

# The gods who were carried and the God who carries

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as we prepare to focus on the living word of the living God, let's seek his blessing. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, you know each and every one of us.

You are the one who has fearfully and wonderfully made us. You know us far better than we know ourselves. You know all that we have brought with us into this building.

We have been worrying, worries, uncertainties, anxieties and frustrations. Whether it be in the school, whether it be in the workplace, whether it be in the home.

But we pray that this evening you would enable us to simply leave these things now at the door. And to focus our minds and our hearts and our souls on you and your word.

Lord, we are thankful that you are a God who speaks. You are a God who reveals himself in his created world and the beauty and majesty of that world.

[ 1 : 14 ] But you also speak to us through your own written word. Lord, may you use it in your mercy and grace and promise.

And we ask for the providence to draw us closer to Jesus. The one who is altogether lovely and chief among 10,000.

Go with us, we pray, forgiving all our sin as we ask in his name. Amen. Well, would you turn with me please to the passage that we read in the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 46 and reading again verses 3 and 4. But we read, Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been born by me from before your birth, carried from the womb.

Even to your old age, I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made and I will bear. I will carry and I will save.

[ 2 : 53 ] Tonight's message is very simple in many respects. It's simply a contrast between idolatry and true religion.

The contrast between idolatry and true religion. Or we might put it another way. It is a contrast between the gods whom you have to carry and the God who carries you.

And we're going to look at Isaiah 46 under two very simple headings in this regard. We're looking in verses 1 and 2 at a word of ridicule. And then in verses 3 down to the end, a word of revelation.

A word of ridicule and then a word of revelation. First we have a word of ridicule in verses 1 and 2. And in these verses, we hear words of ridicule concerning the false gods of the nations.

Now before going any further, it's important to note the context in which this man, this prophet Isaiah, is writing. The people of Judah have been rebelling against the Lord.

[ 3 : 58 ] And Isaiah has told them that they're going to go into exile in Babylon for their continued rebellion. And while in Babylon, they might be tempted to worship the false gods of that pagan nation.

They might be tempted to do what all those round about them are doing. But Isaiah refuses to play the tolerant, politically correct card as he speaks to them about these Babylonian gods.

He doesn't say to them, well, we're all worshipping the same god at the end of the day. Neither does he say, well, we're all on different paths but we'll eventually reach the same destination.

According to Isaiah, there is only one true and living God and his name is the Lord. And it's at this point that we find Isaiah mocking these Babylonian gods.

Isaiah begins in verse 1 by speaking about Bel and Nebo. These were the two most prominent gods in the Babylonian pantheon. We have Bel. He's also known in the Babylonian literature as Marduk.

[ 5 : 03 ] He was the sun god, the god of life, the god of energy. And then we have Nebo and he was the son of Bel. And he was the god of writing, the god of learning, the god of knowledge, the god of wisdom.

And look at what Isaiah says in verse 1. He claims that Bel is bowing down and Nebo is stooping over. And Isaiah goes on to speak about what's happening to the idols, the images of these gods in the remainder of verses 1 and 2.

He says that their idols, their images are placed on beasts of burden and livestock, but quickly become a burden that wearies those carrying them.

Not only that, he says they're so powerless that even their images are stooping over and bowing down as they're carried along in these carts. Not only that, Isaiah claims that these idols cannot save.

They simply go off into captivity. Listen, friends, to what Isaiah is saying. He's looking ahead to a day when this great empire, mighty Babylon, will eventually fall.

[ 6 : 12 ] And on that day, the Babylonians would mount the images of their gods onto carts to prevent them from falling into the hands of invaders. But these images, these gods would only weary the livestock and be unable to prevent Babylon from experiencing calamity and captivity.

It's a pathetic image. These were meant to be the most powerful of gods. But Isaiah says they cannot save their people. In fact, Isaiah goes so far as to say they cannot save themselves.

They're just a burden. They're just a disappointment. Do you hear what Isaiah is saying? The people of Judah may be tempted to follow after these Babylonian gods.

And Isaiah is asking them sarcastically, if a god has to be carried, then how can it carry you? If a god cannot help itself, then how can it help you?

If a god needs your strength, and if it needs your support, then how can it support you? How can it strengthen you? Idols let you down.

[ 7 : 30 ] That is the message of the Old Testament. We see that in 1 Kings 18. Where the prophets of Baal call on Baal to send heavenly fire.

And we read, there was no voice. No one answered. No one paid attention. Idols blind. And they cheat. And they chain.

And they make promises they cannot deliver on. They will promise you everything and leave you with nothing. That is the message of the Old Testament. Now we might think tonight, ah, but we are far more sophisticated than Babylon, living in point.

We would never fall into idolatry. We would never have carved images and statues of gods in our homes. But our idolatry can be far more subtle and yet just as deceptive and deadly.

Tim Keller writes, An idol is anything so central and essential to your life that should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.

[ 8 : 39 ] An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources on it without a second thought.

It can be family and children. It can be family and children. Or career and making money. Or achievement and critical acclaim. Or saving face and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship.

Peer approval. Competence and skill. Secure and comfortable circumstances. Your beauty or brains. A great political or social cause. Your morality and virtue.

Or even success. Listen to this. Even success in the Christian ministry. An idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts, if I have that, then I'll feel that my life has meaning.

Then I'll know that I have value. Then I'll feel significant and secure. Did you catch those words? An idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts, if I just have that.

[ 9 : 44 ] Then my life has meaning. Then I'll know that I have value. Then I'll feel significant and secure. And these idols all let you down.

We see that in the book of Genesis. We see it in the life of Jacob. You remember Jacob and he longed for his father's approval and blessing.

He did all he could to secure it. He thought, if my dad's just happy with me, that will bring me lasting joy. Is that true of you perhaps? Perhaps you thought, if my parent just approved of me, then that would bring me lasting joy.

And look what happens to Jacob. He ends up in this bitter feud with his brother Esau. And then we go on in his life.

And we find that he falls in love with this girl, Rachel. And it was really a case of love at first sight. And he spends 14 years working for her father. Just so he can marry her.

[10:45] And he's saying, if I'm just married to this girl. If I've just got Rachel in my life, then I'll be happy. Then I'll have lasting joy. And it's a miserable marriage for him.

And then there's his son Joseph. And all his happiness, all of his joy is bound up with his favorite son. The second youngest son.

And his other sons sell Joseph into slavery. And tell Jacob that Joseph's been killed. And we read these harrowing words in Genesis 37. That Jacob refused to be comforted.

And said, I shall go to the grave to my son mourning. All Jacob's idols let him down. Tonight, friends, these verses are reminding us that an idol.

Whatever it is. And I have to even say, even if it's ministry. An idol. An idol. Whatever it is.

[11:47] Whoever it is. Will eventually let you down. It won't bring you lasting joy. It won't be able to carry you or help you in the moments when you need it most.

You know that yourselves. Maybe you put a lot of stock in a job. A lot of stock in a person.

A lot of stock in a position. And it crumbled away to nothing. But this moves us from a word of ridicule to a word of revelation in verses 3 down to 13.

And in these verses we hear words of revelation concerning the true God of Israel. The speaker changes in verse 3.

Isaiah's been speaking in verses 1 and 2. But now the Lord speaks in verses 3 to 13. And in verses 3 down to 7. The Lord reminds his people of his support.

[12:50] Throughout Isaiah 40 to 45. The Lord's spoken about his strength. And the way that he'll support and sustain his people when they become weak. In Isaiah 40.

He says that he gives power to the faint. And increases the strength of the one who has no might. In Isaiah 41. He says that he will strengthen and uphold his people.

And will uphold them with his own righteous right hand. And now in Isaiah chapter 46. The Lord speaks about the way that he supports and carries his people.

In verses 3 and 4. He tells them that he has borne them from birth. And carried them from the womb. Tells them that he's with them in old age. And will carry them when they become grey headed.

He's the God who creates his people. The God who bears his people. The God who carries his people. The God who saves his people. And you know friends. That is what we see throughout God's word.

[13:50] Isn't it? This is the God who sustains and supports his people. He carries them. As a man carries his child. Into the land of promise. As you see in Deuteronomy 1.

He's the one who carries them. As a shepherd carries his sheep. Close to his bosom. As you see in Isaiah 40. And his strength doesn't fail. His feelings of tenderness don't fade.

He keeps a hold of his people. And supports them. Not only in their youth. But even in their old age. Friends. It is such a wonderful comfort. That maybe some of you used to.

You were teaching your children to walk. And eventually your children did walk. And eventually they left the family home. But here is a God who allows his people to walk.

But he never stops carrying them. No matter how old they are. How strong they might appear to be. This is a God who says in Psalm 71. That he will not leave his people.

[14:49] Even in old age. And then the Lord compares that support. With the support of Babylon's idols. In verses 5 to 7.

The Lord asks the question in verse 5. To whom will you liken me? And he goes on to speak about the creation of an idol. He says gold is poured out from the purse.

Silver is weighed out on the scales. A goldsmith is hired. And he makes this God. And the people fall down before it. And they don't simply fall down before it.

They worship it. But look at the support of these idols. These gods. The Lord says the people have to lift their God. Onto their shoulders.

And they have to carry their God. And they have to set their God in its place. And once the God is set in its place. It cannot move. But look at what else it can't do.

[15:49] It doesn't answer when a person cries out to it. It doesn't save a person. When they find themselves in trouble. It needs support.

And it provides no support. What a contrast with the God. Who supports and sustains his people. From birth to old age. But then in verses 8 to 11.

The Lord moves from reminding his people of his support. To reminding them of his sovereignty.

The Lord calls out to his people in verse 8. He calls on them to remember.

And he calls on them to stand firm. And to show themselves attentive to what he is saying. He calls on them to call to mind. And to remember the former things of old.

These people he says are transgressors. They are rebels. They have been refusing to trust in the Lord to carry them. They have been thinking that the gods of the nations are far more adequate.

[16:47] Far more sufficient. Far more relevant. Far more able to save. And now they need an exhortation from the Lord. To remember who the Lord is. And the Lord wants them to remember.

That he is God. And there is none like him. He is the one in whom the fullness of divine attributes is found. He is the one who tolerates no rival and demands exclusive devotion.

He is the one who is sovereign. And the Lord describes that sovereignty in verse 10. He declares the end from the beginning. And from ancient times things not yet done.

He stands at the beginning of all there is. And he doesn't simply see into the future what will happen. He declares what will happen.

He stands at the beginning and declares all that will come to pass. Past, present, future. The beginning, middle, end.

[17:49] He commands, decrees, orders, ordains all things. And the Lord says that whatever he orders. Whatever he ordains.

Whatever he decrees. Whatever he commands. Whatever he purposes will be accomplished. His purpose will stand. And then he gives an example of his sovereignty as you see in verse 11.

He says that he calls a bird of prey from the east. A man of his council from a far country. Now friends, this is astonishing. This man the Lord is speaking about hasn't been born.

And this man would never actually know the Lord. And yet he's a man who has been chosen by the Lord. Created by the Lord. Called by the Lord to carry out his eternal purposes in history.

You see this man is described in Isaiah 44 verse 28. And he's called Cyrus. And he's the king of Persia. And even though this man Cyrus, this king of Persia, doesn't know the Lord.

[19:01] What does Cyrus do in history? He destroys Babylon. And he doesn't simply destroy Babylon. He also releases the Jewish exiles from their captivity.

And funds the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. The Lord is a God who works. A God who powerfully works.

Even in the darkest hours of his people. And can turn the hearts of pagan kings. Pagan kings such as Cyrus. To accomplish his glorious purposes.

Isn't that wonderful? We sometimes think. Oh, oh, it's God just running around. Wringing his hands. Trying to fix out a mess. And here's the Lord saying. My purposes stand.

And I decree what will happen before it even takes place. The Lord is sovereign. Sovereign over the creation of the world.

[19:57] And the rise and the fall of rulers and nations. Sovereign over the events of Calvary. And the forgiveness of sinners. Sovereign over the final glorification of his people. And the renewal of the cosmos.

He is sovereign over all things. Reigns. You know what an encouragement. In a world that seems so uncertain and unstable. The Lord reigns.

Doesn't matter who the prime minister is. The Lord reigns. And he even reigns over this congregation friend. And whoever will be the minister of this congregation.

Will simply be the under shepherd. Whom this God has appointed. The Lord reigns. And finally. The Lord moves from reminding his people of his support.

And his sovereignty. To reminding them. Of his salvation. In verses 12 and 13. In verse 12. The Lord again calls his people to listen to him.

[20:57] And he calls him stubborn. And he describes him as being so far from righteousness. These people are just drifting. Farther and farther from him. And still he calls on them to return to him.

His arms continue to be extended. And welcome to those prodigals. To come home. But look at what else he says in verse 13. And it just takes our breath away.

The Lord speaks in verse 13. About a day of divine visitation. He speaks about a day when. His righteousness will draw near.

And his salvation won't be delayed. A day when. Zion will know his salvation. And Israel. Will receive. His glory.

It'll be a day when the Lord's glory. Would come to rest upon his people. As we see in Isaiah 60. A day when the Lord's people. Would no longer need the light. Of the sun or moon.

[ 21 : 56 ] Because. The Lord himself. Would be their glory. As we see in Isaiah 60. It'll be a day when the Lord's people. Themselves. Would be a. Glorious crown. A glorious diadem.

In the Lord's own hand. As we see in Isaiah 62. It'll be a glorious day. When the Lord intervenes. And acts in grace. And you know.

That's the message of the gospel. Isn't it? The gospel speaks of a God. Who. Loved his people. Before they ever loved him. The gospel speaks of a good shepherd.

Who came. For the sheep. That had gone astray. The gospel speaks of a savior. Who died for his people. While they were still sinners.

It is the message of grace. The Lord's one way love. Toward the undeserving. That is the message the Lord gives. To those who are stubborn.

[ 22 : 52 ] And far from righteousness. He doesn't say to them. I want you to build up. Some merit of righteousness. He doesn't say to them. I want you to work. For this salvation.

He says. I'm coming. With my righteousness. And I won't delay. With my salvation. The Lord's answer. To the rebellion of his people.

Is grace. The promise of a salvation. That he and he alone. Will accomplish. You know. It's really a message. That should melt.

The hardest of hearts. And loosen that cold. Icy grip. That people have. On their idols. Just think of it. These. These people. In Judah.

So cold. Toward the Lord. And the Lord's saying. Here's a message. To warm your cold heart. Well. In these verses.

[ 23 : 47 ] We hear the Lord. Speaking about himself. And he reminds us. That he's the one. Who supports his people. And is sovereign. Over his people.

And he saves his people. He's the only God. There is. And in second Corinthians. Paul tells us. That we see his glory.

We see his greatness. We see his majesty. We see his beauty. Where? In the face. Of Jesus.

And he calls us. In these verses. Saying. Don't burden yourselves. Trying to carry a false God. That can never save you. Let me give you rest.

Let me carry you. He's able to carry his people. In their youth. And in their old age. Carries them. As they develop in the womb. Carries them.

[ 24 : 47 ] As they're born. And as they grow up. Carries them. As they go to school. As they go to college. As they go to university. Carries them. In the workplace. And through their marriages. And as they raise their families.

Carries them. As the home begins to empty. Carries them. As the body tires. And the memory. Begins to fade. And fail. He carries them. In every decision.

That they make. In every direction. That they take. He carries them. But there's more. Because he's able to carry. His people. In all their sins. In all their temptations.

He doesn't let his people go. Even in their seasons. Of apathy. Even in their seasons. Of backsliding. Even in their seasons. Of coldness. Richard Sibbes.

That great Puritan. We sometimes give the Puritans. It's a very hard time. But Richard Sibbes. Put it this way. When he wrote. God takes care.

[ 25 : 44 ] Of poor. Weak Christians. That are struggling. With temptations. And corruptions. Christ carries them. In his arms. All Christ's sheep.

Are diseased. And therefore. He will have. A tender care. Of them. Isn't that lovely. Friend.

Shouldn't that make you want to leave this building tonight.

Saying hallelujah. Shouldn't that make you want to leave. This building. Worshipping this Jesus.

Whose. Whose glorious sin. That. That he doesn't let us go.

Even. When we backslide. And when we are so full of apathy. And when we are so diseased. With sin. He's still carrying us. But there's more.

Because he is also able to carry his people. In all their hard providences. If you go on a few chapters. To Isaiah 63. Isaiah speaks about the Lord.

[ 26 : 42 ] Carrying Israel. In all their affliction. The Christian goes through their frowning providence. And the miserable comforters. Come along. And they say.

Well. Well where's your God now? Where's your Jesus now? You're going through such a hard time. Where's this one? Whom you've placed all your hope and confidence in now.

And the Christian replies. Well he's where he's always been. He's right beside me. In fact. He's not just right beside me. He's holding me up.

He's carrying me close to himself. I was watching an interview. And you know him yourselves. You had him in this congregation. With Dominic Smart. And as you know.

Dominic Smart's very unwell. With cancer. At this moment in time. And he was asked in this interview. What's giving him courage. To keep on going. In this really hard season. And he said.

[ 27 : 38 ] The knowledge that underneath. Are the everlasting arms. He'll be carried. For the young people here. There's a scene in C.S. Lewis's horse and his boy.

And Shasta. This boy has claimed that he's the unluckiest person in the whole world. And Aslan the lion says to him.

Well tell me your sorrows. And Shasta proceeds to tell Aslan about all his sorrows. Especially how his life has been tormented by lions. And then Aslan speaks and says.

I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you as you slept.

I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear. For the last mile that you should reach King Loon in time. And I was the lion you do not remember.

[ 28 : 41 ] Who pushed the boat in which you lay. A child near death. So that it came to shore where a man sat wakeful at midnight to receive you. Behind every frowning providence Aslan hid a smiling face.

Now the Lord hasn't let you go if you're in a frowning providence tonight friend. But there's even more because he is also able to carry his people in their final moments in this world.

Oli Hallisby, Norwegian pastor, last century wrote. I have witnessed the death struggle of some of my Christian friends. Pain has coursed through their bodies and souls.

I've seen them gaze at me anxiously and ask. What will become of me when I am no longer able to think a sustained thought nor pray to God. And I remind them.

God hears all the pleas that your suffering soul and body are making to him. But if you should have an occasional restful moment. Thank God that you have been reconciled to him.

[ 29 : 52 ] And that even now as you are leaving this world. You are resting in the everlasting arms. None of us knows what our last moments in this world will be like.

I don't know who I'll be with. I don't know where I'll be. I don't know what I'll be saying. But I know this. I will be safe and secure in the mighty nail pierced hands of Jesus.

He was strong enough to carry my sin all the way to Calvary's cross. And he will be strong enough to carry me as I face that last enemy. And he is strong enough to hold on to me as I face that last defeated enemy.

However much that final tempest may smash against me. And however much the waves may seem to go over my head. And however high the stormy waters may rise.

And even if I find myself losing sight of his peace, his presence, his promises. I know this. He will still be holding on to me.

[ 30 : 53 ] Because he is the one who has said to his people that his flock have been placed into his palm. And nothing will pluck them from those hands.

He's able to carry, as his people face their final moments in this world. And he is able to carry his people safely and gently into his heavenly harbor.

His heavenly haven, his heavenly home. The moment they die. He receives their spirits, receives their souls. And brings them into the place that he has prepared for them.

Where they might be with him forever. Don't you love the promise of Jesus where he says to the disciples, I will take you to be with me.

I will take you. I'll pick you up and carry you to be with me. Jesus will take us home. He will carry us home.

[ 31 : 59 ] It's like that wonderful image in the Song of Solomon, isn't it? You hear the crowds looking across the wilderness. And they see this young girl, this young princess.

And they say, who is this coming up from the wilderness? And what do they say of her? Do they say, well, she's such a strong warrior? Do they say she's such a capable and victorious servant? No, they say, who is this coming up from the wilderness? Leaning or even being carried by her beloved.

And that is what the heavenly choirs will say when they see you and I coming toward that heavenly city. They won't say, there goes Andy coming.

Faithful servant, faithful warrior, victorious man. They will say, who is this? Coming up from the wilderness, leaning and carried in the arms of his beloved.

[ 33 : 00 ] He is the one of whom the Christian can sing. From sinking sand, he lifted me.

With tender hand, he lifted me. From shades of night to planes of light, oh, praise his name. He lifted me. My friend, is that your confidence?

Is that your testimony? As you prepare to go into another week? That you have a God, you have a saviour who is able and willing to carry you.

And bear every burden that you could never carry on your own. And that he is going to keep on carrying you until travelling days are finally done.

And however much affliction you may think you're going through. However greatly you may feel that you have sinned. However hard your providences may be.

[ 34 : 05 ] And even however harrowing death itself might be for you. He will keep on carrying you to the very end.

I have made. I will bear. I will carry. I will save. What a God we can lean on.  
This evening. Amen.