

# "Behold your God!"

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Date: 10 December 2023

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[0:00] Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Lord and Redeemer. Amen.

! If you read the weekly newsletter, especially the little blog that I write, some people chuckle because it's not so little sometimes, I'm sure, from the rector's desk.

The newsletter this week, I wrote that a good Advent practice is to listen to Andal's Messiah. This wonderful piece of music compiled almost entirely from Scripture.

He used the King James Version and the Covedal Psalter. And this piece of music is considered Andal's Magnum Opus. And the opening movement of that oratorio is actually the first five verses of our first reading this morning in Isaiah 40.

And you can imagine, I really loved, as I prepared the sermon, that the music was just sort of echoing in my head. And it's a wonderful thing.

[1:32] I do really encourage you, as an Advent practice, it's mine. And it's not originally mine.

Someone suggested it to me as well. An Advent practice and an Easter practice.

Only we practice to listen to the first part of Andal's Messiah during Advent. And the second and third parts during Easter. So it's a great time to just be saturated in Scripture and in wonderful music as well.

So that's my suggestion to you. So the wonderful beauty of this artistic work is that it serves in many ways.

For those who appreciate it, it serves as a moving soundtrack to the great story of God's saving plan and work in His Messiah.

And you know, we must take care, as Christians, not to be caught up in the world's rhythms. Do you know that the world has its own rhythms? The rhythms of the world makes God small and makes Him merely a means to our own ends.

[2:46] That's the world's ways. Whereas the God-ordained church rhythms invites us to see that we are not the main act of the story.

Rather, we are bit players. We are important because we are the beneficiaries of the great events. Of salvation. But we must know that it is God Himself who is the main actor.

Now, truly knowing this will, I believe, make this season of Advent and Christmas more bearable and enjoyable for us. Teaching our children to know this will serve them in good stead.

Christmas will not be primarily what we get from Santa. Even if He does give some nice goodies. But it will be primarily about the greater gift of Jesus Christ to the world.

And you know, if we are able to enter into this rhythm, there is true joy and contentment. When our story revolves around the great story.

[3:58] The great law of God's saving work in history. And that's what our passage in Isaiah 40, verse 1 to 11 points to this morning.

It is a beacon that shines a path towards the Messiah of God. The unfolding plan of God's salvation of humanity. Since our calamitous fall in the Garden of Eden.

It's an invitation, even, to lift our eyes from the trivialities of our mundane world. To behold your God.

As the prophet Isaiah says in verse 9. The sovereign who reigns over the affairs of this world. And orchestrates them. In his manifold wisdom.

Orchestrates all things towards his own desired end. Which is his glory. So I invite us, let us do that this morning. As we turn to this wonderful chapter in the book of Isaiah.

[5:02] It's on page 712 of your pew Bible. As always, I invite you to follow along. Now, chapter 40 of the book of Isaiah begins the second part of this three-part book.

The first part of Isaiah, chapters 1 to 39, can best be summarized in these words. Of the prophet to King Ayaz.

In chapter 7, Isaiah 7, 9. Isaiah says this to the king. If you don't stand firm in faith. You will not be able to stand at all.

That phrase summarizes the first part of the book of Isaiah. Because that's what happened exactly to Israel. Israel failed to stand on God's promises by faith.

Israel chose instead to seek security. By making allegiances with pagan kings and pagan gods. And serving their gods.

[6:05] And God judged them for their faithlessness. And the prophecy of captivity was pronounced upon Israel.

It's actually there in chapter 39, verse 6. Where the prophet Isaiah says to King Ezekiah. Behold, the days are coming.

When all that is in your house. And that which your fathers have stored up. Till this day shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left.

Says the Lord. This is the culmination of the prophecy about captivity. About the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

And the people of God being taken in captivity to exile. This is the context in which we come to chapter 40.

[7:03] It's in the context of a series of prophecies of impending judgment. Judgment and the prophecy of the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

And in their context. This is a prophecy of national and spiritual calamity. For Israel.

For Jerusalem to fall. For the temple to fall. But God. During this prophecy of judgment and ruin.

Gave another prophecy to his servant Isaiah.

Isaiah was told to prophesy hope. A new beginning. A new work of God. And that's the chorus line.

Of the second part of Isaiah. From chapter 40 to 55. And it's echoed here. In this first 11 verses.

[8:05] As the prophet Isaiah says. Behold your God. He reigns over the whole earth. And will bring about a mighty salvation.

He will bring about a new and greater exodus. And so verse 1 to 2 was the commissioning of the messengers. The people. After defeat.

And bondage in Babylon. Are encouraged. To remember God's promise. Of an even greater deliverance. Than the deliverance that they had.

From slavery in Egypt. God's aim. Through Isaiah. Through Isaiah. Is to help Israel. Israel to see beyond. Their present circumstance.

Of being under judgment. His aim is to encourage them. To have faith. In God's promises. And purpose for his people.

[9:01] So that. Even while they are in exile. In Babylon. A faithful remnant. That trusts. In God's unwavering word.

Will remain. And so. The prophet says. Behold your God. And the words begin there. In verse 40. Verse 1. Comfort. That's the word.

Comfort. Comfort. My people. Says your God. Now. Comfort here. Does not mean. Being snug. Under a warm blanket. With a cup of hot cocoa.

In your hand. That's not a comfort that. That the prophet Isaiah has in mind. It's not creature comforts. It's not ease. Really. Per se. That's not what the prophet Isaiah has in mind.

The Hebrew word. Used here. For comfort. Actually means. To bring new life. Into something. And even. You know. The word comfort itself.

[10:00] Before the 17th century. The understanding of the word. Comfort. Means. To strengthen. And so. This is what we should have in mind.

When we read this. Comfort. Comfort. Comfort. My people. Says your God. Breathe new life. Strengthen. Consone. God commanding new life.

In his people. A command. A command. To strengthen them. And to restore them. From their weakened estate. And this command. Is addressed. Three times.

In these 11 verses. To three different voices. In verse 3. We hear. We see a voice. Crying in the wilderness. In verse 6. We see a voice. Asking.

What shall I cry? And then in verse 7. The voice. We see the voice of those. Who bring good tidings. These voices. Are messengers. Commanded by God.

[10:59] To bring a message. To strengthen. The people of God. And what's the comfort. Of strengthening. Being proclaimed. To Israel here. Look there in verse 2.

The comfort proclaimed. Is that God himself. Stepping into the pages. Of history. Coming in. To accomplish. That which must be done.

To redeem us. From sin. From death. From bondage. And that's the language. There in verse 2. Warfare is ended.

Iniquity is pardoned. The remnant. Receive a cessation to war. They receive a pardon. For their crimes. And it's summed up.

In the phrase. She. That is Jerusalem. As received. From the Lord's. Hand. Double. For all her sins. Now.

[11:59] You read that. And you might think. That God has punished Israel. Doubly. For her sins. But actually. The literal translation there. Is that.

She has received. A doublet. And what that means. Is that. The punishment. That is owed. Because Israel. Is being justly punished.

Because of its rebellion. And fittleness. But the punishment. That Israel. Hose. That the people of God. Hold. For their sins.

That punishment. Has been matched. Or has been met. And so. It's a doublet. It's as if you. You take a piece of paper.

You fold it. In equal act. So that. The sin is here. And the payment. Miss. What's required. In punishment. That's the. That's the language there. So the Lord's.

[12:53] And so. She has received. From the Lord's hand. Double. For all her sins. Notice that the sin. Has not been overlooked.

Rather. The sin. Has been expiated. Or in other words. It's been atoned for. The debt. That's owed. Has been truly satisfied. By. Another. And so much so. Fully satisfied. That nothing else. Is owed. That's the language. There. At the end of verse 2. And then we see. In verse 3 to 5. The first voice. God's power.

Declaring the revelation. Of his glory. The voice proclaims. That God is coming back. To his land. To his people. To dwell among them. The comfort.

[13:50] To be explained. In verse 3 to 5. The picture here. Is of a great construction. Taking place. Look at it. A voice cries in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight. In the desert. A highway for our God. And every valley. Shall be lifted up. And every mountain. And hill. Be made low. The unheaven ground.

Shall become level. And the rough places. A plain. And the glory. Of the Lord. Shall be revealed. And all flesh. Shall see it.

Together. For the mouth. Of the Lord. Has spoken. Look at the physical pictures. The imagery. Being painted here. And what they symbolize.

And we know that. In light of our gospel reading. Today. In Mark 1. 3. A voice of one. Crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way up. For the Lord. Make his path straight.

[14:50] That prophecy. Was fulfilled. The New Testament. The New Testament. Shows us. That the end. Of the exile. Really. And the fulfillment. Of those promises.

Does not really come. Until Jesus Christ. Comes on the scene. Jesus. Who is the Lord. Foretold. In Isaiah.

Comes now. To dwell among his people. And a messenger. Is sent. To prepare his way. This messenger. Is John the Baptist.

He is the voice. Crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way. For the Lord. Make his path straight. And look at the language. Of this great construction work. In preparation.

For the coming of the Lord. Valleys will be lifted. Mountains will be brought low. Uneven grounds will become level. Rough places will become plain.

[15:48] This is imagery. But it's really pointing. And when John the Baptist. Came on the scene. He didn't. He didn't. Start up. A plan of great construction.

Of roads to Jerusalem. Did he? That's not what. That's not the. The. This is imagery. To talk about the human heart. What is John's. The Baptist message.

In preparation. For the Lord's coming. It's a. It's a cry. To repent. Isn't it? It's our heart. The rough. Hewn places of our heart.

To be made plain. The mountains. To be made low. The valleys. To be lifted up. In our hearts. To make ourselves. In our own hearts.

Ready. For the coming. And appearing. Of the Lord. And when this God comes. This Lord appears. He will come in power. And glory. To make himself known.

[16 : 43] Jesus being God. Displayed. The essential nature. Of God to us. His glory. This is why John himself. The Apostle John. Can say. Speaking of Jesus.

We have seen his glory. Glory as of the only begotten son of the father. And he continues. This glory is full of grace. And truth. The fullness.

Of his grace. And truth. Will be shown to all people. Isaiah tells us. In verse 5. All flesh shall see it together. It will not be hidden. He comes in undeniable power.

To make himself known to all flesh. And then the second voice. Talks of God's eternity. And the sureness.

Of God's word. So verse 6 begins. A voice. Cry. A voice says. Cry. And I said. What shall I cry? And this is.

[17 : 44] What is to cry? All flesh is grass. And all its beauty. Is like the flower of the field. The grass withers. The flower fades. When the breath of the Lord blows on it.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withers. The flower fades. But the word of our God. Will stand forever.

We know this to be true. Don't we? All earthly glory. All earthly glory. Is like a fading grass. Nothing of this world lasts.

I mean in the context of Isaiah. Not even insurmountable powers. Like the Babylonian kingdom. Will last. We know they were supplanted.

By the even greater Persians. The Persian kingdom. Which itself was supplanted. By Alexander the Great. Which itself was supplanted.

[18 : 47] By the Roman Empire. And so on and so on. What may seem like an insurmountable power. And great force. Nothing in this earth.

Lasts. Forever. It all fades. It is all destined for destruction. And notice here. That the course. Of their fading. Is actually the breath of the Lord. When the breath of the Lord blows on it. It fades. Here is the description. That God is the giver of life. And he is also. Ultimately. The taker. Of life. All life exists.

At his. At his discretion. And at his power. The very breath. That you breathe. It's by. God. The giver of life.

[19 : 46] Allowing it. To be so. He breathes life. And he takes life. Such is his prerogative. But we can be assured.

That in the face. Of our mortality. And in the face. Of our finitude. We can be assured. Of this. Sure word. The word. Of our God.

Will stand. Forever. So that when God speaks. When he moves. To act. It is as sure. As done. No one else.

No one else. And nothing else. Is as dependable. And worthy. Of our trust. As Yahweh is.

Mountains.

Are leveled. And valleys. Are filled. At the word. Of his power. And while. All around. Withers. And fades away. His word. Of promise.

[20 : 43] Will stand. Forever. Apostle Peter says this. In our epistle reading. The Lord is not slow. To fulfill his promise.

As some count slowness. But is patient towards you. Not wishing that any should perish. But that all should reach repentance. Is repentance. So.

While we wait. While it seems. It seems that. The promises of God. Tarry. We ought to actually see that. The patience of God. Is.

Is. Is. Is. Kindness towards us. To bring us. To repentance. And that second voice. Cries to us. The voice of that. The second voice cries.

And the cry is. For us to remember. That God. Keeps his word. And then the third voice. In verse 9 to 11. Speaks of God's presence.

[21 : 42] God's presence. In might. And as a shepherd of his flock. Verse 9 begins. And he says. Go on. Up to a high mountain.

O Zion. Herald of good news. Zion. Is also used. Is another word. Used to refer to Jerusalem. Notice that. So far. The news.

The voice. Has been coming to Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem. Is meant to. The people of God. Are to hear this. News. And then dare themselves. Are to go. And declare.

The news. So. Go up to a high mountain. O Zion. Herald of good news. Lift up your voice. With strength. O Jerusalem. Herald of good news. Lift it up. Fear not.

Fear not. Say to the cities of Judah. And in our context. Say to the cities. Of Syracuse.

[22 : 41] Of Auburn. Cato. Whatever town. Around this area. You're from. And further. Even to the city. Of New York. Say.

Behold. Your God. Behold. The Lord. Comes with might. And his arms. Rules for him. Behold. His reward. Is with him. And his recompense.

Before him. He will turn his flock. Like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs. In his arms. He will carry them. In his bosom. And gently lead those. That are with young. Behold.

Your God. The third voice. Cries out. Declare the good news. From tops of mountains. That God himself. God himself.

Is the one. Who is coming. In. The messenger. The messenger of the Lord. Is actually. God himself.

Here is your God. John the Baptist.

[23 : 40] Testified. Of the might. Of the one. Who comes after him. He says. Of this person. This messenger of God. He who is mightier than I. The strap.

Of whose sandals. I am unworthy. To stoop down. And untie. He said. Such is the greatness. And the worth. The worthiness. Of this.

One who is coming. That even the menial. Servant like. Task. Of untying. The straps. Of his sandals. Which is reserved. For the lowest. Of the lowest.

John the Baptist. Says. I am not even worthy. To do that menial task. As to untie. The strap. Of his sandals. Such is he who is coming. Who is mightier than I. Verse 10.

Describes him. As a mighty warrior. He says. He comes in might. And he comes in victory. He is a dread warrior. Whom no one can stand against.

[24 : 41] Do you have a picture of Jesus. As a dread warrior. Or is Jesus just this. You know. Easy going. You know. Sort of. Thing you put in your pocket book.

You know. That's not Jesus. That's not the Jesus. That's portrayed in the books. In the pages of the New Testament. Here. Isaiah tells us.

Of his. Of the nature of this. Of this one who comes. He's a dread warrior. No one can stand against him. He has sovereign power. The power of life. And death.

He has it in his breath. And he comes in his mighty home. To deal with us. In judgment. Or does he? He comes.

In that power. That he has. But he does not come. In judgment. At least not. At his first advent.

[25 : 36] He comes. He comes. With his remnant. As his reward. He comes. As a shepherd. That's how he comes. Verse 11 shows us. He will tend.

His flock. Like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs. In his arms. He will carry them. In his bosom. That is close to his heart. And gently lead them.

Lead those that are. With young. The good shepherd. This lord. This dread warrior. Comes as a good shepherd.

He exercises. His sovereign power. In a personal. In a personal. And intimate. Care. Over his flock. He will come.

In power. As someone else. Puts it. He comes. Through the trackless desert. So that nothing. Can resist. His advance.

[26 : 34] The person. Who comes. In such a manner. Is also the one. Who gathers. The lambs. In his arms. And carries them. Close to his heart. Can I invite you.

This morning. To eat the word. Of the prophet Isaiah. In verse 9. Can I invite you. To behold your God.

To see him. As he truly is. As both king. And shepherd. To see. To see that. The same harm. Of strength. By which he governs.

The world. Is the same harm. That he uses. To shepherd lovingly. And tend to you. The harm. Which governs. The days. And times. The arm. Which governs. All of history. Is the same harm.

That strengthens. The weak. And feeds. The flock.

[27 : 34] Behold. Your God. Isaiah 40. Is for us. Brothers and sisters. As much as it is. For Isaiah's original audience.

I think in fact. It is more for us. The people of God. Those who have come. To trust in Jesus. Because. In him.

We see. God's glory. Revealed. In Jesus Christ. We. Are in fact. The ones. Whose sins. Are forgiven.

We are the ones. Whose pardon. Whose iniquity. Has been pardoned. Because of Jesus. His attorney and work.

On our behalf. The warfare. Is ended. The hostility. That is caused. By. Your sin. And my sin. Is over.

[28 : 31] Because. He has pardoned you. The penalty. For those sins. That you commit. Past. Present. And future. The penalty.

For them. For all them sins. Has been paid for. By Jesus. On the cross. But he is the God. Of power.

Who none. Can resist. Also. Be mindful. Of that. None. Can resist him. It might seem.

That. It's easy. To resist. Now. And. I think. It was. It seemed like that. For the people of Israel.

Even the faithful remnant. Who saw. Israel.

Jerusalem. Being destroyed. Who were taken. To captivity. A faithful remnant. Like Daniel. Who had to live. Exiles. Like Elzise.

[29 : 23] In a foreign land. And it might seem. Like that for you. Even now. But here. Is God's word. He is.

Irresistible. You either submit. And bend the knee. In submission. And obedience. And love.

To his majesty. Or you will be compelled. At his second advent. You will be compelled. All. Will bend the knee.

Whether in love. Or in subjection. And judgment. All. Will bend the knee. This. This. This. Is. This. Is. God.

lip. That. In. This. Is. In. As. In. This. In. This. This. is. The. is. your. God. In. This. not. name. lip. lip.

lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. It. as. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. Not even death could resist him.

[30 : 22] Our king and shepherd has come. He rules as Lord in all areas of life. Does he rule as Lord over every area of your life? And he's coming again, we're told, to judge the living and the dead.

He knows you. If you've placed your trust in him, he knows you. He loves you. He tends to you.

He's promised to tend to you and to carry you close to his heart.

He is your good shepherd. So as you think of the great story, and you think of your story this morning, the question for us, all of us, is which story do you want to participate in?

Do you want to participate in that great story in which Jesus Christ himself is the main actor? Do you want your life to be in participation with that story?

Or will you be like fittest Israel and the world in its rebellion and attempt to write your own story independent of him?

[31 : 43] The reality is that all other stories must bend at the end to the one true tale of God's King and Messiah.

Will you willingly allow him to envelop you into his story as one of his sheep and trust him to keep you to the end?

Or will you be like unfaithful Israel? This Advent season, brothers and sisters, I invite you to come to the shepherd king and trust yourself to his keeping.

And trust yourself to his keeping. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.