

# Behold Your God! Believe His Word!

Isaiah 40:1–11

Old Testament Sermon  
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**Call to Worship:** Isaiah 52:1–10

Open your Bibles this morning to the book of Isaiah, chapter 40.

I often think about this passage of Scripture during the Christmas season. One of my favorite musical compositions that I enjoy hearing this time of the year is Handel's *Messiah*. In the *Messiah*, Handel set to music several passages of the Bible related to the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. He began the work with the opening verses of Isaiah 40, that speak of the peace and comfort in the gospel as Isaiah begins to unfold the good news of the coming Savior.

You just heard this passage of Scripture fashioned into a hymn. But let's take a moment to read it together. This morning we will consider the first 11 verses of Isaiah 40.

If you are taking notes, I have four simple points from these verses:

- I. The Promise of Peace
- II. The Way of Peace
- III. The Word of Peace
- IV. The Herald of Peace

Let's read together Isaiah 40:1–11

Isaiah 40:1	Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
2	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.

3 A voice cries:  
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

6 A voice says, "Cry!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

7 The grass withers, the flower fades  
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;  
surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

9 Get you 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!"

10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

11 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Isaiah begins this chapter in the first two verses by pointing us to—

## I. The Promise of Peace (40:1–2)

He opens with some amazing words:

Isaiah 40:1                      Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
2                                      Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her

He uses a double imperative for emphasis. The words Isaiah brings from God are tender words; words that promise peace and forgiveness. Words spoken to Judah—

that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

He speaks here of hostility ended, sins pardoned, judgment and justice satisfied. These are amazing words, especially when you consider what the nation of Judah was facing.

The hope that Isaiah brings from God is delivered in the wake of troubling news. In chapter 39, just before God's words of comfort, Isaiah brings word to King Hezekiah of Judah of coming judgment when the nation would be conquered and carried away into exile into Babylon. We read in—

Isaiah 39:6–7                      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.

Let me give you some background on Isaiah's ministry—

Isaiah was a prophet (740–701) during the rise of the Assyrian empire (721–612), an empire that God raised up in part to bring judgment on the nations—including Israel and Judah. At this time, remember, the kingdom was divided: Israel was the northern kingdom; Judah was the southern kingdom. Isaiah was one of God's prophets to the southern kingdom (to Judah).

Though Isaiah was tasked by God to bring words of warning and judgment, he was also given by God some of the clearest and most remarkable prophecies about the coming Messiah—Jesus.

If you are familiar with the kings of Judah in the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied under the reign of four kings:

- Uzziah (died in 740) The vision of Isaiah 6 was in the year that King Uzziah died.
- Jotham (750–731)
- Ahaz (735–715)
- Hezekiah (729–689)

Assyria defeated Israel, the northern kingdom, in 721 BC. They were taken captive. And it appeared that Judah would be defeated as well. Around 701 BC King Sennacherib of Assyria threatened Judah under Hezekiah who had fallen ill. The armies of Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem. But during that time Hezekiah humbled himself and prayed. God restored Hezekiah's health, granted him more years, and Assyria withdrew.

But Judah, as Isaiah predicted in Isaiah 39, would eventually be conquered. The fall of Jerusalem finally happened in 586 BC. The city and temple were destroyed. Judah was taken captive and dark days were ahead. They were to come under God's judgment in the not so distant future.

So here, beginning in Chapter 40, Isaiah speaks not to his own day, but to the future exiles. He assures them that their captivity will come to an end and that God's promises will not be broken. Isaiah brings good news of deliverance, restoration, and peace.

He speaks of the rise of Cyrus who would unite the Medes and Persians, conquer Babylon, and make a decree that the exiles return to Jerusalem (an event that happened in 538 BC). Isaiah predicts details and events so precisely that some scholars have suggested the he could not possibly have written the last half of the book. But don't believe them. Isaiah is a true prophet of God. If God could give Isaiah such clear prophesies about the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, He can certainly give Isaiah information about the return of the exiles under Cyrus. That return, like the Exodus under Moses, was but another foretaste of a greater deliverance and greater Deliverer in Christ.

The nation of Judah had dark days ahead—days of distress and uncertainty and trouble. They faced the reality of impending war and exile. Yet in the midst of this time of judgment in the Old Testament, God brought words of hope and comfort as He pointed, not just to their coming return from exile in Babylon, but to the reason for their return—God brought the people home in preparation for the coming of Christ. And He pointed them ultimately to Jesus and to the forgiveness of sin in gospel. God will fulfill all He has promised in His Word.

Though the nation will face this great calamity, God tells Isaiah to comfort His people. Though the times seem dark, God is still at work accomplishing His Word. His promise of a Redeemer is still sure. His purpose to rescue and redeem a people is still moving forward—unshaken, unhindered, unstoppable.

This is important for us to remember. We can easily get overwhelmed when things don't go as we think they should. We can get discouraged and lose heart and wonder if God has given up on us, if God is still there. We must always remember God is at work, even if we can't perceive it, even if events and circumstances seem to suggest otherwise. God will be true to His Word. His gospel remains true and certain.

Do you remember the first promise given in the Bible of Jesus—the very first words of hope? What were the circumstances of those words? Did they come at a time of prosperity or joy?

NO—they were given in dark days—at a time when God's world, God's creation seemed set off course. It was in the ashes of the fall of man in the garden in Genesis 3 that God first promised a Redeemer, the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, though the serpent would bruise His heel. Adam and Eve did not understand just how God would rescue them from sin; but it was enough that God had spoken.

And you remember that it was the darkest of days when God fulfilled that hope of the gospel. Jesus was crucified on a cross, His disciples scattered, His Kingdom—it seemed—was in doubt. But it was

through the cross that Jesus became our peace. God raised Him from the dead that in Him we might have life. In Him we are reconciled to God and brought near (Ephesians 2:16).

God's plan of salvation is moving forward. Here in Isaiah's day, the coming of Christ as Messiah and Savior is just as certain as it was in Genesis 3 in the garden, following Adam's fall into sin, when God spoke that first promise of the gospel. God had planned for the coming of His Son from before the foundation of the world and there is never any doubt that He will fulfill His Word as He works out His plan through human history.

God promised peace. He spoke words of comfort. This was the promise waiting to be fulfilled in the opening pages of the New Testament. When we read of Simeon in Luke 2, a man whom God promised would see the Messiah before his death, Luke describes him like this:

Luke 2:25            Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, **waiting for the consolation of Israel**, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Jesus is that consolation. He came to bring good news. He came to bring comfort and joy.

Later in Isaiah we hear words that speak of the reason that Jesus came:

Isaiah 61:1            The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
                              because the LORD has anointed me  
                              to bring good news to the poor;  
                              he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
                              to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
                              and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
2                        to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
                              and the day of vengeance of our God;  
                              to **comfort all who mourn**;  
3                        to grant to those who mourn in Zion—  
                              to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,  
                              the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
                              the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;  
                              that they may be called oaks of righteousness,  
                              the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

In Luke 4, when Jesus was in Nazareth, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from this passage in Isaiah. Luke then records:

Luke 4:20–21            And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of peace. In verses 3–5 of Isaiah 40, we see how the salvation of God will be announced. God will make a **way for peace**.

## II. The Way of Peace (40:3–5)

Isaiah 40:3            A voice cries:  
                              “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
  make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4                        Every valley shall be lifted up,  
  and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
  and the rough places a plain.

5                        And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
  and all flesh shall see it together,  
  for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

God will do everything necessary to prepare the way for deliverance. He moved empires and kings in the Old Testament to bring His remnant back to Jerusalem. And He does the same to prepare for the coming of the greater deliverance in His Son.

Valleys will be lifted up.  
Mountains will be brought low.  
Rough ground will be made level.  
Every obstacle that would hinder the accomplishment of God’s purposes will be removed.

We hear these words of Isaiah again in Matthew 3 as God fulfills His promise.

Matthew 3:1–3            In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,  
  “The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
  ‘Prepare the way of the Lord;  
  make his paths straight.’”

It was God’s purpose to make Himself known and reveal His glory in the sight of all people. John tells us how this was fulfilled:

John 1:14                And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The angels sang of this at Jesus’ birth:

Luke 2:10                And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for **all the people**.

Simeon, in his prayer, also rejoices in the fulfillment of God’s promised Word.

Luke 2:29–31            “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
  according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared **in the presence of all peoples**,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Jesus is a Savior for the nations. Not just Judah and Israel, but a people from every tribe and nation and tongue will be brought near to find peace in His kingdom.

Isaiah tells us of the promise of peace and shows us the way of peace through the coming of Jesus. But remember, those in Isaiah’s time were facing a difficult reality. They would be defeated by a foreign power. Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. They would be carried off into exile. Their reality—their circumstance would suggest that there is no hope—there is no comfort. How can God’s promises be true when everything we see and feel and experience seems to suggest otherwise?

Look now where Isaiah point us—

### III. The Word of Peace (40:6–8)

Isaiah reminds us that God always is faithful to His Word.

Isaiah 40:6	A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
7	The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.
8	The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Our experiences in this life are temporary—including both joys and trials; but God’s Word endures forever. We are like the grass that withers and the flower that fades—but God and His Word are not. Darkness and difficulties may come, or prosperity and ease—but regardless of circumstances, regardless of how well or how badly things appear to be going, God will always accomplish all He has purposed. His Word is true and faithful. For Judah, devastation and exile are looming, BUT there is hope, there is comfort, there is a SAVIOR. Christ will come, because “the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.”

### IV. The Herald of Peace (40:9–11)

In the following verses Isaiah celebrates this truth in song. Verses 9 through 11 of Isaiah are often called the *Song of Glad Tidings*—it is a song that speaks of the news of the gospel.

I want you to notice what this song directs us to do. Listen to verse 9.

Isaiah 40:9	Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news;
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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!”

This song is addressed to Zion, a name given to the people of God—all whom God has called His own, all who have received this glorious good news. This news that Isaiah speaks of is the good news of the gospel—the news of redemption and deliverance found in Jesus.

In 1 Peter 1, Peter compares our time here on earth to exile and points us to the good news of Jesus that God has made known and fulfilled. He quotes from verses 6–8 of Isaiah 40 and affirms that the good news that Isaiah speaks of is the gospel of Jesus. This is the gospel we preach. God’s Word is certain.

1 Peter 1:24–25      for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers, and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”  
And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Isaiah reminds us that we have the good news. We have the news of Christ’s coming; we have the hope of gospel and we are to be faithful stewards of the news by telling it to others. We are to be the **herald of peace**. We are to speak without fear and with a loud voice, spreading the word: “Behold your God.”

Where is our comfort in difficult times? Where can we find hope when circumstances around us make it appear that God’s promises are not coming to pass? Where do we tell people to look for answers and for hope when all they have found is confusion and despair?

**We must look to the sure Word of God and behold Him as He has revealed Himself to us!**

Everything else is temporary and unsure. All flesh, human experiences, events, wars, calamities—they are all fading away. But God’s Word stands sure. You can believe everything He tells us in the Bible is true and will certainly come to pass.

Isaiah then does as he tells us to do; he shows us our God.

Look now at what he says about God:

Isaiah 40:10      Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

Here we see God’s omnipotence and sovereignty. He has all power and all rule to accomplish His will. All He has said He will do, and none can stay His strong hand. This is why His Word is certain and true. This is why we can trust Him and believe Him. He is God and there is no other.



He is Almighty—all powerful—able to save, but that is not all. Look at the next verse.

He is also gracious and merciful and good. He is both Mighty King and Gentle Shepherd.

Isaiah 40:11            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.

This takes us back to the opening verse of Isaiah 40, where we are told to speak tenderly words of comfort. God's promise to His people is of peace. Jesus Himself said:

Matthew 11:28–31        "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Our Savior is sovereign and Lord, a Judge and King—and He is gentle and humble. We can come to Him and find rest in Him. In Him we no longer fear condemnation.

In Isaiah 27:3 in the *Song of the Vineyard*, God described Himself as a Gardener who keeps His vineyard, He says:

Isaiah 27:3                I, the LORD, am its keeper;  
   every moment I water it.  
   Lest anyone punish it,  
   I keep it night and day;

He then says in verse 4 "I have no wrath."

Because of Christ, God has mercy toward His people. His wrath, His fury was poured out upon His Son at the cross, so all who come to His Son might find forgiveness and peace with God. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

In verse 11 Isaiah compares God to a Shepherd. He cares for us and gently takes us in His arms. This description is of Jesus. Jesus said in—

John 10:11                I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

In Jesus we have a mighty, all-sufficient Savior.

In Jesus we have God's most tender mercy and love.

In Jesus we have God's sure and certain Word.

Now understand here what Isaiah is showing us. Jesus is the way of peace. He is God's salvation—the only way, the only truth, the only life. This truth does not rest on human experience, on fleshly sight and feeling. God is good, not just when we feel Him good with our senses, or see Him good with our eyes—He is *always* good, because He has spoken it.

The reality of Christ's coming and His work upon the cross was as certain in Isaiah's day as it was at Calvary. God's Word was spoken. Christ was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, so the joy and mercy of the gospel are evident even in the darkest days of the Old Testament. The Word of our God stands forever!

SO—what difference does this make? What should we do in light of God's Word here in Isaiah?

Let me close this morning with three **points of application**:

### **1. First we must Behold!**

We need to see God for who He is—as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word. We need to see His glory and see ourselves, how far short we fall. We need to see and lay hold of His Word—read it, hear it, study it, remember it—and keep our eyes fixed on Him and His promises.

Isaiah goes on in chapter 40 to describe in more detail the greatness and majesty of God. There is none who compares; none who can be His counselor; none who can stay His hand. All that God says He will do. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself—His sure Word to us.

So I encourage you today to look to God and to the promises of His Word.

Maybe you are here today and you don't believe in God. Maybe you have never seen Him. Maybe your experiences and observations of the world around you have led you to be a skeptic.

Lay aside that skepticism. Throw off your doubts about God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you in His Word. Ask Him to help you understand His Word. Then read and hear His Word and behold.

### **2. We must Believe!**

We must not stop with beholding. We must also believe. We must put our trust in what God has said and risk everything on the certainty that what He has told us in His Word is true.

Our difficulty is often **NOT** that we haven't heard God's Word, or that we don't know God's Word, or don't have His Word close at hand. (For most of us here, it is only a click away on our phones and devices.) Our difficulty is that we don't really believe God's Word, or at least we don't always live like we believe it.

We are so forgetful and fickle.

We know God is sovereign. We know He is working for our good and His glory, even in our tears and trials. We know that He has promised never to leave us or forsake us.

And yet we are so quick to complain, quick to become frustrated, quick to grow discouraged, even with small things and the slightest inconveniences.

And so we must day by day, repent of sin and believe and live in the gospel. We must keep our souls anchored to the truth of God's Word and encourage and pray for one another together as His church.

### 3. Finally we must Share

Our commission, as those who have received the sure Word of God and are standing on the promises of the gospel, is to make widely known the hope that is found in Christ. We are to tell of the greatness and holiness and mercy of our God. We are to say to those around us: “Behold, your God!”

So I encourage you to spread the hope of the gospel wherever God is giving you opportunity.

There are many in our community who are hurting. Many are facing difficulties and trials. Many facing uncertain days who are without hope. We need to spread the good news. We need to let people know that there is a God who saves, a God who will lift us out of brokenness and bring us forgiveness and peace.

Later in Isaiah, Isaiah speaks of the blessing of making Christ known. Isaiah 52:7–10 is often called the *Song of the Watchmen*.

Isaiah 52:7	How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”
8	The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.
9	Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.
10	The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Paul echoes this in—

Romans 10:15	As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”
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God had given His Word and He will accomplish all He has said. Even if it doesn’t look like things are working to that end; even if we can’t see it. All He has said will come to pass.

Isaiah wrote prophetic words about the future, but he wrote them with confidence, knowing that God would bring them to pass. We can look back on Isaiah’s words and see how God fulfilled them in Jesus and how He is even now fulfilling them as the gospel goes to the ends of the earth.

So pray that God will help us to behold Him and believe His Word.

Not just in our heads, where we have some mental grasp and some understanding—

Not even just in our hearts, where we love the truth and embrace it as our own—

We need to believe it in our hands and feet, where we live it and walk in it day by day.

Where it makes a difference in how we get up each morning and face the day.

Where it makes a difference in how we choose to spend our time, our money, our lives.

We need a belief that fuels our passion to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

And we need a belief that stirs our compassion to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Pray that God would give us a confidence in Him and passion for Him that would compel us to share and take the good news of the gospel to those around us.

Do as Isaiah says:

Behold your God!

Believe in His Word!

And lift up your voice with the good news of salvation in Jesus.

Let us pray.

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