

Isaiah 40 God Brings His Children Home

What makes a place a ‘home’?

We may think of familiar surroundings, a fireside and favourite chair where we can relax and put our feet up but there’s more to it than that.

Has it to do with where we grew up? Is it where we now eat and sleep most often? Is it where our closest family and friends are?

In very general terms we might say that ‘home’ is somewhere we feel we belong, where we feel comfortable, and safe and loved.

Christians may identify with all of the above but we are given an extra, deeper dimension. For us, ‘home’ is not so much a physical place as a state of being. We can be ‘at home’ anywhere when we are closely following our Lord and Master, seeking His will and enjoying His care.

In the epic story of the Old Testament the nation of Israel are the ‘covenant’ people descended from Abraham and Jacob. A fundamental part of their identity is their relationship to their forefathers’ God. Biblical writers teach that God established and prospered the nation in the land of Canaan with David and Solomon and Jerusalem and the Temple but the people proved disloyal to their God, committing spiritual adultery by worshipping the idols of their neighbours.

God is holy and after many prophetic warnings He eventually let Jerusalem be overthrown and its people deported to exile in Babylon. But He is also loving and merciful so we find that 70 years later a ruler signs an official edict permitting and even helping finance Jewish exiles to return to their homeland.

God is faithful to His promises and He brings His people home. Home to Jerusalem. Home to Himself.

The prophet Isaiah was preaching before Jerusalem fell and its people were taken into exile. Throughout his writings we find an important balance. The Lord God is awesome in power and holiness and true to His Word so some of these messages are stern warnings that people need to repent of all God says is wrong or suffer dreadful consequences. But Isaiah’s long ministry also had many beautiful promises of comfort such as we find here in ch40.

The Lord we worship is almighty, with infinite power. He created the billions of stars in this universe and knows the detail of each one. He overrules human governments, establishing or deposing leaders. Idols can’t do these things. People of faith take comfort that our fate is ultimately in God’s all-powerful hands.

More, God's Word can be trusted. The grass grows but then withers, people and empires flourish and pass away but God and His promises remain true and dependable from generation to generation, century after century. Skeptics and atheists die but the Lord lives on and keeps His Word. He warned His people they would be disciplined in exile and it happened. He promised to bring them home and He did so, more than once!

God's Word has been carefully recorded and preserved in the Bible. His living Word at a time also became incarnate, embodied in Jesus, God's Son. Isaiah ch40 speaks of the Lord coming like a conquering king to bring His people back to Jerusalem. Jesus is that king and He has paid for our sin on the cross. We can be forgiven, reconciled to God. His generous blessing can now be restored. We don't have to stay away, we can come home.

Prepare the road, says the Word of God, remove any obstacles, fill up the valleys and potholes, any areas which are lacking by practising righteousness. We might recognise these words for John the Baptist quotes them in the Gospels as he announces the promised Saviour King is about to appear. God keeps His promises. Many witnessed His glory in Palestine 2000 years ago. When Christ returns at the end of the age '*all* mankind together will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken'!

We should notice the tone of this chapter, how the prophet is to speak 'tenderly' to the people and give them words of comfort and encouragement. To be sure, 'the Sovereign Lord comes with power and His arm rules' and His glory seems at times to be overwhelming. Biblical writers like Moses, Isaiah, Daniel or the Apostle John who are granted a glimpse of God's heavenly majesty are initially quite terrified and convicted with a deep sense of unworthiness.

But Isaiah is told to speak *tender* messages of comfort and reassurance. God is beyond awesome and yet 'He tends His flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young.' Our Lord is compassionate and understanding. No one knows us better. No one gives us more or has more patience. Good Shepherd that He is, He has come to seek and to save the lost, to rescue us, to gather us as one flock safe home to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What an amazing picture, that the infinite Lord of all glory would ever think of very flawed people like you and me and carry us 'close to His heart'! Yet so says the Word of God!

Are we ever tempted to doubt God's power or his care? Might we sometimes wonder if He has forgotten or given up on us? Does the road home from Babylon to Jerusalem seem too long, the task of rebuilding God's house too difficult? Do we ever get tired or discouraged? Life can weigh heavily on us and even young people can become disillusioned and despair.

Let's be reassured by the closing words of Isaiah 40:

'The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth...He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.'

The One Who has a name for every star, knows and cares for each one of us. There is a home waiting in heavenly security and joy which he has gone to prepare. There is new life and strength for those who trust in Jesus, who 'wait' on Him in prayer - and who start walking!