

Get a Good Look at God

by Warren Wiersbe

The sermon emphasizes the unparalleled greatness of God and His ability to provide comfort, strength, and guidance in our lives.

Duration: 39:26

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-4, Isaiah 40:6-11

Topics: "Divine Comfort", "Faith And Trust"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the passage from Isaiah chapter 40, specifically verses 1-17 and 26-31. The sermon begins by emphasizing the comforting message of God to His people, assuring them that their warfare is over and their sins are forgiven. The preacher then highlights the voice of preparation, urging the people to make way for the Lord and trust in His guidance. The sermon also emphasizes the voice of promise, reminding the people that while human beings are temporary like grass, the word of God is eternal and trustworthy. Lastly, the preacher discusses the voice of pity, encouraging the people to not be afraid but to trust in the Lord's strength and victory. Throughout the sermon, the preacher emphasizes the themes of comfort, preparation, promise, and overcoming fear through faith in God.

Transcript

Turn in the word of God to Isaiah chapter 40. I shall read verses 1 through 17 and then verses 26 through 31. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken it.

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever. O Zion that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains.

O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up, be not afraid. Say unto the cities 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. Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and measured out heaven with the span, and measured the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being his counselor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel? And who instructed him, and taught him in the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the coasts as a very little thing.

And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the Lord, the Holy One? Lift up your eyes on high, and behold, who hath created these things? Who bringeth out their host by number? He calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for he is strong in power, not one faileth.

Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and the justice due to me is passed away from my God? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to those who have might he increaseth strength. Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint. May God help us today to see how great he is.

The first king and monarch had died, and all of the royalty of Europe was assembled in the huge cathedral to witness the funeral. The heads of state were there--emperors and kings and queens and great men of political stature--and the casket wherein this monarch lay dead was surrounded by tributes, the cost of which could have fed a city. Wherever you looked you saw pomp and power and wealth and prestige.

And then the clergyman stepped to the altar to open the funeral service. I know not who he was, but as he surveyed that crowded cathedral, as he saw the gold and the glitter, the uniforms, he said, Only God is great. And if the prophet Isaiah had been in that congregation, he would have jumped to his feet and said, Amen.

Only God is great. In fact, that's the whole theme of Isaiah chapter 40, the greatness of God. Isaiah gave this message to a group of strangling, straggling, struggling Jews.

The prophet was looking down through the years and saw the day would come when the exiles of Israel in Babylon would be coming home. And so he wrote them a message. And the message of Isaiah chapter 40 is a message of encouragement.

God is great. Here is this motley crew of Jewish exiles. And now the door has been open.

Go back to your land. Go back where you belong. And they look around at the greatness of Babylon.

They look ahead and see the meagerness and the littleness of Israel. And they look at themselves and they see how weak and broke they are. And they say, we can't do it.

The world is filled with people who say it cannot be done. Somebody here today is facing some problem. I don't know what it is.

But as you look at your circumstances and as you look at yourself, you're saying it can't be done. And Isaiah, the prophet says to you and to me what he said to these exiles, don't look in the wrong direction. Look at the greatness of God.

And as you look at the greatness of God, you will say it can be done. Now, today, I want us to contemplate the greatness of God. Only God is great.

It's a good thing the word great is in our evangelical vocabulary or many churches would not be able to write great buildings and great sermons. I have been reading and studying sermons for some 30 years. I'm not sure I know what a great sermon is.

Great preachers, great ministries and over and above all of this evangelical promotion comes the voice of a prophet saying only God is great. And the sooner you and I acknowledge that fact, the better off we're going to be. Now, the prophet Isaiah is not just a theologian.

He's a pastor. He takes the greatness of God and he brings it right down to where we live. He's not giving a lecture to young theologians who want to understand all the philosophy of God's greatness.

What he's doing is applying medicine to people with broken, wounded hearts. He's bringing light in the darkness. He's bringing strength for the weary.

And how does he do it? Well, he makes three declarations about the greatness of God. And in these days, when you and I are tempted to think man is great and what man has built is great, it might be good for us to listen to these declarations of the greatness of God. In verses 1 through 11 of Isaiah chapter 40, the prophet says God is greater than your sins.

And then in 12 through 26, he says God is greater than your circumstances. And then in 27 through 31, he says God is greater than your feelings. God is greater than your sins.

God is greater than your circumstances. God is greater than your feelings. Oh, get a hold of the greatness of God.

God is greater than your sins. Now the Israelites had sinned. There was no question about that.

That's why they were in Babylon to begin with. They had rebelled against God and broken his law and slandered his name. They had defiled his land with idols.

They had bowed down before heathen gods. God says, all right, you want to live like the heathen? Why don't you just live with the heathen? He took them off to Babylon. And in Babylon, they woke up and said, oh, we've sinned.

He said, well, I'm going to keep you here a little while until you really learn your lesson. They had sinned. And you have sinned.

And I have sinned. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar.

His truth is not in us. And in these first 11 verses, the prophet says, will you get a hold of the greatness of God? God is greater than your sins. The very first word he speaks, comfort.

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye tenderly. And that Hebrew word means to the heart.

Speak ye to the heart. Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem. Well, what shall we say to Jerusalem? What shall we say to the people of God? Shall we say, stew in your own grease.

You made this trouble. You live in it. No, he didn't say that.

Oh, they suffered. There's no one who sins who does not suffer. Sin brings its own suffering.

God doesn't have to send an angel down to spank. A sin brings its own suffering. What is the message that her warfare is accomplished? That means the time of your disciplined service is now over.

I have brought you here. Your time is up. That her iniquity is pardoned for she has received of the Lord's hands adequately for her sins.

Must have been good news to those people. Their iniquity is pardoned. In these 11 verses, you're going to find a number of voices.

This first voice is the voice of pardon. The good news that God has forgiven your sin. That's good news.

If I speak to someone right now who carries a dirty conscience, you have something on your heart that should not be there. I have good news for you. In Jesus Christ, there is the pardon of sin.

Who is a pardoning God like thee and who has grace so rich and free following the voice of pardon. There is the voice of preparation. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord.

My people are going to go back to their land. Now level off all of the mountains, fill up all the valleys, straighten out those curves, smooth out those rough places. My people are coming.

I'd like to read verse four up and down the streets of Chicago. Have you driven in Chicago lately? I wish that someone would come in Chicago and make the rough places smooth. We have potholes big enough to be used for parking lots.

The voice of preparation, I have pardoned you. Now I'm going to prepare the way for you to go back. They couldn't get on a jet plane.

There wasn't an airlift. There was no Amtrak. Here they were having to cross the wilderness to get from Babylon back to Palestine.

How could they do it? God says, don't worry about it. I'm preparing the way. The same God who pardons you prepares the way for you.

Another voice comes out. It's the voice of promise. The voice said, cry.

What shall I cry? All flesh is grass. Don't you Jews think you're any better because you've suffered here? You're still grass. I can mow you down.

All the leaders that you trusted are dead. All the people that you trusted are dead. But one thing is not dead.

The word of God is not dead. It's living. It abides forever.

Flesh is like grass. It withers and dies. But the word of our God shall stand forever.

And when my word says go, you go. Even today, we can hear the voice of pardon that says, comfort, I've forgiven you. The voice of preparation.

Don't be afraid. I'm going before you. The voice of promise.

Don't trust yourself. Trust in my word. And there's a third, fourth voice that comes.

There's the voice of pity. Oh, Zion, that bringeth good tidings, good news. Get up on the mountain.

Shout it out now. Oh, Jerusalem, shout out the good news. What's the good news? Don't be afraid.

If you were to stop every other person on the streets of Chicago and say, please tell me the truth, are you afraid? They would say yes. Our doctors are treating people today who don't have physical afflictions. They're just afraid.

Some are afraid of the past. It might catch up with them. Some are afraid of the present.

It has caught up with them. Some are afraid of the future. They don't know where they're going.

Fear. He said, here's the good news. Don't be afraid because the Lord is going to come with a strong hand.

He's going to come as a mighty conqueror. He will go before you. But would you notice in verse eleven, this strong arm of the soldier becomes the tender arm of the shepherd.

And God is saying to his people in the voice of pity, I'm going to gather you like a shepherd gathers his sheep. I'm going to watch over you. I'm going to smooth out the way for you.

You've had it rough. I have pardoned you. I have given you my promise.

I'm preparing the way for you. And I'm going to go with you and lift you up and hold you close to my heart. The voice of pity.

My friend, God is greater than your sin. This whole chapter talks about the greatness of God. And the first thing he says is God is greater than your sin.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord. Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt. Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured there where the blood of the lamb was spilled.

Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that can pardon and cleanse within. Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin. Now, where do you find that grace? At Calvary.

Who purchased that grace? Jesus did. How can God be greater than my sin? Because his grace is greater. There's no need for any person here today to carry the guilt and the stain of sin.

God is greater than your sin. And someone sits here today and says, Pastor Wiersbe, I know I'm saved, but every once in a while the devil digs into my diary and he comes up with a dirty page and he wraps mud around it and he throws it at me. And when he does that, you just look the devil straight in the eye and say, God is greater.

My sins have been buried in the depths of the sea and he remembers them against me no more. God is greater than your sins. Now in verses 12 through 26, he tells us that God is greater than our circumstances.

The king said to the Jews, go back home. God raised up the leaders to go with them. And they said, how can we do it? Our little ones, they can't walk through the desert.

And there are armies that are going to attack us. And here's the great Babylon. Look, these great monuments and these great statues and buildings, they've been protecting us.

And now we're going to go out there. I find that Christians more than anything else are concerned about their circumstances. For some reason or other, circumstances are always bigger than God.

You ever notice that? God sent the Jews into the promised land and said, go in, take over. It's all yours. They said, let's spy it out first.

So they spied it out. And the spies came back. It was a typical committee meeting.

The majority said nothing could be done. A committee, as you know, is a group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide nothing can be done. And the minority said, we can do it.

God is greater. Did you see those giants? Ah, but we saw God. God's bigger than the giants.

Did you see the walls around those cities? Yes, we did. But we looked higher and we saw God up there. I speak to someone right now who is greatly concerned about circumstances.

Things are not going the way you think they ought to go. And God doesn't know what he's doing. And Isaiah the prophet says, God is greater than your circumstances.

It's beautiful how he does this. First, he says, look at the things on earth. Did you ever measure the water in the palm of your hand? You ever walk up to the ocean and say, I'm not going to measure the ocean.

One, two, three, four. Can't do it. God can do it to God.

The ocean is just a drop in the bucket. Do you ever weigh the mountains? Have you noticed that you drive along the highway? You see a sign that says way station for the trucks. Have you ever actually seen a truck being weighed in a way station? I never have.

They're always closed. Ever notice that? And here are these, this little band of Jews. And they're looking at the roadmap back to Palestine.

Oh, the mountains. God says, you ever weigh the mountains? I can do it. I've hefted them more than once.

Do you ever count out the dust of the earth? I've done it. The prophet says, look at the world around you. God made it.

And the God who made this world is big enough for your circumstances. He's not afraid of the ocean. He's not afraid of the desert.

He's not afraid of the mountains. Then in verses 12, 13 and 14, he gets kind of close to home and says, look, you think you're smarter than God? Were you around to give God advice when he made the world? You know, one of the greatest things today, if you don't want to have to work too hard, become a consultant. Be a consultant.

Be an expert. An expert is an ordinary spurt under pressure. Did God consult you when he made things? No.

Has God consulted you about how to run them? No. Then what are you worrying about? Quit trying to second guess God. And he gets us from the earth.

He looks at the nations of the earth in verses 15 and 16 and 17. Here's great Babylon. Where's Babylon today? Have you heard much? Any news releases come out of Babylon lately? All of these great nations that you fear, says Isaiah, they're just less than nothing to God.

He's not worried about history. He's in control of history. He puts one man up, takes another man down.

The God who made this world can control the circumstances of life. The God who manages the affairs of history can control the circumstances in our lives. Then he says, lift up your eyes to the heavens.

We look at the earth now, the dust and the water and the mountains and the nations. Now lift up your eyes to the heavens. The circle of the earth.

He sits upon the circle of the earth. God is enthroned in the heavens. He's the ruler of all the rulers.

He's the king of all the kings. He put all the stars out there. He's named all those stars and not a one of those stars ever fails.

Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things, who bringeth out their host by number. You can't number the stars. He can.

He calleth them all by names. I have a hard time remembering the names of a few hundred people. He knows the names of all the stars and calls them by name.

He calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might for he is strong in power. There's a remarkable statement back in the book of Psalms that has encouraged me on more than one occasion. Psalm 147, let me read it to you.

Verses three and four. He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds. He appointeth the number of the stars.

He calleth them all by their names. The psalmist puts two verses together that are remarkable. The God of creation is the God of the broken heart.

The God who named the stars knows the wounds down inside. And the prophet says God is greater than your circumstances. Are there mountains in your way? He knows how much they weigh.

Is there a desert you have to cross? He knows how much dust there is there. Are there waters you have to span? They're but a drop in the bucket to him. God is greater than your circumstances if you trust him.

At the end of Isaiah chapter 40 he comes to a third declaration verses 27 through 31. God is greater than your feelings. Here is where the rub comes in.

Here is where you and I have to bow in shame and say oh God you have found me out. More Christians live by their feelings than by faith. He talks about their feelings here.

Why sayest thou oh Jacob and speakest oh Israel? My way is hidden from the Lord. He doesn't know about me. I've been forsaken.

And the justice that is due to me is passed away from my God. You know what they're saying here? They're saying two things. God doesn't know and God doesn't care.

You find a Christian who starts talking like that he is a candidate for trouble. God doesn't know. God doesn't care.

I feel rejected. I feel forsaken. I feel so weak.

Can you imagine this small group of exiles facing this long journey back home? And they're looking at each other and saying we'll never make it. We'll never make it. Do you feel like that? Sitting next to you could be a person who is carrying today a burden that would crush you and yet that person is able to sing and praise God and greet you and not run around and complain, make merchandise of his misery.

What's the difference? Why are there some Christians who are able to plow right through, keep right going? There are other Christians who collapse and fail and become critical and miserable, make everybody else miserable. The Christians who win are the ones who have learned that God is greater than their feelings. Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth never gets tired and there's no searching of his understanding? He giveth power to the faint and to those who have no might he increases strength.

Oh the young man will fall and the youths are gonna be weary and faint. But whether you're young or old, rich or poor, smart or dumb, doesn't make any difference. God is greater.

How can you and I start living above and beyond our feelings? I don't feel like praying. I don't feel like serving God. Did you know that most of the work being done in this world is being done by people who don't feel good? Did you know that? Did you know that much of what's going on in this world is being done by people who are handicapped? See the answer is not running away from responsibility or giving in to our feelings.

The answer is God. The God who is greater than my sins, the God who is greater than my circumstances, is the same God who is greater than my feelings. So I'm fainting.

He doesn't faint. So I'm tired. He never gets weary.

So my mind is befuddled and I can't think straight. There's no searching of his understanding. What's the secret of getting victory over your feelings? Feelings of resentment, feelings of criticism, feelings that poison us down inside and sap away from us the strength that we need to live.

Feelings that make us impatient and indignant and independent. They that wait. Our American public doesn't like this word wait.

We don't wait for anything. Wait? Wait. We're always in a hurry.

Christians are running from one meeting to another meeting, from one thing to another thing, on the go, constantly, a religious roller coaster that never ends. And we call this spirituality. And then we start checking them off as they fall by the wayside, fall by the wayside, casualties, casualties.

Oh, God didn't say, and those that run. No, no. He said, those that wait.

They that wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength. That's what that word renew means. Exchange, exchange your weakness for his strength.

Waiting on the Lord. What do you do when you wait on the Lord? You listen to him speak to you. You, you, you look at his greatness, his glory.

We are too busy today just to wait before God and let our heart calm down. Let our mind calm down and behold the greatness and the glory of God. And my friend, when you do that, everything else gets in perspective.

That neighbor who drives you up the wall doesn't look so big. That responsibility at work that's kept you awake at night doesn't seem so threatening. All of these giants and mountains that have hemmed you in begin to get to their right perspective.

When you spend time waiting on God, they that wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles that takes care of the mountains. But you know, you can't always be doing that.

It's marvelous when God gives you that grace to put out your wings and you soar, but you can't always do it. Even eagles are not always flying. But in the crisis hour of life, God enables us to soar like the eagle.

They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. There are those days and weeks we just got to keep on going.

But he gives us strength as we wait before him. But the hardest part is not soaring like an eagle, and the hardest part is not running. The hardest part is walking step after step, yard after yard, mile after mile.

When I face crises in my life and I come to God, he always gives me the wings of faith to soar. When there are demanding days, he gives me the strength to run. But I've discovered I need to spend more time before God in those routine days of life.

When you're just walking step by step by step, that's when people fail. As these exiles began, it was like taking off in a jet. We're going home.

We're going home. And they mounted up with wings like an eagle. A few days later, they're running.

Oh, we're going home. Are we there yet? No, we have several hundred miles to go. And they start slogging along a step at a time.

I read an interesting couplet the other day. It said this yard by yard. Life is hard.

But inch by inch, life's a cinch. That's what Isaiah is talking about. Walk and not faint.

The daily routine of life, nothing exciting, nothing special. Fix the beds and do the dishes and mop the floor and fix the meals. And nothing exciting is happening except one thing.

The greatness of God has touched your life and what you are doing. You are doing in a great way for the glory of God. You see, a believing Christian is not a person who does great things.

A believing Christian is a person who does little things in a great way and they all add up to great things. So God is great. God is greater than your sins.

Have you trusted him? God is greater than your circumstances. Are you looking to him by faith? God is greater than your feelings. Are you waiting before him? You see, if you and I are trusting him and looking to him and waiting before him, the greatness of God is going to be shared with us.

And life won't get out of proportion. Life won't get out of perspective. And all of this greatness is ours because of the greatness of his grace and the greatness of his mercy and the greatness of his love.

The great God came down here as a baby. The great God grew up on this earth. The great God went to Calvary and bore on his body my sins and became a great savior and a great high priest.

Oh, God is great. God is great. Let his greatness move into your life.

Yield yourself to Jesus Christ. Rest upon his word. And you will be soaring, running, walking, and you won't give up.

Heavenly Father, who can measure your greatness? We have no problem measuring our littleness, the littleness of our minds. Our thoughts are so small, the littleness of our faith, the littleness of our love. But oh, how great you are.

Forgive us for our busyness. We've been too busy to wait before you and see how great you are. Forgive us for our unbelief, for looking at the giants and the walls and the mountains instead of looking to our God.

Gracious Father, send us forth realizing that we belong to a great God who will never forsake us. May someone here today trust in the savior and experience that great salvation. I pray in Jesus name.

Amen.

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