

A Voice Crying ...
Isaiah 40:3-8

September 12, 2010

A. Introduction

1. Review

2. Isaiah 40:1-11 as a prologue to Isaiah 40 through 66

3. today's text in its context

B. It is time to get ready, for the King is coming

40:3-5

1. A voice crying ... clear the way

2. A voice crying ... John the Baptist^A

3. A voice crying ... in the wilderness

4. A voice crying ... can we trust this voice?^B

C. Our humanity makes this preparation a necessity

40:6-8

1. A voice crying ... giving a message

2. the preparation of repentance^C

3. the assurance to those who listen to the cry

D. How do things stand between me and God?

^A Mark 1:3-4

^B Psalm 19:1, 57:5, 79:9, 96:3; Exodus 16:10, 24:16ff, 33:18, 40:34, John 1:14, Matthew 24:27-28

^C 1 Peter 1:24-25

A. Introduction

1. A quick review, as we look in this 40th chapter of Isaiah
 - a. Isaiah, it seems, has concluded his public, official ministry
 - b. for about 40 years he had been the prophet of Judah
 - c. he had spoken God's word to the 4 kings of Judah in turn: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah
 - d. he had rebuked them and their people of sin, especially the sin of trusting other nations instead of God
 - e. he had encouraged them that the Lord would deliver His people, Judah and Jerusalem from Assyria
 - f. he pronounced the wonderful promises of Messiah, who would bring salvation to God's people
 - g. but the people continued in sin, and in Isaiah 39, the eventual punishment of that sin by exile into Babylon is announced – though it was yet more than 100 years away
 - h. so now Isaiah begins a more private, personal ministry; one that is addressed to the remnant of Judah that would later be going through that time of exile

2. Isaiah 40:1-11 is a prologue to the last 27 chapters of Isaiah
 - a. and the first two verses are, as it were, the prologue to the prologue, announcing the purpose of these chapters
 - b. we looked at them last Sunday morning and saw there the three-fold consolation from God to His chosen people: 'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God. 'Speak kindly (or, to her heart; comfortably) to Jerusalem ...'
 - c. then is given the basis for that comfort: God has fully and finally dealt with her sin: 'and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins.'
 - d. this then will be the subject of these chapters
 - (A) a gospel message of comfort and salvation
 - (B) because God is going to deal with sin
 - e. a message that will find fulfilment at 3 levels
 - (A) first, with the return of the remnant from exile, as they are purified from the worship of idols
 - (B) second, of the coming of God's Elect One, Jesus the Messiah, who will save His people from their

sins

- (C) and third, of the second coming of Christ when He will deliver His people from the very presence of sin

3. verses 3 to 8, our text for this morning, continue this prologue

a. for they announce the one who would in turn announce the coming of the Lord Himself

b. these verses consist of two stanzas

(A) each stanza is part of the obedience of Isaiah, the spokesman of God, to the command given in verse 2: 'and call out to herm' i.e. to Jerusalem, to God's people

(B) in each of these stanzas there is a physical picture

(C) behind which there is a spiritual lesson

(D) and each is concluded by a chorus

(1) a chorus that assures us of its certainty in coming

(2) because it has been spoken by God Himself

4. let us consider these verses under the following outline

a. It is time to get ready, for the King is coming!

b. Our humanity makes this preparation a necessity!

B. It is time to get ready, for the King is coming

1. [Isaiah 40: 3 A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley'](#)

2. [A voice is calling](#), crying out: [Clear the way for the Lord](#)

a. in the middle east, in that day, and in places even now

(A) roads and highways were not as we picture them

(B) a highway was made by the earth having been cast up from the soundings in order to fill up any gullies

(C) and a road was but a path taken and worn into the earth by man and beast travelling from place

to place

- (D) there were no crushed stone and cement foundations covered by a smooth layer of asphalt
 - (E) even our modern roads are not that permanent – in our camping trips across Canada, we have camped in Northern Ontario on disused parts of what was once highway 11, with places washed out by flooding; and where weeds, bushes and even trees were growing
 - (F) in the same way, roads in the east were soon
 - (1) covered by the wind with earth in sandy regions
 - (2) eroded by wind and rain into little valleys
 - (3) covered with various forms of vegetation
 - b. so when a great prince or princess in the east set out on a journey, it was usual to send a party of men before him to clear the way. Sir Thomas Roe during his embassy in Delhi (1615-1619) described the passage of the emperor of Hindostan on a trip through his dominions. Ahead of him went a great company of labourers, cutting up the trees, bushes and brambles, levelling and smoothing the road, and preparing places for the party to encamp.^{-(2)}}
 - c. in more recent times, when the Libyan leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi made a state visit to the drought-stricken southern African country of Malawi in July, 2002, he was accompanied by an entourage in two Boeing 707s, two transport aircraft and his own personal jet; two security buses loaded with machine guns, assault rifles and rocket launchers; his own mobile hospital; 600 support personnel; and 70 armoured vehicles for the drive across the country (with one of the vehicles stocked with \$US 6 million, much of which he tossed freely to villagers who had lined his route).^{-(3)}}
 - d. in Isaiah's time, it was just a popular for great persons to send of such heralds to prepare the way for their journey
 - e. this, then, is the physical picture being portrayed; but behind this picture there is a spiritual meaning
3. A voice is calling, crying out
- a. as the NT makes clear, the voice was not only crying out for the clearing of a way in the wilderness, but the voice was out in the wilderness, doing that crying out
 - b. in our adult Bible class we have just begun a study of the Life of Christ from the Gospel of Mark. We came today to Mark 1:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of

repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

- c. as we remarked in the class this morning, Isaiah's words are a herald to John the Baptist, just as John the Baptist is the herald of Christ
 - (A) these verses foretell the coming of John the Baptist
 - (B) if John the Baptist was so great a person as to have a herald, how much greater must Christ be!
- d. John's message, and Scripture's application of Isaiah's prophecy to John the Baptist, explains the spiritual significance of the Isaiah's picture
 - (A) the preparation for the coming of the Lord, Yahweh or Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel, for which the voice calls in Isaiah, is the same preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, for which the voice of John the Baptist calls in the NT record – the Lord Jesus Christ is the God of Israel come in human form!
 - (B) the preparation that Isaiah is calling for in the OT is shown to be a spiritual preparation in the NT – that by baptism – an application of water to the whole body – people would demonstrate repentance to find forgiveness of sins – a repentance that was not only a change of mind, but represented a change of heart in turning from sin and turning to God

4. **A voice is calling**, crying out, **in the wilderness**, in the desert

- a. not only was the voice in the desert
- b. but the people were in the desert
- c. what an apt picture the desert is to the tragic, spiritual condition of the people of Judah of Isaiah's day, and the people of Judea of John the Baptist's day – and of men and women who are outside of Christ today
 - (A) it is waterless – a place of death rather than life
 - (B) it is infertile – fruitless and pointless
 - (C) it is pathless – where people lose their way
- d. to escape this wilderness, the preparation of repentance is needed, of sorrow for sin, of turning from sin – it is as we are convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit that we are prepared to receive Jesus, to accept by faith His finished work on the cross on our behalf

5. **A voice is calling**, crying out – can we trust this voice?

- a. let us read on, Isaiah 40:5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
- b. the mouth of the LORD has spoken
 - (A) that is our assurance that forgiveness of sin is to be found by faith in Jesus Christ
 - (B) to this thought of God's word we will return
 - (C) but what else is it that He has spoken?
- c. The glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together,
 - (A) as we see a number of times in the book of Psalms, the glory of the Lord is revealed in the splendour and magnificence of creation, as for example in Psalm 19:1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
 - (B) again, in the time of the exodus of the children of Israel, some millions of them, the glory of the Lord was revealed, Exodus 16:10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.
 - (C) in the return of the exiles from Babylon, a remnant of a mere 50,000, there was no such revelation of the glory of the Lord, and certainly not to all flesh
- d. but in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - (A) 'And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:14) in the past
 - (B) and today as He works in His body, the Church
 - (C) but the complete fulfilment yet awaits us; Matthew 24:27 For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. ... 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.
 - (D) oh! how we need to prepare our hearts before that great and terrible day shall come!

C. Our humanity makes this preparation a necessity

- 1. we come now to the second stanza, Isaiah 40:6 A voice says, 'Call out.' Then he answered, 'What shall I call out?' All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass.

2. Again, [a voice is calling](#), crying out – and it gives a message
 - a. [surely the people are grass](#)
 - (A) for those who have ever been, or more especially lived, in a dry country, the illustration here is vivid
 - (B) it is one frequently used in God's word
 - (C) with the rains, a desert can be turned almost over night into a garden, green with the reawakened grass and sparkling with the opening blossoms
 - (D) but, just as quickly, and even more certainly
 - (1) that grass will quickly wither in the sun to brown
 - (2) those blossoms will drop their petals and fade
 - (E) and that is a picture of mankind; of me; of you
 - (F) our life, though it can be spectacular, beautiful,
 - (G) though it may be many years in length, it is but a drop in the bucket of eternity
 - b. The story is told of a great Persian king, who engaged his wisest men to give him in one sentence a basis on which in good times and in bad he should conduct his kingdom; to the most fitting he would give great reward: which was gained by the wise man who said 'This too shall pass.'
 - c. as the English poet Edward Young is reputed to have said, 'we think all men mortals but ourselves'
3. the preparation of repentance
 - a. of turning in sorrow away from our sin
 - b. and turning in faith to God in Christ Jesus for salvation'
 - c. is the first lesson of the gospel of salvation in Jesus: these are quoted in 1 Peter [1:24 For, 'all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, 25 but the word of the lord endures forever.'](#) And this is the word which was preached to you.
 - d. the apostles preached it for it is absolutely necessary
 - e. because one day we shall have to stand before the King, before Jesus Christ as Judge over all the earth
 - f. the verdict on our life, when our works are judged
 - g. will have been decided in our life by our answer to the question, '[what think ye of Christ](#)'– is He our own Saviour

4. there is an assurance to those know have made that decision
 - a. Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.
 - b. our life is transient; it will end soon; its ending is sure
 - c. but God's word stands forever
 - d. we can trust it with assurance
 - e. we can live by it with assurance
 - f. God's word is a recurring them in Isaiah
 - (A) it extends far beyond God's written revelation
 - (B) it encompasses all His plans, His commands
 - (C) what He intends to do, He will carry out
 - (D) what He promises, He will fulfill
 - (E) the Scripture cannot be broken; when God speaks, His word expresses the truth; and that truth cannot be annulled or changed^{4}.
 - g. the Scriptures reveal to us the things necessary for our salvation; and we can trust them with our lives, for they are the words of eternal life

D. Conclusion

- a. perhaps you have never made your peace with God; there is a voice crying to you this morning, oh! repent of your sin and turn to Christ for salvation through faith
- b. perhaps you are not walking with him as you ought; oh! repent and return to live for him
- c. perhaps you are living with unconfessed sin; oh! repent and find the forgiveness you need for His fellowship
- d. surely the people are grass – beware, the time is short – come to Christ now; just as you are ...

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2. Information from *The Biblical Museum*, editor James Comper Gray, *in loc*
3. From *The Times*, London, July 17, 2002 – Kerux illustration #17863
4. From *The Book of Isaiah* by Edward J. Young, *in loc*