

# Isaiah 40

Valleys Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014

## Intro

- This morning we are going to look at the writings of someone whom many would consider to be the greatest of the Old testament prophets- Isaiah. Isaiah heard from God with remarkable clarity and God used him to predict what would happen to great Empires, what one leader of a future empire would be named and achieve (even before he was born) and also, with remarkable detail, the future ministry of Jesus, particularly concerning the cross.
- There is a noticeable contrast in the first half of the book of Isaiah compared to it's second half, so much so that some think there were two different authors (I don't think so). Isaiah chapters 1-39 are a challenge to God's people to stop sinning and speak generally about warnings of judgement against God's people for their sin and chapters 40-66 speak in general about God bringing blessing and favour to His people.
- This morning we are going to look at the middle of Isaiah where the blessings half starts. We will look at what it meant for their situation and how God was going to bring them through to a good place through the bad times. We will also look what it means for us today and how we too can receive strength from God to persevere through tough times into great blessing.

## Read Isaiah 40:1-31

## Background

- Hezekiah was king of Judah at this time. The previous chapters give us the horrendous story of what was happening at this time. The King of Assyria, Sennacherib had taken away the Northern Kingdom of Israel and now was oppressing the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including it's capital, Jerusalem where Hezekiah was ruling. Sennacherib's annals also record what follows, but with a slightly different slant. The Assyrians besieged many of the cities of Judah and then surrounded Jerusalem but Hezekiah prayed to God and God struck the enemy with a plague of some description (killing 185,000 of them) saving the city of Jerusalem. Sennacherib then goes back to Nineveh and is assassinated by two of his sons.
- As well as this amazing deliverance God also had previous to this (see 38:6 for proof it was previous as well as other historical records) healed Hezekiah of a terminal illness, adding 15 years to his life. God gave an amazing sign to Hezekiah that he would both live another 15 years and also that He Himself would defend Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. The sign was that a shadow would freakily move backwards by 10 steps on the royal sundial belonging to the previous king of Judah, his father Ahaz. The equivalent to this today would be God telling you he was going to give you an extra 15 years and protect you from your enemy and a sign would be the hour hand of the clock will go backwards as you look at it 10 hours!
- You would think this would be enough to cause Hezekiah to trust in God's power to deliver Judah from the Assyrians, however an alternative offer of help comes in from the king of Babylon. Historical records show that this particular king was also being oppressed by the Assyrians and was looking for other nations to form a coalition with to fight against Assyria. Twice he had tried to break away from Assyrian dominance and once had actually taken back his city of Babylon from the

Assyrians for a short time. This king of Babylon sends a gift to Hezekiah, but it was probably with a view to see what resources Hezekiah has so that they can team up against the Assyrians.

- It is at this point Hezekiah gets a big telling off from God and then God reveals that in future when he has died it will be in the time of his son's lives that the real power to fear will be the Babylonian Empire and they will carry some of his sons off into captivity.
- So it is like a scene from 'Back to the Future'- when the Doc says to Marty and his girlfriend (before they have kids) 'You've got to come with me, back to the future' and Marty replies 'Why are we in some sort of trouble in the future?' and he replies 'No, it's your kids who are in trouble'. Here too God is revealing that He knows the future and if they thought the Assyrian threat was 'dark days' they really would know what dark days would be when the Babylonians would succeed in taking them into captivity for 70 years. It was about 701BC when King Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem and when Isaiah wrote down these prophecies. When Isaiah wrote these words of encouragement for future peoples to read (chapters 40 onwards) the people of Judah still had 100 years of struggle left with the Assyrians before the Babylonians would take their city of Jerusalem around 597 BC.
- What does chapter 40 then tell us about God? It tells us that He does in fact know our struggles even before we go into them. It also tells us that He is concerned about us in our struggles and wants to speak to us, encourage us, and help us through them.

*Let's look at 3 points which must have spoken to the people of Judah going through these trials and which also speak to us today as we go through trials:*

#### **God Comforts Us- 40:1 'Comfort, yes, comfort My people says your God'**

- Here we see the tenderness of God expressed with a great desire that His people should be comforted. Three times at the start of this passage the word comfort is used. The words 'comfort', 'comforted' and 'comforts' are used 13 times in the second part of this book of Isaiah. God has brought His discipline to His covenant people, who have broken the covenant they made with God and rather than worshipping Him they have worshipped idols instead. After the discipline is brought, however, there is a great desire in God to bring comfort.
- V2 'Her warfare is ENDED' God here is promising a time when the tough times will have ended and the blessings will be flowing. Maybe you feel at the moment that things are tough and that they will always be so, however this passage makes it clear- there IS light at the end of the tunnel! This prediction is followed by the voice of one crying in the wilderness. This was fulfilled by John the Baptist crying out in the desert to prepare the way for King Jesus. The promise of comfort is fulfilled by the coming of royalty. Hence the 'red carpet' treatment of making the roads smooth for the King's chariot, which is what this passage is talking about- verses 3 & 4. In Christchurch in New Zealand where there was a terrible earthquake in 2011 there was comfort brought by the royal visit from William, Kate and George. The Queen Mother played a huge role in bringing comfort to many during the war.
- Read Luke 2:25-30 – Simeon was waiting for this 'consolation of Israel' and he recognised that the consolation would come through the King coming to them- Jesus.
- Jesus is the comforter- He promised to send 'another comforter' like Him to be with us- the Holy Spirit- John 14:16- the word can mean helper, comforter, counsellor, advocate, one who comes alongside- paraclete. In court it's a great comfort to have a good solicitor who comes alongside you as your advocate, to fight your case for

you- it brings comfort to us. God is our comforter. His understanding is incredible- Is 40:13 & 14- He doesn't need a counsellor to advise Him- He IS the Counsellor!

- God is the God of all comfort- 2Cor 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. Although we have to suffer at times in this life, God also wants us to experience His amazing comfort. He knows what it is to suffer loss and He is able to truly comfort us as we go through loss and pain. As He does this for us, so too we will receive comfort that we can share with others in need.
- In Is 40:11 His tenderness is seen as a loving shepherd- He feeds us, he gathers us with his arm and carries us in His bosom (close to his chest) and gently leads those who are with young. It's touching to see the love shown by those who are lambing the commitment and care they take over the sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for us as His sheep. He also longs to gather us in unity when we fall out and stray, that we would be brought back into the fold. Jesus commissioned Peter that if he truly loved Christ he should feed His sheep and lambs. Christ was concerned with the welfare of the flock- this should also be our concern- that His church should be glorious.
- **Application:** Do you need to experience afresh today the comfort Christ brings into our lives? Have the cares of this world crowded in trying to choke the good seed Jesus has planted in your life? Let's choose to clear some space in our lives to bring our focus back to Jesus. As we do this, like Simeon did, we will be able to know a great peace from him. This peace passes all understanding because it's not based on our circumstances but on Him- the Prince of Peace.
- V9 says about proclaiming good tidings. This is the gospel of Jesus. It is the good news of peace mentioned in Ephesians 6:15. We should have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. What does this mean? Just as a good army is ready for action if it has good footwear so we too should be ready to share the good news of God's peace. It is the news of what Jesus has done so we can have peace with God. The gospel brings comfort, peace into our lives and enables us to be at peace with those around us too. Let's remind ourselves just how much God has done for us, and we will know that peace again. Let's also share this good news of peace with all around us living in a world that knows little of the amazing peace Christians know experientially.

### **God is Sovereign- v21 '*..it is He who sits above the circle of the earth*'**

- Sovereignty means having the power to rule, possessing supreme or ultimate power. God truly is in charge, even when it appears to all intents and purposes like He's not. Sometimes it seems to us as if God doesn't know what He's doing. This is Job's complaint to God. Job was incredibly patient, but finally broke and let loose at God. God responded to Job by reaffirming His sovereignty, and this was all Job needed to hear to again trust that God actually knew what He was doing. Have you ever tried to criticize or help someone you truly believe is incapable only to be shown up when they then show sheer brilliance? I don't really have a clue about tennis but once was playing my dad at tennis and a voice kept coming from outside the court from a stranger giving me tips how to play and what I should be doing. The tips were very helpful and after my dad tired of playing the stranger offered to give me a game. It became very embarrassing when I actually beat him!
- There can come a time in all of our lives where we go beyond and then complain to

God. In these times we need to be reassured that God does know what He's doing and we can trust Him with our lives. From verse 12 to verse 28 God knows that His people are questioning events they have been through and He is reassuring them of His sovereignty as Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

- The bottom line is that often we equate suffering we go through with the conclusion that God does not care and that He does not love us. In verse 27 Jacob claims that her way is hidden from God and He passes over her cause. So God brings affirmation of His love despite the suffering they have been through. We are living in a fallen world and all of us will go through a measure of suffering in this life, even Christ was not immune to suffering. The cross is God's display of how much He loves us- there is no greater display of love- 'Lord how much do you love me' and Jesus replied 'This much' and stretched out His hands and died.
- Rom 8:17 says we will suffer with Christ in this life that we may share His glory. We all want to share His glory, but if we are honest we are not in glory yet- although there are some truly great things in this life there are also trials to get through, we get tired, irritable, disappointed, let-down, sad, we suffer, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will experience an element of persecution. The wrong conclusion to draw from these things is that God is against us. No, rather God is FOR us and He will even use the tough things we go through to conform us into His image. Rom 8:18 says that the glory to come to us isn't worth comparing to the suffering we go through in this life- I.e the glory far out weighs it- God will bring about justice. 2Cor 4:17 says *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* Rom 8:35 says 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Rom 8:38 says 'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'
- **Application-** Do you really know that God loves you? Do you sometimes doubt His love when difficult things happen? Spend time thinking about the reasons why Jesus went to the cross because of His love for you. Also think about what the long term future hold- I.e the eternal rewards in glory for a godly life and a simple faith in the completed work of Christ on the cross. Bring areas of suffering to God in prayer and ask for His help with situations you are going through.
- Often the temptation when we suffer is to put our trust in something more solid, that we can feel, touch, experience with the senses. In Is 40:19 & 20 God speaks about how crazy it is to craft an idol and put trust in it as if it were God. An idol can be anything which comes between us and God, any substitute we go to rather than going to God. God wants us to enjoy the good things of this world without them becoming idols to us. Be completely honest with yourself about where you go to for comfort, are there any areas which are not healthy which you need to repent of and ask for God's forgiveness and cleansing? Let's choose to place Him first as Sovereign in our lives.

### **God Brings Strength** v29 *'He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength'*

- v10 'Behold the Lord shall come with a strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him'. What are you like at arm wrestling? God really is no wimp- He is all-powerful, He is truly mighty, He is truly strong and knowing Him brings a strength into our lives.
- I was very much into Marvel superheroes and one of the things which impressed me about them was their strength- I was but a puny, skinny lad and I think secretly would have loved to have had the strength of one of my superheroes.
- Žydrūnas Savickas is a Lithuanian powerlifter and professional strongman. He is widely considered to be

one of the greatest strongman competitors of all time. He is the only modern strongman competitor to have won every major strongman competition and recently won the title of World's Strongest Man 2014. During the competition he lifted a new world record by doing a deadlift of a weight of 1155 pounds (524kg or 524 bags of sugar!).

**He was asked the following:**

**What is your diet like during heavy training?**

I eat about 6,000 calories a day, plus I drink four or five litres of water and three protein shakes with milk or water. I eat four times a day, mainly cottage cheese, eggs, chicken, beef, fish, rice, potatoes, vegetables and fruit juices. I monitor my body weight. If I just need power for a competition then I eat fried food. But if I also need speed or endurance, such as in the World's Strongest Man competition, I eat more healthily. I'm very careful with alcohol: I have a glass of white wine perhaps two or three times a year. I also take lots of different supplements made by my sponsors.

**What injuries have you sustained during your career?**

Nine years ago I ripped the patella tendons in both knees at the same time. It was a competition in the Faroe Islands, an event called the Conan Circle. I was lifting 400kg and at first didn't feel any pain. It was a real shock – the next thing I heard was 'boosh, boosh' and I was lying on the floor. I couldn't understand what was happening and couldn't move my legs. I was taken straight to hospital and after a few hours was in surgery. I started competing again nine months later. I've also ruptured my hamstring and my calves. I've torn my quadriceps before and have even dropped a keg on my foot. But the patellas were the worst.

- What is the source of your strength? How do you cope when you come a cropper? One of the things which makes us weak is by just trusting in ourselves rather than trusting in God. Sometimes our strengths can become our biggest weaknesses because we become self-reliant, rather than needing God or others. Some people are very good at 'keeping it together' for the camera, they are always 'fine' when you ask them, but there is a silent scream on the inside of them. God will help us to take the courage to take down the wall which keeps God and others out, and to become vulnerable and able to access the help we need from God and those around us. 'I am a rock, I am an Island' sang Simon and Garfunkel, but the truth is we all need others and especially God- this is how we are wired.
- Paul had learnt the secret that when he is weak he has more of a need for God and so he said 'I will boast about my weaknesses' 2Cor 12:5.
- V31 'Those who WAIT on the Lord shall renew their strength'- what does this mean? The Hebrew verb 'to wait' used here comes from an original meaning to twist cords together to make a rope. In this way the thought is that the cords then become more permanent, more durable, and so it would seem the word came also to mean patience, waiting, enduring in a situation. In this way, God/Isaiah has chosen a word which ties together the idea of waiting with the idea of becoming strong. As we wait on God, trust in God, we become strong. In Ecclesiastes it says 'A threefold cord is not easily broken'. It is those who choose to align themselves with God to become strengthened by Him rather relying on their own resources who access the strength God has to give.
- The same word 'wait' is used in Psalm 27:14 'Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord!' Here David teaches us what it is to wait on the Lord- it means placing our confidence and trust in God. David is confident that the Lord is his salvation and the strength of his life-v1. We think of 'waiting' as something passive, but waiting on the Lord is something active- it means placing an active trust in God and refusing to entertain our worries and fears. Waiting on the Lord means having more faith in His ability to pull us up than on our circumstances to pull us down. In v10 David states that 'when my father and mother forsake me then the Lord will take care of me'- He is confident that even if our most precious loved ones reject him God will still take care of him- such a confidence is an ultimate expression of what it is to 'wait on the Lord'- to be confident in God's care of you despite your circumstances.
- What does it mean to renew our strength and mount up on wings like eagles? Well first of all we have this lovely picture of an eagle and expositors have suggested

ways that eagles renew themselves as they grow and shed and then develop different feathers, some varieties looking whiter and younger in their old age. However, it is also said that the word used here does not necessarily mean eagle but is more likely to refer to a desert vulture common in Israel. Not such a pretty picture! However, I think what this verse is referring to is the way these birds suddenly catch a thermal of air and are lifted up without any effort on their part by having to flap their wings- they can just relax and let the air current do it's work. This is contrasted either side by talk of youths dropping and fainting- the exact opposite if being effortlessly lifted up. When we surrender to God we access His strength, we do things in the power of His Spirit, lifted by His thermals. We become the overcomers rather than the overcome.

- In February 2014, Davina McCall undertook a BT Sport Relief Challenge called 'Davina - Beyond Breaking Point', seven days of either running, swimming or cycling for 450 miles from Edinburgh to London, to raise money for Sport Relief. She raised over £2,239,931. Davina says she felt traumatised after the challenge- it was both the best and worst thing she has ever done. The footage of her being fished out of Lake Windermere, chilled to the bone tells only half the story of the conditions she faced, as Britain experienced some of its harshest weather in decades. She also had to cycle through 50mph sleet, and wade through snow when she got to the Lake District.
- There are two amazing things which must have kept her going. The first must have been the goal of raising the money for Sport relief, knowing the amazing effect it would have on so many. The other thing must have been all the encouragement she received from the crowds and friends to 'keep on going' and the help and support of a good strong team around her, looking out for her and strengthening her through the trials.
- **Application-** Our passage is really encouraging us to not run our race in our own strength but in God's. Really the voice crying out in the wilderness is a warning to people that they are just like grass, or chaff- frail and easily blown away. One minute we are feeling like we could take on the world, the next we are wanting to throw in the towel.
- Maybe today you are feeling how Davina must have felt in the middle of her challenge, maybe you are feeling like giving up. Our passage finishes by saying even the strongest of us, the youths, can easily grow weary and feel like giving up, but those who trust in the Lord have a supernatural source of strength which does not come from themselves- they have stamina, power to persevere through the trials. As we place our trust squarely in the Lord He will bring us through the trials of life and over that finishing line to a great heavenly applause. Let's lean on His strong arm and go for it!

## Summary

- God Comforts Us
- God is Sovereign
- God Brings Strength

## Song

*Strength will rise (Everlasting God)*