

HOPE IN THE LORD

Text: Isaiah 40:21-31

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-20; Psalm 77

Belgic Confession Article 1

Theme: The Lord exhorts his people to hope in him as their ruler, creator and helper.

Purpose: To direct us to hope in the Lord as our ruler, creator and helper.

Sometimes we hear news that seems too good to be true, news that is hard to believe, so much so that we have our doubts. We say, “No, that can’t be true! That is impossible!” Then the person bringing the good news must convince us that what he has said is indeed true, this really has happened!

This is the sort of situation addressed in Isaiah chapter 40. The first major part of Isaiah prophecies, chapters 1-39, are warnings about God’s judgment on his people as a result of their sin. Isaiah warned that the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed and the people of Judah would be taken into exile. Chapter 40 introduces the second part of the book which promises of restoration. After many years in exile God would bring them back to their own land and they would be allowed to settle there again.

But the people of Judah found this hard to believe; it was too good to be true. And they doubted whether this was even possible; how could God do such a seemingly impossible thing?! In response God assured them that he was able and willing to restore them to their land.

He could do this because he is the ruler of all rulers, he is the creator of the world, and he is the helper of his people; therefore, Isaiah urged them to hope in the Lord.

1. GOD IS THE RULER OF ALL RULERS (21-24)

a. Each of the three sections of this passage begins with **a question**. The questions are rhetorical, which means they are asked for effect, to make a point, and the answer to the question is obvious!

In verse 21 Isaiah asks; “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?”

Isaiah was about to explain some basic truths about God that the people of God ought to know. These truths about God were elementary, they were basic; this was Theology 101. He asked them, “How come you don’t know these things?!”

b. He explains (in verse 22) that God rules over **all the world**. “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.”

God is the great Ruler, the almighty King, and he is seated on his throne in heaven.

He is so far above us that we seem like grasshoppers to him. Not that he treats us like grasshoppers - that is not Isaiah’s point – rather that God is great and we are small.

c. In verse 23 he explains that God rules over **all the princes** of the world – over kings and queens, over presidents and prime ministers.

Think about the great empires of the world: the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and the Romans. Each one has come and gone.

Think about all the kings and queens of England, and the presidents of the United States of America, and the prime ministers of New Zealand. Each one has ruled for a while and then gone.

Isaiah compares them to plants that God put into the ground; they are there for a short time, they take root and then he “blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.” (v 24)

The prophet Daniel said about God; “He sets up kings and deposes them.” (Dan 2:12) He gives them a task to do and when that is done he removes them and they vanish from the scene.

d. Isaiah explains this because he wants the people of Judah to **trust in God**. They were anxious about the Assyrians and the Babylonians but they needed to realize that God is in control.

Sometimes you are in a messy situation in an office or a shop or a class room and you ask; “Who’s in charge here?!” If we ask that about the state of the world then the Bible informs us that *God* is in charge, he is in control of everything, he is the one who knows what is going on and he will direct everything for his good purpose.

That is true of world events and of your life and mine. We need to trust him; he knows what he is doing. He is the Ruler.

2. GOD IS THE CREATOR OF THIS WORLD (v 25-26)

Isaiah begins this section with another rhetorical question from God, the Holy One, who asks, “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” (v 25)

The answer is obvious: no one can compare with God! He is almighty, all powerful, supreme!

To prove this Isaiah points to the night sky: “Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these?” (v 26)

The Babylonians believed the stars and the planets controlled what happened on the earth, but the Scriptures teach us that God created these heavenly bodies and he controls them.

Psalms 8 and Psalm 19 describe this: “O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens.” “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

Our earth and solar system are a tiny part of the Milky Way galaxy, which is a moderately sized galaxy containing about 100 billion stars. The Milky Way is only one of more than 100 billion galaxies in the universe, many of which are much larger than ours!

The size and scale of the universe is beyond our imaginations and our minds; yet God has created every planet, all the stars and all the billions of massive galaxies; he knows and names each one of them! He has arranged them and he guides them by “his great power and mighty strength.” (v 26)

Isaiah mentions this so that we will trust in God: the all powerful God who created the heavens and the earth can and will look after us as his people. Nothing is too hard for him.

3. GOD AS THE HELPER OF HIS PEOPLE (v 27-31)

a. Again Isaiah begins with **a question**:

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God.” (v 27b)

That is what the people of Judah were saying, and their complaint anticipated how the people of God would feel when they were taken away into exile. They thought God had forgotten about them and that he was not aware of the troubles in their lives. They complained that their rights as God’s elect people had been ignored and that he had not kept his promises to them.

Asaph, in Psalm 77, put similar questions to God:

“Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his love again?

Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time?

Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Has he in anger withheld his compassion?” (v7ff)

Sometimes things happen in your life that causes you to ask questions of God; you are chronically ill, or in a financial crisis, or your children are very difficult, or your marriage is shaky.

You might ask: Why is this happening to me? Where is God in all this? Why has he forgotten about me? You might feel low and discouraged. You might feel sorry for yourself and wallow in self-pity. You may allow resentment and bitterness to take root in your heart.

If you are tempted towards any of these sins then you need to listen to what Isaiah says about the Lord in these next verses.

b. He directs us to **God's greatness** in v 28;

i. "The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth."

When we are low and discouraged we need to turn our minds to God and his glory.

This is what Asaph did after his questions in Psalm 77; he went on to say,

"Then I thought, 'To this I will appeal:

The years of the right hand of the Most High.'

I will remember the deeds of the Lord;

Yes I will remember your miracles of long ago.

I will meditate on all your works

And consider all your mighty deeds." (v 10-12)

The Lord is the everlasting God, he is eternal, he is infinite, he does not change, he always keeps his promises, he is the same yesterday, today and forever.

ii. An aspect of his greatness is that "he will not grow tired or weary."

You do a hard day of mental or physical work and you are tired. You are ready to put your feet up. At night you are glad to go to bed and put your head on your pillow and sleep!

But God never gets tired, he never needs to rest, he never expends all his energy and he never sleeps. He strength is inexhaustible.

iii. "And his understanding no one can fathom."

We have our questions about God and his ways, and we are allowed to ask them, as did Job, and as did Asaph and David in the psalms.

But as we ask our questions we need to remember that we are human and finite; our knowledge is small and our understanding is limited.

We cannot fathom God's wisdom and understanding. He is all wise and all knowing.

We can have a true and accurate knowledge of who he is but we can never know him fully; we will never know all there is to know about him nor can we understand all his ways. Our knowledge of his is true but not exhaustive; it is genuine but not complete.

This is what the Belgic Confession means when it says he is "incomprehensible"; we cannot fully comprehend him. (cf. Is 40:13)

Paul wrote about him; "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom 11:33)

b. Isaiah not only points us to God's greatness but also to his **help** (v 29); "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."

Isaiah has already spoken about God's inexhaustible strength; "He will not grow tired or weary." (v 28)

The prophet then thinks of the fittest and strongest human beings, who are youths, young men, in the prime of their life, full of energy. But “even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.”

He contrasts them with “those who hope in the Lord.” The word translated as 'hope' literally means 'wait'. In times of trial and difficulty and weakness we must look to God for strength. We need to do that waiting for him to respond, to act, to help us. We wait for him with a sense of expectation believing that he will help us. We “hope in the Lord”. (v 31)

Remember that these words were originally spoken to people who were going into exile. While in Babylon they would have to wait for the Lord to deliver them, to rescue them. That was their hope - that the Lord would take them back to their land.

This was the attitude of the Old Testament believers as they waited for the coming of the Messiah. At the time of Jesus' birth there was a man living in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon who “was waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). He was waiting for the Messiah, Christ Jesus, and was privileged to see him!

As New Testament believers we know that Jesus has already come and that we are still waiting for his second coming. We too are living in hope.

While we wait, we trust that God is with us no matter how we feel; we believe he will act for our good; we rely on his goodness and strength, and we are confident of his power to help us.

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles.”

The eagle is used as a symbol of strength and power. It is one of the largest and strongest of all birds and is able to soar to great heights in the sky. Their flight seems easy, effortless. (cf. Ps 103:5) God promises us that when we wait for Him we will find strength to soar like an eagle. Of course, we are not to take this literally but rather as referring to *spiritual* strength.

Isaiah continues; “They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.”

Sometimes in the Christian life we are running; we are enthusiastic, busy, active, energetic. But most of the time we are walking. We are persevering, doing our duty, keeping up our commitments, fulfilling our calling.

As you do all this keep in mind the Lord's promise: “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.”

At times God's promises seem too good to be true, hard to believe. But God is able to fulfill all his promises to us because
he is the Ruler of all rulers,
he is the Creator of the world,
and he is the Helper of his people.

Amen