

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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The Greatness and Majesty of God

August 23, 2020

Sermon Text: Isaiah 40

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40

1 John 2:15-17 ESV Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The longer that you live in this present life, the more you will see and experience just what these verses say. The world and everything in it is *passing away*. When we are young, we normally do not experience much loss, but as we age, things and people that once *were*, are no more. Parents,

friends, favorite places, pets – they are gone. Therefore, God tells us – do not set your love upon this world or anything in it. Don't place your hopes in them. *The grass withers and the flower fades...and we are like them.*

I was thinking about all this last week and as one example I remembered a stream over by Grand Ronde that my dad and Verla and my cousin would often go to and fish for the native cutthroat there. Always in July and August, sometimes in the early morning but most often in the evening when hatches of insects were hovering over the water. I had fished there often enough to know every hole and I could pretty well predict right where a fish was going to take my fly. There was a kind of secret hole back in the brush where a smaller creek came into the main stream and if you walked back into it a 100 yards or so and kept quiet and low so your shadow didn't cast onto the water, you would catch a couple nice fish every time.

But those days and places have been gone for me for almost 40 years. My

dad is gone. My cousin is gone. And the place is in a sense gone because the timber company blocked off all access to the area long ago.

Time and space are cruel things. Even if you can go back to a certain *place*, time has marched on. The place is not the same, nor are the people. As that Greek philosopher said, you cannot dip your foot in the same stream twice.

Psalms 90:10 ESV The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

James 4:14 ESV yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

But there is something, or rather Someone, who never fades away and in whom, if we place our faith and hopes in Him, we will also enjoy *increasing strength and vigor* rather than fading away. He is of course, the Lord. He does not change:

Hebrews 1:10-12 ESV And, “You,

Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; (11) they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, (12) like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

Isaiah 51:6 ESV Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

How different man is! If we go away, even for a relatively short time, and return to the people and places from which we left, haven't you experienced this? Things are different. The people are different. YOU are different. *But the Lord is unchanging! Christ is the same ALWAYS.*

Now, in this world and in regard to human beings, *unchanging* eventually means *boring*. Same-o same-o. Even your most loved friends and places

would, given sufficient time, end up in boredom. But not so in God. Why? Because not only is He glorious beyond what we can even think, He is infinite in His being. That means that even in an infinite span of time (it's a contradiction to use that phrase), *God would never be boring because we will never cease discovering Him and coming to know Him more.*

Furthermore, God's unchangeableness means that His Word never changes. His promises are always true and certain. And this is what Isaiah reminds us of here.

The 40th chapter of Isaiah is one of the best loved parts of the Bible. It is about the greatness of God and how, therefore, His promises to His people will never fail. Several of the passages in this chapter have been famously set to music – you hear Handel's Messiah as you read it. Let's look at just some of the key truths the Lord has put here for our encouragement and wisdom:

Isaiah 40:1-5 ESV 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."

This passage, and in fact this entire section of Isaiah, is about the Messiah. We know this for instance because here in verse 3 we have this voice, which we know is the voice of John the Baptist announcing the coming of Christ.

Notice then this last phrase:

"...for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

The Messiah would come. He would effect forgiveness of sins for God's people. He will bring peace and comfort to them. Count on it. It was going to happen. God's Word never changes. And that is exactly what we have next:

Isaiah 40:6-8 ESV 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.

This is really, through Isaiah, the very same thing that we have in 1 John 2 about the world and everything in it *perishing*. People – that is, us – quickly wither and fade away. Look at the grass and wildflowers for instance. If you go over to the Willamette Valley right now, you will see harvested fields everywhere. Straw. Not long ago at all, at the beginning of summer, they were all green. Wheat. Rye grass. Oats. But now by August, they are gone.

The Bible was written by people who lived in a very arid climate – desert and wilderness. And I suspect that if you know much at all about places like that, you would have seen desert flowers blossom and then fade away very quickly. The Lord’s point to us in this illustration is *we are like that*. And we need to keep this in perspective. If all

my hopes and dreams are set upon a wheat field in June, by August my hopes and dreams are toast!!

Often you will hear older people tell young people – “You are so fortunate. You have your whole life ahead of you.” And in one way, that is true – though it may not be certain at all! The life of a young person can suddenly and quickly end. But we need to have perspective here. Even when we are young, that “whole life” we had ahead of us *is going to fly by in a flash*. At the end, as we look back and think through the course of our years, it’s like watching one of those videos that someone put into fast speed.

“but the Word of our God will stand forever.”

Let me ask each one of us then – *are you living your life in terms of eternity, or for this present life? How many of our decisions and values are based upon fading flowers and withering grass?*

Mark 13:28-31 ESV “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. (29) So

also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. (30) Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (31) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Listen to Isaiah again:

Isaiah 40:9-11 ESV 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!" (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.

These are the certain promises of the Lord. They are promises of the Messiah, who is of course the Good Shepherd. His promise is twofold-

- Reward
- Recompense

Reward for His people. Recompense and judgment for the wicked. All of this began to play out when Christ came and the cities of Judah did in fact *behold their God*. They saw His reward and recompense. And both of these are coming in fullness when Christ comes again. It is all certain and unchangeable because *the Word of God stands forever*.

Isaiah now challenges us to think very carefully about the greatness of the Lord, and of our lowliness in comparison-

Isaiah 40:12-18 ESV 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?

(13) Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? (14) Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

(15) Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. (16) Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. (17) All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

(18) To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

The bigness and greatness of God, you see. We are challenged to look at what He has created and to realize that as vast as the universe appears to be, God's vastness is infinitely greater. All the oceans and rivers and lakes and water suspended in the atmosphere, every speck of dust in the creation – it is known to Him and held by Him. In contrast to His greatness, the boastful rulers and nations – even the mightiest ones – are nothing. In fact, there is *nothing in the universe that can be used as an accurate illustration of His being.*

This is why God's law forbids making any kind of image of Him. The thing is impossible – to claim to represent God with...well, listen to Isaiah again:

Isaiah 40:19-20 ESV An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. (20) He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.

Idolatry is insanity – evil insanity. It rejects the glory of the incorruptible God for the image of a creature. Man in his sin would rather worship a bug than humble himself before God.

And yet, this is what man does. He might make an expensive image out of gold, or if he cannot afford that, he gets some wood and has someone carve it into some kind of creature. But the thing won't move, because it can't. It won't hear or see or smell, because it can't. This is what man will worship. He does not want a God who is God, who is beyond his ability to control and fully understand.

Isaiah 40:26 ESV Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the

greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

The closest we can come to having any idea of the greatness of God's power is to look up. (I suppose it could be said that the same could be true of looking "in" – through a microscope).

Psalms 8:3-4 ESV When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, (4) what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

And yet, as we have seen, this is man's response:

Deuteronomy 4:19 ESV And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

What we should be thinking when we look up at the stars, especially now in this day and age when the Hubble telescope and other tools have told us

far, far more about the unimaginable distances in space and the seemingly unending number of not just stars, but galaxies. And then you consider again what Isaiah says about the Lord:

Isaiah 40:26 ESV Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

See it?

- He created all the stars and planets and galaxies and moons
- He names every one of them and knows exactly how many there are
- Not one is missing – in other words, He holds them in their place

We cannot even conceive of the energy that is in our sun. We think that the nuclear energy we harness is quite something, but God's power is infinitely greater.

And then we have the practical application of it-

Isaiah 40:27-31 ESV 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”?

(28) 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. (29) He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. (30) Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; (31) 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.

Our tendency, particularly when we are in difficult times, is to assume that the Lord does not know. That He does not see our predicament. Or that somehow our mess is more than He can handle.

But this is foolishness in light of what we have just seen about the being of the Lord. His knowledge and understanding of our situation – every

detail of our lives – is exhaustively known by Him. His power to help us is never diminished – He is not a man who tires out.

And His promise to all who follow Him is that *we will share in His power and wisdom*. Here is the promise. Listen again to it-

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.

What does it mean to *wait for the Lord*? It means to put your faith and trust in Him, to believe His promises, to believe that He is who He has revealed Himself to be, *and that in His perfect time He will renew our strength*. This I believe means more than just strengthening us in this life – though it certainly does mean that too. But it ultimately is looking to the new heavens and earth, to our resurrection.

One day not only will our physical strength and stamina never diminish no matter how far we run, our mental, emotional, and spiritual strength will

never wain again. There will be no depression, no anxiety, no weakness of spirit. When we experience these things now, we must remind ourselves of His promises, of who the Lord is, and wait.

Richard Baxter's wife suffered all kinds of bodily ailments for a long time before she died in 1681. Baxter had written several things on the marble stone marking the grave, and included this one, with which we close –

*Thus must thy flesh to silent dust
descend,
Thy mirth and worldly pleasure thus
will end,
Then happy, holy souls but woe to those
Who heaven forgot, and earthly
pleasures chose;
Hear now this preaching grave without
delay,
Believe, repent, and work while it is
day.*

*[A Grief Sanctified: Through Sorrow to
Eternal Hope, J.I. Packer]*