

Isaiah 40 - the Everlasting Word

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the transiency of human life and the eternity of God's word, encouraging listeners to respond to God's revelation with obedience, acceptance, and heedfulness.

Duration: 27:25

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1

Topics: "Word Of God"

Description

In this sermon, Carl Henry highlights the paradox of our modern world, where we have access to vast amounts of knowledge but remain ignorant of God's will and word. He questions how we receive the Word of God and compares different types of hearts to different types of soil. He emphasizes the importance of responding to the Word with a receptive heart. The sermon also references the prophet Isaiah and the message of comfort and preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Transcript

During this Advent season leading up to the commemoration of the first coming of Christ and looking forward with hope to his second coming, we have been focusing on the 40th chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 40, beginning to read at verse 1. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling, in the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low, and the rough ground shall become level, and the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

And now our text for today. 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 upon them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

Questions and answers can be a very intriguing thing. Some of you, I'm sure, watch a program called Jeopardy, where the answer is given, and then you must reply with the question that would have prompted

that kind of answer. There was a minister here in the city of Toronto who used to be at the now defunct Cook's Presbyterian Church, who later went on to 10th Presbyterian in Philadelphia, where I was privileged to be one of his successors.

And as part of his evening service, he always had a question and answer period. People would write out questions, turn them in during the hymn sing, and then he would proceed to answer them. Well, John McNeill had his own sense of humor, and one night he opened a sheet, and on it was just one word, fool.

It didn't faze him at all. He said, brothers and sisters, many times I've received a question without a signature. Tonight I've got a signature with no question.

Questions and answers. In the words of our text, we have man asking a question and God giving the answer. Just as earlier in the book of the prophet Isaiah, in the sixth chapter, we had God asking a question and man giving an answer.

You'll remember that question was the kind of question that's going to be heard repeatedly at Urbana. Whom shall I send and who will go for us? And the answer of a man who came to the point of commitment. Here am I. Send me.

In the words of our text, it is man who asked the question and God who gives the answer. Here is a man who has been called to be a spokesman for God. God has commanded him to lift up his voice and to declare a message.

He has been summoned to preach. He is to deliver a speech from the throne. Now, in common parlance here in Canada, a speech from the throne comes from the throne, but not from the throne because it's written by the political party that happens to be in power and handed to the royal representative to be read.

In biblical preaching, it is royalty itself, Almighty God, who devises the message and hands it to mere mortals to deliver in his name. So God calls Isaiah to preach. God calls his servants in every generation to let loose his message that others might hear it.

And at this point, the preacher asks a very valid question. What am I going to preach about? What word am I to deliver? What message do you want me to give to my contemporaries? And the answer of God is this. Tell them that all men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

Tell them that the grass withers and the flowers fall. Tell them that the grass withers and the flowers fall, but only the word of our God stands forever. Make them aware of the tremendous contrast between the transiency of men and women and the permanence of the word of God.

The transiency of men and women. Is it true that all men are like grass? Is it true that all the godliness and the glory and the full flowering of mankind is like a flower that is destined to fade and its petals to fall? All you've got to do is visit a burial ground to be convinced of the truth of what God wants his spokesman to say. In London, England, there is a burial ground by the name of Bunhill Fields.

And within that plot, you have the burial place of Susanna Wesley, extraordinary mother and gifted educator of almost a score of children. There you have the burial place of Isaac Watts, a man with a gift of poetry, who wrote many of the hymns that are still enriching our services of worship today. That's the burial place of Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe and of John Bunyan.

Whose pilgrim's progress next to the Bible has been most read in the English-speaking world as a source of devotion and illustration of the way of gospel grace. There have been indeed tombstones in use among the Romans of the Latin era where the truth that is mentioned in Isaiah was underlined with simplicity and strength. One of the stones read, As you are, we once were.

As we are, you shall be. All flesh is like grass and all the goodness and the glory of humanity is like the flower of the field which flourishes only for a while and then is withered or wilts or is cut down. Have you ever read through the fifth chapter of the book of Genesis? Many people don't get past the first three chapters.

Creation, the forming of woman to be man's counterpart and equal, and then the story of temptation, transgression, and expulsion from the garden of Eden. Perhaps we go as far as chapter four, the first homicide, fratricide, where Cain killed his martyred brother, Abel the righteous. But the fifth chapter could very well be called the symphony of death.

Repeatedly, almost with a sense of monotony, statements are made that so-and-so was born, he lived a certain number of years, and he died. Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. Seth lived nine hundred and thirty, and he died.

Enos lived nine hundred and five, and he died. Jared nine hundred and sixty-two, and he died. Enos, Methuselah, reaching nine hundred and sixty-nine, and he died.

The only exception being Enoch, who walked with God and one day got so far away from his own home that God says, keep walking with me and come home with me. The symphony of death in the fifth chapter of the book of Genesis, that no matter how long we live and no matter what the quantity of our days and no matter what the quality of our life, the time comes when the story ends and the book is closed forever. One can have the strength of Samson, the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, the daring of Daniel, the courage of Paul, the warm-hearted impulsiveness of Peter, and still not evade the truth of what is here affirmed, that all flesh is as grass and all the goodness of man is like the flower of the field.

But we must do more than affirm the transiency of human nature. We have to apply that truth to our daily life. If none of us is here forever, then we had better make up our mind to make the best possible use of the days of our years that God does give us.

That's why Moses, the man of God, in Psalm 90 and verse 12 said, so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Realizing that we are not in this world forever, realizing that we are only here in transit, realizing something of our transiency, our frailty, and our mortality, we need to get our priorities straight we haven't got forever. Life has its limits upon this planet and we must ask God to give us a right sense of our priorities so that we don't waste the days of our years on what is worthless and harmful, but rather devote ourselves to what is good in God's sight.

Jesus was aware of this, for in the ninth chapter of the gospel, according to John, he shows us the sense of urgency under which he lived and operated. I must do the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work. And the apostle Paul, great missionary and evangelist that he was, was very much aware of this when in 2 Corinthians 6 he cried out, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

And the author of the letter to the Hebrews echoed this in his own postscript, today if he will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. And so the transiency of humanity is something that needs to be affirmed and the truth needs to be applied so that we follow the kind of lifestyle that is compatible with the will of God. Life is too precious to be wasted in trivial pursuits.

Our transiency, and in contrast to our transiency, the eternal character of the word of God which abides forever. The word of our God stands forever. We have a God who invented the communications business.

For our God is not stricken with a spirit of dumbness, our God has a mouth as well as a mind and a heart, and our God communicates, our God wants to be heard, he wants to be seen, he wants to be known. And it was one of the greatest insights that ever came to mortal man when John Calvin at the very beginning of his historic work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, put it like this, that we are made to come to a knowledge of God. God wants us to know him, that's why he has spoken to us in his word.

And when we come to know God for what he really is, then we will come to know ourselves for what we really are. Trying to define ourselves, to describe and to understand ourselves apart from God is as futile as defining a valley apart from a mountain or a shore apart from an ocean. As we come to know God, says Calvin, we come to know ourselves, and God is knowable because he has communicated, he has given us his word.

In other words, we are dealing with the reality of a revelation. God has given us his written word, a message that is received by men and then written down. In 2 Peter 1, the apostle says that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, like a mighty current that carries away, like a wind that takes a leaf and suspends it and directs it in midair.

So the authors of scripture, so those who gave out the message, were impelled by the spirit of God. Their individual personalities, their literary styles, their way of thinking certainly comes through. There is a humanity to scripture, but all of these men wrote and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Theirs was the hand that held the quill, but the hand of the spirit guided theirs in producing the message that we now have in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. It wasn't a matter of dictation to robots and automatons, but of God communicating with men who then wrote down and gave us, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, an accurate record of what God wants us to know. And so if you and I want to know what we should believe, and if you and I want to know how we should live, we don't look to subjective feeling.

We don't look to church tradition. We don't listen for philosophical abstract speculation. We go to the law and the prophets.

We search the scriptures, for through them God makes known his will. We have his word written. Undoubtedly, there are many things in scripture that are not easy to understand, but that the American humorist Mark Twain put us straight on that one.

He said, it's not the things I don't understand in the Bible that bother me, but the things that I do understand. And enough is made known to us in the Bible so that we may know how to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. God speaks, God communicates, God calls us to be written down the revelation of his nature and the revelation of his will.

The great church father Augustine said that the Bible was a letter addressed to us. And in it, we could hear the voice of God and reading it, we could see the heart of our heavenly father. And that was the view of Martin Luther.

And that was the view of John Calvin. And that was the view embodied in the 39 articles of the church of England. And that is the view that is enshrined in the first chapter of our Presbyterian Westminster confession of faith.

And everything that has a lower view of scripture than that is a deviation and needs to be returned and reformed by what scripture says about itself. The word of our God abides forever. This is true, not only of the written word, which we have in scripture, but of the word made flesh, which we celebrate at this season of the year.

God, who at different times in a variety of ways, made himself known through the prophets, has in these last days, says the author of the letter to the Hebrews, made himself known to us in a person. God states truth in propositional form, and then God makes truth known in personal form. Jesus Christ is God's nature and God's will made visible and tangible as well as audible to you.

And the word of the father now in flesh appearing. Oh, come, let us adore him. Jesus Christ is that eternal and divine word, which in the fullness of time became flesh and dwelt among us.

What is our response to God's revelation? Carl Henry points out that our world is one that has had an unprecedented knowledge explosion. And yet, even though we have so much factual data to process and to understand when it comes to the word and the will of God, many of us are woefully ignorant. We do not know what God wills.

We do not know what scripture says. We do not know what Jesus teaches, how we need to receive the word, which is written and made flesh in Jesus Christ. What sort of reception have we given to the word of God? How are we receiving God's word here and now at Spadina and Harvard on the 16th of December? As the word is read, as the word is preached, as Jesus Christ is held forth, how do we respond to the word? Is our heart like stony soil that repels the good seed of the word of God? Is our life like shallow earth, which lets it in, but not long enough to take root? Is our heart like thorn infested ground that seeing the word fall, then chokes it with the cares and anxieties and preoccupations of life? Or do we have fertile soil in which the word may fall, take root and bear fruit to the glory of God? What should be our response to God's abiding word? You and I, who are frail creatures of dust and feeble as frail.

For one thing, we ought to obey the commands of the word, which do not become obsolete as moral systems change in our society. We ought to accept the invitations that come to us through the word, for they are not invalid. A while ago, I was sent a little card by one of the car rental firms to tell me that I would qualify for an upgrade.

And then I read the fine print, valid till December 31. And I don't intend to fly and rent a car between now and then. But the invitations of God that are given in scripture last as long as our lives.

For he pleads with us through his word to come back to him while there is time. His invitations are not invalid. They come from a sincere heart.

We need to respond to the word not only by obeying its commands and accepting its invitations, but by heeding its warnings. We have a God who does not blink. We have a God who sets conditions.

We have a God who gives a warning. And when the time of grace expires, judgment falls. And if we are heedless to the Lord's warnings, we are doing despot to his word.

We receive the word by trusting its promises. For he does not deceive. He means it when he says, come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

He means it when he says, him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out. So the word comes to us and is addressed to our ears, is addressed to our eyes, is addressed to our minds, is addressed to our wills, is addressed to our hearts. In a moment, we'll be singing a hymn, which many do not consider a genuine Christmas carol, but is most appropriate tying in the words of the text with the theme of the season.

On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh. Awaken, hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of Kings. Then cleansed be every breast from sin, make straight the way of God within.

Prepare we in our hearts a home where such a mighty guest can come. Oh, come to our hearts, Lord Jesus. There is room in our hearts for thee.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that the eternal God has made himself known to us, men and women who are frail and transient and mortal. Enable us to receive that eternal word, the word written down in Holy Scripture, the word made personal, the word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Forbid that we should disobey your commands. Forbid that we should reject your promises and invitations. Forbid, oh Lord, that we should close our hearts to your everlasting word.

In Jesus' precious name we ask it. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26742.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mariano-di-gangi/isaiah-40-the-everlasting-word/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net