovable, unchangeable promises of God. When the Lord wills for something to happen and when he says something is going to happen, it's going to happen. I know that I know. It stands forever. It's never going anywhere.

Kinda like this **picture**. It's called the Great White Throne in Zion national park. Sydney and I visited Zion about a month ago. One of our tour guide bus drivers pointed out this huge monolith rock formation. I don't think it's technically a mountain, but whatever it is - it's massive. The picture doesn't really do it justice. But it's immovable. Just like God's Word. *the word of our God will stand forever*.

That should give you assurance. That should give you confidence in Christ. That should give you hope and endurance in the promises that you are holding to. You are safe within the mountain of salvation. Your feet are planted on the rock of eternal life. You stand on the mount of his forgiveness. When God saved your soul, he opened your heart to see all the confidence you can and should have in his word and his promises. You can rest assured. I know that I know, he never fails.

As we end, I'm compelled to show you how the New Testament uses this verse, because it's amazing – and our understanding of the text wouldn't be complete without it. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 1. Peter, writing to the church, tells us to love one another... **1 Peter 1:23–25 [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.**

What Peter is saying here, is that the summation of all of God's promises are found in the Gospel. That the fullness of Isaiah's prophecy is found in Gospel.

The Gospel truth that Jesus was God in the flesh. He came into this world, he came into our brokenness and lived a perfect life. He died on the cross in our place to take our punishment for the sins we had done. Then he bodily rose from the grave to prove who he said he was. And he offers forgiveness when we believe in him and repent of sin. The fulfillment of all God's promises are in the Gospel and in Jesus Christ. *And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

And so we will continue to preach that good news. That Gospel. Because that message never grows old. That word is never tiresome. That good news remains forever. The Gospel, that God saves his people, is as true for us as it was for Israel in Isaiah 40.

When they were in captivity because of sin, he made a way for them to be saved. He freed them from their captivity. When we were in captivity in our sin, he provided his only son as the way for us to be forgiven, freed, and saved.

When God saves his people - when he saved you - you received his comfort, you surrendered to his work, beheld his glory, and you were assured of his promises. It happened to you.

And if you haven't experienced those 4 realities in your life - it's because you haven't entrusted your life to him. But you can do that today - today can be your day of salvation - if you admit that you are a sinner, if you believe that Jesus can save you from the punishment of sin, if you repent and turn from your sin, and if you receive him as Lord of your life. You have to admit, believe, repent, receive. If you will do that, he will rescue you and he will prove what happens when God saves you. Let's pray.

Prayer — Father thank you for the salvation you offer and all the blessings that come with it. We stand in awe of what you have done in our lives. And we want to worship you for it. We want to give you all the glory, because you are worthy. We rest Lord in the immovable covenant of your Gospel. In Jesus name we pray, amen

Isaiah 40:1-8 (When God Saves You)

- You receive God's comfort (v1-2)
- You surrender your life to God's work (v3-4)
- You behold God's glory (v5)
- You are assured of God's promises (v6-8)