

# Isaiah Chapter 40

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## Two Day Shares on Other Passages in Isaiah

Most of this PDF relates to the one chapter - Isaiah 40 but there were two previous Day Shares based on two other passages from Isaiah. Maybe these provide some background to the main study - my favourite chapter in the whole Bible.

In two Day Shares I cover a few verses in Isaiah 29 - on the subject of Upside Down and then we look to the future in The Coming Transformation.

## Upside Down - Day Share 03/02/2020

*You turn things upside down!  
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,  
that the thing made should say of its maker,  
"He did not make me";  
or the thing formed say of him who formed it,  
"He has no understanding"?* [Isaiah 29:16 ESV]

This verse jumped out of the pages of my Bible one morning as I was reading the chapter. It seemed to be an apt description of people in Scotland in 2020. They are turning things upside down - as far as God is concerned. We live in a society which reckons that God owes us something and we feel aggrieved when we don't get what we deserve. We blame God - this is surprising because I have heard people who claimed that they did not believe in God blaming Him for what they perceived to be an injustice. God is blamed for bad weather - it is only recently that there has been an acknowledgement that our carelessness and greed has affected the climate in our planet. They blame God for catastrophes and disasters - And yet, they are reluctant to acknowledge God and give Him his place in our lives.

Isaiah reminds us that God is our creator and we are his created beings or his creatures. The picture of the potter at the wheel is very powerful. The pot or jug owes its existence to the potter - it is the potter's creativity which has designed the piece of pottery and it is his skill which has expertly shaped the pot. The thing which has been created on the potter's wheel begins to complain and there are two complaints

1. He did not make me. That's interesting because in our day, it is not popular to think of us as being created by God. We have come about totally by accident and by chance. That freaks me out. I find it hard to believe that anything in any way complex could happen without any form of planning or design. I know that they tell us that it took millions of years for the world to come about as we know it today and we have evolved from other species - and no one is in control. No one has planned it all. That I find impossible to believe. Many a time I have opened a furniture pack from Ikea and looked at the complex instructions - there is no way that this piece of furniture will just come together. It needs a creator.
2. He has no understanding. This is claiming that God has made a mistake and that we know better than he does. They blame God for the evil in the world - even though God is holy and cannot tolerate evil. Sin is not God's fault. He could have made us robots - to do His will without thinking -

but he knew that this would not have made us righteous. We would have had no choice. He gave us the right to choose to do good or to do evil.

No wonder Isaiah exclaims, 'Oh your upside-downness!' We are twisted in our thinking. We don't think the way God thinks.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts. [Isaiah 55:8-9 ESV]*

How many of us Christians blame God when things go wrong? We deserve a good holiday with good weather and we get irritated when things don't go according to our plans. I have to admit that I have become angry when things don't go my way. I am behaving like the inanimate piece of pottery complaining about the potter.

The next study looks at another lesson from this same chapter - God will put things right. There is a great transformation coming. Maybe sooner than we imagine.

## The Coming Transformation - Day Share 05/02/2020

### Read Isaiah 29:17-24

Our studies in Luke's Gospel illustrated an important principle - that the kingdom of God is the opposite of mankind's kingdom. You will remember that in the parables there was a great reversal which meant that those who were despised and ignored, were given prominence in God's kingdom. The reverse is also true - those who are considered important on earth are not part of God's kingdom.

Christians are waiting for the coming again of our Lord Jesus to set up his kingdom. And there will be a great transformation. Isaiah speaks about this transformation being so great that it will be as if Lebanon (which was renowned for its wildness - mainly vast forests) will become like a well-planned and ordered garden and the reverse will also take place - cultivated land will become wild.

What does this mean? Can I list the things that Isaiah predicts will happen. [Read Isaiah 29:17-24 ]

1. The deaf will hear the word of the book - that is, those who are deaf to the Bible will hear it for the first time
2. The eyes of the blind will see - those who are blind to Jesus and his word - will see him and realise who he is - every eye shall see him
3. The downtrodden will find new joy in Yahweh (a word used for God) and in the Holy One of Israel - Luke's Gospel showed the beginnings of this - the social outcasts such as the tax collectors and sinners found joy in the Saviour. This will be a feature of the coming kingdom. Those who have been treated badly on earth will find abundance of reward and satisfaction in the Lord. Christians are the most persecuted group in this world.
4. The vulnerable among mankind will take delight in the Holy One of Israel
5. Tyrants and terrorists will disappear - they will not be active any more.
6. The cynics and mockers will vanish.
7. Those who love to do wrong will be eliminated.
8. There will be an end to those who have made up false stories and testimony against God's people
9. Those who have tried to undermine justice and have deprived the innocent of justice by making false charges - will be no more.

I do not know what lies ahead,  
The way I cannot see;  
Yet One stands near to be my guide,

He'll show the way to me:

*I know Who holds the future, And He'll guide me with His hand;  
With God things don't just happen, Everything by Him is planned.  
So as I face tomorrow, With its problems large and small,  
I'll trust the God of miracles, Give to Him my all.*

I do not know how many days  
Of life are mine to spend;  
But One who knows and cares for me  
Will keep me to the end:

I do not know the course ahead,  
What joys and griefs are there;  
But One is near who fully knows,  
I'll trust His loving care:

## Studies in Isaiah 40

### A Message from the Lord - Day Share 07/02/2020

#### Read Isaiah 40

Isaiah 40 is almost certainly my favourite chapter in the Bible. It reads powerfully - it is a wonderful piece of writing. I love listening to sections being sung in Handel's Messiah. But more than that it is a powerful message from God himself.

Here is how the chapter begins.

*Comfort, comfort my people, **says your God.**  
**Speak** tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and **cry** to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins. [Isaiah 40:1-2 ESV]*

In verse 1 of chapter 40, God is speaking. 'says your God,' He is the one who is giving a message of comfort to his own people. He gives a command to 'speak' and to 'cry' maybe to the prophet - he is eager that this message of good news is transmitted to his people.

There are three unidentified voices which speak in the early verses of the chapter. We are not told who is speaking - they are like disembodied voices. They are all messengers from the Lord proclaiming God's message.

Verse 3 is the first of these voices -

***A voice cries:**  
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; [Isaiah 40:3 ESV]*

Verse 6 is the second voice - it seems like God is speaking to Isaiah telling him to cry and he asks God what is he to cry

***A voice says, "Cry!"**  
And I said, "What shall I cry?" [Isaiah 40:6 ESV]*

Verse 9 is the third voice

*Go on 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!" [Isaiah 40:9 ESV]*

Of course, all the Bible is a message from the Lord but this chapter highlights this more than in other passages. This is interesting when we look at the various strands of the Lord's message.

Isaiah 40 is a Gospel message from the Lord. This is a message from God primarily to the nation of Israel or perhaps more accurately to the cities of Judah but also to all of us in our day and generation. It is a message of Good News or Gospel (which means Good News).

I want to take two very simple lessons from this. God is speaking to us today - primarily by His Word through the Holy Spirit. He is making every effort to convey his message to the world but he may use us to be his mouthpiece. Are we listening to his voice - especially when we are reading his word or do we play the old trick of thinking it is a message for someone else? Secondly, are we willing to be God's mouthpiece to our family, friends and neighbours who do not read the Bible?

## Good News - Day Share 09/02/2020

*Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of **good news**; (verse 9); O Jerusalem, herald of **good news**; [Isaiah 40:9 (ESV)]* They were in need of good news – the future was bleak – Isaiah had just prophesied that they were going to be taken into captivity.

*Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."*  
[Isaiah 39:6-7 ESV]

So, chapter 39 ends with the bleak prospect of the nation facing exile in Babylon. There would be those who would find themselves as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. That news must have sent a shiver down their spines. The word 'eunuch' means bed-keeper. It was originally the name given to those who were servants in the bed-chambers and larger houses. Because of the culture of the time and the lack of trust, it was customary to castrate the men and deprive them brutally of their manhood. (Later on the word was used for confidential advisers of royal masters and they might not have suffered such indignity and brutality.) This was a terrifying prospect which is mentioned at the end of chapter 39 of the book of Isaiah.

So there is a dramatic change in tone from chapter 39 of Isaiah to Chapter 40. So much so, that it was often compared to the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. I used to hear Bible teachers speaking about the fact that there are 66 chapters in the Book of Isaiah which, they claimed, corresponded to the Bible as a whole. Of course, there are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. So I was brought up to believe that Isaiah 40 was the equivalent of the Gospel of Matthew.

There are some flaws in this line of reasoning. Firstly, the chapter divisions in the Bible are not part of the original text and they were added later to make it easier to navigate our way through the Bible. They are not part of the original inspired Word of God. Secondly, the scholars inform us that in the original text there is no break at the end of chapter 39 and the beginning of chapter 40.

I can understand why the old Brethren conference speakers wanted to emphasise the new beginning in

verse 1 of chapter 40. There is a dramatic change of mood. I love the tone of the early verses of chapter 40. It is so comforting and gentle in tone. This is indeed a message of good news which is the same word as gospel. I hope that I can succeed in conveying the beauty of Isaiah chapter 40 and do justice to a beautiful chapter in the next few blogs.

Notice the number of references to good news - the word 'gospel' means 'good news.' God is commanding his prophet to make this message known - even to go up to a high mountain and to act as a herald. God wants the nations to hear this message today - he wants us to proclaim the message. In our day of mass communications, it is no longer necessary to go up to a high mountain to proclaim it. We still have to look for opportunities to let people know about the good news of the Saviour of the world.

## Message of Comfort Day Share 11/02/2020

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins. [Isaiah 40:1-2 ESV]*

### **Comfort, comfort my people says your God** (verse 1)

This is a beautiful start to this chapter. Isaiah repeats the word comfort deliberately - for emphasis. God wants to give an unmistakable message of Comfort. Notice that he addresses them as 'my people' and he speaks of himself as 'your God.' He is emphasising that he has a covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. Despite their sin and rebellion He was not prepared to give them up. A covenant was like a treaty - it was a promise which God had made to the ancestors of the Jewish people - to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses and to David.

The tone of comfort continues in the next phrase - Speak tenderly to Jerusalem – 'speak to the heart' like a young man wooing a his girl' – See Genesis 34:3 or a deserted husband seeking to win his wife back (Hosea 2:14). The Israelites have abandoned God but He has not rejected them.

“Like tiny children they have stumbled in the uncertain paths of the world and will be bruised by their fall, but they have a God rushing to pick them up in his arms.” [J. Alec Motyer: Isaiah]

This is a genuine message of comfort. Jeremiah, the next Bible book has a number of false prophets who contradict the prophet Jeremiah's message of judgement. They make promises of 'comfort' which were appealing but were fake.

They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when there is no peace. [Jeremiah 6:14 NLT] These false teachers were superficial and casual. They ignored the problem and pretended it was not there. So Jeremiah was unpopular when he told people that God was going to judge the nation and punish the people because of their sins. Any mention of sin is equally unpopular today.

In the 21st century, some ministers and preachers play down Bible passages dealing with God's judgement and make much of the love of God. There is a temptation to make the message of the Bible more palatable.

People in the UK in 2020 are desperately longing for a message of comfort. There are many people who are dissatisfied and unhappy - the incidence of suicide especially among young men of the 18-25 age group is one of the indicators that there is a problem. Scotland has an abusive relationship with alcohol - another symptom of a social problem. Many young people are self-harming - for various reasons - again indicating that there is much unhappiness in our country. The politicians have in general let us down and



people are not finding it easy to trust them. People are not attending church - they feel it has little or no relevance to their situation.

And yet, the message from God is a message of comfort to a distressed world. But - and it is important to add this - we need to listen to the whole of God's message - not just the sanitised ready-made version designed to appeal to our modern post-modern world.

## Message of Culpability - Day Share 13/02/2020

Sorry for using this word - it is maybe a bit forced in order to get the alliteration - all the words beginning with 'C'. Culpability - means blame - or guilt. The Americans use the word 'culpable homicide' when they refer to someone who has caused the death of another by carelessness or some other reason. They cannot pretend that they were not to blame for the death.

In the same way, though this chapter is overwhelmingly a message of good news and comfort, God makes it clear that the actions of the nation have been sinful. In today's world there is a tendency to avoid using the word 'sin' or 'iniquity' - they might seem a bit old-fashioned and some people can become offended by these words. They are used regularly in the Bible.

*and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her **iniquity** is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand double for **all her sins**. [Isaiah 40:2 ESV]*

The word translated 'iniquity' is used frequently in the Old Testament. It means 'perversity' or 'moral evil'. This speaks of the sinful nature that is within each one of us. The word is derived from a Hebrew root which means 'twisted or perverted.' This is the tendency to do what is wrong. I can see it in my grandchildren - and I love them all dearly. I can see it in myself - it is the desire to do what is wrong. There would seem to be three ideas in this word - firstly, we twist or bend away from what we should be doing to do something which is wrong. Secondly, we twist the truth - especially when we have done wrong - we prefer to cover it up or pretend it is not too serious - unless we see someone else doing the same thing and then we think it is terrible. Thirdly, we begin to form habits of disobedience where we are deliberately going against what God wants us to do.

King David wrote Psalm 51 when he had sinned pretty dramatically and he was convicted in his conscience of how sinful he was.

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me. [Psalm 51:5 ESV]*

So we could regard the first word as the sinful nature that we inherited from our parents - this tendency to do wrong.

The word translated 'sins' is a different word - it is from a root meaning 'to miss the mark' suggesting that we are falling short of what God expects from us. It frequently means 'an offence' and the penalty and punishment for that offence. This word is usually used when it is sin against God. It can often refer to habitual sinfulness. In the case of Judah, there is probably a reference to Judah's love of idolatry. She preferred to worship a heathen god named Baal rather than God. This was clearly breaking one of the ten commandments - You shall have no other gods before me.

*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, ... [Exodus 20:4-5 ESV]*

The Jews were doing just that - they had a range of gods whom they worshipped and this involved making idols and bowing down before them. There were other sins associated with this practice. Judah

had deserted God and had preferred to worship Baal and other gods. This had led to a deterioration in moral conduct - there were other sins associated with this worship/ God warned them repeatedly that he would punish them for their sins but they would not listen. They were warned that they would face awful punishment at the hands of foreign powers. We still don't like to think about sin and judgement today.

We are prone to think that this does not apply to us - it seems a bit primitive. Maybe we should remind ourselves that an idol is anything which replaces God in our lives. This is idolatry - if it is affecting our love for God and our worship of Him. We are sinning if we allow anything to take God's place in our lives.

Chapter 40 contains a strong condemnation of the human race.

*All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades  
when the breath of the Lord blows on it;  
surely the people are grass.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.* [Isaiah 40: 6b - 8 ESV]

These verses speak about humans as 'flesh' and we are described as 'grass' - we do not last for ever. Twice it tells us that 'the grass withers and the flower fades'. Notice the contrast with the word of God, which does not wither and fade. It will stand forever. This is a reminder to us how fragile and weak we humans are. Even famous people including politicians and celebrities are only 'flesh' and we wither and fade like grass. We cannot rely on humans - but we can and must rely only on God.

## Message of Cancelled Debt - Day Share 15/02/2020

*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.* [Isaiah 40: 2 ESV]

There are three pieces of good news contained in this message of comfort and good news spoken in a tender fashion to Jerusalem.

1. Her warfare (or hardship) is ended. This probably refers to an event which would happen to her a century later. The nation would end up being conquered by the Babylonians and be taken into captivity. This does not sound particularly good news - but Isaiah's message is speaking of an event in the future as if it had already taken place and the shame of exile to a foreign land was over. There is maybe more than that - it is common to see prophecies only partially fulfilled and their complete fulfilment is still in the future. There is a future blessing for the nation which we must look at in a later study
2. Her iniquity is pardoned. How could God pardon their iniquity without lowering his standards? He could not just 'turn a blind eye' and pretend that it did not exist for that would compromise God's holiness. He is absolutely holy and he cannot tolerate sin. We have already looked at Isaiah 53 where God's Servant - His Son - was wounded for our transgressions and was bruised for our iniquities. So God has punished His son so that he can pardon our sins and iniquities. The New International Version has a different translation - 'her sin is paid for.' The word is better translated as iniquities but the idea of paid for is very accurate. Here is a passage from the book of Leviticus which helps us to grasp what is being said. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him [Leviticus 1:4] This is where the Israelite wanted to be right with God and brought an offering of an animal to the priest. Notice that the person who was making the offering put his hand on the head of the animal and

something wonderful happened. God was pleased with this sacrifice and he made atonement for the sinner. God is pleased with the sacrifice of his own Son and we by faith place our hands on Him and our sins are completely atoned - we saw this in an earlier study - Jesus takes our place and takes our punishment for our sins so a Holy God is satisfied and we are made righteous in his sight. [See Propitiation for our Sins 21/11/19]

3. This sin is completely covered - she has received from the Lord's hand double for her sins. I see this as good news but I want to explain it in the next blog.

## Message of Cancelled Debt (2) - Day Share 17/02/2020

*She has received from the Lord's hand double for her sins.*

Most of the commentaries on Isaiah suggest that this means that when the nation has been sent into exile in Babylon, God is punishing them double for their sins. They point to verses in the Old Testament which agree with this interpretation.

There is a problem with this in my mind. This is a message of comfort and good news - but to hear that they are going to be punished so severely is hardly a message of good news. That is not going to be much comfort to them.

I have found the commentary by a great Bible scholar by the name of Alec Motyer to be very helpful and many of my thoughts were inspired by his writings. He has a very different interpretation of this expression 'she has received from the Lord's hand double for her sins.' He points out that the word 'double' means 'to fold over or fold in half.' When something is folded over, each half corresponds exactly with the other half. So Motyer argues that the picture is that one half contains the sin and the other half is the payment. There is a direct match between the sin and the payment. So the sin is completely covered by the payment. Alec Motyer quotes a practice which illustrates this concept. There was a custom in history for a tradesman to pin the folded account to the customer's door once it was paid and this was called 'the double.'

It does not mean that her punishment is excessive. Notice how the concept of 'double' is introduced in the chapter. 'She has received from the Lord's hand' - which sounds like a gracious gift from a generous God - not like a punishment. Salvation is a gift from God and the sinner has merely to accept it.

## Message of Creation - Day Share 19/02/2020

*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? [Isaiah 40:12 ESV]*

*Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; [Isaiah 40:21-22 ESV]*

I have not sailed across the Atlantic Ocean or the Pacific Oceans. I have, however, sailed across the North Sea and the Baltic Sea - and they seemed huge to me. Water makes up about 71% of the earth's surface - and the land area covers only 29%. Over 95% of the water is salt water from earth's oceans and the lakes and the remainder is freshwater contained in the lakes and frozen water in glaciers and polar ice caps. And the oceans are very deep - there are parts of the ocean which are 1 mile deeper than the height of Mount Everest. The total volume of the water amounts to 1.35 billion cubic kilometres. That's a lot of water - but Isaiah reminds us that our God holds all this in the palm or hollow of his hand. Wow!

He has marked off the heavens with a span. Our universe is boundless. Nowadays, astronomers have a greater understanding of the universe and they admit that it is boundless. The earth belongs to a solar system of 9 planets all of which orbit the Sun. (Earth, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus,



Neptune, Pluto). To travel from the Sun to Pluto (its furthest dependent planet) in a rocket travelling at 100,000 miles per hour would take 4 years and 2 months. The solar system is only a small part of a huge galaxy of stars called the Milky Way. [100,000 million stars]. The Milky Way is so vast that this same rocket travelling at the same speed would take 670 million years to make the journey from end to end. There are millions of galaxies like the Milky Way in the universe. But our God has marked off the heavens with a span - the space between the thumb and the forefinger of his hand.

Notice all the imagery of the science laboratory. He enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure. He weighed the mountains and scales in a measure. All of these are metaphors to begin to convey the greatness and awesome majesty of our God in creation. Our planet earth is really insignificant in the light of his amazing greatness; the infinite universe is also small in comparison to the power of its Creator.

God is portrayed as sitting above the circle of the earth - this is very interesting because it was not until the middle ages - some 1800 years later that mankind discovered that the earth was round. He is so powerful that he stretches out the heavens like a curtain. Notice the homely metaphor used in conjunction with something so vast and unthinkable. He spreads the heaven like a tent for Him to dwell in. By comparison, humans are like grasshoppers. Isaiah is not by any means saying that God is not interested in human beings. There is ample evidence of how much God cares for his creatures. The point is being made that, in comparison with a God who made the universe, all of mankind are just like tiny grasshoppers.

Notice the repeated questions, Isaiah is asking. They are rhetorical questions. An answer is implied but not given. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? These questions are all saying the same thing - yes of course you should know, yes of course, you have heard, yes of course you have been told. What have we been told? We have been told about the greatness and majesty of our God from the evidence of what we have seen in his creation. Paul the apostle writing many years later said that even those who had never heard the gospel were without excuse because the creation itself was ample evidence of an amazing all-powerful Creator.

*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [Romans 1:20]*

I can well remember standing on the summit of some of the Scottish mountains and looking over the beautiful landscape below and worshipping the God who created it all. David the writer of the Psalms looked out at a starry sky, perhaps as he was watching the sheep in the darkness of an eastern night and he said,

*O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is your name in all the earth!* [Psalm 8: 1 and 9 ESV]

This is one of the most popular hymns.

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

And when I think of God, His Son not sparing;  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
And lead me home, what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then I shall bow with humble adoration,  
And then proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art!"

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

From <<http://www.songlyrics.com/john-keys/o-lord-my-god-when-i-in-awesome-wonder-how-great-thou-art-instrumental-version-lyrics/>>

## Message of Care - Day Share 21/02/2020

*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. [Isaiah 40:11 ESV]*

This is a lovely verse reminding us that our God cares for us. He has been portrayed as the almighty Creator and the powerful conqueror.

*Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; [Isaiah 40:10 ESV]*

It is wonderful to observe that our God rules the world with his arm (singular) - the arm is a symbol of strength. However, as a shepherd caring for his sheep, he uses both arms. 'He will gather the lambs in his arms.' He carries the lambs in his bosom - they are close to his heart.

Although He is the mighty Creator, he cares for his sheep. He gives special attention to those who are in greatest need - the lambs and the ewes. The lambs are very vulnerable because they are so young and fragile. There are predators who would readily snatch the lambs. The ewes are pregnant - they are about to give birth so they are also in need of special care - and they receive it from the shepherd. He knows when we need additional care and attention from him. He 'gently leads' them - this is not the time for rough handling. Our God knows exactly what we need and when we need it. We can trust him fully to care for us in all of life's circumstances.

In human organisations, the chief executive officer is unlikely to be the one who is responsible for the care of the individual members of the organisation. S/he is too involved in the big decisions and the strategic planning to be interested or have the time or inclination to be involved in the detailed and demanding care of the individuals. For past experience, this is time consuming and requires patience. Our Shepherd is not too busy to take time to care for the individual needs of his flock.

And yet, Israel feels that God is ignoring them.

*Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God"?* [Isaiah 40:27 ESV]

How often we get into our heads that God is not interested in us. We unjustly accuse him of not caring - just like the disciples during the storm on the sea of Galilee when Jesus was fast asleep in the stern of the boat. We think he is ignoring us - "my way is hidden from the Lord" or we think that he is not looking after our rights and our entitlement - "my right is disregarded by my God." I often think we are unfair to God - we feel that we have a right to a good job and a good house and good health and we feel let down if we fall short in any of these areas of entitlement. We are so prone to forget that he is the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep and knows what is best for us.

*Why do you say, O Jacob,*

*and speak, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God"?  
Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.  
Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint. [Isaiah 40: 27-31 ESV]*

This passage starts with a grouse - a complaint against God for not bothering or caring about them. We saw this in the last blog - Israel was claiming that God was forgetting about them. He was ignoring them.

They had a wrong idea about God and the prophet corrects this. "The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. They were judging God by human standards - their God was too small.

This chapter is encouraging us to have complete faith in God the Creator. He will never become exhausted and give up on us. There is no limit to his power or his understanding. There have been times when someone has looked to me for help and I have been unable to provide the necessary advice - I did not know what to say - it was too hard for me. God is never in that position - his understanding is unsearchable. The universe is ample evidence of that. There have been other times when I lacked the time or the energy or the inclination to help - not so with our God. He never lacks energy or inclination.

*Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. [Isaiah 40:30-31 (ESV)]*

There are two words used here which seem very similar but when we look more closely at the Hebrew words we discover something very interesting. The first word 'youths' refers to age and speaks of those in the prime of life - sadly, that is only a distant memory for me! The second word translated as 'young men' comes from the verb 'to choose' - i.e. those picked out for their stamina and fitness. They are the equivalent of the commandos or the marines. You would not expect them to give up. But the powerful statement is that even at their best human beings are frail and can suffer from exhaustion.

By contrast Isaiah speaks of those who have placed their complete faith and trust in God. Those who wait [or hope] in the Lord. The word 'hope' always includes certainty - We use this word differently from what is meant in this passage. This is not wishful thinking. We might say that I hope to do something - but it might be very unlikely that I will achieve it. The word hope in the Bible speaks about certainty. The word wait always includes the idea of patiently. God might not answer our prayers as soon as we might like - but he wants us to wait on Him - because his time is always right.

Isaiah says that those who exercise hope and trust and wait on God will renew their strength. This suggests that there is a great transformation or change takes place. We find that our strength is daily and hourly renewed as we use it.

There is a wonderful picture of people becoming like eagles. They soar above the problems and obstacles of life - because they are given supernatural power. They experience divine strength each day. Their strength is like the Lord's own strength that does not weary or faint.

They shall run and not be weary - as we get older we don't run very much. It is an exceptional thing for

us to run. It is only when we are in a crisis. We walk every day - this is the normal activity. So the verse is telling us that we will experience God's strength in the exceptional circumstances (running) and in the normal everyday life experiences (walking) - the daily grind! - and God will sustain us in both of these.

Speaking personally, I sometimes find that it is the everyday pressures which take their toll on my reserves of energy and strength. I wonder how I managed to cope with the pressures of a demanding job back in my pre-retirement days. I need to trust the Lord to give me the strength to cope with the demands of family life and church life as well as the aches and pains of getting older. It is good to know that the same God who is there for me when there is a crisis, will support me in the everyday routines - I need to learn to trust him more. I look at the picture of the eagle and think that the slug would be a more appropriate image for my spiritual life. But God wants us all to soar like eagles - to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.



Wee Poem on Isaiah 40

This wee poem goes to the tune of Auld Lang Syne. It is based on Isaiah 40:11-14.

### **In the Hollow of His Hand**

He'll care for them, look after them,  
As a shepherd with his sheep.  
Will guide the ewes away from harm,  
Hold the lambs with his own arm.

In the hollow of His mighty hand,  
Protected by His love;  
Near to His heart they are secure  
With a love that will endure.

To measure sky or oceans vast,  
His hand his only tool,  
He weighs earth's soil and mountains tall,  
With his strong and mighty hand.

In the hollow of His mighty hand,  
Creator over all,  
The God of all the universe,  
He is in full control.

Who was it taught Him how to make  
the stars and planets vast?  
Who instructed Him in just designs  
His creation to control?

In the hollow of His mighty hand  
Beginning and the End  
Eternally He is supreme  
The Sovereign Lord of All

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