

Behold Our God - Isaiah 40

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)*

Warm-Up

1. Think about a week when life felt tiring or unsettled (a busy season, a change of plans, the rising cost of living). What did you find yourself turning to, or looking at, for comfort?

Read Isaiah 40:1–14

2. Look back at Isaiah 39:5–8. What's the context of Isaiah 40?
3. Even though they have rejected him again and again, God still calls them "my people." What does this tell us about his heart for his people, and what does verse 2 say has happened to their sin?
4. Matthew 3:1–3. How does John the Baptist use Isaiah's words, and who is he preparing the way for? Why do you think the return from Babylon wasn't the full answer to this promise?
5. Isaiah 40:5 says that "all flesh shall see" the glory of the LORD. How does Jesus fulfil this, and how does his death and resurrection deal with the sin and iniquity of verse 2?
6. What does Isaiah say about people, and what does he say about God's word?
7. The prayer book prays for those "wearied by the changes and chances of this life". Where are you feeling those changes and chances at the moment (health, work, the cost of living, a busy season)?
8. What difference does it make to know that God and his word never change?
9. In V9 God's people are told to "Behold your God!" How good are we at simply stopping to look at him, think about him and be amazed by him, rather than just studying him? What tends to get in the way?
10. Read verses 12–14. What does it say about God that he needs no consultants or advisers, and why does his self-sufficiency make him uniquely qualified to comfort us?

Read Isaiah 40:15–31

11. How does Isaiah describe the nations next to God? Why would this have been a comfort to God's people living in exile under Babylon?
12. What does it mean that God "sits above the circle of the earth"? When the news feels out of control, how does knowing he is on the throne change the way we respond?
13. What were the exiles saying in verse 27, and how does God answer them in verse 28? When do we find ourselves thinking that our way is hidden from the LORD?
14. What does it mean to "wait for the LORD"? How is that different from simply sitting back and hoping for the best? What's the promise for those who wait on the Lord?
15. How does what we behold or spend our time or energy on shape us? What would it look like to spend more time looking up at God?
16. Isaiah shows us the God of comfort, certainty, self-sufficiency, the nations and strength. Which of these do you most need to behold this week? What is one step you could take to do that?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you that you are the everlasting God, the God of comfort, certainty, self-sufficiency, the nations and strength. Thank you for sending Jesus, who put on flesh and paid for our sin so that we can know your comfort. Help us to look up and behold you, to wait on you and to be renewed by your strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

TITLE: Isaiah - Behold Your God

PASSAGE: Isaiah 40

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: YHW is the everlasting and living God.

APP: Our comfort in the midst of whatever we go through can come from remembering who our God is.

BT: This immortal, eternal God, put on mortality and flesh in order to take the penalty for our sins so we can have the everlasting comfort.

STRUCTURE:

- 1-5 - The God of Comfort
- 6-8 - The God of Certainty
- 9-14 - The God of Self-Sufficiency
- 15-24 - The God of Nations
- 25-31 - The God of Strength

- One of the great things about the Calder household at the moment is that there is usually some Colin Buchanon playing in the background. Colin is a Christian song writer for Kids.
- And he puts great theological truths in memorable tunes and also bible verses to tunes.
- And just recently, I had a morning where the boys were waking a bit overnight, I was up a lot of the night so that Rach could sleep and so was pretty tired,
- the coffee machine didn't warm up properly so I wasn't yet caffeinated,
- Hudson was a bit sick and so was a bit impatient for breakfast - there was a lot of noise and snot going everywhere,
- I looked on the kitchen bench and realised that I had forgotten to put the leftovers away last night,
- I stepped on a toy that was left out,
- Huddy was still wanting breakfast and was letting me know about it…
- and I could just feel the anger and frustration rising in me…I was just about to let it out at my poor sick kid
- But then…I heard Colin on the speaker…and he was singing:
- "Remember the Lord oh oh, remember that he is in Control…remember the Lord oh oh…he's watching his children, he cares…oh oh"
- And let me tell you…it's harder to be angry and frustrated when you're being urged to Remember the Lord…

- Isaiah 40 urges us lift up our eyes to "Remember the Lord" and "Behold our God"
- This is a grand poem and song about the grandness and greatness of God and we could spend five weeks just looking at this!
- But this morning as we go through it, I want us to be stunned at the brilliance of our God.
- I want us to "remember the Lord" and "Behold our God" together.
- Because we're going to see that YHW is the everlasting and living God.
- He is the God of comfort, eternity, self-sufficiency, the God of nations and the God of strength.
- And it's in him and in remembering who he is that we can experience his great comfort that he promises us.

- But before we get into it, let's just look back a bit…
- Because last week we ended on a bit of a high - King Hezekiah relied on God, the Assyrians eventually left Jerusalem and King Sennacherib died by his own sword.
- God was faithful to his people once again.
- In Chapter 38 - Hezekiah gets really really sick even to the point of death. He again cries out to God - and God heals him.
- In Chapter 39 - some people from the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery! It's always nice to be flattered!
- But then he does something really stupid. He showed them all around his house, all around the treasury, showed them his bank statements, investment portfolios, showed them everything!

- And this is bad. Really bad. Because it seems that Hezekiah is boasting in himself, AND/OR trying to make an alliance with Babylon. In showing off all he's worth, he's almost shmoozing up to the big schoolyard bully!
- And so Isaiah confronts him on this:
- 39:5-9 "Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: **6** 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. **7** 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."
- This is Isaiah predicting the Exile of Judah that was to come 100 years later. The destruction and plundering of all the goods that he just showed off and boasted in! Nothing will be left!
- And this isn't just because of Hezekiah's sin, this is because of the collective rejection of YHW as the Lord.
- And so because they rejected him, he is going to send them to Babylon…

- But after predicting the destruction of the temple, the plundering of the goods, the distress of the people, the exile into Babylon, here are the very next words:

- **1-5 - The God of Comfort**
- Is 40:1-5 "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 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."
- Comfort, comfort.
- God is commanding people to comfort his people.
- And note, even though they have been rebellious, even though they have rejected him time and time again, tested his patience - God still calls them "MY people?"
- Nothing will stand in the way of God's covenant love for his people - if only they would return to him.
- Do we and God's people sin? Yes. Do we suffer for it? Yes. Is that where God leaves us? No!
- God won't leave his people wallowing in Exile.
- And when the return from exile happens (which it will) - God won't be wearing a frown and saying "tut tut Israelites, I hope you've learned your lesson", But he'll be wearing a tender smile.
- Their sin will have been pardoned, and the debt paid in double.
- They will be free - because of the comfort and grace of our great God.

- *One of my memories of growing up in Sydney where my dad was the minister, was after the 8:30 traditional service, running to him and burying my head in his robes and him cuddling me. The cassock and surplus smelling like febreeze.*
- *It was comfortable, safe, secure.*
- Well, that's what our God is like - comfortable, safe, and secure
- And also glorious.
- Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Lord - that nothing will stop!
- 3-5 "A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.""
- Every obstacle will be removed! Both physical and spiritual!
- And all flesh will see it. Not just Jerusalem, but the whole world shall see his glory.

- So when will this happen?
- Well, eventually the Jews did return from Babylon to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and the walls…But in all honesty, the return wasn't all that it was cracked up to be!
- The temple wasn't as nice, they were still under the thumb of the Persian empire - and there wasn't this dramatic world-wide revelation of the glory of God!

- So when?
- Well - in the beginning of the first century, John the Baptist was on the scene - and used these very words I wonder if you recognised them!
- Preparing the way for Jesus to come…the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, YHW in flesh - stepped onto this very earth…
- And through his death and resurrection, the debt of sin and iniquity was paid, he won the war against sin and death…
- And then this news of the Glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ - was spread, from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the world, even to hear in Wishart 2000 years later!
- It's because of Jesus that we can experience the great comfort of God!
- And we can know this comfort - because the word of God is sure.
- He is the God of certainty

- **6-8 - The God of Certainty**
- Isaiah hears another voice giving him a message to cry and tell out in V6-8.
- And the message is this:
- Humans are unreliable but only God is reliable and certain:
- V6 "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. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."
- We are like Grass - unreliable, gone with the wind -
- But God's word stands forever.
- He is the only certain thing…He's the only sure thing in a changing world
- One of my favourite prayers in the prayer book goes like this:
- "Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."
- Are you feeling weary by the changes of this world? The uncertainty?
- The uncertainty of health? OF when your next proper break will be? Weary of the ever rising cost of living?
- Come to the God of comfort. The God of certainty. Who doesn't change.
- And he is the God who doesn't need anything or anyone, because he is completely self-sufficient.

- **9-14 - The God of Self-Sufficiency**
- In this section from 9-31, we get an amazing picture of who God is. This is a glorious poem, using metaphor and images to try and describe God. And if you haven't yet, this week - read it through again. Read it out loud!
- But the main thrust of this is that God is the everlasting, living, all powerful God.
- So V9 "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!"
- The people of Israel are urged to shout out to the people of Judah - This is what your God is like - "Behold him!"
- If you were to drop the word "Behold" in usual Aussie conversation, people would be pretty confused…we don't generally use this word too much,
- and in modern reformed-evangelical churches… I don't think we are all that good at "beholding" God or thinking on him or being awed by him or meditating on what he is like or being still before God.
- We might be good at interpreting the word, good on exegesis, good on answering the questions for bible study…but how good are we at just remembering who he is and letting that wash over us as we contemplate the greatness of God?
- How good are we at just being slow before God?
- But that's what we're being urged to do here - Behold our God!
- And the song starts with the might and rescue of God as well as his great tenderness in V10-11

- And then vv12-14, the song asks a series of questions about God which reveals that God is self-sufficient.
    - That is - God is self-existent, he isn't dependant on anyone else for health and wellbeing. He doesn't need anyone else.
    - He is strong and mighty.
- V12 "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?
- God is so powerful….so great - that all the oceans can fit in his hands.
- All of those stars in the sky, the milky way, the galaxies far up above are just the distance between God's hands when he reaches them out…
- All the lands of earth, the great outback of Australia, the great dividing range, the blue mountains, the rocky mountains in colorado, the great heights of everest, the Austrian alps…he just can pick them up and pluck them on a scale…
- That's how great God is!
- And his wisdom is infinite as well
- V14 "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?"
    - *Over a 6 year period a state government of Australia once spent $800m dollars just on consultants. Consultants are firms or people used to help aid the development of policies and proceedures…*
    - *They call in external help when it's needed - and it seems, maybe they called in a number of working lunches while they were at it!*
- However, when God created the heavens and the earth…who did he consult? Did he get KPMG on board? Did he ring another god and ask "Hey mate… you might have tackled this problem before, but those humans have eaten from the tree that I told them not to…what do I do now?"
- No! Not at all!
- Because he is infinite wisdom and is completely self sufficient. He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, he doesn't change, his word is eternal, which means he is the one who is uniquely qualified to comfort us.
- And his rule has no boundaries, because he is the God of nations.

- **15-24 - The God of Nations**
- V15 "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales;"
- *You know when you're at a beach and making sand castles and you get a bucket of water from the ocean, and walk up the beach, and some water sloshes over the side…you don't worry about it, you don't go back to try and get that drop of water back - who cares! It's a drop!*
- And that's what the nations are like to God! Not in their worth…It's not like God doesn't care about us…but in their scale compared to God!
- Just imagine - this bucket that God carries…and some goes over the side
    - Oops, there goes the Roman empire…
    - And another drop…
    - Whoops, there goes the Greek empire…
    - Another…The british empire…
    - Another..the USSR…
    - Another…the USA…
- The nations are nothing before God as it's says in V17!
- And even if they brought their all before God to try and repay him or sacrifice to him…it wouldn't be enough..
- V16 "Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering"
- If you take all the cattle here in Australia, and all the sheep…and all the trees….that wouldn't be enough for God or enough to impress him…
- Because he already owns the nations…he is the God of the nations.
- He sits above it all!

- V22 “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness…”
- God sits above it all. He’s enthroned above it all. He is the everlasting and sovereign God who is in control…
- Even when we doubt.

- **25-31 - The God of Strength**
- Remember, that this is a song written for the people of God in babylon in exile. And the exile would have brought with it so many questions…so many doubts about the goodness of God or the power and authority of God.
- And this is preempted:
- V27 “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”? 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.”
- God isn’t forgetful or tired…but he is the everlasting, creator God - and he does not tire or wear out!
- V30 “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 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.”
- Those who wait on the Lord will be strengthened by him…
- And to “Wait on the Lord” means to live in confident hope and expectation that he will do what he has promised to do. To “wait on the Lord” means to surrender control over to God and live on his terms…
- To “wait on the Lord” means to behold him and contemplate him.
- And the same God who upholds the stars…will uphold and strengthen his people…

- You know the saying “You are what you eat”? What you put into your body is what you’ll get out of it…if you eat junk food, your body is going to become a bit “junkish”...
- Well there’s another saying written by someone smarter than I am…“You become what you worship” OR “You become what you behold”
- You become what you behold.
- If we spend all our time beholding the earthly news sites…social media pages…buisness news…our school report cards…our GPA…our looks…our relationship status…then chances are - we’re going to become more worried about the world, more worried about our bank account, or more worried about ourselves!
- And that worry is going to lead to weariness and exhaustion!
- But if we spend less time looking down at this earth, and more time looking up and beholding our Great God…the more of his comfort we will be able to know and experience in our lives! The more we will be renewed!
- He is the God of comfort, certainty, self-sufficiency, the nations, and of strength - why would we turn to anyone or anything else!?
- And this same God put on flesh to show us exactly who he is in Jesus Christ. And surrendered himself to death on the cross to remove the sin and iniquity that separated us from him - so that we can come to him - and be renewed and comforted by him.
- Why would we turn to anyone or anything else!?
- Friends - Behold our God.