

Readings for Lent 1 – Isaiah chapter 40:-

During Lent we will be looking at some readings from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, leading up to studying Isaiah chapter 53 during Holy Week (10th - 16th of April). We begin with Isaiah chapter 40, the opening chapter in “The Volume of Comfort”. This ‘Volume’ runs from chapter 40, verse 1 right through to chapter 66, verse 24. The end of the previous chapter is a gloomy prediction of the fate of the royal family of Judah. After the death of the faithful King Hezekiah his son Manasseh came to the throne, he was encouraged by the worldly minded nobility into a spirit of ‘broad-mindedness’ and gave license to the resumption of idolatry. With the abandonment of their dependence on the Lord God the leadership exploited the populace for their own selfish gain, leading to corruption, depravity and bloodshed. (See 2 Kings chapter 21.) Exile was inevitable! This “Volume of Comfort” was a reassurance of better things to come when the People of God returned to him, their Maker and Redeemer.

Isaiah chapter 40, verses 1 – 2:- The opening words of this chapter set the scene! The Lord God claims his people for his own. From the promise made to Abraham In Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 – 3, through Exodus chapter 19, verses 5 – 6 and chapter 20, verse 2 and the various books of the prophets right through to the final fulfilment at the end of time when there is a New Heaven and a New Earth – see Revelation chapter 21, verse 3: the Lord God has cared for, guided and blessed his people. The promise here is that even in judgement the Lord God is sovereign and merciful. This is important as we look at other chapters from this book in the weeks ahead.

Verses 3 – 5:- Gospel writers all apply these words to the person and message of John the Baptist. A spiritual preparation for the coming of the Lord God to be present with his people. It should be a message for us to prepare our hearts and minds as we look for his coming both now and at the end of time when he comes in glory. Are you ready?

Verses 6 – 8:- A reminder that human beings are frail and our lives in this world are relatively short. Remember Jesus said “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will not pass away.*” (Matthew chapter 24, verse 35).

Verses 9 – 11:- Zion and Jerusalem are to proclaim the coming of their God to the cities round about. The Lord God is coming, ushering in a kingdom of righteousness and peace. Again the theme is picked up by Mark in his Gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ comes into Galilee saying “*the kingdom of God is at hand*” (Mark chapter 1, verses 14 – 15). The description of the way that God would minister to his people in verse 11 is a beautiful picture of the work of our Lord Jesus.

Verses 12 – 17:- These verses remind us that the Lord God is sovereign over his creation. A similar picture is in the Book of Job chapter 38 through to the end of chapter 41. The verses here in Isaiah are a deliberate contrast to the idols described in the following verses.

Verses 18 – 20:- A longer description of the uselessness of making and worshipping idols is to be found in Isaiah chapter 44, verses 9 – 20. A thing made by man cannot save its creator! I like the description of the man using part of the wood for fuel and making part into a graven image which he then worships. (See chapter 44 verses 16 – 17). The prophet points up the futility of such idolatry.

Verses 21 – 26:- In verse 21 we are reminded that from the beginning the Creator God was known. Adam met with the Lord God “*in the garden in the cool of the day*”. (Genesis chapter 2, verses 8 – 10). “*Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.*” (Genesis chapter 5, verse 24). The grandeur of the starry heavens (verses 22 and 26) is contrasted with the ‘great ones’ of this earth (verses 23 and 24). Even a Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar or Putin are mere worthless trash before the omnipotent sovereign Lord God. They are like uprooted seed, shrivelled and withered and blown away by the wind.

Verses 27 – 31:- These closing verses of the chapter begin with a picture of God’s people Israel feeling abandoned and unloved. Again the message from God – *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* The Lord reigns! Even when the world seems to heading for destruction – The Lord reigns! When we are worn out with striving to do things in our own strength – The Lord reigns! And then the promise! *They that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.* (verse 31).