



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 40: 1-31

“The Comfort of Israel's Incomparable God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] A word of prayer. Father, we again turn to Thee and ask Thy blessing upon us as we study the Scripture s in this hour.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight is “The Comfort of Israel’s Incomparable God,” and we are turning to Isaiah chapter 40, and studying verses 1 through 31.

Now, we have completed 39 chapters in the Gospel of Isaiah. It is the Gospel and the prophecy of Isaiah and we have 27 left. You probably have noticed that the 39 chapters are like the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 that are left are like the 27 Books of the New Testament, for Isaiah, which has 66 chapters, as a chapter for each Book of the Bible. There are 27 chapters then that are left in the study of the prophecy of Isaiah.

These 27 chapters contain the highest mountain peaks of prophecy that are found in all of the Old Testament. The prophet soars, to use his own figure with wings, like eagles. The theme of these 27 chapters is the good news of divine deliverance as it centers in the clarion cry, which we find in our chapter here, “Behold! Your God!” And so we are going to be looking throughout the 27 chapters at this great theme of divine

deliverance which centers in the ministry of the suffering servant of Jehovah and which concludes with Israel and the nations, blessed in the Kingdom of God and finally even reaches the high peak of the new heavens and the new earth.

The appeal which is found more than once throughout the 27 chapters is the appeal of repent. This is the response of man to the good news of the divine deliverance that is to come. Furthermore, these 27 chapters of the last part of Isaiah may be divided equally into nine chapters apiece. Many commentators have noted this for the last hundreds of years, actually. For example, chapters 40 to 48 form the first section in which the theme is the termination of the Babylonian affliction, the Babylonian captivity that is to come in the future. Will you notice how the 22nd verse of the 48th chapter concludes? “There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.” So, the nine chapters which begin form the first division of the last 27 and the theme is the termination of the Babylonian affliction.

Beginning at chapter 49 verse 1 and going through chapter 57 and verse 21, the next nine chapters, we have the second division of the 27 and if you look at verse of chapter 57, you will find this said: “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” And so, Isaiah has concluded the first nine chapters with the Text that is just like the Text that concludes the next nine chapters.

And then finally, the whole Book concludes in chapter 66 and verse 24, at this time, there is not the repetition of the same words, but the same sentiment, for while before, he has said “There is no peace, saith my God to the wicked.” Notice he says essentially the same thing in different words as he writes the conclusion to the entire Book in 66:24, “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

Now it is rather startling that the second verse of the 40th chapter after Isaiah has said, “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God,” he said, “Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: that she hath received of the Lord's hand, double for all her sins.” Now notice in that second verse that Isaiah is told that he is to speak tenderly to Jerusalem because of three things, “her warfare is accomplished.” Now that word really means something like “her affliction is accomplished.” Her struggle is accomplished, and so that clause corresponds with the first nine chapters, the termination of the Babylonian affliction. The next clause is that “her iniquity is pardoned.” That corresponds with the next nine chapters.

Chapter 49 through chapter 57, “her iniquity is pardoned,” where the theme is the expiation of the guilt of Israel by the servant of Jehovah and the third statement of verse 2, “For she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for her all her sins,” I think is a reference to the exaltation of Israel and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, which is the great theme of the last nine chapters of the 27th. So the second verse is really something of a key to the next 27 chapters, three nines, each of them being summed up in the clauses of verse 2. The historical background of these 27 chapters is the Babylonian captivity.

Now, remember Isaiah wrote during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, some think Manasseh. Now Uzziah died in 740 B.C. [Johnson writes on board] and Hezekiah concluded his reign perhaps in 686 B.C. The captivity began in 605 B.C. These dates are sometimes given differently depending upon the place from which you count the seventy years. This was seventy years of Babylonian captivity, so the prophet is writing during the reign of Hezekiah at least 100 years or about 100 years before the captivity begins and he is writing against the background of that captivity and describing the deliverance of the children of Israel, a deliverance which centers primarily in the ministry of the great servant of Jehovah. So, you have been studying, some of you, under

Bill McRae in the Sunday Morning Bible class for the adults – “the restoration period.” It is the study of this period of time that concluded the Babylonian captivity. Now, Isaiah writes with that background in mind. He looks down into the future and he sees the children of Israel returning from the Babylonian captivity, but he writes with only that in the background. This movement of the children of Israel back from captivity into the land is like the great deliverance of the future, when Israel shall be gathered from the four corners of the earth and brought back into the land finally to experience the kingdom of God. So he writes as a prophet looking at least a 170 years on into the future, sees Israel returning from the Babylonian captivity, but he sees that only as an illustration or type of their return from the four corners of the earth to which they will be scattered after the rejection of Jesus of Nazareth, many hundreds of years in the future.

Now, many who have studied the Book of Isaiah of course say that a prophet who is simply a human being could never really by his own prophetic insight be able to see the captivity which was a hundred years ahead of him, could not see of course the return from captivity a 170 years before him and consequently Isaiah must be writing from the time of the captivity itself. But if we just remember this, if we remember that a prophet by the very nature of the case is a man who is given the supernatural ability to see into the future by the Spirit of God, then we shall have no difficulty in believing that Isaiah who lived in the reign of Hezekiah is the one who wrote these last 27 chapters of the Book of Isaiah. And, this is why, in some of your Sunday school materials perhaps, you have read that Isaiah was written by two men.

Deutero-Isaiah is usually called the author of the last 27 of the chapters of Isaiah, and sometimes because the language, some scholars feel is not the same. There is even a third Isaiah, and a fourth Isaiah. And, some have seen more than four Isaiah’s as the author of the Book of Isaiah, largely because men today find it very difficult to believe that there is such a thing as the supernatural and that God is able to take hold of a man and give him insight into the future, but I believe, with most conservative scholars, that

Isaiah wrote in the reign of Hezekiah, that by prophetic foresight, he was given an indication of the captivity, the return from the captivity, and in fact, saw the future deliverance of Israel in the future from us and against the background of this, wrote of the events that shall conclude the present age.

Now then, let us take a look at the chapter. These things are going to emerge as we go through the chapter. The first two verses, I have called it the prologue of the prologue, because the first eleven verses are really a prologue to the last 27 chapters of the Book of Isaiah. But the first two are a prologue of the prologue. Now, let me read the eleventh, and I want you as I read it to notice how the word ‘voice’ or how ‘voices’ emerge. Now, in the first two verses, there is no reference to voice, but we do have a voice,

“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 hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?” This is what he is to cry. “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field: The grass withereth, and 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 mountain; 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!”

Those of you who turn the pages just then, have let me know you do not have the revised edition. So, I want you to be sure and try to get the revised edition. Verse 10,

“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.”

Now, you have probably noticed that throughout this prologue of eleven verses, only voices are heard. They break the night of God’s discipline of his people, the prophets are addressed in verses 1 and 2 and they are exhorted to comfort the people and then the people are addressed in verse 9, “O Zion, O Jerusalem,” and yet while we hear nothing but voices, the prophecy is not anonymous, it is a prophecy that comes from God, for we read in the first verse, “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.” It is My people. Israel is God’s people even in their discipline and it is, “God’s people, saith your God.”

Now, there are four voices here. That is the first voice. The second voice is in verse 3, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The third voice is in verse 6, “The voice said, Cry. What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field: but the word of our God shall stand forever. And the fourth voice is found in the ninth verse, “Lift up Thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” Now, the first voice is the voice of redemption. Let us look at it. Verses 1 and 2: “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people.” That “ye” is plural of course and God is addressing his prophets and saying, “Comfort My people,” and he stresses it: “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, for I have a good message for them. Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem.”

Now, let us stop for a moment and try to analyze that expression because it is really a very beautiful expression in the Hebrew text and I want to be sure and talk about the Hebrew text now because next year, I would not be able to do that. You will all be sitting with your Hebrew testaments, unable to see it for yourself, no doubt. But really, the Hebrew expression here is an expression that means to speak up against the heart off. It is like the German to speak on Thy spirits, or as someone has said, like the Scottish, it came up round my hear; that is, around my heart. The English, we might say, would be something like “speak home to the heart off.” “Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem, speak home to the heart of Jerusalem.” And for those who are lovers, now I see that most of you in this audience are too old to be lovers any more, but for those of you who are still lovers, and who can remembers your days of loving, this is an expression in Hebrew which was used of young people who are in love. They were spoken of as speaking to the heart of someone.

Now, back in my day, when young men were going out on a date, someone might say to some friend of his, “What you are going to do?” He said, “Well, I have got a date.” “You are going to pitch a little woo.” That was an expression they used over in South Carolina. Is that understandable over here in the west? “Pitch a little woo.” Now, this is the Hebrew expression for making love. “Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem.” If you were to describe a young man and words that he might say to some young lady of whom he thought on often lot, he would be speaking tenderly to her heart. He would be speaking home to her heart. He would be speaking up around her heart. So, this is an expression of love on God’s part. Israel’s discipline has now reached its conclusion.

He of course, I say, is speaking in the near of you of the conclusion of the Babylonian captivity. The seventy years are drawing to an end and Israel has been abiding on their God’s discipline and the time has come now for the Father to give his children, freedom. And so, he is going to return them to the land, but we know now as

we look at it from the standpoint of the 20th Century that Isaiah was also speaking in language that were far beyond that time that goes on down past our present day.

The time is coming when God is going to really speak tenderly to the heart of Nation Israel, scattered today in the dispersion to the four corners of the earth, and he is going to bring them back into the land through the saving work of the suffering servant of Jehovah and give them their land and their kingdom promised in the Old Testament. So here, “Speak ye tenderly unto her.” And this is what you are to say, three things, her warfare is accomplished, the exile is over, her hard or forced service has been completed. Secondly, that her iniquity is pardoned, her guilt has been absolved.

Now, of course, in the Old Testament, this was before the time of the cross, and what was said of course was said in the light of what our Lord would do, but the full fulfillment of this is the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross, it is there that the guilt was really absolved and finally, for she hath received of the Lord’s hand, double for all her sins.

Now, we may understand that clause in two ways. We may understand that clause to mean that God has given Israel, double punishment for her sins. And we may understand that to mean that God has felt it so personally that it has seemed as if it were double to him, he would not of course, give double for her sins, and the sins of beyond just. But that may also be understood as she is going to receive double for all of her sins; that is, her blessings will be doubled in the future. And I am inclined to think that that is what the prophet means, and I must say, for your guidance, that I am in the minority -- I am not without some support -- but most feel that what this means is that she has now received enough and to God, it has seemed, He has felt it so much personally that it says, “If she has received double for her sins.” But I think since this verse has to do with promises, primarily, that this is a promise, too, and it means that she is going to receive tremendous blessings which are like a doubling of her sins, because of what the word of God states.

At any rate, let us move on now to the prologue, and here we have the next voice in verse 3 through verse 5. Someone might ask at this point, “What is this positive salvation referred to? What are these blessings?” Well, here are some of them. The second voice is not the voice of redemption, but is the voice of preparation. “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.”

Now, I am going to ask you, if you will, to turn over to Matthew chapter 3 and verse 3, for we have here, the fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah chapter 40, in the ministry of John, the Baptist. Matthew chapter 3 and verse 3. Now, while you are finding, let me read verses 1 and 2. “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” In the Old Testament, in Isaiah chapter 40, verses 3 through 5 then, we have an anticipation of the ministry of John, the Baptist. A voice calls out, Isaiah hears the voice, he does not know of whom the voice speaks in the Old Testament, the progress of divine revelation will point us ultimately to John, the Baptist, who became the ambassador of the King, Jesus Christ. And the message of John, the Baptist is, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

The allusion there is to the ancient custom of cutting a new road for a king who came to visit a community. In order to celebrate the arrival of the king and to honor him, frequently, the community would make a new road, and the king would be first one to ride in on the road, just as if, for example, we were to have a visit from President Nixon and Dallas wished to honor President Nixon, and so we would decide to have a new freeway, and we would cut a new freeway out, and President Nixon would come into Dallas as the first one to ride upon that freeway. O, this was what they did in ancient times, and so the prophet hears these words, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make

straight in the desert, a highway for our God.” And, we know when finally the history of the fulfillment of this came, it was John, the Baptist, who began in the wilderness to preach concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus. So, John, then is the fulfillment of this second voice of preparation.

Now, the third voice is the voice which I have called the voice of perpetuation, or if you wish the voice of the permanence of the word of God. Verses 6 through 8, notice here, “The voice said.” This is another voice the prophet hears. “The voice said, Cry.” And the prophet said, “What shall I cry?” And this is what he is to 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.” What we are is just grass. We are fading flowers. Now my camellias, I have referred to that more than once, but my camellias are now beginning to fade. I still have some blooms, but I am mainly sweeping up petals of flowers now, because the time has come for the flowers to fall off. They are fading away and the new growth has begun.

And, Isaiah likens human beings to grass. All flesh is like the grass. It is like the flower the fades away. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever. As I said in the last hour, Adam’s sin has turned the world into a vast cemetery. But there is hope in the word of God. That is what the prophet is called upon to say to Israel. Israel has entered into great discipline, 70 years of captivity. They shall enter into an even greater discipline. They are in it today, now. The dispersion to the four corners of the earth, because of their rejection of their Messiah. They are now in that dispersion and as the years pass, and as Israel dies, we have evidence of the judgment of God. Their hope, however, is in the undying word of God. The word of God shall stand forever and forever.

Some years ago, when I was in Scotland studying, I was in the Scottish National Library in Edinburgh, in reading an account of a man who visited one of the churches in Britain, and he was not a man who was accustomed to visit low churches. He was a high

church Anglican, but he had visited a church in which the word of God was proclaimed and he said one of the things that impressed him was the preaching of the preacher, who was an outstanding preacher. If I said his name, you would remember it. But he said, he went in and he sat in the back and he said during the course of the message which has to do with the word of God, the preacher took up a book of current theology which was sitting on the side of the pulpit and he held it up like this above the pulpit and he said, “This is a work of contemporary theology. It shall fade away.” And with that, he let it drop.

Then he reached over on the other side and he pulled up a book like this and he said, “This book is a work of contemporary literature. It shall fade away.” And, when he said that, then he reached down and he picked up the giant pulpit Bible which was there and he held it up before the whole of the audience and he said in a great booming voice, “But the word of the Lord shall stand forever.” And that is true. It is amazing when you study the writings of men to discover how soon they fade away. I can remember when I went to theological seminary that men were speaking about contemporary theology and they were talking about Chicago liberalism.

Now, the old Chicago liberalism is studied as if you would study the science of archaeology. I saw a book the other day which was a reflection upon that age, the age of the old Chicago liberalism. It is ancient history now. And then, when I began to teach in theological seminary, men were talking about Karl Barth in the United States and Brunner, and others. Now today, men are through the next decade. Men began to speak of Rudolph Bultmann, of Marburg, and others, and today, their thinking and speaking in terms of newer theologians, Pannenberg, Voltmann etc. One thing you can be sure, if you want to be behind times, stick with some contemporary theologian, because it would not be long before the fad is past and he is gone, and you have gone with him too.

But in one way, you can be contemporary and that is to stand with the word of God. You may have to undergo some criticism, you may have to be called a fanatic, you

may have to be called a fundamentalist, even. But if you stick with the word of God, you may be sure that you are always contemporary. Do not follow the crowd. If you follow the crowd, you will discover that the crowd is ultimately, usually wrong. There are two expressions in the Book of Acts which I came across recently which have meant quite a bit to me over the past few days.

In Acts chapter 19, when Paul was at Ephesus, the crowd roared for several hours, remember, in the riot there, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” and the town clerk, referring to the religion which surrounded that pagan goddess, said, “these things cannot be spoken against.” In other words, these men can do nothing about the religion that honors Diana. “These things cannot be spoken against.” But then in the 28th chapter of the Book of Acts, the apostle Paul was informed with reference to those who had accepted the truth of God, as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.

Now, in one hand, we read these things cannot be spoken against, the religion of Diana, the contemporary theology of Paul’s day. But then we read when Paul came to Rome, it was said that everywhere these people, like Paul, are spoken against. Now then, we are living in 1969 and where is the religion of Diana? Where is it? “These things cannot be spoken against,” the town clerk said, “These are the abiding truths of men.”

And then when Paul came to Rome, they said, “Everywhere, he is spoken against,” and the system of truth which was everywhere spoken against in the 1st Century is the truth that millions today embrace as the truth of God and sad to say but true, everywhere, still it is spoken against. But it is relevant, it is vital, it is contemporary, it is the truth by which we have been saved. And so when we read here that “All flesh is as grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field,” you can add to it, “not only is all flesh, grass, but all of the fault of the flesh of men is feeding, but the word of the Lord shall stand forever. And he who stands upon the word shall also stand forever.”

Now, that is the third voice. That is a great voice. It is something that we need to listen to. But here is something even greater. In the ninth verse we read,

“O Zion that bringest good tidings, get Thee up into the high mountain; 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!”

This is a wonderful message. Zion, I want you to climb the highest mountain and I want you to shout out to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” And when you read the New Testament, the Book of Mark for example, you will discover that the message that was given John the Baptist and our Lord about the fact that the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Good News, that message is taken from Isaiah chapter 40 verses 9 through 11 and Mark says, in effect, here is the fulfillment of the preaching of the Good News of Isaiah chapter 40, verses 9 through 11 and the Good News is, “Behold, your God!” That is what Mark says was being proclaimed when Jesus came on the scene. “Behold, your God!”

Now, it is a striking thing because you see what is really stated here is that the message that the New Testament contains is the message, “Behold, your God!” and that God who is to be seen by men is Jesus of Nazareth. Well, now, with the great message like this, your eyes turn and you want to take a look at this God, do not you? Notice the 10th verse, “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.” “Behold your God who shall come.” My, I really want to see what this God looks like, and the 11th verse tells us, Lo, when your eyes turn what you see? A shepherd? Did you notice it? Look at the 11th verse. “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.” This is our God, the one who comes as a shepherd.

And, you remember some of the teachings that Jesus gave when he was here? What did He say? Well, he said this. “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. I am the door. By Me if any man enters in, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.” He is the shepherd. We would read in Hebrews chapter 13, “Now the God of peace who brought again from the dead, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” Our Lord is the Great Shepherd. This is our God. Our God is pictured like a shepherd. And the God is pictured as a shepherd with little lambs in his arms.

You want to know what God is like? That is what He is like. I think you know as I read this, I might have expected if I have not looked at the 11th verse, you know what I would have thought, I would have thought Isaiah was going to, in the 11th verse, he has told us, “Behold, your God. Get on the high mountains and shout it out. Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him: His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.” And the next thing I expect to see is something like a ball of fire flashing with glory and wonder and the types of things that you might find from something magnificent, I would expect that they come from heaven and everyone’s eyes to be blinded by the sight, and what I am shown is a shepherd with lambs in his bosom. That is the Lord God.

That is the God we have and you know it certainly is a wonderful thing to know we have a God like that, is it not? When I come to that, even though this is a Presbyterian kind of gathering, I want to shout, Hallelujah! This is my God. The God who comes like a shepherd with the lamb in His arm, for I feel weak like a lamb and I need some support like a lamb and my God is a Shepherd.

We all this point, we want to know some more about this God and so Isaiah, now in the remainder of our section, in roman III, the Preeminence of Israel’s God, gives us a picture of this one which again at first glance seems to be a paradox, for he now is going to talk about an incomparable Creator and Governor of the universe. In one breath, he

describes him as a Shepherd. In the next, he describes him as the Creator and as the Governor of all things. I would call, if I were likening the prophecy of Isaiah to a sunrise and then a day, and then a mid day, and then an evening, if I would think of these 27 chapters, as an unfolding of the glorious day of God, I would call this the sunrise, of the prophecies of the last half of the Book of Isaiah. So here is the sunrise of Isaiah’s gospel, his good news.

And the first message is the message to idolatrous Jews, verses 12 through 25. The tenor of this is the tenor of challenge and sarcasm. The sections in then questions, notice verse 18, “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” Verse 21, “Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?” And then verse 25, “To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? Saith the Holy One.” So this first section, which we have call to the idolatrous Jews is a message in which the prophet Isaiah reviews the past and remains of the greatness of the God, who brought them or who has come into relationship with them, and who has brought them to the present place.

Then the next chapter, Isaiah chapter 41 will be a message to the gentiles in which he previews the future for them. But I say, the tenor of this challenge and sarcasm. It is God’s glory and nature and in history and lets read it beginning at verse 12, “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?” What magnificent figures of speech these are.

You know, when I had been studying the prophecy of Isaiah, I studied up in my study and then occasionally when I get so full, I have to say this, say what I am studying and learning to someone, I come down to Mary, and she is usually sitting around in the den then doing nothing as most women are. [Laughter] Seriously, she is usually very busy, but I interrupt her and I expressed to her some of the things that are really filling me, and

one of the things that I keep saying over and over again to her is, I feel like I am just getting to the place where I can make a study of the Prophecy of Isaiah, now, and I feel like I want to give not 45 messages, as I did on Hebrews here Sunday morning, I want to give 1400 messages on the prophecy of Isaiah to try to bring out some of the tremendous things that are found in this great work.

Just look at this 12th verse and the magnificent picture that is given at the Greatness of God, “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand.” Have you ever tried to hold water in your hand, like this? You can only hold about a swallow. That is all you can do. What is Isaiah saying? Like God’s hand is so great that he can hold the oceans, all of the water that we know that is in our universe can be put in the hollow of his hand. He is that great. “And measured out heaven with the span.” Do you know what the span is? The span is the difference between your little finger and your thumb, stressed up, that is 6 inches, I guess. That is the span. “And measured out heaven with the span.” While God’s span is so great, that he can measure the whole heavens by the little distance between his finger and his thumb.

Now, Isaiah does not mean that God has hand, he is using anthropomorphic language, he is speaking as a man. He says, if he did have a hand, this is the kind of hand he would have, a hand in which you can put all of the oceans, a hand that you could use to measure out all of the heavens and measure the dust of the earth in a measure. Have you ever seen little scales? How much can you put on scales? Not very much. God said through the prophet, on God’s scales you can just pile up all of the dirt that exists in the universe and it will stand on His scales. “And weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.” O, the greatness of our God.

And this is the God who holds us in his arm as a shepherd holds a lamb. I would imagine that if I am in the arms of the Lord Jesus, and I am not trying to get out of them, that whatever He wants to do for me, He can do for me. Would not you think? If He is this great God who has all of this power and authority, then I am his little lamb. That is

where I want to get, right next to Him, in his bosom and let him care for me. “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?”

When the Lord decided that He was going to create the Universe, what consulting firm did He call in to give Him a little bit of advice? He did not need any. He is the great Creator. He is the great Governor of the universe. He does not call in any one. Behold, the nations are like a drop in a bucket. You know what that means? That is, you know, you pick up an empty bucket and you poured out the water and there is still a few drops hanging around in the edge of it that is what it means. He carries the nations around just like an empty bucket, as a drop of water on it, that is all. “Behold, the nations are like a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.” When you have moved everything off the balance scale, and there is still a little dust there left, like that; that is the nations of the earth in the sight of our great God who is our Shepherd.

“Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing,” like you reach down and pick up Spain, and say, “I think I will take a look at Spain.” It is like that. “Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.” What He means is there is not enough wood in all of Mount Lebanon and there are not enough wild beasts to offer up a sacrifice that is suitable to Him. Get all of the wood that you can offer from Mount Lebanon, and it was noted for its great Cedar forests. Pile up all of the wood upon a fire, get all of the animals that exist, and you do not have a sacrifice that is worthy of our God. All nations before Him are His nothing. That includes Russia, that includes Arab, China, that include the United States. They are counted to Him less than nothing in vanity. That is all.

Now, as we looked at our great God, Isaiah said, “Let’s take a little look at some of the gods of men.” Now, do not laugh. Do not laugh, if you can help it. But let us talk about the idols. So, he moves our eyes from the heights and swoops down to the images

of the earth, those idols that men make and worship which dissolve before the divine scorn. “The workman melteth and casteth an image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh a skillful workman to prepare a carved image, that shall not be moved.” You know what that means. Here are stupid men. They are not able to go to someone to make a metal idol. So, they get some wood that will not rot and they take a piece of it to a carpenter and they say, “We want you to make a little god for us.

But be sure to make one that won’t fall over.” And, so he makes it in such a way that it would not fall over. That is his god. And, I can see the Prophet Isaiah. He must have had a great laugh over this that will not be moved. “Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? So, God laughs at men’s idols. You know, sometimes, it is amazing how Christians are misled by idols. Have you ever been told, while you know an idol is something that spurs up my affection for God. It causes me to think of God and actually my idol is not bad, my idol is good; it makes me think of God, and so when I look at my idol, I am stirred up to worship the true God and I do it through the idol.

God is at eternal war with idols. You know why? Because that is a lie. That is not true. You know what happens when you look at little wood now? I do not have one. I am going to have on in Believers Chapel ever and you to see to that ever. But let us just suppose that we did have a little idol sitting here. The very first thing that I do when I look at an idol, I think little thoughts of God. Instead of thinking big thoughts of the eternal God who fills the universe with his immensity, I look at a little thing, and my thoughts begin to narrow down immediately and I notice too that this idol is a corruptible thing. It is made out of wood or silver or gold which corrupt, but our God is an incorruptible God and I have a lot about God. The very first thing I do when I make an idol is to lie about his nature. He is incorruptible.

This is why the reformers in Scotland, for example, went throughout that land into the cathedrals and smashed the images. Now, some men said that they were men without culture. They have no appreciation for art. But it was just the opposite. Those who make them thought little things of God and narrowed their imagination down to the material things. The Reformers smashed them because they realized that God was too big for idols and images and as a result of that, there came out some of the great literature of men like Carlyle and Milton and others who were freed from the narrow thinking of idolatry. God is moved to laughter and scorn with the idols.

Now, verse 22, God’s glory and nature and history again, so few minutes after now, I am going to go on just a few minutes if you do not mind. “It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth.” I wonder if that is an indication that God knows that the earth is round and has put it in Scripture. Well, all we can say of course, is that God knows that. Whether this is really an indication of it or not, I have to let someone else decide. Perhaps if men had read of this text, they would not have been disturbed about sailing out and falling off,

“It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.”

God’s glory and nature and history is greater than anything that we can imagine. He is greater than the idols. John Knox, when he was in prison in France, was given a little image of the Virgin Mary and he was told to kiss it. And Knox was not a man to pay

any attention to anyone, but the Lord. And so he took a look at it, he walked over, and tossed it out into a river that was streaming by. He said, “If that is a God, let the Virgin learn how to swim.” [Laughter] God’s glory and nature. Why does God speak to the children of Israel and remind them of his creation. Well, that was the monument of God’s work which they appreciated.

We today, who live after the cross, we sit down around the Lord’s table, and we look at the elements and we remind ourselves of what he has done for us upon the cross at Calvary. They are monuments of his saving work. Israel looked into the past and saw the great creation that was about her as a monument of her God and they remembered how he had brought them up out of Egypt and his great redemptive power, and so Isaiah is calling them to look at the greatness of God and to reflect upon it and to use this as an ordinance for spiritual provident benefit.

Now in the last part, we must hasten through. He speaks to the despondent Jews. And here he lifts their eyes from the earthy idols to the stars, and to one who shepherds the stars. Notice verse 26. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might.” Listen, God calls all the stars of the heavenly host by name. Not one faileth.

Why does he speak in this way? Why does he in this imperative ask them to lift up their eyes and look at the stars? Where were they? Well, they were in Babylonia. What kind of country is Babylonia? Well, it is like Texas, it is flat, West Texas. It is flat. There is not a tree around, and here they are with Nebuchadnezzar’s great multitudes of slaves and servants, now crushed together in the Babylonian plain. And what were the Jews thinking? Is there a God? Is there providence? Is this all within the plan of God or has God forgotten us? On the earth are the idols that men are worshipping, the gods of the Babylonians and the others. Everybody had his god and all the different nations were

crowded and the Babylonian gods were all over that city, all different kinds, new models, old models, all were there.

And through the Prophet Isaiah, God says, take a look up, look at the stars, look at the heavens, see those stars. I am the Shepherd of the stars. They come out at night. Every one of them, I call them by name, not a single one of them fails. I bring them out. And as you look at the stars, you have an understanding of what I am to you. I, who am the Shepherd of the stars, I am the Shepherd of the lambs in captivity. That is what he means.

“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and the justice due to me has passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? 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 that have no might, He increaseth strength,”

Just as there is order and unfailing guidance in the heavens, so he preserves and keeps us. He does not go to sleep. And finally,

“He giveth power to the faint and to those who have no might, he increases strength. Even the youths 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.”

The idea of a God who does not faint, neither is weary. That idea we could call the sixth point of Calvinism. The perseverance of our God. If we think of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, the perseverance of the saints add another perseverance of our God. That is a God who never faints. I wonder what

the 31st verse means. “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; they shall walk, and not faint.” How would you have written that? Once you have written it the other way around, “They shall walk and not faint; they shall run and not be weary; they shall mount up with wings like eagles,” which to me like you start out with a burst and then wind up just walking along backwards.

He probably was thinking of the fact that Israel was going to come out of the captivity and they were going to mount up with wings like eagles. There were going to run and not be weary, but in the final analysis to get into the land again, there was not going to be an awful lot of walking and there was a burst of energy, but there is the necessity for continuance. I think also that there probably is some application to life of the believer in Jesus Christ. You know when you are young, you mount up with wings like eagles, do not you? And when you reach middle age, that’s 35, you run, and are not weary, but when you get to old age, you are slowed down. You walk, but even then, you shall not faint. He is not thinking about hot rod here in which you drag or burn off, he is thinking perhaps of a bicycle.

You know the test of handling a bicycle is to be able to sit on it and stand still. Have you learned how to do that? It’s to take a bicycle and run off down the street in a hurry. It is harder to go real slow. It is hardest of all to stop still and just sit. Well, when you get the old age, remember this. Your Shepherd in the days that you mounted up with wings like eagles is going to be your Shepherd when you walk and you shall not faint. This is Israel’s incomparable God, a Shepherd, a Creator, a Governor, but He is also our God. My God, if we believed in Jesus Christ. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for Thy word. What a wonderful thing it is to realize that our God is so great that He may comprehend the dust of the earth in a balance, that He may measure out the heavens with a span and hold all of the oceans in

“The Comfort of Israel’s Incomparable God” by S. Lewis Johnson
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the hallow of His hand, and we thank Thee that He is a shepherd who nourishes the little
lambs, and O Father, cause us to lean up His breast.