

TRUST IN GOD'S WORD

40 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her affliction has come to an end, that her iniquity has been pardoned, that she has received from Jehovah's hand double for all her sins.

³A voice is calling out in the wilderness, Prepare the way for Jehovah! In the desert make level a highway for our God! ⁴Let every valley be raised up, let every mountain and hill be made low; let the rough ground be made level, and let the rugged places become a plain! ⁵The glory of Jehovah will be revealed, and all mankind—[all those who are flesh]—shall see it together, for the mouth of Jehovah has declared this. ⁶A voice commands, Proclaim [these things]! Then came the response, Why should I proclaim it? [After all,] all men—[made of flesh]—are like grass; and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades; because the breath of Jehovah blows upon it. Surely, the people are like grass. ⁸[Yes,] the grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever!

⁹You who proclaim good news to Zion, go up to the top of a high mountain; you who proclaim good news to Jerusalem, raise your voice with strength—raise [your voice], do not be afraid. Proclaim to the cities of Judah, Here is your God! ¹⁰Look! The Lord Jehovah is coming with power, and his arm will rule for him. Look! [He brings] his reward with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹He will tend his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom; he will gently lead the nursing ewes.

¹²Who has measured the waters in the hallow of his hand? Who has carried the dust of the earth in a basket, and weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills on a balance? ¹³Who has directed the Spirit of Jehovah; or, Who, serving as his counselor, has instructed him? ¹⁴With whom did [Jehovah] take counsel and who taught him? Who instructed him in the path of justice, who taught him knowledge, who showed him the way of understanding? ¹⁵Listen; the nations are like a drop [of water splashing] from a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales. He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. ¹⁶Even Lebanon's [forests] are not sufficient to kindle fire [upon the altar], nor are its beasts enough to make a [suitable] burnt offering. ¹⁷All the nations are as nothing before him, they are regarded by him as less than nothing and worthless.

¹⁸To whom, then, will you compare God? Or what image will you compare to him? ¹⁹As for the idol, a craftsman casts it; a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. ²⁰A man who is too poor to make such [an expensive] offering, selects a tree that will not rot. Then] he looks for a skillful craftsman to set up a carved idol that will not topple. ²¹Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the time the earth was founded? ²²It is [Jehovah] who is enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. It is he who stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent in which to live. ²³It is he who reduces rulers to nothing, and makes the judges of the world meaningless. ²⁴Indeed, as soon as they have been planted, as soon as they have been sown, he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵To whom, then, will you compare me, to whom am I equal? inquires the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens and

observe. Who has created [all] these? Who brings out the starry host one by one? He calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. ²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, why do you assert, O Israel, My way is hidden from Jehovah, and my cause is disregarded by my God? ²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, neither does he become weary. No one can fathom his understanding. ²⁹He gives strength to the weary; and he imparts power to the one who has no might. ³⁰Even youths grow tired and become weary; and young men stumble and fall. ³¹But those who wait for Jehovah will renew their strength—they will soar with wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not become faint. (Isa. 40:1-31)

Introduction

Isaiah hears the voice of a herald, a voice gives the command, *“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her affliction has come to an end, that her iniquity has been pardoned.”*

Then Isaiah hears the voice again, this time it commands, *“Prepare the way for Jehovah! In the desert make level a highway for our God! ... The glory of Jehovah will be revealed, and all mankind—[all those who are flesh]—shall see it together.”*

There follows a silence. Then a third time Isaiah hears the same voice. The voice commands, “Proclaim the good news you have just heard!”

Then Isaiah hears another voice respond to the first, *“Why should I proclaim it?”* To paraphrase that second voice, “You say that all flesh together shall see the glory of the LORD. But I tell you that all flesh is like the grass: it withers away before the scorching wind of the LORD.” In the light of the hard realities of this present world, I find it hard to accept what you are saying.” (Note: The Hebrew word, *מה*, usually translated “what,” also has the meaning “why,” which is the preferable meaning in this present passage.)

Like that second voice, we, too, when confronted by the hard realities of this present world, find it difficult to accept God’s Word. But listen to how the first voice responds to the objection raised by the second voice. That first voice fully acknowledges the hard realities of this present world: Yes, indeed, it asserts, *“the grass withers, the flower fades”* (vs. 8a.) But then that voice goes on to remind us of the all-powerful and ever dependable Word of God: *“but the word of our God stands forever”* (vs. 8b.)

There are two ways to approach life. There is that of the Sadducees, who could not and would not look beyond the hard realities of this world, note Matthew 22:23, *“the Sadducees ... say there is no resurrection.”* Jesus responded to them by declaring, *“You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God”* (Matt.

22:29.) Then there is Abraham, who did not discount the hard realities of this world, but looked beyond them to the God who is able to fulfill His promises, note Romans 4:18-21,

[Despite all the obstacles standing] against hope, [Abraham] believed with hope, so that he might become a father of many nations, just as it had been spoken [to him], So shall your offspring be. ¹⁹And without becoming weak in faith, he acknowledged that his own body was now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and [he acknowledged] the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰Nevertheless, looking to the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, [thereby] giving glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that what [God] had promised, he was also able to fulfill. (Rom. 4:18-21)

The reply of that first voice in answer to the objections of the second, the reply of Jesus to the Sadducees, and the example of Abraham, are all the same: Despite the hard realities of this present world, we can and we should depend upon God's Word. Let us trust in God's Word, especially at those times when we feel the pressures of this world brought to bear against us that would cause us to doubt that divine Word.

I. Trust in God's Word, When It Speaks about Forgiveness (Isa. 40:1-2)

The LORD issues the earnest command that His people be comforted: *"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God."* Tender words of comfort are to be addressed to Jerusalem: *"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem."*

The content of this message of comfort is now proclaimed. Jerusalem's *"affliction has come to an end"*—her time of affliction, hardship and knowing the alienation from God are finished. Here is the answer to the Psalmist's question: *"Will the Lord reject us forever? Will he never show his favor again? ⁸Has his lovingkindness vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? ⁹Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"* (Psl. 77:7-9.) Such would be the sentiments of God's people when they were consigned by the LORD to defeat and captivity because of their sins—but Isaiah 40:2a now proclaims that that period of alienation is over! Isaiah goes on to proclaim, *"her iniquity has been pardoned"*—the debt has been paid, full compensation for sin would be provided by the Messiah Himself at Calvary; note 1 John 4:10, *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;"* "the propitiation" is the sacrifice that satisfies divine justice and appeases divine wrath. Note, too, Galatians 3:13, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'"* Isaiah asserts that Jerusalem (the city representing all of God's people) *"has received from Jehovah's hand double for all her sins."* The LORD Himself has provided sufficient payment for our sins: *"[Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself"* (Heb. 9:26b;) and now *"from his [Christ's] fullness we all received, grace upon grace"* (Jn. 1:16.)

These words of Isaiah 40:1-2 were spoken in anticipation of the hard reality of the Babylonian Captivity that was about to come as the consequence and punishment for the sins of the people, note 2 Chronicles 36:15-17,20a,

Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of Jehovah was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. ¹⁷He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar ... ²⁰He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons. (2 Chron. 36:15-17,20a)

Yet even in the face of that hard reality, the repentant people of God possess this sure word from the LORD their God: *"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her affliction has come to an end, that her iniquity has been pardoned, that she has received from Jehovah's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2.)*

The initial fulfillment of these words would come in the form of the deliverance from Babylon and the restoration to the land of Canaan—and to the LORD Himself:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of Jehovah spoken by Jeremiah, Jehovah moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ²³This is what Cyrus king of Persia says, Jehovah, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the Jehovah his God be with him, and let him go up. (2 Chron. 36:22-23)

When Jehovah brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. ²Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, Jehovah has done great things for them. ³Jehovah has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. (Psl. 126:1-3)

The ultimate fulfillment of these words would be accomplished only by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary:

... God was by Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, Be reconciled to God. ²¹Him [Christ Jesus] who knew no sin he [God] made to be sin on our behalf; so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. (2 Cor. 5:19-21)

There may be times when we are confronted with the hard reality of the awfulness of our sins and the gravity of our guilt: “What I did was so bad; ...what I did was so defiant towards God; ...I’ve been piling up my sins for so long; ...just look at my sins: the great number of them, the magnitude of their offensiveness to God.”

Especially at such a time, but, indeed, at all times, let us trust in God’s Word, when it speaks to us about forgiveness:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:9)

Come now, and let us reason together, says Jehovah. Even though your sins are [as dark] as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Even though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (Isa. 1:18)

II. Trust in God’s Word, When It Speaks about the Future Glory (Isa. 40:3-5, 21-26)

The herald now issues the command to prepare the way of the LORD. God’s people are to “*Prepare the way for Jehovah! In the desert make level a highway for our God!*” (vs. 3.) All obstacles shall be removed and the highway shall be made ready for the coming of the great King: “*Let every valley be raised up, let every mountain and hill be made low; let the rough ground be made level, and let the rugged places become a plain!*” (vs. 4.) When all has been made ready, then “*The glory of Jehovah will be revealed, and all mankind—[all those who are flesh]—shall see it together*” (vs. 5.) Verse 10 indicates that on that glorious day the LORD will bestow His reward of grace upon those who have loved Him and faithfully served Him. Verse 11 goes on to indicate that on that day the redeemed will experience the intimacy of the LORD’s tender care, which is compared to that of a loving shepherd for his precious sheep.

These words of promise are spoken within the context of the hard reality of man’s own frailty, as the second voice points out to the herald in verses 6-7, “*Why should I proclaim it? [After all,] all men—[made of flesh]—are like grass; and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades; because the breath of Jehovah blows upon it. Surely, the people are like grass.*” In response to the herald’s promise, “*the glory of Jehovah will be revealed, and all mankind—[all those who are flesh]—shall see it together,*” the second voice reminds us that “*all men—[made of flesh]—are like grass.*” In Palestine in the spring the fresh new grass appears, but within a few weeks it withers away before the hot desert winds, and man’s own frailty is compared to that grass.

In verse 8 the herald now responds to this second voice. The herald acknowledges the fact that “*The grass withers, the flower fades*”—he acknowledges the frailty of man. But he then goes on to declare, “*the word of our*

God stands forever.” What the LORD promises will be fulfilled, because the LORD is able to do all that He says.

The fulfillment and accomplishment of God’s word is guaranteed by the awesome power of God, as is indicated in verses 21-26. According to verses 21-23, the LORD is the Sovereign God. *“It is [Jehovah] who is enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers”* (vs. 22a.) *“It is Jehovah who stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent in which to live”* (vs. 22b.) *“It is Jehovah who reduces rulers to nothing, and makes the judges of the world meaningless”* (vs. 23.) Verses 24-26 reveal the LORD to be the Incomparable Creator. The LORD Himself challenges the whole world to produce someone who is equal to Him, the One who is *“the Holy One”*—the One who is separate, distinct, and high above all of His creation (vs. 25.) The LORD commands us to gaze upon the starry heavens and consider, *“Who has created [all] these?”*—i.e.; to consider how great and awesome their Creator is: each night He brings out the stars just like a shepherd leads forth his flock (vs. 26.)

The accomplishment of God’s promise contained in verse 5 is guaranteed by His own awesome divine power, and the initial fulfillment of that promise is seen in the resurrection of Jesus. In Ephesians 1:19-21 the Apostle Paul speaks of *“the immeasurable greatness of [God’s] power,”* and then proceeds to declare that God employed His divine power in Christ’s resurrection, *“raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this present] age, but also in the coming age.”* The final resurrection, at which time the promise of Isaiah 40:5 shall be fulfilled, is directly linked to Christ’s resurrection:

But now [the fact is] Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death] ... ²²Just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own turn: the first fruits, [which is] Christ; then those who belong to Christ when he appears [in glory]. (1 Cor. 15:20,22-23)

Let us trust in God’s Word, when it speaks about the future glory.

Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to bring everything in submission to himself, he will transform the body belonging to the present state of our humiliation, so that it may be conformed to his glorified body. (Phil. 3:20-21)

III. Trust in God’s Word, When It Speaks about His Care for Us (Isa. 40:27-31)

According to verse 27, in light of the awesome greatness of the LORD—as evidenced by the heavens He has created and that He controls (vs. 26)—the Christian should never feel that his *“way (or, his lot) is hidden from the LORD;”*

i.e., that it is unknown to the LORD what befalls His children. Consider the assuring testimony the Lord Jesus provides in Matthew 10:30, *“even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”* Nor should he fear that his *“cause”*—his covenantal rights—is disregarded by his God. If the LORD cares for His creatures, how much more does He care for His blood-bought children in Christ? Consider the assurance the Lord Jesus offers in Matthew 6:26, *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”*

According to verse 28, the Christian should never feel that the LORD is unable to care for him. The questions, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard?”* imply that the things about to be revealed are facts that should be common knowledge and well known to the people of God. These great truths include the fact that the LORD, *“the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, neither does he become weary”*—He Himself is the Source of all power, He is by no means deficient in power or energy and, hence, unable to minister to His people. They include also the fact that *“no one can fathom his understanding”*—He is the God of all wisdom, the depths of His understanding are beyond human comprehension. The LORD may not do what we think He should do when we think He should do it; but this should not be taken as an indication that He is unable to act. To the contrary, the truth is that His purposes and His methods for accomplishing those divine purposes are far beyond the purposes and methods we would employ if we were in charge.

Far from being either impotent or unconcerned, the LORD is willing and able to provide grace to His weary people:

He gives strength to the weary; and he imparts power to the one who has no might. ³⁰Even youths grow tired and become weary; and young men stumble and fall. ³¹But those who wait for Jehovah will renew their strength—they will soar with wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not become faint. (Isa. 40:29-31)

Three images are employed in these verses: the eagle ascending to the heights of the heavens and effortlessly soaring through the sky; the spiritual “long distance runner” who is enabled to finish the race; and the man who sets out on a long journey and is enabled to reach his final destination. According to verse 31, the key to receiving this spiritual strength and refreshment is for the Christian to wait upon the LORD. They who wait upon the LORD cease to resemble man in his frailty (vs. 30) and come to resemble their God in His strength (vs. 6b-7), by having that divine strength imparted to them by grace.

Let us trust in God’s Word, when it speaks about His care for us.

...humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, (so that he may exalt you at the appointed time), ⁷by casting all your cares upon him, because he cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:6-7)

Conclusion

Like that second voice heard by Isaiah, we, too, when confronted by the hard realities of this present world, find it difficult at times to accept God's Word.

But the reply of that first voice, the reply of Jesus to the Sadducees, and the example of Abraham, all bear the same testimony: Despite the hard realities of this present world, we can and we should trust in God's Word *"The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever"* (Isa. 40:8.)