

Overview of Lesson on Isaiah 40

Excerpted from Isaiah by the Day by Alec Motyer

IS 40:1-11

The most wonderful thing about these verses is not the beauty of their expression (though that in itself would have been enough), nor the attractiveness of what they reveal (though, again, that would suffice), but the place where they come.

Doom has been pronounced on Hezekiah (39:6-7), and with it the death knell seems to have been sounded for all Isaiah's glittering predictions of a coming king. At this darkest of moments, the call goes out to speak the word of comfort (v. 1), to proclaim hardship finished and sins forgiven (v. 2), to announce that Yahweh himself is on his way with worldwide significance (vv. 3-5), that his word and promises can never fail (vv. 6-8), and that Zion's people are the flock he has worked for and now holds in his tender care (vv. 9-11). This is the Lord undefeated even by our most grievous sin; the Lord who never calls back the word he has spoken, and who cannot be deflected from its fulfilment! It will all become even more wonderful as Isaiah develops his message in these chapters.

...Even if we wouldn't dream of saying it, circumstances can easily prompt the unbidden thought, Where is God in all this? And why is he not doing something about it? Has he forgotten? There is, of course, a god who is not there when we need him (I Kings 18:27), but not the Lord God Almighty.

He is 'un-fainting, un-wearying, that is, he lacks neither energy nor commitment; his strength does not ebb away, nor does he tire of the task in hand. It's just that 'he is unfathomable in his discernment' — he *sees* to the heart of the situation in a way we never can and in ways we are not equipped to appreciate. The sooner we learn that lesson the better. It will meet us again in Isaiah in the famous words (55:8), 'my thoughts are not your thoughts ... your ways are not my ways.' But please remember: our inability to 'discern' does not mean that no discernment is at work; our inability to see point or purpose does not mean there is no point or purpose.

The more we exalt the greatness of our God, the more we learn to appreciate our smallness, weakness, incapacity. We need to learn not to fret and fume; we need to accept our limitations of knowledge, wisdom and foresight. Or, as Isaiah tells us, we need to practice 'waiting' for the Lord. Waiting is looking. When Isaiah puts Israel's grouching into words (v. 27) what does he do next? He directs our eyes to the Lord (v. 28). Look away from yourself, *look at him*. Next comes, *expect from him* (v. 29); he is ever the giving God — giving strength to surmount the problem, to run the race, and (best of all) to walk the path (v. 31). But this is not (so to speak) a hypodermic syringe operation — the injection of some transforming serum called 'strength'. It is what the Lord is in himself: the unfainting, unwearying one imparts his own unfainting, unwearying nature (vv. 28,

Questions - Isaiah 40:1-31

1. **Isaiah 40 begins with a message of comfort to a people at war. Who are the combatants in this war and what are the two causes given in verse 2?**
 - A. Who is the giver of this comfort and why?
 - B. In light of Matt 3:3 and Mark 1:3, what does the New Testament teach about the end of the exile and the fulfilment of the promises in verses 3-5?
2. What is Isaiah's main point in verses 6-8 and how does it impact you thinking and acting?
3. What are the 10 rhetorical questions asked in verse 12 and their answers? What is Isaiah's purpose in asking these questions?
4. Read verses 18-20. How do these verses apply to people in our own culture? In light of these verses, what Idols have you discovered in your own life?
5. Does God really have the power to achieve this rescue and give this comfort? Unpack some of the vivid imagery that Isaiah uses in verses 12-20 to answer the skeptic.
6. How is your view of your life circumstances changed when confronted with the comparison of God and Man revealed in Isaiah chapter 40?