

Strong and Tender

#0283

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—1972

Someone has called our attention to the fact that the earlier part of the book of Isaiah, in a special way, presents the sins of Israel and points out the judgments of God that must of necessity follow transgression. And while there are echoes of these warnings in the latter part of the book, nevertheless, these closing chapters from the 40th chapter on to the end of the book are big with glory in presenting the future triumph of the church and the certainty of the eternal purpose of God being carried out in fullness.

And so you notice these opening words in the 40th chapter:

“Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God”
Isaiah 40:1.

God’s message to His people is one of comfort. It’s true that He sometimes has to point out our sins, but this is preliminary, this is preparatory. His great goal is to bring us a message of comfort.

“Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,
that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is
pardoned...” Isaiah 40:2.

Here the prophet looks ahead to the final triumph of the people of God, the church reaching the point of reflecting the image of Jesus fully here in this world and then on through the eternal ages in the city of God.

Now in the third verse, the vision comes back to the work of preparation that must be done if that wonderful purpose is to be fulfilled.

“The voice of him that cries 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...” Isaiah 40:3–5.

John the Baptist applied this prophecy to himself when the delegation from Jerusalem came to the Jordan, and pointedly asked him, “Who are you? Are you the Messiah?” He said, “No.” “Are you this? Are you that?” “No.” “What are you?” Read it there in John’s Gospel, the first chapter. He said, quoting this very prophecy:

“...I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias”
John 1:23.

It's a wonderful thing, dear friends, when a man *knows* that he's fulfilling prophecy. John was born for that work. He was a miracle child. And what a wonderful thing it was, I repeat, for him to know in his work there by the Jordan that he was fulfilling what had been written years before, centuries, by inspiration.

What was his work? To prepare the way of the Lord; to make straight a highway for our God. And, dear friend, to you and me has been committed that same work. His work, I say the same, I mean in this way, his work was to get the people ready for Christ's first coming. Our work is to get the people ready for Christ's second coming.

The figure here is an interesting one. You see, in the ancient times when a king was to tour some part of his domain, workers and messengers would be sent ahead heralding his approach and seeing that the highway, the road, was in good shape. And sometimes to do this, extensive repairs or even the making of a road was necessary. And in this, every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

We've seen it in recent years in the bringing of this superhighway right through our place here. We've seen the mountains brought down, and the valleys filled up. What for? To make a highway. And so God uses this figure to represent the work that must be done in our lives personally, as individual members, and with the church as a whole. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

You know it's an interesting thing to see these great bulldozers, these great caterpillars, earthmovers, swarming around and to see the men with the power hammers drilling in the rock and then hear the blasts. And then see all that debris taken from the high places and brought down into the low, and finally, things are leveled out and the pavement put on, and people can go along 60, 70 or more miles an hour.

Dear friends, in your life and mine a similar work must be done. And isn't it an interesting thing how the workmen produce a level highway and how God produces a perfected people by bringing down the high places and building up the low?

Are you willing to have the strong points in your character modified? Are you willing to have the weak places built up? You know it's easy for us to, shall I say, get to living with ourselves so long that we suppose because we've always had certain weaknesses we must always have them. Not so, friend. Thank God.

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low...” Isaiah 40:4.

God is in the business of balancing characters, of giving us lives that reflect the image of the divine fully. Isn't that wonderful, friends? But of course, it means

that God's agencies must be allowed to work in our lives. It means that some things have got to come out. Come off. And some things have got to be added. And thus, by subtraction and addition, by multiplication and division, we shall finally be brought to that place where looking upon us, God can see His image reflected fully.

"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field" Isaiah 40:6.

Your goodness and mine are as transient as the grass, the flower of the field, here today, gone tomorrow and next week. But oh, there is something that endures.

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" Isaiah 40:8.

The Word of God shall what? Stand forever. The work that is to be done then in preparing His people for His coming, this work must be built upon the Word of God. And so in the ninth verse:

"O Zion, that brings good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that brings good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" Isaiah 40:9.

It is by beholding Him that sin is to be taken out of our lives and our whole lives transformed.

Just today, I was reading an experience. I had heard of it sometime before, but I was just thrilled as I read it anew. All of you have heard of J. C. Penney. You see his name in most every city and even in some of the towns, don't you? J. C. Penney. He died not long ago at the age of 95. But this experience dates back many years.

Mr. Penney, as he tells in his autobiography, lost more than 40 million dollars in the financial collapse of 1929, 1932. Now I imagine that's more money than anybody here ever lost—40 million. And as he went through those trying experiences in those early years of the depression and saw what he had labored to build up crashing around him, he got sick, physically, nervously, with shattered nerves, and with disease.

In the providence of God, he came to a sanitarium. Now, any of you that don't know it, a sanitarium is a unique institution. It takes more than a sign on a building that calls it a sanitarium to make it a sanitarium. But this man who had lost 40 million dollars and was broken in body and mind, in health, and in nerve, here he was at this sanitarium.

One of his chief worries as he lay there was that he knew he didn't have enough money to even pay for his stay in the sanitarium. And then also the thought was deepening in him that he was coming to the end of his life.

One night he was overwhelmed with the feeling that he wouldn't live to see another day. And there were things that he had wanted to say to his wife and children who at the moment were at a distance. And so there in his room, he dashed off a letter to them thinking that it would be his farewell message. He sealed the envelope, turned out the lights, and in his exhaustion feeling that he'd never see the morning.

However, in the early morning hours, he was awakened with a strange kind of surprise. But he felt restless and apprehensive. He wandered down the hall in this sanitarium toward the dining room. He felt enclosed, he said, in an immense aloneness. But the dining room wasn't opened. He stood in the hallway, and in an emptiness, he said, "That seemed to me to have no horizon." But as he stood there alone, down from down the corridor drifted the lines from an old familiar hymn.

Somebody was singing. "Be not dismayed, what e'er betide; God will take care of you." And J. C. Penney found himself moving slowly toward the sound. The music and the words became clearer.

"All you may need, He will provide.
God will take care of you.
Lonely and sad, from friends apart,
God will take care of you.
No matter what may be the test,
God will take care of you."

Then he found where the music was coming from. It was from the little chapel. He entered and sank into a back seat. They were finishing the song,

"Lean, weary one, upon His breast,
God will take care of you."

Mr. Penney is telling all this later in his autobiography, *Fifty Years with the Golden Rule*. And there in that chapel in this sanitarium, one of the workers sat down with him and read a verse from the Bible:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden
and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn
of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find
rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is
light" Matthew 11:28–30.

J. C. Penney said he found the Lord that day. The Lord found *him*. But in response to the song he had heard sung by those doctors and nurses and helpers, and in response to the message he got from the Bible, his heart went out in longing to God. He said, "Lord, I can do nothing. Will you take care of me?" And God did take care of Him. Something happened, that wonderful miracle of conversion. And from that day on, the world saw what could happen to a man who though once beaten to despair, had found a new consciousness of God's love and concern for his life.

And for the next 40 years, until he died at the age of 95, J. C. Penney witnessed to his Lord and to the power of his Christ. Would you like to read in fuller detail the story that I've just told you about J. C. Penney? You'll find it in this week's *Review and Herald* on the editorial page.

Now I come back to our text here in Isaiah 40:9. What is the message that God says is to be brought to His people? "Behold, your God!" This is what brought hope to that despairing man, that brought life to that body, and peace to his wounded spirit, beholding God.

And my dear friend, I'm so glad that to you and me has been committed the word of reconciliation. We can go to the sick, the sad, the discouraged, the sinner and sinful, and to all the message is, Behold, look. Look where? Look up. Who? Look at God! Behold, your God! That's where help is. Isn't it, friends? That's the purpose of the medical missionary work. That is the mission of every Christian.

Listen, friend, everybody here in this chapel tonight, each person is either somebody that knows God or that doesn't know Him. And all of us who know Him ought to know Him better. But, oh my friend, everybody who knows Him, even a little bit, should be busy helping other people to know Him. And the way to get people to know Him is to get them to see Him, through His Word, through the book of nature, through the lives of those whose hearts have been touched by His message—in all these ways God is to be exalted. And every voice is to say, "Behold, your God! Look to God!"

Do you know, friend, even the failures of human beings can be turned to good account in bringing this message? Doesn't it happen that every now and then a conversation opens with somebody telling you about how somebody else has failed them?

"In His mercy and faithfulness God often permits those in whom we place confidence to fail us, in order that we may learn the folly of trusting in man and making flesh our arm"
Ministry of Healing, page 486.

And so as we meet those who are discouraged because this one has failed them or that one has done them wrong. This one has failed to keep his promise, and that one is neglected. Ah, friend, the message in each and every case is, "Well friend, why not look to a Friend that never fails? Why not look to one that has almighty power blended with tender love?"

And now 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" Isaiah 40:11.

Ah, friend, the 10th verse tells how strong He is; the 11th verse tells how tender He is. It takes *both* to get us through. If He were only strong but didn't love us, we could well be afraid. If He were only tender but lacked in almighty power, we

might be afraid. But to the greatness and power of the King of kings, our Lord unites the tender care of the loving shepherd. Aren't we rich to know it, friends? Aren't we rich to experience it?

Isaiah here is echoing David's Psalm—"The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." My dear friend, if there's somebody here like J. C. Penney in that sanitarium 40 years ago, that is tired, sick, discouraged, weak, the great Shepherd is saying, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

To all of us who may have known Him in the past, He's sending the invitation: Press closer that you may get My word of comfort to you tonight, and that you may share with Me the work of reaching out and shepherding others.

He's your shepherd. If you know it, because of His tender care, that makes Him happy. If you haven't found Him yet, remember, He's seeking to find you. The Good Shepherd left the 99 in the fold and went after the one until He found Him.

[Song and testimony service follow]

Precious Lord, Thou art our Shepherd, and we are Thy sheep and lambs. We thank Thee, in Jesus' name, amen. God bless you all.

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