

The Forerunner Message in Isaiah 40: God's Power and Love

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Isaiah issued a twofold call to the Lord's messengers to comfort to Jerusalem (40:1-2) and to prepare the way of the Lord or to "build a highway for the Lord" initially by preparing people spiritually for the coming of the Lord (40:3-5) in the generation the Lord returns.
- B. Outline for Isaiah 40
 - 40:1-2 The call to comfort Jerusalem
 - 40:3-5 The call to prepare the way of the Lord
 - 40:6-8 God's plans, purposes, and promises will last forever
 - 40:9-11 The mighty Warrior is a tender Shepherd
 - 40:12-20 The Lord has all power and wisdom
 - 40:21-26 The Lord has power over all the nations
 - 40:27-31 Practical application: receiving strength

II. MESSENGER CALL #1—TO COMFORT JERUSALEM (ISA. 40:1-2)

- A. The Lord's messengers are mandated to speak a message of God's comfort to Jerusalem (40:1-2). There are two groups being addressed in Isaiah 40:1. The Lord commands the global body of Christ who love and listen to God (yet who are distinct from Jerusalem) to give a message of comfort to a group referred to as "My people Jerusalem" (who live in Jerusalem). The first group includes Gentiles believers speaking an end-time message of comfort to Jerusalem.

¹"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. ²"Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." (Isa. 40:1-2)

- B. God called Gentile believers in the ends of the world to comfort Israel (Isa. 62:11).
¹¹The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world [Gentiles nations]: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him...'" (Isa. 62:11)
- C. ***Her iniquity is pardoned:*** The Lord can give a full pardon to Jerusalem and others because Jesus took the penalty for our sin by bearing the wrath of God on the cross (Isa. 53).
- D. ***Double portion:*** Jerusalem will receive a double portion of grace in the Millennium (61:7). Jesus will sit on His throne in Jerusalem. Israel is comforted with truths found in 40:2, 5, 10-11, 27-31. The full comfort of salvation is anchored in seeing the millennial and eternal blessings.

⁷Instead of shame you shall have double honor ... they shall rejoice in their portion. (Isa. 61:7)

- E. The glory of God will be openly manifested in Jerusalem (60:1-3).

¹Arise, shine; for...the glory of the LORD is risen upon you [Jerusalem]. ²For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth...His glory will be seen upon you. ³The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isa. 60:1-3)

III. MESSENGER CALL #2—THE CALL TO PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD (ISA. 40:3-5)

- A. The Lord's messengers will comfort Jerusalem (40:1).

³*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; ⁵the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together..." (Isa. 40:3-5)*

- B. *All flesh shall see it together*: Isaiah anchored this "messenger mandate" in an end-time context when all nations see the glory of God (40:5). Thus, the primary context of 40:1-11 is on preparing people spiritually for Jesus' second coming when all the nations will see His glory (40:5, 10).

⁵*"...the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together..."¹⁰*Behold, the Lord GOD shall come...*" (Isa. 40:5, 10)*

1. Jesus will be seen by every eye when He returns (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7).

⁷*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him... (Rev. 1:7)*

2. In context to John the Baptist's ministry, *not everyone saw God's glory* as Isaiah prophesied (40:5). Thus, John was only a partial fulfillment of the 40:3-5 prophecy.

- C. A mysterious call went forth to prepare a highway in the desert for the Lord to come to Jerusalem (40:3-4). In the ancient world, a city would build a special road to welcome a visiting king.

- D. *Highway for God*: It's a highway "for God" or one that serves God's purposes by preparing people either to walk with God spiritually (before Jesus' second coming) or to come to Him in Jerusalem physically (after Jesus' second coming).

"Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isa. 40:3)

1. *A spiritual highway*: Before Jesus' return, the Holy Spirit will raise up messengers who will prepare people spiritually for His coming by equipping them to "walk with God" (40:3-5).

³*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3)*

2. A basic kingdom principle is that God releases His power through people who walk in agreement with His values and plans—they participate in releasing His glory, instead of drawing back in compromise, fear, or offense. The forerunner message prepares people to walk in agreement with the Lord so that they can participate with Him in releasing His glory in context to the unique dynamics of the generation that He returns.

3. The call to prepare people spiritually to receive the Lord's leadership includes calling people to repent and agree with God's values and plan.

4. *A physical highway*: After Jesus returns, He will cause a physical highway to Jerusalem to be built. This highway will serve different purposes such as facilitating Jewish refugees in returning to Israel, Gentiles making pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3; Zech. 14:16-19), and people who travel from Egypt to Assyria to serve the Lord together (Isa. 19:23).

- E. Gabriel prophesied that John would prepare the way of the Lord (Lk. 1:17).
¹⁷*He [John the Baptist] will go before Him [Jesus]...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*
 (Lk. 1:17)
- F. John the Baptist was the voice prophesied by Isaiah (Jn. 1:23). God is raising up those who will be a “voice” and not merely an “echo.”
²²*They said to him,...“What do you say about yourself?”* ²³*He said: “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the LORD,’’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”*
 (Jn. 1:22-23)
- G. John saw himself as a friend of the Bridegroom (Jn. 3:29).
²⁹*“...but the friend of the bridegroom...rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice...”*
 (Jn. 3:29)
- H. *The message of John the Baptist:* John modeled the way to prepare a spiritual highway for the Lord. He emphasized a twofold message—calling people to *repent* (to agree with God’s values) and announcing *Jesus’ coming* (to agree with God’s plans that are associated with Jesus’ coming).
³*And he went...preaching a baptism of repentance...⁴as it is written in...Isaiah...saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled and every mountain...brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth...¹⁶One mightier than I is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷...He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.*
 (Lk. 3:3-6, 16-17)
1. It is a *highway of purity* (God’s values) and a *highway of understanding* (God’s plans).
 2. We know that 40:3 includes preparing a spiritual highway in context to “spiritual” valleys, mountains, and crooked places because John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy in part by preaching on repentance that addressed spiritual valleys and mountains (Lk. 3:3-14).
 3. *Agreement with God’s values:* John called people to repent and live in agreement with God’s heart and values—His love, purity, humility, generosity, righteousness, etc. (Lk. 3:8-14).
⁸*...bear fruits worthy of repentance...¹⁰The people asked..., “What shall we do then?”*
¹¹*He answered..., “He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none...”*
¹²*Then tax collectors...said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”* ¹³*And he said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed.”* (Lk. 3:8-13)
 4. *Agreement with God’s plans:* John announced the first coming of Jesus in context to an outpouring of the Spirit and the release of God’s judgments associated with His return.
¹⁶*One mightier than I is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*
¹⁷*...He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.* (Lk. 3:16-17)

- I. **Make straight:** The Lord's messengers make the message straight or clear by removing the ambiguity. They are to boldly, clearly, and tenderly address God's values. For example, John rebuked Herod for immorality (Mt 14:3-10) and warned the people of covetousness (Lk. 3:8-14).
- J. Isaiah highlighted four aspects of walking on the spiritual highway. They reinforce the call to holiness and the *Sermon on the Mount* lifestyle.
 - 1. **Every valley shall be exalted:** There are valleys or low areas in our lives emotionally and spiritually that need to be healed and brought up. This includes areas where we have wrong thinking in accepting a low view of God and of our spiritual identity. This includes emotional low spots where rejection, condemnation, and inferiority dominate our heart and mind. The Lord wants us to resist wrong thinking and replace it with the truth of who we are in Christ.
 - 2. **Every mountain shall be brought low:** There are high things or proud things in our thinking and emotional life that need to be brought down such as drawing undue attention to ourselves, manipulating situations to gain honor, or being defensive in refusing to accept correction.
 - 3. **The crooked places shall be made straight:** Crooked places speak of areas where people continue to live in compromise, including immorality, drunkenness, covetousness, slander, along with various addictions or areas of perversion. Jesus highlighted drunkenness and immorality in context to the escalation of end-time pressures and temptations (Lk 21:34-36).
 - 4. **The rough places shall be made smooth:** Being in a rough place emotionally is to live in a judgmental, critical spirit or with a mean or critical spirit such as many of the Pharisees had.
- K. The end-time call to prepare a people for God includes *the Bride* being made ready (Rev. 19:7).
⁷...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

IV. GOD'S PLANS, PURPOSES, AND PROMISES WILL LAST FOREVER (40:6-8)

- A. Isaiah emphasized the certainty of victory before the hostile Gentile armies of the earth. Nothing can prevail over God's plans, purposes, and promises—they are eternal (40:6-8).
⁶The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it...⁸The grass withers...but the word of our God stands forever." (Isa. 40:6-8)
 - 1. Isaiah asked for specifics on the message that he was to "cry out" as he called messengers to comfort Jerusalem and to prepare people for the Lord. The Lord answered by telling Isaiah that all flesh is grass (40:6-7) and that God's plans will prevail over all obstacles (40:8-26).
 - 2. I see the message in Isaiah 40:6-31 as giving insight into the spiritual diet on which John the Baptist fed and what he spoke to others to prepare them for the Lord. End-time messengers will follow John's example in preaching these themes alongside the truths outlined in 40:1-5.

V. THE MIGHTY WARRIOR IS A TENDER SHEPHERD (ISA. 40:9-11)

- A. Believers in Jerusalem are to boldly proclaim the coming of Messiah as a mighty warrior who is also a tender shepherd (40:9-11). Isaiah 40:10-11 is one of the most descriptive passages about what Jesus will do when He returns as a mighty warrior (40:10) and tender shepherd (40:11).

⁹“...lift up your voice with strength...say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him...¹¹He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs...and carry them...and gently lead those... with young.” (Isa. 40:9-11)

- B. ***The context:*** Jerusalem will be surrounded by the armies of the Antichrist (Zech. 12:2; 14:2).

²For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem... (Zech. 14:2)

VI. THE LORD HAS ALL POWER AND WISDOM (ISA. 40:12-20)

- A. Jesus is great in power and wisdom. Thus, He understands everything, fulfills all of His promises, and perfectly administrates justice (40:12-14). Isaiah asked two questions (40:12-14)—who measured creation and who taught God? Isaiah describes the vast range of His wisdom and power.

¹²Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales...? ¹³Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? (Isa. 40:12-13)

- B. None can compare in power to our *God as Creator* (40:15-17) and as *Ruler* of nations (40:18-24).

¹⁵Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look...¹⁷All nations [Antichrist's empire] before Him are as nothing...¹⁸To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? (Isa. 40:15-18)

VII. THE LORD HAS POWER OVER ALL THE NATIONS (ISA. 40:21-26)

- A. The Lord has power over all the nations and their leadership (40:21-24). People are as weak as grasshoppers in their ability to prevail against God. People in powerful positions as princes and judges, can easily intimidate those under them, but these powerful leaders are under God's control.

²¹Have you not heard? ...²²It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers...²³He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.²⁴Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither. (Isa. 40:21-24)

1. ***Scarcely planted:*** The Antichrist will plant his headquarters near Jerusalem (Dan. 11:45).

⁴⁵And he [Antichrist] shall plant the tents of his palace [near Jerusalem] between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end... (Dan. 11:45)

2. ***Jesus will blow on them:*** The Antichrist shall scarcely be established in power, then Jesus will blow on him, and his empire will wither—he will only rule for 3½ years (2 Thes. 2:8)

⁸And then the lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. (2 Thes. 2:8)

- B. No force in the heavens can stop God's plan (40:25-26). Jesus has authority over the powers in the sky or the heavens (Acts 2:19-20). Jesus is more powerful than the heavenly forces that will trouble the nations of earth in the end-times (Rev. 6:12-13; 8:12; 16:8-10, 21).

25*"To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. *26*****Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might...not one is missing. (Isa. 40:25-26)***

- C. Since the Lord understands and directs trillions of trillions of stars, then surely He can take care of His people who are so dear to Him. He even counts the very hairs on our head (Lk. 12:7).

VIII. PRACTICAL APPLICATION: RECEIVING STRENGTH (ISA. 40:27-31)

- A. Isaiah teaches God's people how to respond to the Lord (40:27-31). Israel's complaint was that their life was "hidden" from God because He seemed to allow injustice to continue. They felt overlooked by God in the pressures in their life and the crisis in their nation. God's people need not be afraid that God has forgotten them. Trusting His leadership is a foundational issue in the kingdom.

27*Why do you say, O Jacob... *My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God*?" ***28****Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. (Isa. 40:27-28)**

- B. The Lord gives strength to His people to the degree that they pursue it His way (40:29-31).

29*He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. *30*****Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, *31*****but those who wait on 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. (Isa. 40:29-31)*

- C. ***Wait on the Lord:*** To wait on God is to be preoccupied *engaging with Him* and His plans. We wait on God in two ways—by engaging with Him in prayer with faith and by not drawing back into passivity and offense when His promises are delayed. Waiting on God is not about "just biding time," but is engaging actively with God in contending for His promises.

1. ***Renew your strength:*** The Lord promised to renew the strength of His people—their love, resolve, peace, courage, etc.
2. ***To mount up with wings:*** This speaks of being lifted up and empowering by the Spirit. This is in a way parallel to how an eagle interacts with the wind while flying to the heights.
3. ***Run and not get weary:*** In a believer's life there are some seasons that require more intensity than others in "running" to God and with God and running from compromise (Rom. 6:13).
4. ***Walk and not faint:*** In a believer's life that are some seasons that require more perseverance to "walk" with faithfulness in the midst of the routine and mundaneness of everyday life.