

Good News; Great God; Gentle Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Now turn to the passage that we read, prophecy of Isaiah chapter 40, and we may read again at verse 9.

Get you 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. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God. Behold the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him.

Behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend 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. The first psalm that we sung together here this evening presents to us a doleful picture of what exiled Jews experienced during the period referred to as the captivity.

[1 : 19] It was a time of deep sorrow for the Jewish people, compounded by perplexity as the covenant.

People tried to analyze their providence and where they stood regarding their place in the purposes of God.

The very opening words of the psalm indicate to us how praise emotionally is impossible for them.

They were severely distraught by the waters of Babylon. There we sat down and wept when we remembered it.

Their pain comes across in the opening stanzas of the psalm, as they reflect on the trial occasioned by their providence.

[2 : 17] Some would contend that they were subjected to ridicule by their captors, as they requested that they sing the songs of Zion.

I am not too sure in my own mind if that is entirely clear from the scriptures. But it is a possibility, knowing how human nature operates.

But how could they sing the songs that spoke of the loveliness of God's dwelling place, when they themselves were plunged into such deep, dark, intense sorrow, and so far removed from where the temple had been?

It was a time to weep. But they did not break their musical instruments. Had they been overwhelmed by despair, I think they may have been tempted to do so.

Instead, they hung them on trees, creating the impression that one day, one day they would again play these instruments and sing the songs of Zion.

[3 : 39] The hope was still there. But to do so then would only accentuate their sense of pathos and yearning for the land of covenant promise.

You may be asking, what bearing does that have on our text this evening? Well, from this perspective, Isaiah is addressing a nation who are to be brought into exile because of their flagrant departure from their covenant relationship with God.

The emphasis of the message given by the servant of God is comfort. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

May not be initially obvious from the text, but this is something that is repeatedly given.

Say it, says your God. Could best be understood as God keeps saying this over and over and over again.

[4 : 55] There has not been a period in the history but that the people of God have been living in circumstances of affliction and distress.

It is not something that is unique to the captivity. It is something that is in the lives of the people of God in every generation.

So it is therefore a relevant message to the immediate audience in exile or about to be placed in exile. Behold, the days are coming.

In chapter 39, when all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up to this day shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord.

And so that comfort is found primarily in the fact that God has a plan. You find that in verse 5, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

[6 : 04] Yes, you might say that has eschatological note to it or theme to it. When the Lord shall come, as he inevitably must, in the majesty and splendor and greatness on the last day.

But I don't think we are meant just to read into it the events of the last day. But we must also read into it the promise of the revelation of God himself in human nature in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

And that is guaranteed to be fulfilled. Only the short-sighted and the foolish ignore the message. How do we know it's guaranteed?

Because the Bible tells us the mouth of the Lord has spoken. And whatever God speaks, you can be sure it will most certainly be fulfilled.

The promise, as I say, initially points to the incarnation of Christ. Isaiah looks forward to that time.

[7 : 27] The Apostle John looks back to that time. Remember how as an old man he began his gospel narrative.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. Or the Word was face to face with God.

And the Word was God. What does he tell us about the Word? The Word became flesh. And dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory.

There is John looking back to what God had promised through the prophet. Isaiah. Where Isaiah says the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

And John reflects on the glory that was revealed. The glory of the only Son. From the Father full of grace and truth. John is able to reflect on this when the revelation that is predicted in Isaiah has come to pass.

[8 : 36] And so the prophet turns to the transient nature of man in this passage. More especially, I think, the untrustworthiness of man.

In comparison to the enduring nature of divine commitment and truth. All flesh is grass.

And all its beauty is like the flower of the field, writes the prophet. The grass withers. The flower fades. And that is not just setting before us the transient nature of man.

It is also setting before us the, I suppose, for want of a better phrase, the unreliability of man.

It reinforces the message of human impotence when it comes to salvation. And in direct contrast, the word of our God will stand forever.

[9 : 40] Father, how grateful you are in an ever-changing world, in an ever-changing life, that the word of God stands forever.

That this word is sure and certain. Because the God who has given us the scriptures and he alone has the power to achieve what he has purpose to do.

And so in this section, from 9 to 11, I've labelled it the section of the three G's.

The first G is good news. And the second G is a great God. And the third G, a gentle shepherd.

Because these, it seems to me, are the three themes that are highlighted in these verses 9 to 11. Good news, great God, and a gentle shepherd.

[10 : 47] Just to keep the alliteration. In other words, let the message be proclaimed, is the emphasis of the opening part of this section in verse 9.

Let the good news be proclaimed confidently and loudly, without hesitation or equivocation.

In other words, there is a compulsion to share the good news. There is a very real sense in which every believer is to participate in proclaiming the good news.

Remember the example we have in the New Testament of the fired-up messenger of good news. He could not contain his exuberance or his sheer delight at the discovery he made.

And the congregation to which he preached was converted. Do you remember the name of the proclaimer? His name was Andrew.

[12 : 06] Do you remember the text from which he preached? We, he says, have found the Messiah, which means Christ.

Yes, there was only a congregation of one. Simon, Peter's brother. And Simon, Peter is brought to Christ through the message that is proclaimed by Andrew.

To become an effective ambassador for Christ in the world. And every ambassador is doing what Paul says we proclaim.

What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. You're not there to reflect yourself or project yourself, but to reflect Christ and to project Christ.

And there ought to be a sense of awe and reverence as we proclaim the message, the good news, about one who is so majestic and glorious and who has captivated our lives.

[13 : 23] And your trust will captivate the lives of others in directing them to him. And so the prophet passes on.

I only want briefly to mention verses 9 and 10 because I want to focus a little more on verse 11. You find the prophet passing on to the second G.

Behold your God. Three times in the context, Our attention is drawn to this great God.

And that in itself is reason for us to stop. The word behold has implied in it, Ponder, consider, reflect upon, meditate on.

All of that, it seems to me, is enshrined in this little word, Behold. Behold the one who is unchanging.

[14 : 38] Behold the one who is unchanging in his life, in his character, in his truth, and in his ways. Behold the one who is majestic.

And you note how the writer in this chapter expands on his theme as if he is carried away by the great creator God.

And he expands on that down through the chapter and the verses that we haven't read. As if God were saying, Look at what I have done.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heaven with a span, closed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.

Can you and I do this? And the answer is a resounding no. But says this great God, I did. The nations, despite their great power, are before him as nothing.

[15 : 43] You may have seen in the media recently, the combined exercise and display of military power by Russia and China.

And it may have seemed very impressive, as you viewed all that military armor that they had and wished to use.

But, says God, the nations, despite their great power, are as nothing.

The nations, he says, are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as the dust on the scales, how minute and insignificant in comparison to this great God.

Look at the world population and the many millions that are found in the world at any one time. But how insignificant in comparison to the planet Earth and to the many stars in the galaxy.

[16 : 49] We may be dwarfed by it all. When you look up on a starry winter's night, you may say to yourself, what is man? As you look up to the heavens and you may, with the psalmist, reflect upon the insignificance of man in comparison to the wonders of creation as you admire it.

But you see, this God, we are called to behold, he dwarfs the whole of creation. It is he who sits above the circle of the Earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.

Oh, behold your God, says the prophet, because he rules supremely, the undisputed ruler of the universe.

What is true of this God? The Lord is the everlasting God, says the prophet. The creator of the ends of the Earth, he does not faint or grow weary.

And you know, one day, you too will be like him. How do we know? They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

[18 : 11] They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run, not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Here is the prophet setting before us, the great creator of God who is unwearied.

Never weary. You and I, we grow weary many times, don't we? many things cause us to be wearied in our pilgrimage.

But one day, for every person in Christ, you shall be like him. And so, you shall run and not be weary and walk and not faint.

You shall be like the great creator God. God. And so, that brings me to the third G, the gentle shepherd. And just, like to expand on that a little.

The language that is chosen here is most suggestive. God is like a shepherd. And shepherd is a recurring theme in the Old Testament.

[19 : 23] David referred to it in his role as king in Israel. Times passed. When Saul was king over us, say the people of Israel, it was you who led out and brought in Israel.

And the Lord said to you, You shall be shepherd of my people Israel. You shall be prince over Israel. That's why they anointed him.

He chose David, his servant, and took him from the sheepfold, from following the youths great with young.

He brought him to feed or to shepherd Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance. And you remember how the psalmist, how he comes to petition the shepherd.

He's not coming to petition someone who is impotent and without power. He comes to plead before one who dwells between the cherubim, one who is possessed of omnipotent power.

[20 : 30] Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock. Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

And so in this passage we are given an attractive picture of God as shepherd. he shall feed or he shall literally shepherd his flock like a shepherd.

Gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom. Shall gently lead those that are with young. And you remember how in the New Testament Christ uses this language of himself.

and you remember how it caused consternation amongst the audience because they understood although they refused to recognize who Christ was, they understood that he was claiming to be God when he said I am the good shepherd.

And you remember they took up stones to stone him. They fully understood what he was saying although they didn't understand who he was and didn't recognize him as the eternal son of God in human nature.

[21 : 53] And so he takes the title to himself I am the good shepherd. And you remember in the New Testament the word shepherd is described in three ways.

Described as good as great and as chief shepherd. These are the adjectives that are used to describe the shepherd.

In John's Gospel we are told the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. In other words it's as if John is saying that goodness is the particular quality that shines from the character of our Lord in his earthly life and in his passion for those whom he has come to save.

Now as you look upon him in the scriptures during his earthly ministry what was true largely despised largely rejected of men and yet he is described as the great shepherd.

shepherd. And when you look at the flock it's not a huge flock that you see when Christ is lifted up in his ascension we are told in the book of Acts that about a hundred and twenty gathered together.

[23 : 24] It doesn't seem a large number it's not hundreds of people just a hundred and twenty yet here is one who when he saw the multitude had compassion on them for they were as sheep without a shepherd.

The good shepherd he healed their sicknesses he wept over their sins when it was time for him to die when his hour came he crossed the brook Kedron agonized in Gethsemane till he sweated great drops of blood he went to trial condemnation and then in the place of the skull he gave himself to death the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep.

Can you tell how good a shepherd Jesus was? Can you measure the height and the depth of the extraordinary goodness that dwelt in him?

So good that he saved others himself he could not save. So good that when he gives an account of his work he can say to the father I have lost none.

That is the claim that genuinely belongs to the good shepherd. Kept them all safely although he himself laid down his life and regally bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

[25 : 17] The good shepherd. He is also we are told the great shepherd. Does that refer to his life on earth and to his death?

Well it seems to me in the context where that is placed that it's not so much referring to his life and his death. If you remember the context may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do his will.

He is not the great shepherd when he dies he is the good shepherd but he is the great shepherd when he is brought back again from the dead.

In his resurrection you can see his greatness. You remember his body he lay in the grave he is the good shepherd.

He had laid down his life for the sheep. He had laid it down in death but he had experienced penal death before he laid it down when he gave himself to natural death.

[26 : 37] And so you remember the events that are set before us how the grave is empty how those who were around the grave as guards are filled with terror he is no more the dying shepherd he is the great shepherd and he appears to his disciples for forty days then at last takes them out to the hill of galilee and rises from earth he goes up to heaven as the great shepherd and he tells them and instructs them to go to jerusalem they are waiting till the time of fullness has come and you remember how at pentecost there is heard the sound of a rushing mighty wind and so on who has given this it is the great shepherd he has ascended on high receiving gifts among men he is the great shepherd the shepherd riding in triumphal state through the center of new jerusalem surrounded by the acclamation of the angelic host sending to his sheep below the precious gift of apostles ministers according to his will the good shepherd he is also the great shepherd but the bible also says to us that he is the chief shepherd he is the great shepherd who equip us with everything good that you may do his will when he died he washed away your sin and he rises for your justification and complete sanctification he left the grave clothes behind just as you and I may leave our sins behind as he left the grave never to enter it we too may leave this world in which we once lived and live in newness of life before the throne so there is the chief shepherd and it is in

Peter's epistle that you find the terminology the chief shepherd when is he this you see Peter doesn't speak of him as the good shepherd or the great shepherd he is all of that but he is a great deal more he is the chief shepherd when will he wear the title well do you notice when he is the good shepherd he is all alone no others are mentioned when he is the great shepherd he is still a solitary figure but when he is the chief shepherd it is implied that there are others among whom he is chief in undertaking the work of atonement he is alone there is no one with the good shepherd in resurrection he is alone but at the second advent he will appear with his people chief among them when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory so you see

Christ is the chief shepherd at the second advent then shall the world discover that he was alone in atonement alone in justification but he is not alone in service or in glory every under shepherd whoever they might be who have given service who have been guided by him who have been involved in the feeding of the flock shall appear but he is the chief shepherd he has no crown we don't read of a crown for him as the great shepherd but when he comes with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding remember when Solomon was crowned it was an indication or a symbol of his authority over the nation when Jesus is crowned by his mother who is his mother

Mary his mother is the church the church crowns him and when he is crowned they are recognizing the supremacy of his authority and power not just over a nation but over all things and then you shall appear with him in glory having the crown of life that is unfading you know when you look at it good in his dying great in his rising chief in his coming seems to me that these terms seem to fit in with his incarnation with his resurrection and with his second advent and so this person who is a shepherd who is a gentle shepherd because we are told here of his loving pastoral care for the flock and you notice it is those who are most vulnerable who are highlighted in the context the lambs and those that are with young the lambs new converts and you know in the first flush of conversion when your emotions are highly stirred in the first flush of conversion you need the guidance and the vigilance of the shepherd to keep you perhaps when you are swayed by your feelings rather than by the truth swayed by what you feel rather than by what the word of God is setting before you how you need the shepherd to watch over your life at that stage when you are so vulnerable and so open perhaps to other teachings but he gathers the lambs in his arm he will carry them in his bosom the practice in the east at that time pretty shepherds had huge pockets

I've never found a jacket that had a pocket big enough to carry a lamb although I've carried a lamb frequently literally but apparently they had pockets that were large and they were able to carry the lambs when they were at their most vulnerable they are under the protective care and shelter carry the lambs in his bosom it's almost as if the writer is saying to you they are near to his heart and you can be sure that with regard to this person who is shepherd that the lambs are indeed in his heart and that he bears them before the Father day after day as one who makes continual intercession for them the lambs are precious in a sight but there are also those the sheep that are more mature the pregnant ewes or even those who have lambs they need special care too if you know anything about sheep you will know that you have to be vigilant over the sheep before she lambs and after she lambs there are always problems of one kind or another that arise she needs help with lambs sometimes and so here he is setting before us the more mature believers in life and you might be saying well surely the mature believers are able to stand on their own feet are able to progress in the path of grace on their own

[36 : 33] I'm afraid not doesn't matter how mature a believer you are you need the guidance of the shepherd you need to be led by the shepherd you need to be directed into rich pastures for feeding you need to be able to trust in the shepherd to lead you to places of security and safety and you remember how David elaborates on that where he speaks of the Lord is my shepherd these well-known words that you have sung many times and how he speaks of the leading and the guiding and the support and the help of the shepherd throughout life even in going into the very darkest of places to be assured that the shepherd is with you and perhaps if I can illustrate from the scriptures you remember when

Jacob met Esau it was a momentous meeting after all these years from the time that Jacob had left the home after deceiving his elderly father and seeking the blessing how he spent all these years in the home of labor and you remember when he was returning and he was afraid he was afraid of meeting with Esau and he seemed more afraid of meeting with Esau than he did of accounting to God and you remember a man wrestled with him that's how the Bible speaks about it it's not Jacob that engaged in the wrestling match first it was God who wrestled with Jacob why in order to bend the will of Jacob to the will of

God and you remember when these brothers met they were twins remember and Esau wanted to move quickly and you remember the reply of Jacob my Lord knows that the children are frail that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me if they are driven hard for one day all the flocks will die there speaks a shepherd there speaks the wisdom of a shepherd if they are driven hard they will die so here is the gentle shepherd the one who cares for those who are young and those who are mature he is considerate of their needs poor and needy yes and he is concerned for them he is concerned for the poor he defends the cause of the poor he gives deliverance to the children of the needy and he crushes the oppressor so it's as if he singles out the weaklings and the sickly of the flock to be of special care for the gentle shepherd now who of us can say hand on heart that we've never been weak and never sickly perhaps tonight your conscience more than ever of your weakness or of your sickness of your need of this pastoral care in your own inner life as you wrestle with forces and powers that you are incapable of overcoming except through the instrumentation of the assistance of this gentle shepherd you remember how in the prophecy of

Ezekiel you find him saying I will seek the lost I will bring back the strayed I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak oh how lovingly he binds up remember the psalmist grasps this when he is exhorting Israel to praise the Lord and you remember how in the psalm how he in his exhorting them to praise God you remember those that are broken in their heart grieved in their minds he healeth and their painful wounds he tenderly abounds can you tonight testify to this gracious loving pastoral care in your life one who has experienced the gentle touch of this gentle shepherd who is set before is here he is a loving shepherd you know he doesn't forget those who are in his flock he will tend his flock like a shepherd he will gather the lambs in his arms carry them in his booth and gently lead those that are with young what a privilege to be in the flock of the gentle shepherd let us pray eternal god oh help each one of us this evening to say anew with the full assurance of faith the lord is my shepherd to know that intimate relationship with thee that is so personal to each one where jehovah the unchanging immutable god is the shepherd of the fold bless our meditation on thy truth and the glory shall be thine in jesus name we ask it amen