

Marks of Discipleship

December 6, 2020

Day 1: Isaiah 40:1-2

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.

From chapter 40 on to the end of the book, Isaiah is trying to encourage his people to come back to their home. They were taken away into captivity by the Babylonians. Isaiah tells his people that God has not abandoned them and in fact they have more than paid for their transgressions. Isaiah and the other prophets gave the people of Israel the reason for their national disaster (the fall of Jerusalem) and a means of once again feeling close to God.

Question: Do you think Jerusalem is a city or a person or all the people?

Challenge: What sin do you imagine that Israel committed to be sent into captivity?

Scripture: Isaiah 41

Day 2: Isaiah 40:3-4

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; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

Isaiah is comparing the return to Jerusalem with the first exodus. In the first exodus the wilderness was harsh and very hard to traverse. This exodus will be totally different in that the way will be cleared by God. God provides for us a road to follow but expects us to do the walking. The Israelites in Isaiah's time had to leave their new home and risk following God just as they did in the first exodus. It is always a risk to follow where God wants us to go.

Question: Whose voice is doing the calling?

Challenge: When have you felt God calling you to do something risky?

Scripture: Isaiah 42

Day 3: Isaiah 40:5

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The visible expression of the Lord's presence is "God's glory." The whole world can see God's goodness and strength in the return of the people to Jerusalem. Today the glory of God can be seen as people are returning to God. By returning to God I mean that we return to follow God's leading and participate in God's plan for the redemption of the world. Our part is to be faithful disciples by witnessing to the love of God.

Question: How does the Lord speak?

Challenge: What could you arrange so that the "world" could see God's glory?

Scripture: Isaiah 43

Day 4: Isaiah 40:6-7

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 voice asks the writer to "cry out" which means state that it is OK to venture forth on this journey. The grass withering is an allusion to the end of the Babylonian empire. The empire will come to an end just as all the things made by humans will come to an end. But Isaiah is further stating that the evil that Babylon represents will not prevail. We need to keep in mind when we see evil getting the upper hand that it will always and eventually fade and die.

Question: Is it possible to build something that will last for 4,000 years?

Challenge: Come up with a different image than the one Isaiah used to describe something like a institution that will not last.

Scripture: Isaiah 44

Day 5: Isaiah 40:8

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

Words have a way of getting our attention, especially our name. If someone calls your name you will turn to see who called you. If we hear a voice that is familiar we will search for the source of that voice. Words that are spoken in a loud or threatening voice will also command our attention. Some words have an almost universal response, for example the word "fore" or "heads up" tells us to duck or be alert. God's word, unlike our words, has the power to stay in effect long after they are spoken. God's word is eternal because it is what brought all things into being, so that God's word is a part of everything that exists.

Question: If the word of the Lord stands forever then what do you think stands the second longest?

Challenge: Why do you think Isaiah used the term "word of the Lord" instead of saying "the Lord"?

Scripture: Isaiah 45

Day 6: Isaiah 40:9

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You, who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, and do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

When the leading people of Jerusalem were taken into captivity and the Temple was destroyed those that were left thought that God had gone away. They associated God with the Temple so strongly that the feeling was that if the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, so was God. Even if they did not think God was destroyed they believed that God was reduced in power. Isaiah has been telling his people that God is still God and the proof of that is that the people are coming back to the land. They will feel again the power of God as they see hope renewed and life going forward.

Question: What part of God is seen when the voice says "here is your God"?

Challenge: Bring some good tidings to somebody this season.

Scripture: Isaiah 49