

Psalm 4

by Carl Armerding

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the evangelist getting up to the high mountain to experience God's presence and bringing a message that is worthy of its divine source.

Duration: 22:41

Scripture: Isaiah 40:9

Topics: "Psalms"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preaching the word of God with strength and urgency. He highlights the need for believers to immerse themselves in scripture and live according to its teachings. The speaker references Isaiah 40:9-11, where God calls upon Zion and Jerusalem to proclaim good tidings and lift up their voices with strength. He encourages believers to have a burden for reaching the cities of their own country and other countries with the gospel, emphasizing the power of the message of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

For our meditation at this time, let's turn again to the book of Isaiah, chapter 40. And this time we'll consider verses 9 through 11. Isaiah 40, verses 9 through 11.

O Zion that bring us good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem that bring us good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up, be not afraid.

Say unto the city of Judah, Behold your God. Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him. Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. As we scan afresh the whole passage from which these verses are taken, we notice a very definite pattern in it.

Here we see the Lord making overtures to man. It's not a case of a man seeking God, but of God seeking man. And that, of course, was also the manner of our Lord when he was here on earth.

He said, The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost. And as a good shepherd, he went after that which was lost until he found it. Our Lord also lightened his mission to that of a man sowing seed in his field.

But before he could sow the ground, it had to be broken up. And John the Baptist was the plowman who went before the sower. And in that way he prepared the way of the Lord.

In our preceding study we saw how all of this was foreseen and foretold by the prophet. In our present portion we get the commissioning of those who are to carry forward the work of proclaiming the good tidings. It's interesting to observe that it is a city rather than an individual which is here addressed.

This does not mean that we are to lose sight of the individual. In these days when so many are turning to collectivism as a philosophy of life, it's well for us to emphasize the fact that God is ever and always interested in the individual. Collectivism, socialism, and communism all tend to lose sight of the individual, but God never does.

It is our understanding that in addressing a city as here, the Lord has in mind the individuals who live in that city, just as we often identify a city with its inhabitants. The striking thing is that the whole city is here addressed as an evangelist. As a matter of fact, another translation puts it just that way.

O evangelist Zion! Most cities are anything but that. They do not proclaim good news, but bad news. Our daily newspapers give abundant proof of that.

But things will be different when this verse is finally fulfilled. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which it may be fulfilled even now. All who are truly born again are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, and as such they go forth with the good tidings of God's grace.

The idea of a city seems to have been in the mind of God from all eternity. But this idea seems to have been in the minds of men as well. Cain built a city which he called after the name of his son, Enoch.

Later on we read of another attempt to build a city and a tower, for we read that they said, Go to, let's build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven. And let us make us a nail, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. Alas, they built without a foundation, and they used to substitute materials.

For they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. How different a city for which Abraham looked! We are told that he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Such a city as Zion, which is here addressed as an evangelist, or a bearer of good tidings.

In view of the constant threat which menaces our cities in these days of the atomic bomb, there is great consolation in the thought that we have here something which shows it will not always be like this. Having seen what can happen to such cities as Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, those of us who live in cities may well wonder what may happen to our homes. Fear has already driven many into the suburbs where they feel more secure.

We gather from our texts that Zion herself is afraid. And when we consider the number of times that the city of Jerusalem has been besieged and destroyed, we need not wonder that its inhabitants are afraid. Although destined to be the joy of the whole earth, it has probably seen more grief and sorrow than any other city of its size in all the world.

And that in spite of the fact that its name means the foundation of peace. God has been dealing with her in his holy discipline just as he deals with his individual children. But his discipline always has as its objective the restoration of the offender.

I take it that we have the spiritually restored city before us here. It may be that like the psalmist she has prayed, Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgresses thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Psalm 51 The first thing that this city is now told to do is to get up to the high mountain. Now just what might that mean? Well, a number of answers come to mind. We remember that the Lord Jesus went up into a mountain to pray.

And it seems it was an ancient custom to go up to a high place to pray and to worship. Even the heathen did that. In the case of our Lord we read that as he prayed the fashion of his countenance or his face was altered.

And his raiment or his clothing was white and blistering. Such were the wonderful and visible effects of his communion with his Father. And it may be that that is what the Lord is here asking his evangelist to do also.

Nothing could be more appropriate and fitting. But we believe it's more than that. It is essential, without it the message of the evangelist would be but a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Then too we may learn from this that the message which we publish must be kept on a level with its divine source. There is a tendency in our day to lower standards. Gospel music, so called, is hardly distinguishable at times from dance music.

And the content of the message, as well as the manner of delivering it, have often been degraded as well. In saying that, I am in no way suggesting that we should be stilted or artificial in our presentation of the gospel. A messenger need not be an orator.

But one of the practical effects of having been in the high mountain with God should be that the message be brought in keeping with such a sublime experience. The glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus is worthy of the best that we can do. But it is sometimes argued that men of the world do not understand or appreciate the lofty language of scripture.

Experience does not bear that out, however. I have often found the opposite to be the case. It has amazed me more than once to note how the uneducated and uncultured seem to respond most heartily to a message which is almost wholly cast in the language of scripture itself.

It seems that they recognize the divinity of the message instinctively. We all know that there is something which the best schools in the country cannot communicate. Be the home ever so humble and ever so poor so far as this world's goods are concerned.

If the word of God is read and taught there, a culture will be found which is easily recognizable by all who have ears to hear and eyes to see. In the good providence of God, I was born into such a home. Because of economic conditions, I was not able to avail myself of the privilege of going to high school after completing my studies in the grade schools.

It was not until after I was married and had a family of my own that it became possible for me to obtain more formal education. In the city in which we lived at that time, there was a state university. I enrolled there as a special student at the suggestion of the president of the university.

After two years of that, I was urged by the dean of the university to qualify for a degree. In order to do that, I had to pass an entrance examination. And I still remember the fear with which I approached the examination in English.

But I never had a better opportunity to prove the value of home training in the reading and study of the holy scriptures. The examination lasted several hours. And after it was all over and I learned that I had passed, I requested to see my paper.

The request was granted. I noted corrections here and there, but the thing that interested me most was a comment at the top of my paper. Comment, this paper smacks of Shakespeare or the Bible.

Until that time I had read but little of Shakespeare's works, but I had read my Bible. And evidently it had left its mark on me. As I thought over that remark, it occurred to me that the English of our King James Version of the Bible is what might be called the English of Shakespeare.

It is the English Bible which has kept it alive and current even to this day. And but for that fact we might have as much difficulty in reading the writings of Shakespeare as most of us have in trying to read the works of Chaucer and Spenser without a dictionary. The professor who graded my paper was not slow to identify a quality which is sadly lacking in much of the preaching of our times.

It may be that we do not read the scriptures as assiduously as the generation that preceded us. They seem to have been so steeped on language of scripture that it was evident to all that they lived in scripture. They had fewer books about the Bible than we have.

Therefore they were not exposed as we are to that which is best. At best is but second rate when compared with the Bible. We need again to get up into the high mountains.

All of this leads quite naturally to the next thing here. Lift up thy voice with strength. In other words, when you preach the gospel, the glorious gospel of the grace of God, let's put all that we have into it.

If we do that we shall not leave people in doubt as to what we mean. Those who warn men to flee from the wrath to come should do so with urgency and solemnity. This is solemn business.

The very tone of our voices should indicate to the listener that we are in dead earnest. It is written of the apostles that they so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and also Greeks believed. Barnabas testified of Paul that right after his conversion he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And it was Paul himself who asked, If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? When we witness to the word of God let us strive to leave the impression that we really believe what we preach. And I am confident that if we have been on the high mountain in the immediate presence of the Lord himself before we face the public we shall have no difficulty in this respect. But the preach of the gospel also needs courage.

Accordingly, the next thing we have here is a word of encouragement. Be not afraid. God has not given us the spirit of cowardice but of power and love and of a sound mind.

The gospel which we preach requires no apologies. Our education may be limited and we may be limited in other ways also. But the gospel is not deficient in any way.

Therefore we should proclaim it boldly. We have known individuals who were naturally timid in retiring but who, when speaking about the Lord Jesus, not only waxed eloquent but they manifested a courage that was positively amazing. That comes from knowing who it is that we preach and from a sense of the dignity of the position of one who represents the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Such may like Paul be cast into prison for his sake without losing sight of the fact that even there they are ambassadors in bonds. Brethren, we're ambassadors for Christ. Therefore, be not afraid.

Having considered the preparation, let's now consider the field of operation. We note that Zion, the evangelist, is sent to the cities of Judah which were her sister cities, of course. This is also according to the pattern given us in the New Testament.

The disciples of our Lord were sent first of all to the cities of their own country. They were to be witnesses unto the Lord Jesus both in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and then to the uttermost part of the earth. But they were to begin right at home, so to speak.

The regions beyond would be reached in due course. It should be feared that some are attracted to the regions beyond who have never witnessed very much at home. But such is not the order here.

To make that very practical, I would like to suggest that we take upon our hearts the burden of the cities of our own country. Let us prayerfully support those whom the Lord has specially gifted and equipped for the task of reaching them with the gospel. But let us not forget the cities of other countries where the light of the gospel has not come as yet.

For example, we have it on good authority that there are thousands of cities, towns, and villages in France where there is as yet no evangelical testimony. Oh, that the Lord will raise up someone to go forth as an evangelist to those cities and their other countries just as needy. The message given to the evangelist is brief but full of meaning.

It is not one of personal testimony, wonderful as that may be. No mere human experience can ever be as effective and powerful as the gospel whose theme is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our chief business to bear witness to him.

In keeping with this, Zion is told to tell the cities of Judah, Behold your God. This message implies that God can be seen. If it be asked how that may be possible, we have a ready answer in the scripture itself.

The Word, who is God, became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, says the Apostle John. God was manifest in the flesh, says Paul, by the same Spirit. And both were referring to the Lord Jesus, and both were emphasizing his deity.

And that is precisely what is emphasized in the message given to Zion for her sister cities. If the one whom we preach be not God, then there is nothing distinctive about the message which we bring. The importance of that is evident in the sayings of our Lord himself.

To the Pharisees of his day he said, If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die on your sins. Again he said, Before Abraham was, I am. If he be not God, he could not rightly say, Let not your heart be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me. Only one who is equal with God could ask us to trust him even as we trust God. And those who obey from the heart the summons, Behold your God, soon discover that there is

only one man to whom these words apply.

It is the man Christ Jesus. He is both God and man. He is the only being in the universe of whom that can be said.

And that makes him altogether unique. It is just that that gives both character and value to the gospel of which he is the theme. It is remarkable that the same passage which tells us that God was manifest in the flesh also tells us that he was seen of angels.

From that we may infer that before the incarnation God was never seen of angels. Previous to this even the seraphim covered their faces in his presence while they cried one to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

We are not told what effect this first sight of God manifest in the flesh may have had on the angels. But we do know what effect it had upon the prophet. When he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, he said, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. In similar strain we hear Job also saying, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear.

But now mine eyes seeth thee. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. Such are the effects of beholding God in the person of his Son.

It is then that we see ourselves as God sees us. The same thing is implied in the statement made by Paul when he says, All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Note that he does not say all have sinned and failed to measure up to the standards of conduct which befit a human being.

Neither does he say that all have sinned and failed to live up to the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. All of that, no doubt, would be true. But it does not go far enough.

The standard of measurement is the glory of God. And where do you see that? In the face of Jesus Christ. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

How important it is then to present Christ both as God and as man. Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God. The fact that he is presented as your God shows that he has a claim upon us.

And as our God he has rights over each one of us. In the following verse he is presented as the coming one. Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand or with might.

And when he comes with strong hand it is to deliver his people. This expression implies at least two things. First, they're in a desperate situation.

And second, they're unable to deliver themselves. It's evidently a time of crisis. The power which holds them in its grip is too great for mere human strength to overcome.

But when there is none to help or uphold, then his own arm brought him salvation. Because of that we can say with Paul, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it's the power of God. It is salvation to everyone that believeth.

And since the passage which we are considering is prophetic, we believe that there's a sense in which the Lord will come again with strong hand to deliver his ancient people Israel. On the other hand we are sure that we may also claim it in times of crisis. Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save.

Neither is ear heavy that it cannot hear. Next we learn that the same one who serves saves also rules. His arm shall rule for him.

The one whom we preach as savior is also the divinely appointed sovereign. And that applied to the individual as well as to the universe. That heart that has been cleansed from sin by his precious blood must now become his royal throne.

We know only too well from first experience how the natural man resents and refuses such control. But those who have submitted their hearts and lives to his beneficent control gladly confess that nothing has brought them greater joy than this. To have him in control means that one's life is delivered from the confusion and failure that is so prevalent today.

Truly his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

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