

Isaiah 40:27-31

Turning to the God Who Saves

We are going through a series at Oxford called [RE]new. This sermon series will be followed by a report from a team that we elected as a congregation who has been investigating what strategic changes Oxford can make to align ourselves with God's purpose. Our entire motivation as a church in engaging in such an endeavor must be centered on this: We know Him! Once you know Him, once you make it your endeavor to know Him, you cannot remain the same.

If I can do well as your pastor, I will spend my efforts reminding you of Him, proclaiming Him, inviting you to turn to Him. We don't want programs, we want Him. And we know what having Him means - glory!

Continuing that theme, would you take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 40 today.

As you are turning there, I want to share a quote to you from one of my colleagues in North Carolina. A quote that I wrote down as soon as I read it, a quote that I keep in my desk and open to ever so often. Andy Davis is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Durham, NC and has led the church in revitalization. From a church that was turning theologically liberal to a church that is now conservative. From a church that was stagnant and declining, to a church that is vibrant and growing. Here is the quote from Andy:

"The reformation of a local church can never be anything less than fully turning to God - loving Him, trusting Him, seeking Him, obeying Him." (The Reformation of FBC Durham, Nine Marks Journal)

The same is true for us. If we are to experience renewal at Oxford, this will be our direction - towards Him, fully turning to Him. I am doing my diligence as your pastor to lead you to the Cross, to take you to the pages of Scripture and show you glory - His glory.

READ TEXT

Today, we meet this text bearing the name of the prophet who wrote the book - Isaiah. The whole point of the book is found in the name of the book. Isaiah means the LORD saves. The book of Isaiah is such a profitable book for us because it gives a lens by which to look through and see the world. After looking through the lens of Scripture our worldview changes from self-centered to God-centered. And, after seeing things with God as the center, we align our lives with the truth - we turn from living a life of self sufficiency to living a life of worship, a life of turning to the God who saves. We don't go outside and see ice on our windshield and not scrape it off if we are intending to drive, so we don't read Scripture and see God as the center and not order our lives around that fact. This is what Isaiah is all about - calling us to realize that the Lord saves.

Such a message is an act of grace. By the time that Isaiah writes, most of the ones that he wrote to had already forsook God and had turned their thinking to the temporary instead of the eternal. God speaks a word to these people in the midst of their forsaking, in the midst of judgment, and the word is found in the first few verses of Isaiah 40. Do you see them? *Comfort*.

The comfort in Isaiah is not the people (or anything that they can muster). The comfort in Isaiah is the promises of God. Hope comes from those who wait upon the Lord. Hope comes from the God who brings hope to a haggard people clinging to Him.

This AM, as we turn our attention to these last verses of Isaiah 40 in light of the whole, I want to encourage you to Hope in God. Don't let go of hope, turn to the God who saves.

If we are to turn to the God who saves we will confess first:

1. We Need His Presence

If we miss this truth we miss the whole point. Pay attention! If we don't start out on the right foot what foot will we start out on? The wrong one. What do we need to get right away?

Our hope comes from Him. We aren't hoping in anything or anyone else, our hope comes from the God who made the heavens and earth. The fact that we can know this is an act of grace. We are the people who know the name of God, who know the one who made the heavens, and the greatest part of the story is not only that we know Him but that HE knows us - not just knows about us but knows us!

Why do we need His presence? Look at the text:

Because of Who He Is

What does this text teach us about who He is? Isaiah 40 marks a transition in the book of Isaiah. The Lord had spoken clearly through the prophet that their sins had brought about calamity. Because of Israel's turning to idolatry they had brought about the destruction of their city by a foreign invader and they will soon be carried away into exile.

In the midst of calamity God has a word for the people and the message is *Comfort*. Who is He? **He is the God of all comfort**. Aren't you glad? Aren't you glad that he is more ready to comfort us than we are even to seek His comfort? Aren't you glad that in the midst of our hopelessness he brings comfort? This is the message of Christianity, the message of the Son being sent to save. We confess as Christians that God looked at our pitiful condition of a people who had turned from their God facing an impending and certain judgment and God comes into our chaos personally to save.

This God is the God of all Comfort and His being the God of all comfort further let us know that He is **Incomparable**. When we realize how incomparable he is the more we realize how great His comfort is the more we long for his presence.

Look at the way the text describes Him:

- 12ff
- He is the Sole Creator
- Psalm 96:5 - *For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.*
- The Supreme Sovereign
- The God of Salvation
- Verse 3-5

- Shepherd language of verse 10-11
- Verse 16 - We won't know until chapter 53 what kind of sacrifice is a worthy sacrifice for this God who is beyond compare. This one who is wounded for the transgressions of others has his life spent on behalf of others so that through His stripes we are healed.

How could we not stand amazed at this Great God? Psalm 8 says, *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?* (Psalm 8:3-4)

His awesome splendor has a great effect on us, and it should. In light of the truth of who He is how could we not confess with John the Baptist - I must decrease He must increase? How could we ever consider anything less than fully trusting in Him, than waiting for Him?

We not only need His presence because of who He is but also

Because of Who We Are

Who are we? Those who are in a mess and needing comfort. Those who left to ourselves would choose to worship the creature rather than the Creator (v.18ff). We are those who are not God. It cannot be said of us that we are incomparable. Such a title of distinction fully belongs to God. There is no one else like him. Think about the way that we talk. When someone is strong we say he is as strong as an ox, as strong as a bull. Mohammed Ali floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee. But with God - He is the sum total of Himself.

We are prone to wander, prone to worry, prone to leave the God who loves us! This is the reason for the whole book of Isaiah! We are prone to forget how awesome this God is and stand in constant need of remembering how awesome He is!

We are hopeless without Him. But, thanks be to God

2. He Gives His Presence

The solution to our predicament is Himself. He has come and entered into everlasting covenant with man. This covenant has been sealed by his own blood! Look at verse 27. See the despair and see the way the despair is answered.

The despair is answered by using the name LORD - the covenant name of God. This the God of everlasting love and care, the God who is full of compassion who invites all men to turn to Him.

Look at verse 29 - *He gives....* His gifting of anything can be nothing short of amazing grace! Remember the Psalm - what is man that you are mindful of Him and yet we know that He is mindful of us!

This is why good theology matters. We don't want to be left to our own opinions on things, we want to know what God says. Look at verse 27. In verse 27 Israel is wandering where God is. The answer is verse 28 - *have you not known?* When I read this I can't help but think about the experience of Jesus with his disciples where Phillip asks Jesus a question after he tells the disciples that He is the only way to the Father.

*Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."
Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.*

(John 14:8-11)

Just as Jesus met Philip with an encouraging word so too our God sees us who are prone to wander and gives us a good word. Right theology matters. Listen to what one commentator says: "The wrong inference from God's transcendence is that He is too great to care; the right one is that he is too great to fail." (Kidner in Motyer, *Isaiah*, 307)

Look how He cares. Verse 11. The God who made all flocks will tend His flock. Verse 26. He creates the stars and yet knows each of them by name.

His presence is the way by which he gives power to the faint and supplies all of our needs. Our portion - waiting on Him. By waiting on Him we show our absolute dependence upon His greatness. I love this - the way that we receive strength is by falling into His arms, by waiting on Him. Don't make the mistake of reading waiting and thinking of doing nothing. For those of you who know anything about waiting you know how difficult waiting can be. Ask a pregnant woman about waiting between contractions to push, or a kicker waiting for the ball to be snapped. Waiting here does not involve inactivity - this waiting involves all of our activity. But what is all of our effort? Trusting in Him, Holding onto Him. By waiting we are turning our entire selves to Him.

This waiting has a result - Waiting on the Lord is what gives us wings as eagles, is what renews our strength, is what makes us run and not grow weary or walk but not faint. Total and complete dependence upon this God who is more than able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think.

Church, we have to spend our lives here - waiting on the Lord, ordering our lives according to His word. We have to never grow weary of trusting in Him. We need His presence, He gives His presence.

Here is the truth. If we are not waiting on the Lord then we are running to idols. Waiting on the Lord means putting our full confidence in Him, and even if we are doing a good thing the good that we do is no where near the best that we can do. The best that we can do is turn our entire selves to Him.

So what does that look like for you and me personally in the day to day?

It begins with our affections. As Isaiah 40 tells us, God is who He is, we are who we are. Does the thought of his greatness move us? Does the sheer weight of His glory leave us desperate for Him?

Start with our affections and then move to our actions. Are we trusting in God to be who He is? Do we have faith in His Word and are we living like it? God doing work does not mean that we get to watch it happen it means that we get to participate in His work. Ministry is not something that we do but something that is done through us as we wait upon God, as we align our wills, our desires with Him.

God's power is there, we have to recognize it, to act upon it. What will God say about us? Will he find us collectively turning to Him, waiting upon Him? Will he find a people desperate for His presence and assured that He will give His presence? God knows each heart and is able to take even the stoniest of hearts and use them for His purpose. Let's make it our endeavor together to wait upon the Lord, to turn to the God who saves.