

Isaiah 40-41 • Comfort and Blessing for God's People

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Let's get into some Scripture tonight, shall we? We are in the book of Isaiah, in the fortieth chapter. So open your Bible there, please. Isaiah, Chapter 40.

You are going to notice as we get into this chapter that the tone of Isaiah is going to take a pretty sharp, different turn for us. Whereas it has been a predominantly –I guess– judgmental tone regarding the previous 39 chapters, we now begin to enter into a time of comfort and blessing, which is what this chapter and the chapters beyond it really encompass.

And, kind of funny– Sue was telling me just this morning that, when you get to chapter 40, it is the payoff for persevering through the first 39 chapters. It is like, oh, we got here. It's like reaching the fountain after you have been on a very dry and dusty journey.

By the way, another big fan of this chapter was a man by the name of George Frideric Handel. Some of you know who he was. You have never met him because he lived a long time ago. But in the year 1741, he borrowed heavily from this chapter to write several different songs in a musical oratorio that he entitled, Messiah, Handel's Messiah.

For those of you who are very familiar with Handel's Messiah, I am more familiar with Handel's, Young Messiah, which came out in the 80s. I think it was in the 80s, I'm pretty sure. I went back and watched it. Based on the hairdos of the gals, I think it was the 80s. But we were still in the big-hair phase. But anyway, it is a young version of Handel's Messiah. And it is amazing. I love it. So I'm going to have all these songs going off in my head, and I am just going to do my best here tonight not to break into song, because that would be a little weird, and you would probably get up and leave.

Anyway, it is a great chapter. And so we are going to start with prayer. So let's do that.

Heavenly Father, as we dig into this chapter tonight, we pray for Your Spirit. We pray for Your guidance. We pray for the life that is only found through

Jesus Christ. And we ask You to open our hearts and fill us with grace and understanding.

Help us to see Your heart. Your heart; let it shine through, Father, in Jesus' precious name, amen.

I want to emphasize one thing before we get started, because this whole thing between judgment and comfort can really throw some people off in terms of like, did God change His mind? Did He just decide to start having a better day? Was He just no longer angry? And so now it is like, okay, I've had some time to cool off. You need to understand that what we are going to be reading here in this chapter and in the chapters following is an expression of God's character that was no less present during all those chapters of judgment, justice, and condemnation.

You and I have to suspend certain attributes in order to express others. For example, if I'm angry, I usually have to suspend kindness in order to express anger. If I want to be very kind to someone, I have to suspend anger in order to express kindness. God never does that. He never suspends one emotion to express another or any expression of His character.

When God is judging, He is no less kind, loving, merciful, and gracious. When God is pouring out His mercy and grace, He is being no less just. There is always and ever a perfect balance in God's nature as to who He is, and that is important. It is important to understand. Just because we are reading some very different things in these chapters does not mean God has changed.

And as we go through this chapter, you are going to see, or at least it is going to appear, like Isaiah is once again being catapulted into the heavenly courtroom where he is hearing things. He hears the Lord, and then he hears other voices that he doesn't necessarily identify as the Lord, but he hears these voices, and he sometimes even responds to the voices, but he doesn't tell us from where or from whom the voices originate.

But anyway, it goes like this. Verse 1 of chapter 40: *“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak 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.” (ESV)*

I want you to stop there for just a moment because this is what introduces the chapter and the chapters to follow: the words of comfort, the words of reconciliation, and the Lord is speaking.

And Isaiah hears the Lord speaking in the hallows, the courts of the Lord. And the Lord is saying, *“comfort my people.”* Speak tenderly to my people.” And he says that a cry is going to go out saying that Israel's warfare is ended. Now you might think, well, wow, that's interesting. This was spoken 700 years before Christ was born on the earth, and it says that Israel's warfare is ended. Again, we are talking prophetically.

And really, these are not going to be fully realized until such time as Jesus returns to the earth in what we call, of course, His Second Coming. And at that time, the cry will ring out. And it will say, Your warfare is ended. It's done. Your iniquity is pardoned. And the reason Israel's iniquity will be pardoned at that time is because, as Paul tells us in the Book of Romans, at that time when Christ returns, *“All Israel will be saved.”* (Romans 11:26) All Israel at that time will turn to the Lord in a time of national repentance. They will embrace, finally, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that He bore on the cross. And at that time, all Israel will be saved.

Now as we go on, these next words—you are going to notice— will strike a familiar chord from the Gospels. Verse 3, *“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”*

Now, notice in Isaiah's perspective, he just hears a voice. He hears a voice crying out this thing as he is listening in the halls of heaven. And it says, *“⁴Every 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. ⁵And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

Well, it's an interesting set of verses, and we all know that John the Baptist quoted these verses (Matthew 3:3) as pointing to his own ministry and in his job of preparing the way for the Lord, preparing the hearts of the people, which, of course, he did by encouraging them to repent of their sin. But these words are going to be further fulfilled.

Now listen to me. They were partially fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist. They will be further fulfilled when Elijah comes right before the Second Coming of the Lord, and he will also prepare the way.

I want to show you a passage, a prophecy, from the book of Malachi on the screen. Chapter 4, it says:

Malachi 4:5-6 (ESV)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome (and that word can be translated terrible) day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Now, it is a great prophecy. John the Baptist was the first fulfillment of this prophecy. And it was said, you will remember, (Luke 1:5-17) that when his father received an angelic visitation while he was burning incense in the temple, the angel appeared to him, told him his wife was going to have a baby.

In fact, you remember that whole story? It is almost funny because the angel says to Zechariah, the Lord has heard your prayers. And Zechariah is like, what prayers? This is long since time he prayed for his wife to have a baby. She was long past her childbearing years. And yet the Lord said— the angel said— the Lord has heard your prayers.

Your wife will conceive. You will give birth. She will give birth, and you will have a son, and you will name him John. And then he went on to say, He will go forth *“in the spirit and power of Elijah.”* (Luke 1:17) So the angel made reference to this prophecy of Malachi that John is a partial fulfillment of. But we know that God is also going to physically send Elijah back before the great and terrible Day of the Lord and to have a similar kind of preparatory work to turn the hearts of people back to the Lord

Now, another voice speaks, and Isaiah writes it down. Look at verse 6, *“A voice says, ‘Cry!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’”* Can you hear this? Isaiah is getting this in a vision, and this voice says to him, Cry. And he says, What do you want me to say? What do you want me to cry?

And here is the message: *“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. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”*

I bet you that has been a memory verse for some of you guys. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever. And in these verses, again, Isaiah is told to cry out that men's lives are fleeting. But in contrast to the brevity of human life, we are told here, the Word of God is going to stand forever. The Word of God is going to stand forever.

Peter made application from this very passage in Isaiah. Let me show it to you on the screen. From 1 Peter, Chapter 1, he writes:

1 Peter 1:22-25 (ESV)

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

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We are told here about the permanency of the Word of God. Now, you guys know this, but it is so easy to lose our grip –not our belief– but our grip on the idea that the Word of God is eternal and everlasting. Let me show you; you remember what Jesus said about the permanency of the Word from Matthew, Chapter 24?

Matthew 24:35 (ESV)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

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He said, you know what? Heaven and earth are going to pass away, but not My Word. My Word will never pass away. It is not going to pass away. Now, that is really interesting. God's Word is more enduring than this world, than this globe that we are on right now. It is more enduring. We do not endure. The world does not endure.

And it is interesting, isn't it, that God likens us and the brevity of our lives to the grasses of the field that are here today; they are gone tomorrow. Makes it sound like life on earth is pretty frail. And that is exactly the point he is trying to make. Our lives on earth are very frail and, along those lines, I found a quote that I think you might like.

Check this out from William Kelly. Here's what he writes:

...as the end draws nearer we do greatly need simplicity to rest upon God's Word. There may be difficulties to such as we are, and the Word seems a weak thing to confide in for eternity, but in truth it is more stable than heaven or earth.
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And the reason I say that is because we forget it. And we forget it –and I'm going to talk more about this as we go on– but we forget about it when we go through a difficult season of life; when we are going through a hard time, and God's Word has made promises to us about that hard time and His faithfulness in the midst of it, but we let go of it. We think for some reason it just hasn't endured, and we will put our faith in earthly things which won't endure and will let go of the Word of God which will endure. And it is crazy that we make those kinds of decisions to just let go of the Word of God. Anyway, more about that in a while, but let's keep going

Verse 9 in your Bible; it says: “Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news (so now it is speaking of Zion as this herald who is giving the news, and the news is this): 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!’” And again, this is still dealing with the coming of the Lord to the nation of Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation.

And I trust that you know the timing of those events, that Jesus Christ will set foot on earth at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. And at that time, Zion is going to have some very good news for its people, the Jews. Behold your God! Behold your God. He's here. He's here. What a cool thing.

And then it continues. Verse 10: “Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; (Look at this next part) behold, his reward is with

him, and his recompense before him.” So we learn a couple of things about the coming of the Lord. He comes with power, and He comes with reward.

By the way, this is not your reward. You have to remember the Church receives a resurrection, which we call the Rapture of the Church prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And the Church is caught up, Paul says in Thessalonians, *“to meet the Lord in the air.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17) Not when He comes to earth. In fact, when He comes to earth, we are going to come with Him.

We are going to return. And I say, we, the Church, is going to return with Him. We will have already gone through the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and this will have happened during that time of the Great Tribulation. So these rewards are not— it is not really with you and me in mind here. But what is the next thing we are told about His coming?

Verse 11, it says, *“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young”* Now, you have to understand that verse 11 is primarily referring to God's care for Israel. You guys know, and you need to remember, the church is not in view in the Old Testament.

These words are spoken to Israel. Now, it doesn't mean that we are not understanding God's heart for His people here, because we are. And when it says here that He will tend His flock like a shepherd, that is the heart of the shepherd, the heart of the Father. And that is going to be His heart regardless of who His people are.

But you have to understand that these things are specifically and primarily written to the nation of Israel here. Now, beginning in verse 12 and following, we are going to see a classic section on the greatness of God. And I think you are going to find here that some of the things that are said about the Lord are going to sound similar to what we have seen in the past.

Like in the Book of Job, when God begins to speak to Job out of the whirlwind, and He begins to speak about Himself and often does it by advancing rhetorical questions. And you are going to see some of that here. Verse 12 (this is great): *“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? (Who has done those things?) ¹³Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?”*

You know what? Nobody has ever given counsel to God, but plenty of us have shown God our counsel. And it was a really dumb thing to do, to be honest with you. I mean, that is the fact of the matter. We have never given God counsel, but we tell Him what to do all the time.

And we shouldn't; it says in verse 14: "*Whom did he consult, and who made him understand?* (in other words, who gave God understanding?) *Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?*" Doesn't that sound a lot similar to the language in the Book of Job, all these questions?

Now you will notice the Lord goes on to speak of the nations. And I want you to know, as we get into these next few verses, the nations is another way of saying, the kingdom of man or the kingdoms of men. Because God is going to make a point about the kingdoms of men, and you will see what it is here.

Verse 15 and following: "*Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coast lands like fine dust.* ¹⁶*Lebanon would not suffice for fuel.*" That's an issue. You have to know. Lebanon is known for its great cedar forests. Huge cedars. You heard of the cedars of Lebanon, and there it is just famous. But it says here that all of the great cedars of the forests of Lebanon wouldn't be sufficient for the fuel for the Lord.

And it says, "...*nor are its beasts* (in other words, all of the animals of its renowned grazing lands) *enough for a burnt offering* (to give God, if you will, what He deserves)." This is the prophet's way of speaking the greatness of God. All the wood in the world, all the animals in the world, they are not enough.

Verse 17: "(And) *All the nations* (and again, we are talking about the kingdoms of man) *are as nothing before him, they are accounted by Him* (in fact) *as less than nothing and emptiness.*" Isn't that interesting?

The kingdoms of man. That which really dominates us. When you watch the news, if you do watch the news or read about the news, wherever you get the news, if you get the news, it is all dominated by the kingdoms of man. That is all it is. Our kingdom. What does God say about the kingdoms of man?

They are less than nothing. They are less than nothing. Now He is not talking about the people. God loves people. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. We understand that there is differentiation here. But the kingdoms of man, in other words, the established rule of mankind, which of course sets itself

up against the knowledge of God, He says, in My estimation, it is less than nothing.

And so he goes on to say in verse 18: *“To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness (are you going to) compare with him? (You're going to... how about) ¹⁹An idol! (What about an idol? He says,) A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.*

“²⁰He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.” And again, this is just God's way of –and this happens throughout the prophetic writings of the Old Testament– God speaks of idols and idolatry as just utter stupidity.

And that is really not too harsh of a word. Because to Him, it is like the wisdom in taking a piece of wood and fashioning it in an idol and overlaying it with gold and then bowing down and worshipping. And you took some of that wood, and you put it on your fire, and you roasted your food over it.

And God says that; and He says, does that sound dumb to you? Because it sure does to Me, so it is almost like the Lord is expressing amazement. Look what He goes on to say in verse 21. This is interesting. More questions. *“Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”*

And here is what Isaiah– or the Lord is asking here through Isaiah–He's saying, since the very beginning, it is obvious, when you look at creation, that there is a master designer. It is obvious. Paul says in Romans, Chapter 1, it is obvious. He says He has revealed himself to all mankind, and what He has revealed is obvious to them. And what does He reveal? He has revealed creativity. And wherever you have creativity, you have to have a creator. It is obvious. Paul says, in fact, in Romans 1 (verse 20), it is so obvious, that men *“are without excuse.”* So he is saying, Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Haven't you been told? All these things, people have understood these things from the foundation of the earth.

He goes on now describing the eternal God. Verse 22. Now, this is an interesting scientific statement. It says, *“It is he who sits above the circle of the earth.”* And so we're talking 700 years before Christ. How did Isaiah know that the earth was a circle? The Lord knew, who inspired him to write that, but he goes on to say, *“and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out*

the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.” Their lives in God's estimation of time as they barely get started, and they end.

And so he asked the question again in verse 25, *“To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.”* Now, what is very cool about this question is that you and I have been given a revelation in Jesus Christ that we can look at, and we can say, that is what God is like. He is what God is like, but He is God. He is not like God. He is God.

Verse 26, *“Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? (Who did it? He says,) He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name: by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.”* In other words when night falls, and God calls all of the host out to show themselves to man, not one is missing. He calls them out, all by name. He numbers them all. This is just a statement to simply make this the point that God is the master of creation, and He maintains that mastery and sovereignty.

So in light of everything that he has said, everything you have just been reading in the last several verses about the greatness, the majesty, the power of God, now, God has a question for his people.

It goes like this, in verse 27: *“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’?”* And this is a very important confrontational question, and it is probably a good one to just take out of the rhetorical arena and just flat out ask it and say, I would like an answer to this.

Because in light of the greatness of God and all the things that He has said about Himself in these previous verses, He now asks, Why do you say, *“My way is hidden from the LORD.”* In other words, how can you say dumb things like, “God doesn't, He's not even noticing my life. My way is hidden from Him.

Nothing is hidden from God. And how can you say things like, my right (or this would be my cause, my concern) is disregarded by the Lord. He doesn't care. God doesn't care. Guys, can I just tell you that this word is still very needful for today, for God's people. I find it a very common thing for Christians to go through a season of difficulty and hardship and very quickly throw away the

things that they previously confessed to be true about God. I find that people will begin to question the things that, in times of joy and peace, they would easily say, yeah, I believe that. But hardship causes them to disbelieve it. And they begin to ask their own questions.

Does God really care for me? Does God really know my situation? Here's the big one. Does God really hear my prayers? I just don't feel like God's listening anymore. Does God forgive my sin? Does He really forgive my sin? Because it doesn't seem like it. I get that one a lot. Really.

Why don't you feel like you're forgiven? Well, because I just don't feel forgiven. Well, that's it right there, isn't it? It is all about feelings. If you feel forgiven, then you must be forgiven. I don't know very many times I have actually felt forgiven. I know that I'm forgiven because He promised it. He promised it, and His promise trumps my feelings.

His promise trumps your feelings too. But I just don't feel... I don't care. His promise supersedes your feelings. We have to remember that. Does God really have the power to change my situation?

Yeah, and the only reason we are doubting is because we are not seeing things work out in the timeframe that we thought we should. And so now we begin to question everything the Bible says, everything that is true. And now our circumstances cause us to look at the Word of God, which we saw earlier will never pass away.

This world will pass away. The heavens will pass away. This won't pass away. And that's what we doubt. That's the thing that we doubt. That's the thing we begin to question. And that's what God is confronting the nation of Israel with right here, right now, and in so doing, also questioning you and me.

Which is why God has some questions now of his own. Verse 28, look with me in your Bible. *"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.* (You think he doesn't understand your problems? His understanding is unsearchable.)

²⁹He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength. (Listen, he says, verse 30:) Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted (even): ³¹but they who wait for the Lord (and there it is right there, isn't it? They who wait for the Lord) shall renew their strength."

And you want even a little more descriptive example of what that means to have your strength renewed? He says, *“They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.”* Isn't that a great— you guys know that— section of Scripture. It is well-quoted, memorized by a lot of people, but I don't think we fully sometimes remember the context in which it was given.

It was given as a response to these other rhetorical questions. Did you really think I'm not strong enough to deal with your problem? Did you think that I was just too dull so that I didn't understand what you're going through? Do you really think my arm is shortened that I cannot save? “Yeah, but God, look at my life.”

He says, Listen, I'm going to make a promise to you. You feel faint, you feel weary. I get that. Yeah, even young people with seemingly endless, boundless energy, they still get tired and exhausted. But I'm going to make a promise to you. You wait on Me, you put your hope in Me, and that is really what that passage can also mean.

Those who hope in the Lord, and that is what it means to wait on the Lord, to put your hope in Him, and to wait on Him for His deliverance, His guidance, His direction, His peace. He says, I will make a promise with you, your strength will be renewed. You will be renewed. So if our strength isn't being renewed, it is not God's fault.

The enemy is so effective, you guys. And you need to understand that. He has certain tools that he uses, and he is very effective at using them. And what he wants to do is to breed discouragement in your heart, because if he can bring discouragement into your heart, because you have waited too long, and nothing has happened, and you haven't seen the kind of deliverance you have been praying for.

And you are the one who set the timeframe there, not God. It was your timeframe, and you are just mad, and you are discouraged because God didn't meet your expectations in this particular situation. So now you are going to give yourself permission to give in to discouragement. Oh, the enemy does a happy dance when you and I do that because that is his playground.

You are discouraged. Yay. Now I can absolutely throw a lasso around your life and drag you through the proverbial mud. Because you are discouraged. Now you are going to question everything. And I am going to be right there to affirm every question you ask. That is a good question. Does God really forgive you? I

think that is a fair question there, son. That is the voice of the enemy. That is the voice of the enemy.

But the voice of your Heavenly Father says, if you will hope in me and not let your hope waver, if you will wait on Me, I will renew you. I will renew you in strength. We all get weary. It's funny. I think we look at our weariness as a sign that somehow we have let God down or we failed.

Well, if that is the case, then I have failed God on a fairly regular basis throughout the course of my Christian walk, because I can remember many times that I have been weary, not necessarily physically weary, spiritually weary, and it is always because of some circumstances that seem to be drawing the life out of me.

And I just haven't put my hope in God to the point where He renews my strength. I just haven't taken time to even wait on the Lord. Isn't it funny sometimes; we try to distract ourselves when we start feeling that discouragement. We know that discouragement isn't a good thing, so I'm just going to distract myself.

I'm going to get busy. I'm going to get busy with my job, or I'm going to get busy with my family or get busy with maybe setting some goals. I know that is what I need. I need to set some goals, and I just get myself busy, and I don't take time to wait on the Lord. I don't take that posture of resting in Him and putting my hope in Him, and so forth. I'm just going to get busy. Forget about it. Ignore it. It'll go away. It doesn't go away. And then I'm weary in my busyness. Now, I've just wearied myself further, rather than waiting on the Lord and being strengthened.

But that hope is so important, because hope is the by-product of faith. When we have faith in God, our hope is bolstered. You guys, remember that story? And I love it. Frankly, it is the story of that father who came with his son to meet Jesus as he was coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:17-29).

He had asked Jesus' disciples who had been left at the bottom of the mountain to cast this demon out of his son, and they weren't able to do it. And so Jesus began to have a conversation with this father, and he started asking him questions. How long has your son been like this? So on, and so on, and the father is explaining these things, and then he says this – and this is by the way... Oh, we won't look at it, but it is all recorded in Mark, Chapter 9– but the father says to him finally, if you can do anything to help us, please do.

And Jesus immediately comes back and confronts him in response by saying, *“If you can!”* (Mark 9:23) Is that what I just heard you say? If you can? And of course, the father instantly knew what he was being confronted with, and that is, his disappointment, his discouragement, and the lack of faith that goes along with it. And he recognized he needed greater faith. He says, I have some faith, but help me have more.

And I love what Jesus said to that man. He said, *“All things are possible for the one who believes.”* All things are possible for the one who believes. That is why Satan is working so hard during your times of difficulty to bring you to the place of discouragement because that will take away, it will shatter your faith, take away your hope, and leave you with discouragement.

And suddenly all things are not possible, because the Bible doesn't say all things are possible for those who are discouraged. It says all things are possible for the one who believes, and we need to continue to have our faith and our trust. And that doesn't mean God has to do it just the way you say. That is not faith to put something out there and then say, He's got to do it my way, my time, exactly in this way.

Faith in God is faith when you don't know what He is going to do. You don't even know how He is going to do it, and you have no idea when it is going to happen, and you continue to trust the Lord. That is faith. Faith in the face of the unknown is real faith.

Chapter 41: *“Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; Let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment. ²Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, so that he tramples kings underfoot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow.*

“³He pursues them and passes on safely, by paths his feet have not trod. ⁴Who has performed and done this, calling the generation from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.” Who is it, who stirred up this one from the east? He is already talking and, in a few verses, or a few chapters, rather, he is going to talk about this one who comes from the east.

He is also going to talk about him as coming from the north. And the reason he is doing that is because he is talking about Cyrus. King Cyrus, who hasn't been born. He won't be born for another 150 years, but God not only is talking about him, but he is going to talk about him by name here in a couple of few chapters. We won't get to it tonight.

The reason he says he came from the east is because he basically comes originally from Babylon. But it also says he comes from the north because he came over, and he defeated the Medes. And so he comes from his conquering in the north, and he is talking about this one. And the whole point of this prophecy is God basically saying, I'm telling you this ahead of time. Who else can do that?

You see, that is what chapter 41 is really all about. It is all about prophecy and God's ability to tell the beginning from the end and the end from the beginning. And He is basically going to challenge the Israelites and say, Do your idols do that? Do they tell you about things that are going to come? Do they name people? Do they call them by name when they haven't been born for another 150 years?

Verse 5: *"The coastlands have seen and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come. ⁶Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, 'Be strong!' ⁷The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, 'It is good'; and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.*

"⁸But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; ⁹you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'; ¹⁰fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

"¹¹Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. ¹²You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. ¹³For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I am the one who helps you.' (I love this.) ¹⁴Fear not, you worm Jacob."

There was a time in my life I read this, and I thought, I think that's me, too. I knew this was written to Israel, but I felt like God put His hand on my shoulder and said, yeah, Paul, you too. You're kind of a worm. Kind of squiggly. Don't possess a backbone. Yeah, been there, been that.

"You men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel."

First he calls him a worm, but then in verse 15 he says: *“Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge.”* By the way, a threshing sledge was a heavy wooden platform with sharp, cutting, jagged teeth on the bottom of it that would be used to grind, and in this case it is being used figuratively. So he is calling them a threshing sledge, to speak of them as having the power, being given the power, to grind their enemies to nothing. And that is right after calling him a worm. Isn't that great?

But he says, *“¹⁵I (will) make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff; (He says) ¹⁶you shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel, you shall glory.”*

And again, this is talking about that time after the tribulation period, when the Lord rules and reigns in Israel, *“¹⁷When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them.”*

Look what he says He is going to do during this early time of the Millennial Kingdom : *“¹⁸I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land (is going to turn into) springs of water.”* When Jesus comes and sets up his throne on the earth, He is literally going to change the landscape, and the parched and dry lands are going to run with water during that time. Isn't that amazing?

He says, *“I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.”* (and other... can you imagine in the wilderness, those big trees are going to grow; there are going to be forests where there was wilderness. I think of Nevada. We were talking in staff meeting the other day about what state is best to drive through at night.

Nevada. I said, Nevada. There is nothing to see. Well, you go through Nevada, and if you take the right road, you might run into Las Vegas, and there is a light. Oh, it's a light! And then you go past it, and then there is nothing again. And that's it. So, can you imagine a place like that becoming a forest? That is the way it is going to be. I don't know if He is going to do it specifically to Nevada. We'll have to just wait and see.

But there are going to be all these trees. I'm in the middle of verse 19, *“I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together, ²⁰that they may see*

and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.”

So he says in verse 21, *“Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. ²²Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come.*

²³Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. (He says,) ²⁴Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; (in fact, it is) an abomination is he who chooses you (in other words, who chooses you over me).” It is an abomination to choose an idol over the Lord.

Now he is going to talk about king Cyrus again. Verse 25. *“I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun (that is the east), and he shall call upon my name; he shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay.*

“²⁶Who declared it from the beginning, that we might know, and beforehand, that we might say, ‘He is right.’? There was none who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words. ²⁷I was the first (God says,) to say to Zion, ‘Behold, here they are!’ and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news. (And when I look, there's no one among those there, excuse me...) ²⁸But when I look, there is no one; among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer. ²⁹Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind.”

So what he is saying here in these verses is neither man nor idol is able to give an answer to what he has been saying or what he has been asking. Who can tell you the things that are to come? He has just gotten done talking to you about Cyrus again. A king who is not going to be born for another 150 years or so.

By the way, king Cyrus is the king who came to power and who gave permission to the Jews to return to their homeland at the end of their 70- year exile. And Cyrus was made to understand that his name was given in the Hebrew Scriptures. And he was impressed by that. And he knew that God had spoken about him long before he had even been born. Wouldn't that be a trip to have your name in the Bible, before you were born, God talking about things you are going to do?

Well, so this is the man he is talking about, but then he is asking the question. So, who has done this like I did for you; who has told you things that are to come? And he says, I looked to see, and among man and idols, there was nothing. There was no one there. In fact, it is all just a delusion. And he ends up there at the end of verse 29 by saying that their metal images are empty wind, or as the New King James says, *“Their molten images are wind and confusion.”* I like that.

The last thing I want to bring out from this chapter is something you may have noticed. It is the amazing number of times God says, “I will.” You might have caught onto that as we were reading through the chapter. Let me put these up on the screen for you so you can see them. These are the things that he says, and you can see the verses.

- I will strengthen you. (41:10)
- I will help you. (41:10)
- I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (41:10)
- I will make you into a new threshing sledge. (41:15)
- I will open rivers on the bare heights. (41:18)
- I will make the wilderness a pool of water. (41:18)
- I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. (41:19)
- I will set in the desert the cypress. (41:19)

I will. I will. I will. Over and over again. Concerning all of these , I will statements,-- and these are promises-- whenever God says, I will. I am going to do something, He is making a promise. You can bank on it. Concerning all of these promises, I found a wonderful quote by Alan Redpath. Some of you guys know who he is. Here is what he said:

“When God says, ‘I will,’ He says it with all the authority of omnipotence. He has foreseen every difficulty. He has studied every obstacle which may come in His way. He has anticipated every possible contingency. He knows the weakness of the one to whom He makes His promise, and yet He says, ‘I will!’”

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And I love that quote. I really do. It basically says, in light of the people to whom the promises of God are made –and He knows that we are worms – He says, I will do it. I will do it. I like a God who says, I will, and I like trusting in a God who is faithful to His Word.