

Behold I Have Come!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 December 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We'll look at verses 6 to 10. I can read through them first of all. Psalm 40 and from verse 6. Words that were quoted in the passage we read in Hebrews chapter 10.

Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, Behold, I have come. In the scroll of the book it is written of me.

I desire to do your will, O my God. Your law is within my heart. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation. Behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart. I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation. I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.

And obviously from the New Testament quotation of these words, they are applicable to the Lord himself by way of this being a prophecy of what would later come to be realized and fulfilled in the arrival of the Son of God incarnate in our world, in our nature, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 22] The Psalms have many references, as you know, to the redeeming acts of God. The Psalms, of course, the book of Psalms is a unique book, unique from one point of view, that it's set out for a manual of praise and, you know, very well it's been turned, as we use it, into verse that we can actually use in our singings of praise.

But throughout the book of Psalms, in these references to the redeeming acts of God, you actually have passages that speak specifically of what the New Testament makes clear, are references to God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit mentioned specifically at times.

And so you would expect that when there are such exact matches from the book of Psalms to some passages in the New Testament that speak about Jesus, for example, Psalm 22, the beginning of the first verse there, as you know, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Well, these are the words, the very words that Jesus took and used on the cross, as you know, in the very process of laying down his life. You would expect, then, references in the Psalms to the likes of things like atonement, such doctrines as the doctrine of the atonement, sacrifices that themselves represent the sacrifice of Christ of himself.

You'd expect the sufferings of Jesus to be mentioned, and they are, not just in Psalm 22, but other Psalms as well. You would expect also to have such references to the way in which God has fulfilled his promises through the work of Christ.

[3 : 11] And therefore, in the book of Psalms, here in Psalm 40, is just one passage out of many that refer to God's saving act, but especially to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, coming to speak of his obedience, his obedience as part of his atoning work, the center of his atoning work, as that is made clear in the New Testament.

And the high point of these verses is, in these words, behold, I have come. The rest of the verses round about that really feature different ways in which this statement is then considered.

Behold, I have come. We'll look at the phrase in more detail in a moment. But these words, as they are applied in the Old Testament to Jesus prior to his coming into the world, I mean, you can really see that these are words which were in the mind of God, and in the mind of the Son of God from all eternity.

That they were words which he had himself in mind prior to their fulfillment in his coming, in his incarnation, in his being born into the world.

In other words, they're words from the throne of God that have really reverberated down through history until actually they came to be fulfilled when he actually came physically into the world.

[4 : 42] Remarkable thing itself, isn't it? That he uttered these words from the throne of God all the way from eternity through history until the New Testament age when he came, having taken our nature.

In other words, he uttered these from the throne and then left the throne in order to become the servant of God in this world. And at this time of year, though it's not by any means the only time we think of it, it is desirable and it's important that we give emphasis to certain aspects of the incarnation, of the coming of Christ, the coming of the Son of God, and seek to set that out before the world in which we live and move and work and breathe so that we can hopefully draw people's minds to the relevance of the whole Bible in terms of the way it reveals the importance of the incarnation, the person of Jesus, of the work that he came to do.

Now, these words that I've mentioned in verse 7, behold, I have come. Some of the older translations have, behold, I come, or am coming. Those who know something about Hebrew grammar tell us that these words are actually what Hebrew has as a prophetic perfect. And we're told that that actually means they are spoken in such a way that's so certain as if it had already happened. It's not yet happened in the days of the psalmist here in the Old Testament, but they're put in such a form that's making it so certain and so sure that it's just as if it's already been accomplished and happened.

Remember something similar, though it's not in Hebrew, it's in Greek, in the Lord's Prayer in John 17, where he's there, not yet having died, not yet having gone out to his trial and subsequent crucifixion, and yet he is there in prayer to the Father, saying, I have finished the work which you gave me to do.

[6 : 55] In other words, it's a certain in the mind of Jesus, it's a certain in the way in which he speaks of it as having been done as if it had already been accomplished.

Scripture here is also giving us something similar to that, where it says, Behold, I have come. It's from the point of view of being future, and yet it's certain in the mind and purpose of God.

So let's see what it says about his coming. Why did he come? What's involved with his coming?

First of all, he came to fulfill the types and promises of the Old Testament.

You'll find that here in verse 6. Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but you have given me an open ear, burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

Then I said, Behold, I have come. In other words, he's saying, here are the Old Testament sacrifices that always represented Jesus in his death, and the psalmist and the psalmist is saying, they're no longer desired, they're no longer relevant, even though that hasn't yet happened.

[8 : 05] It doesn't mean by this that God has given up on accepting sacrifices throughout the Old Testament. What he means is these are themselves going to actually be done away with, and they're going to be done away with because they're going to be fulfilled in the coming, in the person, in the work of the Son of God in our nature.

Hebrews chapter 10, we read that a few minutes ago, and I may remind you of what it says from verse 8, where, having quoted from this psalm, from verse 5, he then said, Behold, I have come to do your will.

When he said above, you have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings, these are offered according to the law.

Then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will. He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. He abolishes the first, that is, that system of sacrifices, in order that he would actually establish the second, and what is the second?

It's the doing of the will of God by Jesus, his Son. He abolishes the first, not just in order to accomplish the second, but also he abolishes the first, because the second, the coming of Jesus, the doing the will of God, the Father, by the Son, has actually meant these are no longer required.

[9 : 37] They were shadows, they were preliminaries, they were representations, important as they were, but they are no longer required. So that's what the psalmist is really drawing our minds to, in terms of the Levitical sacrifices, having been accomplished as they were in Christ, and here it's as if that's really already happened, because it's prophetic of the Lord's coming.

And you see here in verse 7, then I said, behold, I have come. And the then is important. One of these little words we could easily just skip over if we thought it wasn't just much than a connecting particle.

And it doesn't just mean something that happens in consequence of something else. You know, you use the word then in that sense as we use it commonly in English. If this is the case, then this is what follows.

It's a consequential sort of particle. But actually here it's rather to do with time fulfillment. In terms of the processing of God's plan and in God's time, when this had come about that the sacrifices and offerings were no longer needed because Jesus himself had arrived, then I said, in these circumstances, circumstances, in that context, the Lord himself, Jesus, is saying, behold, I have come.

I am coming to replace and to fulfill them. You recall that Galatians chapter 4 has something very similar. In chapter 4 and verse 4 of Galatians, Paul is saying there, but when the fullness of the times had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[11:33] And when the fullness of the time was come. And that's why you find in Psalm 40 here that there's a reference to the book. Behold, I have come in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

What was that book? What is the book here the psalmist is prophetically setting out and what were the contents of that book? Well, the book essentially is not a book literally as such.

It's actually a reference to what we can call really the divine plan or the will of God. He's going to speak later about doing the will of God.

And that's all already in the book in the mind of God, in the plan of salvation that God himself has devised. This is written, he says, about me in the scroll of that book, in the purpose of God, in the mind of God, in the plan of God, the plan of redemption.

All this already has been inscribed. Metaphorically or spiritually speaking, that's already in the book. It's been drawn up by God and it awaits in the psalmist's time to be worked through and fulfilled by the coming of Christ himself.

[12:53] And there's also an importance, we mention this word quite a number of times in the course of studying various parts of the Bible, this word behold in verse 7.

And we've referred to it as it really is in a sense it's a spotlight, a spotlight in a literary sense this is God's way of actually drawing attention to things.

Whenever you find the word behold, whether it's here or in the New Testament version of it, that is always drawing our mind to something really important, something we cannot afford to miss.

And what he's saying here is here's the spotlight, the sacrifices, the offerings, they're actually now being replaced. Behold, look at this, I have come.

I have come as their fulfillment. And the word I is important because who is speaking? Well, of course, it's God himself.

[14:00] And it's God himself, more specifically, as the New Testament shows in the person of Jesus the Son. Behold, I have come. God and that takes us secondly to say that he came to fulfill the types and promises but he came, in fulfilling these, he came as the servant of God.

I have come. It is written in the scroll of the book of me. I desire to do your will, O my God. Your law is within my heart.

Now, one of the most obvious sets of references to the coming of Jesus, to the person of Jesus in the Old Testament is in the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah, that prophet that presents God in such majestic, such momentous terms, the God who is the creator of all the earth, who holds everything in his hand and yet the God who is, who condescends, who lowers himself to behold the plight of his people and to come to make provision for them.

And it's in that great book of Isaiah, more than any other book of the Old Testament, that you find more about the servant of the Lord. He came to fulfill the types and the promises, but he came as the servant of the Lord to do that.

[15:37] For example, chapter 42 of Isaiah, if you're taking notes, you can take the verses down that I referred to.

I follow them through afterwards. Chapter 42, verses 1 to 4 there, where you find comfort, sorry, chapter 42, where you find Isaiah prophetically saying, behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.

I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. Then he goes on to say, he will not cry aloud, nor lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice, he will not grow faint, or be discouraged, until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his law.

There's a marvelous picture there of the God who is so immense, but nevertheless who has this servant that he commissions in order to do his will, to carry forth his will till it's accomplished in redemption.

[16 : 53] But he does it by this servant who is described as lowly, and humble, and gentle. There's a reference there to a bruised reed he will not break.

If you go to a reed bed and try and walk through it, you'll find some reeds there that are already broken, snapped, almost snapped off in half. It's very difficult to then make your way through it without actually breaking it altogether.

Or take it as the burning wick he will not quench. When you have a candle with a wick burning, and you actually put the light out, it's difficult to do without crushing the wick itself.

It's so delicate at that stage, having burnt for some time. And all of that's a reference to such a precious, precious thing pastorally for us under the pastoring of Jesus, under his own care as our shepherd, as our shepherd king, that when he deals with us in all our trials and our pains and our woes and our needs, and at the very depth of our need, when it might be all too easy just to present ourselves to him as if we're just a smoking wick ready to be snuffed out.

And maybe that's how it feels to us at times. But he will not, he will not break it. When he handles your life, such as his care and quality of care, such as his ability, that he comes in order to heal you by his gentleness.

[18 : 28] He is the great creator whose hands fashioned the universe, and yet he comes gently so that, like the psalmist elsewhere says, your gentleness has made me great.

The gentleness, isn't that a magnificent thought? When you think of the immensity and the majesty and the greatness, the eternity of God, that we can say, your gentleness made me great.

The gentleness of God, how precious is that to you and to me tonight? The very gentleness of God in Christ that has come to deal with our predicament and hasn't crushed us despite our sins or for our sins.

But has come to redeem us and bring us back to himself and restore us and make us into what we should be, what we were designed to be from the beginning.

So here he's doing this by becoming the servant of God. And in that passage in Hebrews that quotes this, there's a slight difference there, where the psalm is quoted as in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in fact, where it says there that, where it says, sacrifice and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

[20 : 00] Now that's not in contradiction to the words of the psalm itself in the book of Psalms, but it's an additional feature that reminds us or teaches us that he became the servant by taking our nature, by taking a body and soul to himself and becoming a servant by becoming human.

And that's why he says here in Psalm 40, you have opened my ear, you have given me an open ear, instead of sacrifices and offerings, I have come and you have given me an open ear.

What does that mean? Well, an open ear is language that's applicable to a servant waiting for the master to give his order. And not just ready to hear the master's order, but instantly obedient to that instruction.

It's the essence of a servant that he or she wishes to do what the master requires in order to carry out the will of the master, assuming, of course, that that isn't cruel, that it's a good thing that he's being asked to do.

But in other words, the obedience of the servant is very much part of the servitude, the position he takes or she takes. And in terms of the Lord, in terms of Jesus, the Son of God, he is saying, you have opened, you have given me an open ear, or you have opened my ear.

[21 : 34] God and how often in the New Testament, indeed in the statements of Jesus himself, you find this very thing brought out in contrast, he says, to the likes of the kings of the Gentiles, Luke chapter 22, verses 24 to 27, where he speaks of himself having come to serve, not to be served.

Mark 10 has the same kind of reference, but you remember the context in Luke 22, here were disciples squabbling as to who was going to be the greatest, just having an argument among each other, even though they were approaching the time when Jesus was going to be crucified, here they were, and that's what they were doing, walking along the road with him, and just in their own minds,

thrusting out their chests, or making themselves kind of important, and disputing as to which of them would be the greatest.

And Jesus saying, here, I'll tell you who will be the greatest, the one who is the least of you will be the greatest, the one who is the servant of all, he's the greatest, for I have come not to be served, but to serve, and to give my life a ransom for many.

That's the context. And in this passage in Luke, in Psalm 40, these elements from Luke and other gospels are really adding some light to what is here already, an embryo, and you can see that it's already included here in principle anyway, in the Psalm.

So that you find here in verse 8, for example, following on from, I have come to do your will, I desire to do your will, oh my God, you see, there's the obedience being followed through.

[23 : 25] I have come, I have come to do your will, and I desire, in other words, there's an element of delight in that as well, a delight in doing the will of God, and it's a remarkable thing as you look at the life of Jesus, how he himself was not only conscious of this, but constantly doing this.

you think of yourself and myself, think of us as in terms of our obedience to God, is it always 100% active?

Of course it isn't, we're sinners, but you look at Jesus, and every single moment of his life on earth as the servant of God, there isn't a single moment of that where he is not actively obedient, where he is not actively obedient in fulfilling the will of the Father.

You will never find an instance where he falls short of that. He doesn't wake up at some times, as it were, in the morning and say, well, I need to be obedient today, and then going through the day, he sometimes forgets, and then he has to say, well, I'm here to be obedient to the Father, I'd better get back on track.

There's nothing like that, because he's constantly perfectly obedient, as the servant of the Father. You remember in John's Gospel, in chapter 4, when the disciples came back and found him talking with Oman at the well, they were amazed that he spoke to the woman, and they urged him to eat something.

[25 : 07] And he said to them, I have food to eat that you know not of, for my food is to do the will of my Father, and to finish his works.

That was his food. Not that he didn't need physical food, but that's where his spiritual appetite was always exercised, in being the obedient servant of the Father, for our sake, for our benefit.

That's why he says here as well, your law is within my heart. I desire to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart. You see, there's the law of God, that you find summarized, for example, in the Ten Commandments.

The law of God is really the expression of the will of God, his demands for our lives. And Christ came, as Galatians 4 put it, Christ came to place himself, or to be placed under the law, born of a woman, born under the law.

In other words, born as a servant, born to fulfill what the law required. And he says, your law is within my heart.

[26 : 29] There's a very interesting passage again. I'm just mentioning these passages. I don't have time just to open them all up just now, but if you note them, you can follow them through easily enough for yourselves. When you remember the way in which Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, you find it in Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel.

Matthew's gospel, you can see his temptation, the three main prongs of the devil's attack. How did Jesus respond? How did he respond when the devil said, why should you hunger here?

Command these stones to be made into bread. He was hungry. And the devil was seeking to take advantage of that so that Jesus would, in an unauthorized way, exercise his power to relieve himself of his sufferings, to relieve himself of the duties that he had as the incarnate son of God, to yield obedience to the father, to the law of God.

How did Jesus respond? Well, he responded to that and he responded to the other two temptations that followed in exactly the same way. He took the devil to the book of Deuteronomy, the book of the law.

And Jesus said to him, it is written, it is written, that's where my food and drink comes from. That's what I'm here to do. I'm here to fulfill this law for my people.

[27 : 54] And I cannot step out of the way of obedience just to listen, especially to the likes of you, he says to Satan. That's essentially what he's saying in the words that he used.

He took him back to the book of the law. And that too is for our motivation, isn't it? And our example and our instruction and also our inspiration.

Because there's one psalm, as you know, in the book of Psalms that more than any other has to do with the law of God, the word of God, the precepts of God, the statutes of God, Psalm 119.

And there are many, many references throughout Psalm 119 to the relish the psalmist has for the law of God. And you remember, I'll just quote two verses, verse 77.

Let your mercy come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight. And then there's verse 97 as well.

[28 : 59] Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. And if that was true as it was for the psalmist, how much more so in a perfect fashion was it true for Jesus?

He could say that at every moment of his life, oh, how I love your law. It is my study all the day. I'm here to do it to accomplish its requirements.

He came to fulfill the times and the promises. He came to do that as the servant of God. But the psalm here tells us thirdly, he came to announce the good news.

He came to announce the gospel, in other words. Because there you have it in verse 9 and 10. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation.

Behold, I have not restrained my lips as you know, O God. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart. I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation.

[30 : 03] I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. And you could really take these words, the great congregation, as indicative really in a sense of all humanity.

Jesus, through the gospel, is declaring the steadfast love, the gospel, the good news, the salvation of God. Now, he himself, of course, is the embodiment of this.

Some people will say, well, we shouldn't really focus as much on Jesus preaching as on Jesus being the substance of what we preach. He himself is the good news, the gospel.

And there's a sense in which that's true. But it's also true that Jesus very deliberately preached the gospel. For example, Matthew 4, verse 17, interestingly enough, after the way in which he had overcome the devil, from that time, Matthew says, Jesus preached.

Jesus preached about the kingdom of God. So Jesus, not only did he preach, but that's what he preached. He preached the kingdom of God and preached, therefore, his own coming in relation to that.

[31 : 18] He came to announce that good news. Jesus knew where he had come from, who he was, where he was going back to, back to heaven.

He knew what he had come to do, why he had come into this world. That it was to die the death of the cross, that it was to fulfill the types, the sacrifices, of the Old Testament time.

He came as the servant of God, to yield perfect obedience to the will of God. He came to announce and to represent in himself the kingdom of God, claim of God over human life, and the call of God through the gospel to come to be citizens, subjects of that kingdom.

them. Oh, we're better some than in John's gospel chapter 10 and verse 10. In contrast to the false shepherds, I have come, he said, that they might have life, that his sheep might have life, and have it the more abundantly.

May God bless these thoughts. On his word, let's conclude by singing in Psalm 40 from the scripture.