

# Powerful but Tender

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon explores the dual nature of God as both powerful and tender, encouraging believers to trust in His care and strength as they enter a new year.*

**Duration:** 30:28

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:1-2, Isaiah 40:6-8, Isaiah 40:10-11, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Tenderness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the concept of comfort and mercy from God. He begins by discussing the meaning of the Hebrew word for comfort, which implies speaking tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem. The speaker then quotes Isaiah 40, emphasizing the contrast between the temporary nature of humanity and the eternal nature of God's word. He highlights God's power and care, comparing the insignificance of mankind to the vastness of the oceans and the earth. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize and proclaim the greatness of God.

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## Transcript

The headline on the newspaper yesterday was 2012, colon, good riddance. What the headline was indicating was 2012 was not a good year in so many ways for so many people. So they were saying, let's hope, in their worldly way of thinking, let's hope 2013 is better, because what's happened in 2012? An economy that everybody's unsure of, layoffs on a lot of jobs, tragedy on the left and on the right, shootings in schools, two people in New York City being killed by being tossed off of a subway platform in the space of a week, 10 days, strife and trouble everywhere overseas, people in Syria being killed by their own leadership, not by the dozens or hundreds, but by the thousands, children being maimed, all kinds of horrific things going on, Hurricane Sandy and other troubles.

So they were saying 2012, good riddance, let's let's hope 2013 is better. Now for a Christian, we don't go so much by the calendar year, we go by day by day. Give us this day our, we walk with the Lord.

And one of the things about God, as you go into a new year, one of the things about God that's hard to put together is this, God is incomprehensible, God cannot be fathomed by the human mind, God is everywhere at the same time, God knows everything, has all power, and yet the Bible also presents God as close as the mention of His name, that God is the Good Shepherd. Well, which is He? Is He this dynamo? Is He this creator that just spoke and out of nothing the universe was created? Or is He this tender Jesus who said, come unto me all you that labor and heavy laden and I'll give you rest? Which is

God? And since I've been growing up in church as a kid, when my parents hauled me off to church, I had a hard time fathoming this God who is so awesome and great, and then this God who represents Himself as so interested in every little nuance of our life. And you find out that most Christians go to one side or the other.

They either have this awesome God who's out there somewhere, but He's not real close to them, or you have the person who has a God who's close to them, but they can't believe He can help them because they don't see His awesome power. Now of all the chapters in the Bible that bring this juxtaposition together and this seeming contradiction, it's one of my favorite chapters in the Old Testament. It's Isaiah, the 40th chapter.

In Isaiah 40, you have these awesome things said about God, and you have talk one way through the prophet, and then you have another thing about God, and it almost like bewilders you. So let's look at it. It's a little longer reading than usual.

I've skipped some verses, but I'm capturing the gist of the chapter. The first message that comes to the prophet, God says to him, comfort, comfort my people, which is what I want to do today. I want to get you ready for 2013.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly, or literally in the Hebrew, it means speak to the heart of Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, and that her sin has been paid for, and that she has received from the Lord's double for all her sins. It's a word of comfort and mercy.

Now verse 6, a voice says cry out, and I said, what shall I cry? All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Verse 10, see the sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lamb in his arms, and he carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young.

Verse 12, who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or who with the breath of his hand has marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him like, help me, I don't know what I'm doing, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught God knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. They are regarded as dust on the scales. He weighs the islands like Trinidad, Jamaica, and those, and they are like fine dust.

Lebanon, which was famous for his trees, is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him, all the nations are as nothing. America, England, Russia, China, nothing.

That's how awesome God is. They are regarded by him as worthless, and less than nothing. 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? He, God, sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, above everything, and his

people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and he spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught, and reduces the rules of this world to nothing. The presidents, the rulers, the kings, the czars, the presidents, the ambassadors, to nothing.

No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them, and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal, says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens.

Who created all these stars? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of God's great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Not one star is missing.

He not only created them, he keeps them. And now out of nowhere, why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel? My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary.

He increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope or wait in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. And they will walk and not be faint.

Let's just put our hands together for the reading of God's Word. God's Word is so powerful that just to read it out loud properly is a blessing, isn't it? As we look into 2013, let's have the right concept of God. Let's have the right understanding of God.

And Isaiah 40, did you see how we were swinging back and forth? This awesomeness of God and yet this tenderness and this care of God? What did we read? The prophet says in one sense, who can you compare to God? All of mankind, all the choir, these are the sopranos and the tenors, altos are on the other side, this congregation, all the people in New York City, they're like grass compared to God. God is eternal. People, they come, they go.

If they live 70, 80, 90 years, 100 years, they're considered, wow, that's really something. And God just says they're like grass, they come, they go. But His Word endures forever.

The people we think are really important, the famous movie stars, they're, God just blows, they're gone. And this God is eternal and awesome. This God is the one who created all the oceans.

Who can measure it? The prophet says. Who can measure the Pacific Ocean? And God just spoke and it was. Who can measure the Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic Ocean, and all the seas that cover the earth? And who can weigh and measure the weight of all the dirt and all the dust in the earth? And God sits above it all and just spoke it into existence.

And He rules and reigns in a way that we can't even fathom. And this earth that we count so big is just like a little speck in the universe. And yet draws such interest from His heart.

So the prophet here, inspired by God, keeps going on. The oceans, the heavens, the dust, the mountains, the hill, the hills. He created them all.

And when He was creating, He didn't need help from anyone. You and I need help for 2013. God doesn't need help from a soul.

God never has to ask anybody, I'm stuck on this. Would you help me with this? Nobody gives God instruction. He knows all things.

He doesn't need counselors for wisdom, because He has all wisdom. And the prophet now is saying, recognize who your God is. Tell people how great God is.

He is awesome. He knows everything. He doesn't need to check with anyone.

And all the nations of the earth are like dust to Him, with their pompous flags and their military and their nuclear weapons. And they're strutting around and trying to gather more land and heaping up material gain. And God just speaks a word and He brings them down.

Empires come up, empires go down, but God just is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So the prophet is being told to amplify this vision of God for the people. He sits enthroned above it all and He rules sovereignly.

He sits above the circle of the earth. That speaks that He's not dependent on anything on the earth. He's sovereign.

All the rules of the earth have to depend on what's happening in other parts of the world, but God doesn't depend on anything. He sits and rules above it all. He started it.

He knows the moment it will end. He knows the moment He's going to send His Son, Jesus Christ, back to this earth. He knows when time began.

He knows when time will end, because He doesn't exist in time. He's eternal. There's no yesterday to God.

There's no tomorrow. He sees it all at once, which just blows the fuses in our mind. He rules sovereignly.

We have to just submit to it. He just does things according to His will, and we'll understand it better by and by. But right now, we don't fathom everything that God ordains for the earth.

The vast universe, the countless stars, He made them all. And yet, to His people, the melody changes. But He rules His people, and He watch-overs them like a gentle shepherd.

Not an imperial czar, not a powerful ruler on a throne that we never get to see or feel His presence. No. To His people, this awesome God, to whom the nations are dust, the islands fine dust, the oceans are nothing to Him, the earth is His footstool.

It's just where He rests His foot, figuratively speaking. But to this God, to you and I, He's a shepherd. And when we stumble and fall, He picks us up.

And the Bible says He holds us close to His heart, and He carries us. Have you ever had times in your life where you realized you weren't even walking with God, but things got so hard, He was carrying you on His shoulder? Haven't you ever had moments like I've had where you just felt like, I can't go on unless God

picks me up and carries me like a child? By the way, at Christmas time, on Christmas Day night, I had Pastor Brian Petrie, my son-in-law, and my daughter Sue and her three children, including Levi, who just turned three years old, who they adopted for you visitors from Ethiopia. And my daughter wanted to show off how much Levi is learning now that he's three.

So she said, as he was opening presents, Levi, tell everybody in the room who was born on Christmas. And he went, Jesus? And everybody went, yeah. And she says, and what was Jesus's mother's name? And he went, Joanne? I don't know what version of the Bible they're reading in Pastor Petrie's house, but Joanne.

But just like when Levi stumbles and he falls and he hurts himself, you run to him and you pick him up. The Lord says to us, yes, I have all that awesome power, but to you, I'm a gentle shepherd. What do shepherds do? Provide protection, provide food, and he guides us.

In 2013, our gentle shepherd is going to protect us from the devil. He's going to provide for us whatever we need. How many say amen? And when we're at a crossroad, he will show us which way to go, because that's what a shepherd does.

And you and I have a right to go to that gentle shepherd who has all power and say, gentle shepherd, lead me, feed me, protect me. So here is this juxtaposition, this seeming contradiction. This awesome God who the nations are as dust to him, and yet to us, he wants us to relate to him, he being our shepherd.

And along that last line, I want to bring you to the close of what I feel impressed to share with you. Because he holds us close to his heart, and because he loves us so much, God says through the prophet to his people, and let's see if this applies. Maybe someone here is going through this.

Why do you say, why do you say, why do you complain, my way is hidden from the Lord? Israel was going through hard times, and when it looked around, it didn't seem like God, this awesome God was working. It didn't seem like his power was being made manifest. It didn't look good.

So now God says to them, because I love you so much, how can you say the Lord doesn't know what I'm going through? The Lord doesn't know the pain I feel. The Lord doesn't know the rejection I'm experiencing. The Lord doesn't know the dilemma I'm in.

The Lord doesn't know. The Lord, he must be so busy with so many things, he's forgotten me. God says, why do you say that? In another place, in this same prophecy of Isaiah, he says, don't you know that you're engraved on my heart? You're always before me.

I could never forget what you're going through. Just because you don't see me working, don't you know I still know what you're going through? I do understand what you're facing. And this was a problem with the people of God.

And it's been a problem in our life. Sometimes the way things roll, we just look and say, God's forgotten me. God doesn't know what's going on in my life.

What in the world is going on? God, where are you? You have this vast power and you're a creator, but you must not be close to me. And God says, why do you say that? That's like a child saying to their father, you don't care about me. You don't know what I'm going through.

You're not interested in my life. And God wants us all to know today. And he's laid this on my heart very strong late last night.

I want to declare to you, God knows what you're going through. God knows exactly what you feel. Every nerve ending in your body, he's sensitive to.

Every broken place in your heart, God's aware of it. Every question mark, every bit of anxiety that attacks you, God knows all about it. Nothing's hidden from him.

And he's interested. And he says, and why do you complain? I've been disregarded by God. Maybe he doesn't know what I'm going through, but maybe I've messed up so much that he just says, you know what? You made your bed, sleep in it.

Just forget about it. You're on your own. And that's this.

The prophet says, this is what God inspired me to tell you. Isaiah says, don't say that about God. Don't say that he doesn't know what you're going through.

He does. Isn't it true brothers and sisters that we go through things that we can tell no one about? Even your wife or your husband, your mother or your father. It's not that you want to hide it from them.

You can't even explain what you're going through, what you feel sometimes. How many understand what I'm saying? Just say amen. There are no human words.

And I want you to know that God is pleased when we don't know what's happening, that we can still say, I know he loves me. And I know he's going to work on my behalf. I do not see it.

I do not understand it. But I trust in his word. He loves me.

He gave his son for me. Would he begin this work of salvation in my life and then let me drop in a black hole? No. God says, don't say, why do you say that? My way is disregarded by the Lord.

God doesn't know what I'm going through. He does know. And I've had many times in my life when the only one I could talk to is God.

The only one I could talk to is God. And I'm just thinking now, the pain you go through, the perplexities that you go through. I'm just thinking now, going back to when I was a kid.

My mother worked on the eighth floor of this Macy's building. It was Abraham and Strauss. And my dad started drinking.

And my house was horrific. And I couldn't tell anyone because I didn't want to shame my dad. I couldn't tell my mother.

She already had too much. What I was going through, she was trying to protect her. And I just had no one to talk to but God.

Oh, how many are happy? We can tell God about every... Lift your hand. We can tell God everything we're going through. Whatever you're going through today, you can go to God.

He understands it. He feels it. You can talk to him and he'll comfort you and help you.

So the prophet says, because his understanding has no end. God not only understands what we're going through and what we face in 2013. And remember this every day of the new year.

He not only knows what we're going through and what we feel, but his understanding has no end. He understands what you and I are going through better than we know what we're going through. There's no depth.

There's no bottom to his understanding. Haven't you ever had times in life that you went through something? You didn't know what was going on. And then later, six months, a year, five years later, you look back and you go, Oh, I see what God was doing there.

Have you ever had that happen in your life? His understanding has no end. He knows, he feels, and here's his final promise. A shepherd is good because he gives direction, leadership, guidance, protects, and he leads to food.

And we need all three. Protection, sustenance, food. And we need direction.

But now God goes further and says this. For my people, when it's hard, and they're tempted to be tired or weary or they want to give up, I have this promise. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

Now there's much more to that verse than is on the surface of that rather poor translation from the King James and the other translations. It actually means this. They that wait for and wait on and hope in the Lord will exchange their strength, not renew as in the sense of, Wow, Jim's battery's way down.

Pastor Simba's battery's way down. Let me give that little sucker a little boost here and get that thing going again. That's not what it means at all because my battery won't make it.

It can't make it. I don't need my battery charged. I need his strength.

I need his battery. And this is what the Bible is saying here. This is why we're having a week of prayer.

They that wait upon the Lord will exchange their strength. You can give God your weakness. And he says, I love you so much.

I'll give you my strength. I'll give you my strength. The one who sits above the circle of the earth and rules and reigns, God says, I'll share my strength with you.

I'm not gonna just help you get by. I'm gonna give you my strength. Just like Jesus said, my peace I give you.

My joy I place in you. God says, now my strength, I'll exchange it. Who does he give this strength to? So when you're tired or you're maybe tired now at the end of 12, 2012, you're going into 2013.

And really in many ways you feel like, wow, my hands are down. My feet are kind of weak. God says, now wait on me, hope in me.

And I'll exchange your tiredness. I'll give you my strength. Give me your tiredness and I'll give you my strength.

And you'll mount up with wings as an eagle. You'll be able to fly above stuff that used to drag you down. A lot of us get caught up in things that are happening and we're struggling and God says, the only way

you're gonna get through this is to get above it.

Now come on, wait on me and I'll give you my strength. You'll be able to soar above it and look down on it and say, oh, thank God I have Jesus on my side. Look at all of this.

Come on, let's put our hands together and say amen to that. I'm soaring above it. I'm gonna run and finish the race.

I'm gonna walk daily with the Lord. I'm not gonna quit, not gonna quit. I'm gonna fly when I need to fly with his strength.

I'm gonna keep running by his strength. I'm gonna keep running by his strength. They that wait upon the Lord will exchange their strength, get God's supernatural strength.

You can have that, you and I can have that. So what does that mean, wait? Some translations have hope. The older translations translate that same Hebrew word, wait.

Well, both things are involved so let's just look at it as we close. Let's say my friends call me and say, Pastor Cimbala, meet us at Junior's and we'll buy you breakfast. Just get to Junior's and we'll buy you breakfast.

Not a bad deal, is it? So I go to Junior's and they're not there. But I wait because I know then they wouldn't say that unless they were coming and I wait. God says, everyone who waits on me, while they're waiting, I'll give them my strength.

Now what am I doing in Junior's? I'm waiting. That's what we're gonna do Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. That's what we're gonna do a little bit tonight, the three o'clock service.

It's good to talk to God. It's good to worship God. But you know what is a beautiful thing? Is just to wait on God.

And think about his goodness. Think about his love. You don't even have to talk.

Just wait. God, I know you're gonna come and help me. I'm just waiting on you.

Sometimes we're so quick to talk. We're so quick to sing that we never take time to wait. But they that wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength.

You don't have to even be talking. You don't have to get real loud. They that wait on the Lord shall exchange their strength.

But notice it's not just waiting. I'm watching the door because I know Craig and Vanessa are gonna walk in. Oh yeah, I do.

They're gonna walk in. You know why? Because I trust their promise. So that's why I'm there.

See, that's what's involved and what God loves is the manifestation of faith that waits on the Lord and says, no, I'm not gonna panic. I'm not gonna get upset. I'm not gonna get angry.

I'm not gonna fight back. I'm gonna wait on the Lord because He said they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. I'm putting my trust in Him.

He will help me. He will help me. How many know we can trust God's word that when He says, I'm coming and I will strengthen you and I will help you, He will come.

And then there's not just that trust. There's that expectancy. Oh, there they are.

The door's swinging open. I bet that's them. Yeah, and then they come and they buy me breakfast.

And they pay the bill. Praise God. Praise God.

And that's the way God says He wants His people to be. Not panicking. Do not panic in 2013.

It could be that it might be harder than 2012 was. Remember, the Bible does say that in the last days, perilous times will come. The Bible also says that as we get closer to the end, Satan knowing his time is short is going to go crazy.

I don't know what's going to happen, but it could be tougher. But what does it matter? They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. How many know whatever 2013 brings, He's going to give us the grace and strength? Wave your hand.

He's going to give us the grace and strength to get through it. In the good times, we're going to praise His name. In the bad times, we're going to do the same.

In everything, we're going to give God thanks. But we're going to be living on His strength, not our own. And we're going to be able to say, it is well with my soul.

Why is it well with my soul today? Because I'm a Christian. And because I know that God says, don't say your way is hidden from the Lord. Don't say He's disregarded you.

He does love you. He's going to take care of business for us in 2013. Father God, we thank you for your word to us today.

We thank you that you're the great and awesome, powerful God, but you're the one who's the gentle shepherd, who picks us up when we fall, who holds us close to your heart. And we are so happy we're going into the new year with you. We don't know what's going to happen, but what does it matter what happens as long as we have you and you have us.

We ask you, Lord, to take away all fear, all anxiety, all nervousness from anybody who's going into this new year and give us peace that passes all understanding. Because we know that they that wait and put their hope in God will renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings and fly like an eagle.

They shall run the race and not get tired and quit. And they'll walk and not give up because you are their strength. Thank you for such a beautiful service.

We've sent your presence from the first song. We love you. We praise you.

And we trust you. Give us a spirit of waiting on the Lord all this first week. So, Lord, it'll be a year of waiting and exchanging.

Waiting on you, worshiping you, and exchanging our weakness for your strength. We pray it in Jesus' name and everyone say. Amen.

All right, give a bunch of people a hug now. Come on, men, hug a bunch of men. Ladies, hug.

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