

Sunday AM Sermon – Date: October 10, 2021 – PM - EBC
 Sermon Series – The Immensity and Greatness of Our God – Sermon 5 / 5
 Isaiah 40:27-31 – Those Who Wait on the Lord

Introduction

This is our 5th and final sermon from Isaiah 40. The prophet Isaiah has masterfully, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, inscribed for his people, and for all people, a beautiful portrait of our amazing God! His intention is to comfort his people (40:1) – to promise a coming Messiah, to show man’s frailty and mortality, and his bent towards idolatry, juxtapositioned with God’s magnificence, omnipotence, creative power and sovereign control of all things, superiority and sovereignty over all nations, His ownership of the whole universe and His eternal power over evens stars and galaxies!

Throughout this chapter, Isaiah reminds his people by way of repeated, effective phrases, that because God is their God, they know He is without peer and they know His character and attributes, because for numerous generations, He has made these things known to them! For example, in v. 21, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”* And in v. 18, to show the folly of idolatry, *“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness compare with Him?”* And a similar verse (25) repeats the question.

The people who hear Isaiah’s words or read them are to be taken aback by their own fears and lack of faith in such a God who has proved Himself time and time again to be exactly who He has demonstrated Himself to be for many, centuries by this point. As Paul says in Romans 1:18-31, He has left them with no excuse. They cannot in truth dismiss Him as non-existent or irrelevant or look out on His created universe, or note His care for them and His control over all nations, and then suppress the truth of Who He really is by expecting Him to now desert them!

I. Fear Not

Isaiah 40:27

This is shown to be their weakness, as Isaiah points out in v. 27. This verse describes people who should not be in despair, and yet “they are beginning to lose hope; they are starting to be overwhelmed by the weight of their circumstances”¹ as God’s prophet has presented these things to them.

They have failed to take to heart what their experience as God’s nation, as God’s beloved people – the very things about God that Isaiah is sharing with them here in chapter 40. This genuine clear vision of who their God is – eternal, powerful, great and yet loving and merciful – should bring them to humility, but in that humility, that

¹ Eric Alexander, Our Great God and Saviour, Banner of Truth, 2010, p. 15

taking stock of the fact that He is their faithful, covenant-keeping God, they will also be the recipients of genuine biblical hope.

It is to this verse and the four that follow it, that Isaiah's discussion has been moving since v. 12. His point in v. 27 is to point out to them, "With such a God as their God, how could Israel ever have doubted that He could control the destinies of His people?"²

Note v. 27 and the complaint that Isaiah attributes to the people, "*My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God.*" IOW – "God is not even aware that I exist! He has no idea what I'm going through!" Isaiah's point is stating here what their state of mind is, in order to rebuke them in light of exactly who their God is. How could they think that way about Him? He is chastising their smallness or lack of faith, their failure to think through what they already know about God, and then apply it to their own lives. Sound familiar to our 21st century ears?

They are seeing God as having neglected their cause. In their minds, He has abandoned them, but the real truth is that they have abandoned Him, and were soon to fall under the discipline described in Isaiah 39:5-7. But Isaiah proves that this would not be the end of their story, and God would not abandon them. They would be restored when the purpose established for the discipline of God had been perfectly fulfilled.

II. His Understanding is Unsearchable Isaiah 40: 28-29

But again, as he did in v. 21, Isaiah chastises their thinking of despair by reminding them of the God they know. (vv. 28-29) Verse 28 is a verse of impatience by Isaiah. The truths he reminds them of here, of the Lord as their strength – their real source of strength – "*has been proclaimed as long as Israel has been God's people.*"³

Isaiah's focus at first is the concept again (cf. v. 12,22,26) of God eternally existing as Creator. He Himself is everlasting and eternal. And there is a vastness to His creation that reveals the scope of His limitless creative power as well as His obvious control over all of it. This is exhibited in v. 26.

Isaiah bolsters his contention of God's eternal creative and sustaining power by pointing out 2 more important facts about Him;

- i.) "*He does not grow faint or weary...*" If, as Isaiah has expressed that the people think – that "their way is hidden from God", it is certainly not because He is tired or exhausted by His efforts to keep everything in line! Psalm 121:1-4 expresses this very well. He is omnipotent – the very thing Israel was wavering about as their weakened faith pondered how to fix things that only God's power could ever fix. This verse is telling them that God never falters – he never fails. He plans out His way to achieve His purpose, and is

² Loose paraphrase of HC Leupold, Exposition of Isaiah – Volume 2, Baker, 1981, p. 37

³ IBID – Leupold, p. 38

relentless in ensuring that it is carried out. Look ahead at Isa. 41:8-10 & 44:6-8.

Not only does He never grow faint or weary, but Isaiah says, secondly,

ii.) *“His understanding is unsearchable.”* Note Psalm 147:1-5, especially vv. 4-5.

These verses relate as parallels to Isa. 40:26 & 28. God is absolutely unique, set apart, holy and beyond our ability to comprehend the extent of any of His attributes. Note how Moses expresses this concept in Ex. 15:11; and Hannah, in her prayer in I Sam. 2:2! His greatness, according to Psalm 145:3 is “unsearchable” and a reason to praise Him!

EJ Young points out:

“This is not to deny that God may be known. If God were unknowable, then Isaiah’s appeal would be meaningless. The whole condemnation and criticism of the people in which the prophet is engaging is based upon the assumption that God and His ways may be known. Indeed, if the people knew God and His ways, they would not doubt Him. If God were unknowable, Isaiah’s denunciation would be without point. The entire context is a strong argument against such an interpretation.”⁴

So, although God is ‘unsearchable’, that does not mean He is ‘unknowable.’

Bruce Ware adds...

“The eternal existence of God is the eternal existence of all perfection, infinitely and intrinsically possessed, within the eternal, triune nature of God. Just as it is unthinkable from a biblical point of view that God could ever not be, so too it is unimaginable that God could ever receive some quality, some value, some knowledge, some power, some ability, some perfection that he previously lacked.”⁵

And...

“God, then, possesses within himself all that is, and absolutely nothing can exist independent of him that could contribute in some way to enrich his very being or enlarge his possessions.”⁶

Then, look at Romans 11:33-36. (vv. 34-35 are quotations of Isaiah 40:13) Verse 36 in Rom. 11 here points out that it is all truly about Him. Although His understanding is unsearchable, we can come to know Him as He reveals Himself to us. He especially does this through His Son, whom He sent to reveal who He is and to express His love for us in Jesus’ obedient life and sacrificial death (JN 1:16-18). But it is not as if we are to just leave it at that, that God’s understanding is unsearchable. Notice Jeremiah 9:23-24.

Although the people Isaiah wrote to are told “His understanding is unsearchable”, they had been taught what God loves – justice and righteousness. He had certainly not

⁴ EJ Young, The Book of Isaiah - Volume 3; Eerdmans, 1979, p. 67

⁵ Bruce Ware, God’s Greater Glory, Crossway, 2004, p. 48

⁶ Ware, p. 49

left them, or us, without a witness of this – in both the OT & NT! God is transcendent for sure, way beyond our full comprehensive powers, but as 40:29 tells us, He cares for us. Since we do grow faint and weary, He has energy and strength in abundance and so (v. 29) He not only does not lack strength, but He is the One who supplies strength to us! In fact, He is the only source of strength. In John 15:5, Christ pointed out to His disciples, *“Apart from me you can do nothing.”* Paul discloses his utter dependence on the strength of Christ in Phil. 4:11-13. The gift of God’s strength to His beloved ones is expressed numerous times in the Psalms. Note just a couple of examples –
Ps. 28:7-8 – *“The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.”*
 And Ps. 84:5 – *“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.”*

God is not a powerful Deity who is completely aloof and Lording it over His people. He is instead a sovereign LORD who delights in extending grace, keeping His promises, and giving strength to His beloved people as they require it and are incapable of empowering themselves with it.

III. Those Who Wait on the Lord

Isaiah 40:30-31

Even those who are young and often seem to be full of exuberant energy and zeal can become tired and spent – they will faint, be weary and fall exhausted. Real life saps our strength, it exhausts us because it goes on and on as we face trials, experience times of grief and years, as we feel our bodies reach the limits of our energy and we falter, as an exhausted marathon runner nears the end of the 25 km run, out of breath, racked by thirst, aching everywhere, feet stumbling to reach and cross the finish line. Our human strength has limitations and we are all too aware of that aren’t we? Life is transitory, temporal. We are mortal, not eternal as God is. We need more strength and courage than we are usually ready to admit, even to ourselves. ④

David, in Psalm 103, expresses something about God’s understanding in vv. 13-14. He shows compassion to His people because He knows how He created us. Take notice of v. 11 as well. These verses are at least partially reminiscent of Isa. 40:30-31.

In v. 31, the statement, *“those who wait on the Lord”* is a synonym for ‘faith’. If we are waiting on the Lord, we are exercising faith that He will act on our behalf. When we do, “He shall renew our strength.” How many times have we been in the midst of a trial that just doesn’t seem to have an end, and we begin to sink into despair, believing our plight to be hopeless? But we pray, and we keep on praying, and praying, and ask others to pray for us, and then, finally, after what seems like an interminable time, we see light at the end of the tunnel? It’s tough to consider, but the Bible says God is using things like this for our ultimate good and for His glory.

Israel had been made aware that such a trial was coming and God was using Isaiah 40 and other prophetic writers to comfort them in advance of the judgment that was inevitable as a result of the rebellion and idolatry. Oh, He still loved them – recall what we just read in Psalm 103 about His forgiveness inherent in His love and mercy for them! According to Isa. 40:28, they knew this because the rhetorical question expected an affirmative answer.

Now, Isaiah tells them to “have faith”; “wait on the Lord”, and He will renew their strength – He will empower them to even soar above difficult circumstances they will face. [[read v. 31 again](#)].

The exercise of their faith would give them the trust they needed to believe in God’s power to deliver them and bring His promises of comfort to fulfillment. Instead of stumbling, they would grow stronger and stronger, even soaring above it all, metaphorically of course. This is the extent of the “*power He gives to the faint*” (v.29) – beyond our comprehension, and ability because His ways are unsearchable, and so high above our imagination that it could only come from God!

Finally, the last sentence of v. 31 gives us a promise that reminds us of God’s own ability (v. 28c-29), which He now shares with us. I like the way that Hebrews 12:1-2 captures the essence of this imagery – “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*” This is showing us what the life of faith looks like. It is a race of endurance, so we will need God’s strength and the focus on Him to complete it. Note [Jude 24-25](#).

Isaiah, as he nears the end of his book, lays out some valuable facts to bolster what he has been saying here in Isaiah 40 and elsewhere. Look at [Isa. 57:15](#) & [66:1-2](#). Notice the conditions – “*humility, of contrite spirit, trembling at His Word.*” In 57:15b, He is the One who “*revives the spirit of the lowly.*” He is the One who lifts them up, makes them soar as eagles, and who makes them “*run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.*”

Let’s never forget who the source of our strength is! This chapter is an OT classic passage and was meant to apply immediately to Israel. However, the application to us, who now have more insight into the “Servant of God” passages whom Isaiah often spoke of in this book – we know Him to be Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, the very Son of the Living God. We count on Him to fulfill the same promises of comfort, strength and peace as we see here. We know Him to be the Creator (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; Col. 1:16) and He is the One in whom all things hold together – Col. 1:15-20, and who reconciles His people to God, and to finally, when we reach that Sabbath rest we will be with Him and He will live with us forever!

So, after 5 sermons on Isaiah 40, the question is: **This is great for Israel, but how does any or all of this apply to NT Christian believers in the church in 2021?** And that is a very good question to ask at this point.

These Things Are Meant for Our learning – Galatians 3:18-26

I mentioned at the end of the last Isaiah 40 sermon that I would try to tie this together for us and answer this question. Honestly, I worked on 3 different angles to determine what I felt was the best way to proceed. I jettisoned a few others, because book-length exegesis would have been needed, and at this point, I have between 12 and 15 minutes before I put you into a coma.

I figured I would appeal to a passage like Acts 8:26-38 where Philip leads an Ethiopian Eunuch to Christ by explaining Isaiah 53 to him, but then I considered a quick trip through OT highlights that point to Christ in prophecy, type and NT quotation of the OT, and finally, I thought of looking at Galatians 3:18-26 where Paul, attempting to show the Galatian church that to be saved and then desire to keep the Law was a foolish gambit, and in doing so, he explains the purpose for the Mosaic Law, appeals to the Abrahamic Covenant, and shows them that the Law was intended to be temporary, and did not save anyone, in fact, it imprisoned people under that Law because of their inherent sin. Anyway – deciding to set aside the first 2 for maybe future sermons or SS classes – I am going to bring us to Galatians 3. To provide context, let's read the whole chapter, but the focus is going to be on vv. 18-26 – the core of Paul's argument. ⑥

< testimony here regarding Andy Goertzen >

To understand why Paul says what he says here, note Gal. 1:6-8; 3:2-3; and 5:1-4. As a result of this crisis, Paul is compelled to show these people the purpose for the Mosaic Law, which was never meant to save, but rather to identify sin so that those who recognized their own sin would avoid self-righteousness and call on God to provide forgiveness and mercy. Coupled with the substitutionary atonement provided in the law by demanding certain sacrifices on behalf of these sinners, as outlined in the book of Leviticus and elsewhere, they would understand that God's wrath could be appeased without the death of the person who sinned, if the offering was made in faith. This obviously prepared the way for the promised Messiah who would provide them with the ultimate, final sacrifice. Hebrews 10:4 tells us that, although the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, the one sacrifice of Christ could and did – see Heb. 10:11-14! Time does not allow us to look at Romans 3:21-31, but if you wonder how OT people had their sins forgiven, v. 25-26 explain that: “*Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*” i.e., OT sins – pre-cross sins.

Gal. 3:19 asks the question pointedly – “*Why then the law?*” *It was added because of transgressions...*” and then the word, “*until*” tells us it was not meant to be permanent. It was to be the operative theological system “*until the offspring [seed – KJV] should come to whom the promise had been made...*” Paul explains the promises in v. 16, and the promises were made to Christ! This is a citation of the Abrahamic Covenant from Gen. 15, which predated the Mosaic Law by 430 years. Verses 19-20 in Gal. 3 go on to say that this [temporary] law was put in place by an intermediary (Moses) who acted as a go-between for God and His people.

But what’s Paul’s point in v. 20? This is a tough verse to interpret, with some saying that there may be as many as 250 ways to interpret it. However, Jared Wilson presents a viable interpretation and I quote it here:

“The Law was put in place via angels by Moses. We see this affirmed in Acts 7:38, and 53 and in Heb. 2:2. Deut. 33:2 tells us it came to Sinai by “ten thousands of holy ones.” That’s a pretty impressive scene. “An intermediary implies more than one,” Paul says. There are several links in the chain of command: from God via His 10,000 holy ones to Moses, then to the people. And let’s not forget to factor in the priests, the ceremonial rites and regulations that went along with all of that. In order to deliver – and then to administer the Law, teamwork...made the dream work.

“But God is one.”

Why is the gospel better than the Law? Why is Jesus more glorious than every other intermediary? Because it is God Himself doing the job Himself for the people all by Himself...Now consider that Christ Jesus is more glorious, more precise, more fulfilling, more encompassing than all that. And then! Consider that Jesus doesn’t just hold up His end of the covenant of righteousness: He holds up our end too. An intermediary implies more than one. But God is one. He does His job and ours.”⁷

Verse 21 – In this very important part of Paul’s argument, “the law is not a source of life and it provides no power for obedience.” The Law identifies sin in a technical and legal sense – IOW – it defines sin. That’s obvious by Paul’s last phrase in v. 21. This is a very important sentence and echoes Romans 3:19-20.

Notice the clause, “*so that,*” as we read verse 22. Do you see the transition here? Scripture (of which the law is a subset) records or documents that at least one purpose of the Mosaic Law was to confine God’s people under sin’s power – OR – per Romans 3:23 – “*all have sinned.*” IOW – God intended His law to function as a temporary code or jailer in order to restrain sin until Christ came. “The redemption that Christ accomplished (Gal. 5:4) was redemption from the power of sin, which reigned during the era of the Mosaic Covenant.”⁸

Verse 23 – Paul now comments on his last sentence from v. 22, “*Before faith came...?*” We know there were people of faith in the OT – for one thing, Hebrews 11 proves that, and OT Scripture continually spells it out. One example, although the word “faith” is

⁷ Jared Wilson, *Gospel Deeps*, Crossway, 2012, P. 137

⁸ Thomas Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, Baker, 1998, p. 75

not used is Gen. 15:6: “*And he [Abraham] believed God, and he accounted it him as righteousness.*” (cited by Paul in Rom. 4:3 & 9). So, what does Paul mean by “*Before faith came?*” His point is that only saving faith unlocks the door of the prison where law keeps men bound” (John MacArthur – NASB Study Bible note).

The object of coming faith to be revealed was Christ – both historically, and at each one’s personal time of salvation. Only saving faith releases people from the jailer that the law is designed to be, and once Christ came, as Jeremiah 31:33 promises, God acts – “*I will put my law within their heart and I will write it, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” And v. 34 adds, “*I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more.*” This is a reference to the New Covenant which replaces the Mosaic Covenant.

Verse 24 – Paul sums up the core of his argument here; “*So then the law was our guardian [schoolmaster – KJV] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*” “*So then*” is a phrase that means a conclusion is being reached. The law – which controlled every move Israel made from Exodus till Malachi - was designed to identify and contain transgressions; to act as sort of moral fence or corral, but only temporarily, even if the temporary lasted for hundreds of years. God’s intention was always (from before time began) to send Christ, who would be our Messiah, Redeemer and Mediator/ High Priest, so the Law was given to guide God’s people to God’s only remedy for their sin – His only Son sent to die in their place. Paul’s further argument in Gal. 4:1-5 uses a different illustration to develop the same points as what he argues in Galatians 3.

⑧

Then to complete our text, in Gal. 3:25-26, Paul makes it personal for them as individuals.

I realize this has not been an intensive exegesis of this passage, but I am confidently hopeful that it has served to give you some insight into one way we can show that the NT is dependent on the OT to supply us with a foundation of our faith in Christ, as well as pressing home the importance of studying the OT by preaching and teaching from it. I’ll close here with a brief reading of 1 Cor. 10:1-12, another source of showing the importance of the OT to Christians.

4,062 words + Scripture

10/3/21