

Your Redeemer Carries You

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 46? Isaiah 46, if you're feeling burdened and weary this morning, then I hope this passage is going to be a comfort for you. That's page 568 in the Pew Bible. I believe we'll have it on the screens as I read it in just a minute, but let me encourage you to have it open before you as we look at this text together. Let me pray as you turn there, and then I'll read for us. There are gods before you, no other loves. Lord, what freedom it would be for us and what joy it would be for us to have an undivided heart that loves and fears you alone. So help us now through your word to be sanctified in that way. Purify our hearts, God, we pray as we come to your word. Teach us, instruct us, change us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, Isaiah 46. I'm going to read the whole chapter for us, starting in verse 1. Bell bows down, Nebo stoops. Their idols are on beasts and livestock. These things you carry are born as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop. They bow down together. They cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. Listen to me,

O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel who have been born by me from before your birth, carried from the womb. Even to your old age, I am he, and to gray hairs, I will carry you.

I have made, and I will bear, I will carry, and will save. To whom will you liken me and make me equal and compare me that we may be alike?

Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh out silver in the scales hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god. Then they fall down in worship. They lift it to their shoulders. They carry it. They set it in its place, and it stands there. It cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. Remember this and stand firm. Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other.

I am God, and there's none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, things not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.

[2 : 4 1] I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed, and I will do it. Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness. I bring near my righteousness.

It is not far off, and my salvation will not delay. I will put salvation in Zion for Israel, my glory. Well, sometimes in order to really see something, it helps to see it by way of contrast.

Mount Everest is apparently over 29,000 feet high. Of course, that's incredibly high. It's hard to even wrap our minds around how high that is, but contrast that with the tallest skyscraper in the world, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which is like 2,700 feet tall. Has anyone here been to Dubai and seen this thing? Oh, yes, the Daniels have. That's almost twice as high as the Empire State Building, okay? That's how big that building is. Can you imagine a skyscraper nearly twice as tall as the Empire State Building? That's really tall, but that tallest skyscraper in the world in Dubai, that highest building that human ingenuity and skill can muster, it's not even one-tenth the height of Mount Everest. Sometimes in order to really see something, it helps to see it by way of contrast, contrast. And that's what Isaiah 46 is doing. Isaiah 46 is trying to help us see something by way of contrast. Now, this whole section of Isaiah, chapters 40 through 55, God has been trying to speak a word of comfort to His people, comfort to them in their trials, comfort to them in their failings. But to really see and receive this comfort, here the Lord's going to help them see it by way of contrast. Contrast, that is, with the idols, with the other so-called gods prevalent in their day.

Here is a God who can do what no idol can do. The Empire State Building, the Burj Khalifa, yes, they might look tall, impressive even, but they're no Mount Everest. Now, what is it that the Lord wants us to see? What comfort is He trying to help us understand? Well, the key word here is burden.

Burden. The word comes up again and again in chapter 46. You see it right off the bat in the first two verses. Burden, the idea of a heavy weight, a load to bear. The audience of Isaiah 40 through 55, we're dealing with the exile as a burden, this burden of exile. Perhaps the darkest moment in the history and the experience of Old Testament Israel. And the burden they were bearing, of course, wasn't just the kind of material or financial or social turmoil of being cast out of their homes, but it was the spiritual crisis, the spiritual burden of the exile. The people of Israel had plenty of reason to question. Had we put ourselves beyond the realm of saving? Given how we've failed, are we now too far gone? I wonder what burdens you this morning. What heavy weight are you bringing with you?

[6 : 14] Perhaps the burden of some trial you're facing at home or at work. You're feeling stretched to your limit, not sure if you'll hold up much longer. Or perhaps you carry with you the burden of some failure you've experienced. You've not just let down a friend or a family member, but you know you've sinned against God. You've not kept His law, His good law. You've not responded to His kindness and His glory with the love and obedience He deserves. So you carry the burden of guilt and shame.

But to those of us with heavy burdens, God here speaks a word of comfort. Twice in this passage, He says, listen. In verse 3 and in verse 12, listen. Listen to what God has to say to your burdened heart.

And in the first four verses, God says to our burdened hearts, our hearts burdened with trials, He says, I will carry you. And then in the rest of the chapter, verses 5 through 13, God says to our burdened hearts, burdened with sin and with failure, He says, I will save you.

Here is the God who carries the burdened. Here is the God who saves the burdened. And as we said, God helps us to see this by way of contrast. So let's take a look at that first.

Let's look at verses 1 through 4 where God says, I will carry you. Now the passage opens with two Babylonian gods, Bel and Nebo. Bel was the chief god of Babylon and Nebo was the Babylonian god of wisdom. And remember, the Babylonians were the ones who conquered Judah in the sixth century and sent them into exile. But here, in Isaiah's sort of vision, these supposedly conquering gods are pictured as collapsing and crumbling. Bel bows down, Nebo stoops. And the graven images of these gods that were once so terrifying and so awe-inspiring are now being carried by beasts of burden, sort of trudging along, themselves being taken off into exile. The idols that once promised so much, the idols that carried such weight and importance are now just themselves a burdensome weight. Even the pack animals are buckling under their heavy load. Idolatry is always like that, you know.

[8 : 46] In the beginning, we turn to a substitute god for relief or for freedom. We invest our significance in some created thing. We place our identity or our hope in some created thing because we desire some kind of relief, some kind of freedom from our burdens. Now I hope you realize that idolatry wasn't just a problem in the ancient world. It's a problem in every world. The human heart's always taking good things and turning them into ultimate things. We take something like family or work or community and we build our whole identity and significance and happiness around it. And we say, this is my thing. This is my identity. And what we're really saying is, this is my God.

And we do that oftentimes because we're looking for relief. We're looking for freedom. Instead of centering our lives around God, we center it around work or relationship or our self-image.

And for a little while, it seems to work, right? The work pays off and we feel some relief. We feel some freedom, etc., etc. But here's the problem. The more we give, the more it asks.

We wanted that thing to hold us up, but in the end, we have to hold it up. And it becomes a burden we cannot bear. A lot of addiction works this way, you know. In response to hurt or pain or disappointment, we turn to something for relief. And at first, maybe that thing seems relieving, but then it grows. And suddenly, we find we can't stop doing that thing. We're trapped. We're burdened.

We want to stop drinking, but we drink nonetheless. We want to stop using, but we use nonetheless. We want to take a break from working, but we keep working nonetheless. And suddenly, the thing we thought would carry us and give us some relief is now a burden that crushes us.

[10 : 55] By way of contrast, though, listen to what the Lord says. Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been born by me from before your birth, carried from the womb. Even to your old age, I am he, and to gray hairs, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear. I will carry and will save.

In contrast to the idols who need to be carried, God says, you don't have to carry me. I carry you. After all, God made you. Before you could think or speak, God was bearing you up, putting breath in your lungs, sustaining you minute by minute, hour by hour. And God promises to keep doing so, even to your old age, he says. He will carry you.

What good news this is for the weary and for the burdened, the promise of the almighty creator of heaven and earth that he sees his people and he will carry them. No matter how dark the skies, no matter how deep the storm, the Lord will carry you. Now, sometimes in the Christian life, you can really get a sense of this. I remember a number of years ago, this was quite a while ago, a friend asked me to do the funeral for her husband who had died after a long battle with cancer. And I knew that nearly everyone there at the funeral was going to be an unbeliever.

And quite honestly, I was really nervous. I wasn't quite sure how I would approach it, what I would say, what I would do. But in those stressful weeks leading up to that memorial service, it was one of those times in my life when I could really feel the Lord's presence sustaining me.

God felt very near, very present. It was still a very challenging and stressful experience, no doubt. But I could sense very evidently what Isaiah 46 was saying here, the Lord will carry you.

[13 : 00] Sometimes we can really feel the truth of that promise. But that's not always the case. Sometimes we go through trials, sometimes we bear burdens, and we can't feel the Lord's presence. Sometimes it feels like we're on our own.

But you know, that doesn't make God's promise any less true. It may not feel like the Lord is carrying us, but He is nonetheless. You know the old poem that goes something like this? At the end of his life, a man looks back and sees how all along the Lord had walked beside him in his life, and look, there's proof.

Two footprints side by side. But then the man gets upset because at some of the most challenging moments in his life, there aren't two sets of footprints walking side by side. There's only one. And he says, Lord, where were you in the dark times? When I lost everything. When I went through the valley of shadow. When I couldn't go on. Where were you then? And the Lord says to him, you only see one set of prints because those were the times when I carried you. So when you and I are feeling burdened, feeling weary, you know, the temptation will be for us to turn, to turn to some idol for comfort or for relief. But Isaiah is showing us here that substitute gods will only end up making the burden worse. The Lord promises something totally different. The idols will burden you, but the Lord will carry you. So trust Him. Walk with Him. He will carry you.

But there's more. Not only does the Lord promise to carry us, He promises to save us. To save us. And in verses 5 through 13, the second part of our passage, God strikes up another contrast with the idols. And notice in verses 5 through 7 how devout and how faithful these worshipers of idols are. They lavish gold from the purse. They weigh out silver in the scales. They're sacrificial in their giving. And notice how hard they work for their false gods. In verse 7, they lift it and they carry it and they set it in place, performing all the duties and all the rights that they should.

And what is the result? If we give all of our money and resources, all our energy and gifts to the idols of our choosing, what comes of it? Look at the end of verse 7. The idols do not answer when we cry out and they cannot save. Have you wondered why so many people who seemingly have everything are so riddled still with insecurity and guilt and shame, just like everybody else?

[15 : 57] Because the gods that we serve, money, success, power, fame, they can't really save us from what's really wrong. We need to be rescued, reconciled, forgiven by the God who made us. The world needs to be put right. Imagine I had a bicycle and everything on the bicycle was pristine. The chain, the seat, the frame, the handlebars, the brakes. Some of you here I know are cyclists. I am not, so you'll probably correct me after the service about how I'm getting all this mechanics wrong. But imagine you had this beautiful bicycle and it was all just perfect and well sort of designed and well engineered and well kept, except for one thing.

The tires were kind of bent, a little twisted. And every time you tried to get on this bike to ride, it just wobbled and shook until eventually you'd fall off. Well, imagine you took that bike with the bent tires and you oiled the chain and you checked the brakes and you polished the frame and you tightened the seat and then jumped back on and went for a ride.

What would happen? The same exact thing. The bent tires would still send you spinning and falling and flailing. The only way the bike is going to ride, the way it's meant to ride, is if the wheels are put right.

Our lives are just like that. You know, we spend so much time polishing the frame and tightening the seat. But all we need are our wheels. We need our hearts to be put right. But the idols that we worship, they can't do it.

They can't save us. Verses 5-7 show us that idols will take your best and give you nothing in return.

[18 : 01] But verses 9-13 show us how the Lord is completely different. Idols take your best and give you nothing in return, but look at the contrast. The Lord will take your worst and give you heaven in return.

Do you see in verse 8 and verse 12 how He calls us transgressors? Stubborn of heart. Far from righteousness.

That's a big difference from verses 5-7, right? There the worshipers were generous and devout, sacrificial. But in verses 8-12 were fallen and flawed and bent.

And yet that's the point. the Lord takes us not at our best but at our worst. He receives us at our worst and what does He give?

He gives us everything. Unlike the idols who cannot save in verses 8-11 God says I'll accomplish all my purpose.

[19 : 08] Verse 11 speaks of Cyrus this Persian general this bird of prey from the east who will come and through the Lord's sovereign hand will defeat Babylon and send the Jews home ending their exile.

Unlike all those false gods this God can save but you know it's not just about a change in geography. It's not just about rearranging their political situation or location.

Verse 12 drives even deeper because remember we need more than a new set of brakes and a polished frame. We need to be put right with God. We need our hearts to be put right. So the Lord says you who are far from righteousness from being right listen I'll bring near my righteousness what you lack I will provide.

You are far from righteousness far from what's right but that won't stop God. He'll bring near His righteousness righteousness and He will put you right.

Why? Because of our devotion or generosity or hard work? No. Because of His grace. Because He loves us.

[20 : 24] And because He wants us to share His glory. Idols take your best and give you nothing in return but the Lord will take your worst and give you heaven in earth.

And is not this the very heart of the gospel friends? That the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth and we literally gave Him our worst and we hung Him on a cross and we called Him a fraud and what did He give us in return?

Judgment? Condemnation? No. He gave us His righteousness in return. He took our curse and gave us His blessing. And for all who put their trust in Christ who turned from these idols that cannot save and trust in the Lord Jesus who is eager to save for all who do that we're put right, we're justified not by our righteousness but by His.

So this is the great contrast. These puny skyscrapers that we build they're nothing to the Mount Everest of the living God. Here is a God who needs nothing from us.

He needs nothing from us because He's the Creator. Everything comes from Him but this God who needs nothing gives everything and He promises to carry and to save.

[21 : 49] Now in closing what does it mean to live then in light of this great contrast between God and the idols this God who carries and saves? Well first we should give God the glory that He deserves.

Verse 5 says who can you possibly compare me to? And that's right we should be more in the practice of giving God the credit and praise and worship that are due Him. You know sometimes we can give God the glory He deserves by way of comparison right?

If the sunset is beautiful how much more beautiful must be the God who created sunsets in the first place right? But sometimes we give God the glory He deserves by way of contrast.

we see sometimes how short-sighted and foolish we humans can be and we think how much more we can revel in how much more wise and good our God is.

So we should get in the practice of giving God the glory He deserves. And second we should live lives that mirror His glory. Notice how the passage ends I will put salvation in Zion that was sort of the city of the people right?

[22 : 55] I'm going to put salvation right in the midst of my people for Israel for my people who are what? They're my glory. God made us to reflect His glory to make His glory visible through lives of love and holiness and compassion and mercy.

God carries us so that we in turn might help carry others. Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Has not Christ borne our greatest burden of all? The burden of our sin our guilt our shame and He's borne our burden so well that He's utterly borne it away. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So what do we do now with this newfound freedom this newfound lightness of being that we've been put right with our Creator and have nothing to fear? Well, we look at our brothers and sisters in need, we look at our neighbors in need, and we say, just as my burden has been born, bared, what's the right tense of that?

I should know, right? Just as the Lord has borne my burden, I'm going to turn and bear the burdens of others. Only Christ can bear the burden of our sin, but can we not come alongside one another to bear financial, emotional, relational burdens?

[24 : 23] And in so doing, we bear forth the image, the glory of our Lord Jesus, the great burden bearer. Last, how do we live in light of this contrast in Isaiah 46?

Well, we live with the encouragement. We live with hope that God will carry and God will save. Friend, if you've been pulling hard at the oars of your life, if you feel like you've been rowing against the tides, let this promise fill your sails with fresh wind.

You're not alone on the seas of your life. The Creator of heaven and earth will carry you. He'll steer your ship on the safest course, and when He's carried you through even to old age, Isaiah says, He'll carry you and He'll bring you safely home to harbor.

He will save. And as we see at the end of this chapter, it's not far off, brothers and sisters. The Lord's salvation will not delay.

So let's lift our drooping hands and strengthen our weak knees and make straight paths for our feet, as Hebrews says. for our Lord stands ready to save. It's not far off.

[25 : 36] It will not delay. Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we praise You that You are not like the false gods we so readily worship.

They burden us, but You carry us. They exact a grueling price, but You give Your salvation without cost and without price.

increase our faith, increase our trust in You, great carrier of our souls. For those who are weary, remind them that Your mighty arms uphold them.

For those who are under conviction of sin, draw them near to You to receive Your forgiving grace. Lord, this week when we're tempted to forget Your carrying and rescuing grace, remind us, remind us, and keep us, Lord, we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen.