

Glimpses of Glory God Arrives

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone, my name's Steve, Senior Pastor here. If you've just checked in with us, we are partway through the book of Isaiah. You could grab your Bibles, open up at Isaiah 40.

And also the St. Paul's app has an outline for today's message. The most memorable moment of the movie, *The Meg*, at least for me, and there's not many of them in the movie that is. In fact, one of the biggest surprises of the movie, that it was successful enough in order to require a sequel later this year. But for the most memorable thing for me was the first glimpse of the Megalodon.

A child is playing with a ball or something in this glass walkway in this under-ocean base. And then it sort of goes dark.

She senses something is there. There's a presence there. And then slowly from the shadows appears this Megalodon.

[1 : 04] And it is right there against the glass. As we... And of course it bites the glass in attempting to eat her. As we turn to the opening verses of Isaiah 40, the word is that something is coming and it is big.

It is God who is coming. And the question is for God's people Israel, Judah in Babylon at this point, is he on their side or not?

Is this big thing a friend or a foe? If you were here last week, you may recall, as we're in chapters 36 and 37, that the great victory of God over the Assyrian army, where he wiped out 185,000 of their soldiers in one night, and Judah didn't even lift a finger.

A couple of chapters later, you know, it's an amazing victory. And then a couple of chapters later, Isaiah predicts that Judah will end up in exile in Babylon because of the faithlessness once again of the people.

And it happened 100 years later. And so as we open up Isaiah 40, as we have just done, Judah is no longer being addressed in Isaiah's own day.

[2 : 36] He is now being projected forward, Isaiah is projected forward by the Holy Spirit into the future where Judah is now in exile in Babylon.

That's the context of Isaiah 40. God's people are in Babylon under oppression from the Babylonian empire. And they think that God has abandoned them in this moment.

Where is God? They are facing political crisis, but more significantly, a spiritual crisis. And God comes to his crisis-riddled people in chapter 40.

And in verse 9, Isaiah declares, here is your God. Here is your God. And so what sort of God is he? Amazingly, for the Jews of the Babylonian exile, this is a message of consolation and hope and not one of judgment.

[3 : 47] And so if you've got the St. Paul's app in front of you, who is coming, what is his arrival like, and how do we respond to his arrival? So the answer is who is coming is in verse 3, Isaiah 40.

Get your Bibles open again. Don't trust my word. Get your Bibles open and see it for yourself. Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. A voice of one calling, in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up. Every mountain will be made low. The rugged places shall become level.

The rugged places are plain. So Isaiah hears a voice, and this voice is calling for a construction project.

Now, the ancient listener tuning in at this point, into this message from Isaiah, would have known exactly what Isaiah is referring to here.

[4 : 49] And especially the ancient person, the person of Judah, sitting in Babylon, knows exactly that when Isaiah says these words, he's expecting a great king, or a divine king coming.

You see, these verses are a combination of the ancient picture of the Lord coming to the aid of his people with the ancient practice of constructing processional highways for visiting dignitaries or for the use by the gods as they are carried throughout the empire.

There is an ancient hymn from Babylonia announcing the journey of the Babylonian god Nebo throughout the Babylonian empire.

And the hymn says this, Whenever the gods were transported throughout the empire, they made a road specifically for the god to be carried with the king.

And the idea here of knocking down every barrier and bridging every gap symbolizes getting rid of every resistance to the progress of the king, the divine king.

[6 : 27] Nothing is to get in his way. Nothing is to be held back from this king. It also symbolizes here the healing influence of genuine kingship.

This king comes to an impassable wilderness, and now it's passable. This desert wilderness is inhabitable, and now it's habitable.

Isaiah is trying to help Judah see that a supreme king was coming for them. That even then they're in exile, a supreme king was coming, and their god had not abandoned them.

He would never abandon them. See, with a human king, you build a bridge over a valley.

When this king comes, the valley is filled up. The language in these verses just bursts the banks.

[7 : 39] You know, a road through the mountain pass isn't made. The mountains are brought down and gotten rid of. You see, what Isaiah is doing here is he's drawing on one of the deepest, deepest hopes of humanity.

Not just Judah, but of all of humanity. It's like he's saying, the whole world is a wilderness.

It's a desert. It's a wasteland. Death, disease, war, poverty, injustice, exile. The whole world is filled with brokenness.

Why? Because the world in which we live is under the control, if you like, under the rule of incompetent managers.

Like a really bad business. Incompetent managers that are just driving it into bankruptcy. And those incompetent managers are us.

[8 : 51] Verses six and seven talk about we're just like flowers of the field. We come, we go. Our lives are being led by incompetent leaders.

Us. That's why Judah is in exile. They did it their way. And only the good king can bring ultimate healing and renewal.

Verse five, we get a glimpse into who this good king is. It says, the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together. For the whole world to see the Lord together means that this Lord must be coming from outside of the world.

That's the hope of humanity right there. A king that comes from beyond the world. Now, I know that there are some who are convinced that what I just said is nothing more than a fairy tale.

But I want to ask, is it really? Is it really? One of the principles that we know to be true in nature, in our world, is called survival of the fittest.

[10 : 22] That is, the strong dominate the weak. It's everywhere in life. And yet, on another hand, if people act like that, we see it amongst the animal kingdom and everything, but if people act like that, we say, no, that's not right.

You can't do that. The strong can't dominate the weak. There's something wrong. Whether it be strong people or strong nations who pick on the weak and the vulnerable, we say that's wrong.

So, think about it then. If it's everywhere in nature, and yet we as human beings call it wrong, either the world is a monster or we are freaks because our value systems and our emotions are out of kilter with the natural world.

They can't both be right. Either our value systems are distorted or nature is disordered. If you want to believe that there's no God outside of this world, then how can nature be disordered if nature and science is all we've got?

Because the very principle of science is it's based on an ordered world. So, if you want to say there is no God and science is all we've got, stop talking about value systems.

[12 : 00] Stop talking about justice. You can't do it. If nature is all we've got, then death and violence can't be called wrong.

It is in fact the super nature, the supernatural, beyond nature, that in fact what makes death and violence and injustice wrong.

How can it be true that the weak need to be protected unless there is something outside of this world? We certainly don't get that idea that the weak need protecting from the world itself.

In fact, the only way we can say that the world is broken is from a standard that exists beyond this world that tells us it's broken.

And passages like Isaiah 40 makes perfect sense of how our hearts and our emotions feel. The Bible tells us there is a king outside and that this world is a wilderness, it's a wasteland, it's desolate.

[13:21] It's like our hearts are tuning into this king, into his justice like a radio picks up radio waves.

And Judah's only hope in this wasteland that they're finding themselves in in Babylon is that this king would come, that he would arrive. Well, several hundred years after Isaiah prophesied the arrival of the God king from outside of this world, Mark opens his biography on the life of Jesus Christ with this, the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

He is saying that what follows in my biography is good news. Good news. Jesus is the long-awaited king from beyond the world.

He is God himself. And then Mark quotes Isaiah 40 verse 3, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Now we are told in the very next verse in Mark chapter 1 that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, the voice in the wilderness is the voice of John the Baptist. That means that the king that was coming outside of the world to his people is the one to whom Jesus, sorry, the one whom John points to.

[14:58] Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is Jesus Christ who is the God king beyond this world who renews all things, who brings the mountains down and the valleys up, who turns the wilderness into a habitable wonderland, a paradise.

The God who comes with power to rule is Jesus. And we see that in the early stages of his ministry, feeding the poor, healing the sick, welcoming the outcast, touching the lepers.

And Isaiah says to the whole world, look, there is your God right there.

So what is his arrival like? Is he a megalodon coming to smash everyone?

Isaiah 1 verses chapter 1 to 39, the first major section of Isaiah is primarily Isaiah articulating the standards of the king from beyond the world.

[16:19] The standards of God himself. And when you look at those standards, it's obvious that not a single person escapes. Not a single person lives up to it.

Everyone has tried to rule their own lives. Everyone's attempted to control their own lives. Everyone has turned against the king and sinned. And we should expect the king to come when he comes like a megalodon.

But, you know, a king with a massive sword. ready to smite, to seek vengeance for us rejecting him. And yet you open Isaiah 40 and the very first words are, comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. What?

Comfort? Comfort? Then it says, speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been complete.

[17:23] The statement her hard service means her struggle. And we are told here that the struggle is now complete. God's not abandoned them at all.

Why? And the answer is the second half of verse 2. her sin has been paid for. Judah's sin has been paid for by 70 years in exile in Babylon.

Well, that can't be right. How can a finite amount of punishment pay for an infinite debt? And yet we also know that after they return from exile in Babylon, they do exactly what verse 6 and 7 says, they are faithless people like flowers, they shine for a moment and they just die, the circle of faithlessness is there again.

After they return from exile, they still operate as if they were in exile. Almost immediately they go back to their rebellion and oppress other nations.

there's more sin to pay for. And so Isaiah's prophecy here looks forward to a greater payment for sin.

[18 : 46] And in fact, this section Father Isaiah 40 to 55, which is the next section, talking about this king, it's in chapter 53, it refers to the servant of the Lord who is crushed for their iniquities.

God has laid on the servant of the Lord this great king who has come in Isaiah 40. Our sin, all of our sin and our faithlessness has been transferred to this king.

Judah's sin, our sin, are on the servant of the Lord, this great renewing king who comes in Isaiah 40. but we are told that his payment means that we receive from the Lord's hand double for our sin. That doesn't seem right, does it? I mean, when you read that double, the payment's been doubled, does that mean that Judah has received double punishment? It deserved 100% but it got a 200% payment?

Well, that doesn't seem right, that seems quite unjust, doesn't it? And yet when you read it, the word punishment's not there. It's double payment, not double punishment.

[20 : 11] What does that mean? Look at the extraordinary picture of what happens when this king shows up in verse 9. 10. In verse 10, we are told he is the sovereign lord with power.

He rules with a mighty arm. And how is he exercising his might? How is he using his power?

Verse 11, he tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lamb in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young.

that's the king that our hearts tell us that he's there.

He's there. We need him to be there. This is a king who exercises his mighty power to see justice for the oppressed, to lift up the lowly.

[21 : 22] A warrior king, a very powerful warrior king, who is a shepherd calling his sheep by their name. Verse 10 tells us his reward is with him.

This mighty king as he comes. What is this reward? What do you give a king who it says in chapter 40 the oceans are in the palm of his hands?

The nations are just a drop in a bucket. What do you give someone who has everything? His reward that's with him is his flock.

That's who he's carrying in his arms, close to his heart. The exiled ones, the weak ones. So how can this king who is powerful and just enough, so just in fact, to put down all injustice and evil in the world and glorious enough for the whole world to see him, but also look at us in all of our facelessness, like little flowers that pop up and disappear in the desert, all of our weaknesses and flaws, how is it possible that he would call us his reward?

Double payment. That's how. Double payment. We see all this Isaiah 40 come together in the person of Jesus Christ, the King, the Son of God.

[23 : 06] On a very dark night, a little over 2,000 years ago, just outside the city limits of Jerusalem, Jesus struggled with his father.

it was a struggle that took him to the cross and from the garden of Gethsemane, he sweated tears of blood as he wrestled with what was about to come.

Until he shed his blood on the cross. And while that was happening, his disciples are over there sleeping. At very best, they could see him going through it, but they never participated in it.

Until eventually, the soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus in order to convict him and execute him.

And at that moment, Peter jumps up from his feet, whips out his sword, and strikes off the ear of the high priest. We are ready to battle for you, Jesus.

[24 : 20] And Jesus turns to Pete, oh, put that sword away. Put it away. What a pitiful display of power.

You don't think my arms are strong enough, that my arms are not mighty enough to smite every sin? I can destroy every enemy of mine?

You don't think I can do that by myself? I can call down legions of angels if I want to. put the sword away. I will show you strength.

I will show you power, Peter, and the nations and the world, and you'll all see it when I surrender my hands to the cross.

You will see my strength and my majesty and my glory, and you'll see it in my weakness as I lay down my life for the sheep.

[25 : 30] And as I spread out my arms, I will gather you to my heart. Double payment, 2 Corinthians 5, 21, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Only Jesus Christ can answer the question, how can God give double? In Jesus, God does not just pardon sinners. he imputes his righteousness in us and on us in such a way that we are his treasure.

We don't just get pardon, we get reward. 2 Corinthians 5 says he doesn't just take away our punishment, he shares with us the reward of what his obedience deserves.

He gives both so that we become his reward. Let me just pause here. Actually, you're not going to pause, I'm going to keep going.

So many people who identify as Christians live a miserable life. Miserable, faithful, what they would describe as a faithful life because they don't understand the doubleness of salvation in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 07] They live the Christian life as if they've just got a pardon. Sins are forgiven. All a pardon does to you is it takes you to the exit door of the prison.

That's all it does. It does not give you an abundant life in any way whatsoever. ever. Too many only grasp that they're pardoning Jesus.

It's like Jesus only just done what he needed to do to get me out of hell. But now it's up to me to live life that pleases him in some kind of way. And too many live as if they are pardoned but not accepted.

Not his treasure, not loved. We get doubling Jesus. Jesus was obedient to his father's will.

He lived the perfect life. And unlike us he didn't go astray and rebel against God the father. And when he came to bring justice to raise the valleys and lower the mountains his glory was not only revealed in his miracle but it was primarily revealed in his death on the cross.

[28 : 17] His power was displayed in humble service. He went to the cross in weakness. He faced exile from his father.

His father turned his face from him. And he died the death that we should have died for our rebellion. And when we put our trust in Jesus our bad record isn't just credited to him but his perfect record is credited to us.

So that we get treated as if in the way that he gets treated that's double payment. So how do we respond?

The answer is right at the end of the chapter. It says that those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. How do we treat Jesus as this great king?

well it says we hope in him. We hope in the Lord. Now five things really quickly. Firstly hope means obey.

[29 : 31] We don't treat him as if he is the glorious king if we're not saying with our lives not my will be done but your will be done. In every area nothing held back whatsoever.

Nothing held back. As Christian author Elizabeth Elliott used to say the hardest thing to give is in. The hardest thing to give is in.

To give in. To give him the right to rule our lives. Secondly hope means rest. Hope means that his schedule not ours.

Hope means God knows what is best. Worry, anxiety, fear always means that if I oversaw the world I would not I would know exactly what's required.

That's what hope, fear and anxiety means. It means if I ruled the world I know exactly what's required to run this world properly. And as soon as we humble ourselves under the Lord of history we actually find rest, even rest amongst the chaos.

[30 : 47] Thirdly hope means expect. If it's true that the Lordship of God is a healing influence then we don't treat Jesus as king if we don't have high expectations of what he can achieve in us and through us.

There are too many Christian pessimists who don't treat Jesus as king, who pray consistently qualified prayers.

Do you look at the problems of this world, the problems of your own life and just think, well nothing can be done about it? John Newton, the great John Newton wrote a hymn with these words in it.

Thou art coming to a king, large petitions to him bring, his grace and power as such, none can ever ask too much. Fourthly, hope means proclaim.

The sovereign Lord of the universe has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ to pay our debt of sin through his death and to share the spoils of victory through his resurrection.

