

RECEIVING COMFORT AND STRENGTH Sunday School- December 5, 2010

Unifying Topic: THE HIGHWAY FOR GOD

Lesson Text

I. Comforting The People (Isaiah 40:1-5)

II. How Great Thou Art (Isaiah 40:25-26)

III .Renewing Our Strength (Isaiah 40:29-31)

The Main Thought: He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. (Isaiah 40:29 KJV)

Unifying Principle: In spite of weakness, trouble, and impediments, people search for a better life. Where do people look for hope? The prophet Isaiah promises the people that God, with whom none can compare, will fulfill their hopes.

Lesson Aim: To help students appreciate how God lovingly comforts, renews, and strengthens us.

Life aim: To teach how God, through His incredibly awesome love and power, brings gentle comfort to those who are weary, gives strength to those who are weak, and inspires hope in those who are in despair.

40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

40:4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

40:5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

40:25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One

40:26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

40:29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

40:30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

HISTORY:

In these eight verses of **Chapter 39 of Isaiah** serves as important background for our lesson. We first deal with *Merodach-baladan – king of Babylon*. He had been ruler of Bit-Jakin, a sheikdom on the coast of the Persian Gulf and had overthrown Babylon as early as 721 B.C., with the help of the Elamites. After an eleven-year reign, he was driven out by Sargon II, the Assyrian king, in 710 B.C. After the death of Sargon II, he reentered Babylon briefly in 703 B.C. In an attempt to rally support against the Assyrians, and Sennacherib in particular, he sent *letters and a present*, which probably arrived in the form of an envoy (messenger; representative) bearing gifts and a letter of congratulations. The fact that he had heard of Hezekiah's sickness and recovery indicates the swiftness with which news traveled even in those ancient times. However innocent the entire situation may have appeared, to Hezekiah, it led to Hezekiah's foolish mistake. Impressed by the attention that he has been given by this renegade king, Hezekiah foolishly "*showed them the house of his precious things...and all that was found in his treasures.*" There can be no doubt that the passage indicates that all of this was done in vanity and pride which the Hezekiah would live to regret.

Merodach-baladan was planning a revolt against Assyria and was forming an alliance. He probably hoped to convince Hezekiah to join this alliance against Assyria. What was so wrong in showing these Babylonians around?—deceit and vanity. Hezekiah failed to see that the Babylonians would become his next threat, and they, not the Assyrians would conquer his city. This was the sneak attack of the enemy.

This caused Isaiah to come on the scene in verse 3, indicating that he was not present to advise Hezekiah during this incident. The prophet Isaiah asks three important questions before he makes his pronouncement.

1. "What said these men?"
2. "From whence came they unto thee?"
3. "What have they seen in thine house?"

When Isaiah learns that they have come from Babylon and that they had seen everything among the king's treasures, the Prophet is compelled to announce "*the word of the Lord of hosts*" to him. The closing words of this chapter must stand as the most solemn and awesome words of this entire book of prophecies, for the prophet predict that *all* of these royal treasures "*shall be carried to Babylon.*" He further announced that even the king's descendants would be taken away to serve as "*eunuchs*" in the Babylonian palace. Remember, in Hebrew there is no specific word for grandsons

or great-grandsons; hence, the reference is to sons that shall issue from thee. In this there is both a word of judgment and a word of great treasures of the Judean kings would now spread throughout Babylon, provoking the desire to come and take them away; the promise that the king will have descendants to be taken away is also made.

It is thought that Hezekiah's son, Manasseh had not yet been born; so even in this message of condemnation there is a word of consolation. The king's response was both sincere and somewhat fatalistic. "*Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.*" He honestly and genuinely recognized that the Word of the Lord was *good* (tōb, referring here to moral or philosophical goodness). In spite of the prediction, the king seemed pleased to know that there would be *peace and truth* during the days of his reign. It should also be remembered that Hezekiah was facing an immediate crisis with Assyria; and perhaps he saw a better result in these words than immediate captivity at the hands of the cruel Assyrians. Nevertheless, the chapter serves as a fitting introduction to the message of hope that characterizes the third part of Isaiah's prophecy.

The book of Isaiah makes a dramatic shift at this point. When one turns from the 39th to the 40th chapter, it is as though he steps out of the darkness of judgment into the light of salvation. Looking beyond Israel's immediate distress and Judah's imminent captivity, the Prophet sees a day of salvation yet to come in the future. The following chapters discuss the majesty of God, who is coming to rule and judge all people. Isaiah, the author, now speaks of events which will occur after the captivity.

This message begins three studies in the 40th chapter of Isaiah about how God Takes Care of Us. The first study is from verses 1-11 — God Is Our Comfort. The next study is from verses 12-22 — God Reaches Down to Us in Power, and the final study is from verses 25-31 — God Gives Us Strength. As we look at these passages from Isaiah, I believe our faith will be strengthened as we see how God truly does Take Care of Us.

LESSON:

Isaiah 40:1-5 Comforting The People

God is our comfort when we're worried

40:1 ¹The nation of Israel had been in exile. They were unsure of what the future would bring. But God sent this message from His Prophet Isaiah to comfort the people. When we are worried or in despair God sends His comfort. He wants to help His people. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*" "*Comfort*" (nachamū, meaning repent or freedom from pain). And comfort only follows after true repentance. The Prophet has received into the depths of his spirit God's announcement and the true spoiler – "*the rod of His anger and the staff of His Indignation*", is no more Assyria, but rather Babylon. He has accepted the sentence that the people because of their sin, (in fact continued sin) and refusal to repent, are to go into captivity. God's people surely need comfort when worried about dislocation and everything taken from them.

²This prophecy reaches to and includes the whole Gospel dispensation, from the coming of John the Baptist to the second coming of Christ. The word "*comfort*" is repeated, he says this, to confirm the thing. It is God that speaks, who is the God of all comfort; His "*people*", whom He has chosen, with whom He has made a covenant in Christ, whom He has given to Him, and He has redeemed by His blood, and whom He effectually calls by His grace.

God is our comfort when we're afraid

40:2 God is commanding Isaiah "*to speak comfortably to Jerusalem and out loud*" – "*Comfortably*" – "*leb*" – (actually a completely different word than the "*comfort*" in the first verse). This is speaking to the inner man, the mind, will, heart, and understanding; speak kindly (NAS), tenderly (NLT). We could translate this as, "*Speak to the heart*". Thus, God's message of comfort in this passage is not a mere strengthening of the people of Israel in an outward deliverance only; it is a deep and inner work of God in the hearts of His people as well.

ⁱ*Barnes comments:* To speak '*to the heart*,' is to speak in such a way as to remove the troubles of the heart; to furnish consolation and joy. Sometimes when we're sharing with people, we can get so worried and afraid about what we're going to say, that we focus only on repeating certain things we've prepared to speak about, and are totally ignorant of the fact that we're speaking as the Holy Spirit leads. Speak to "*Jerusalem*" is meant the Gospel church, and the true members of it. Isaiah was to speak to her:

¹ <http://www.hurtingchristian.org/PastorsSite/otherscripture/isaiahstudies/isaiah40-1-11.htm>

² <http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/geb/view.cgi?book=isa&chapter=040&verse=001>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwn-sundayschool.html>

1. That her warfare is accomplished. The battle may have still loomed (appearance of something large), even though there was still an army against them, as far as God was concerned, "*her warfare is ended.*" This was the reason for comfort. It is in this same sense that God speaks to us and tells us we can be *more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37)*. The battle still looms, but as far as it concerns the believer in Jesus Christ, her warfare is ended, because "*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4).
2. That her iniquity is pardoned. At the moment Isaiah spoke this, Jerusalem was well aware of her sin because Isaiah had made them aware of it! Yet, the prophet speaks of a day when comfort can be offered because her iniquity is pardoned. This is real comfort; to be recognized as a sinner - as one having iniquity - yet knowing just as much that our iniquity is pardoned.

"For she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" – i.e., ³The Old Testament law required that the sinner pay back more than what they took. Most of the time, they were to pay back double what they stole (Ex. 22:9). The idea here isn't that they had received more for their sins than they deserved, but that they had received the full punishment that their sins deserved. ⁴The "*double for her sins*" must refer to the twofold captivity, the Assyrian and the Roman; at the coming close of this latter dispersion, and then only, can her "*iniquity*" be said to be "*pardoned*," or fully expiated [Houbigant]; or both suffering the devastation of their land and their deportation to Babylon as well. It does not mean double as much as she deserved, but ample punishment in her twofold captivity. But under the New Covenant, it is not we who have received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins; it is our sin-bearing Savior Jesus Christ, who received the cup of wrath from the Lord's hand double for all our sins. You can't add to what Jesus has done for you.

God is our comfort when we're overwhelmed

40:3 "*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*" Doesn't that sound familiar? This would be fulfilled by the ministry of John the Baptist. He literally lived in the "*wilderness*", the desert of Judea. His purpose in life was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. His voice cried night and day. The "*wilderness*" and "*desert*" represent the world. As well, it represented Israel that had lost her way; therefore the promise is for the restoration of that nation, which will yet take place.

1. "*Prepare the way of the Lord*" – When eastern princes marched through desert countries, ways were prepared for them, and hindrances removed. The idea of preparing the way of the Lord is a word picture, because the real preparation must take place in our hearts. Building a road is very much like the preparation God must do in our hearts.
2. "*Make straight in the desert a highway for our God*" – The Lord is coming to His people as a triumphant King who has the road prepared before Him. Whatever was wrong in the road must be corrected for God to have clear passage. Preparing a straight road means removing obstacles or rolling out the red carpet for the coming of the Lord. The desert is also a picture of life's trials and sufferings. We are not immune to these but you can't allow things to overwhelm you. Jesus had to go through the wilderness and the desert. Isaiah told the people to prepare to see God work. And the better we prepare our hearts, the clearer answer He can provide. The making of that highway for the Lord is our job, our duty. It is the way we ready ourselves for our communion with God. It is part of how we repent, we make our way straight.

God is our comfort when things appear bleak

40:4 "*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*" The psalmist is looking ahead and what does he see? He sees deep un-crossable valleys and steep mountains and hills which are depressing and bleak. The terrain is uneven and rough before him. Things look very bad. But this verse tells us "*every valley shall be lifted up*" – every low point in our life will be raised. These are sins of deficiencies stemming from doubt in God and His good purposes for our lives. Some of these are: worry, stress, fears, indecision, self-hatred, depression, and suicide. The Lord heals our wounds.

"*Every mountain and hill shall be made low*" – every obstacle in our way will come down. Self-confidence is the belief

³ <http://www.calvaryfullerton.org/Bstudy/index.htm>

⁴ <http://bible.cc/isaiah/40-2.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwn-sundayschool.html>

that one can manipulate circumstances to gain what we want. Some of the sins of self-confidence are: pride, anger, bitterness, looking down upon, immorality, stealing and lying.

"*The uneven ground shall become level*– the rollercoaster of our life will be calmed. And "*the rough places a plain*" – God will smooth out the rough places. The "*mountains*" and "*hill*" represent the oppressors of the world. They will be brought down from their exalted position and shall be made low. Only Christ can make the crooked straight and the rough places plain in our lives.

As the Lord prepare our hearts by the teaching of His Word and the convictions of His Spirit, may high and proud thoughts be brought down, good desires planted, crooked and rugged tempers made straight and softened, and every hindrance removed, that we may be ready for His will on earth, and prepared for His heavenly kingdom.

40:5 "*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*" When the way is prepared, then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. "*The glory of the Lord*" is Jesus Christ. This will ultimately be fulfilled at Jesus' Second Coming (Rev. 21:23). God would display His power, and show Himself to be a covenant-keeping God, by delivering His people from their bondage, and re-conducting them to their own land. This glory and faithfulness would be shown in His delivering them from their captivity in Babylon; and it would be still more illustriously shown in His sending the Messiah to accomplish the deliverance of His people in later days. ⁵The sense of this verse is: Get things straightened out for the King, and you'll catch a glimpse of His glory. For those that are so depressed that they can't look up at the Lord – then when they realize that God loves them, they will catch a glimpse of the glory. For those who are puffed up and become humbled, they too will get closer to the Lord. He's saying, this will come to pass because all flesh will witness this. The word "*flesh*" is often used to denote human nature, or mankind. And the strongest possible confirmation that it would be fulfilled is out of the mouth of the Lord. The idea is, that God had certainly promised their deliverance from bondage; and that His intervening, in a manner which should attract the attention of all nations, was certainly purposed by Him. This should be a comfort to all of us, God's spoken Word of Promise!

Isaiah 40:25-26 How Great Thou Art

40:25 Our lesson skips to the 25th verse: "*To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.*" We have been looking at how God takes care of us by comforting us in a time we will need Him the most. Now we will see how God takes care of us by His greatness as he reaches down to us in Power. This is a summary to conclude from verse 18. If God is paramount over idols, over nature, and over humanity, to whom can He be likened? Is He not altogether unique and incomparable? The Prophet having thus set forth the majesty and glory of God asks now with great emphasis, what could be an adequate and proper representation of such a God. There is nothing whatsoever that is a fit likeness and similitude, by which to represent the Lord. He is called the "*Holy One*" and is pictured as controlling the heavens on high even as He providentially controls the events on earth. No one or thing can be compared to God and He has proven Himself time and time again.

40:26 "*Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.*" Direct your eyes toward heaven. God appeals to the starry heavens as proof of His existence and perfections, and as the most awe-inspiring exhibition of His greatness and power (i.e. moon, stars, sun...).

Some 50 years ago, it was claimed by Astronomers that there were over 40 sextillion stars in the Universe. If every one of these stars were named, there would be enough names to fill approximately 80 quadrillion books of this size.

Not one fails to fulfill its will; not one has failed to fulfill its purpose from when it was first spoken into being. To understand that the Supreme Being has created all of these stars, and calls them each by name, is beyond our comprehension! He is still taking care of His covenant people by His awesome Power.

Isaiah 40:29-31 Renewing Our Strength

God gives us strength when we are weak

40:29 "*He giveth power to the faint; and to [them that have] no might he increaseth strength.*" After explaining all the greatness and glory of God, now Isaiah explains another benefit we can receive from God. God takes care of us by

⁵ <http://www.calvaryfullerton.org/Bstudy/index.htm>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwn-sundayschool.html>

renewing our strength. Notice who God gives power to:

1. the faint;
2. those who have no might

Even the strongest people get tired at times, but God's power and strength never diminish. He is never too tired or too busy to help and listen. He increases our strength; *"...when I am weak, then am I strong"* 2Corth.12:10c. Those who are proud and confident in their own wisdom and strength will receive no strength from God.

Wiersbe tells us, "We can never obey God in our own strength, but we can always trust Him to provide the strength we need. If we trust ourselves, we will faint and fall; but if we wait on the Lord by faith, we will receive strength for the journey." God's strength is reserved for those who know they are weak, and know they have no might.

God gives us strength when we are exhausted

40:30 *"Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall utterly fall."* Two categories used here: youth and young men. They *"shall faint and be weary"* and they *"shall utterly fall."* "Weak" means *"failure through loss of inherent strength."* Youth have so much energy that we wished we had a tenth of it. Yet even the little ones get tired and crash. The most vigorous young men whom we expect manly strength, also, become weary by labor. There may be a time when you are weakened by disease and sink under with discouragement – exhausted. God is able to give strength when you thought you couldn't go on any further. The Israelites needed to know that God would be with them in captivity, be with them when they get faint or exhausted. And the next verse helps us to understand.

God gives us strength when we can't go on.

40:31 *"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."* When we are powerless to continue, then the Lord says to wait. I think this is the one thing we hate more than anything else – to wait on God. We don't like waiting. We are an impatient people. But God says we must learn to wait. It is only in that place of waiting we find the promises of God:

1. *renew their strength*
2. *mount up as eagles*
3. *run and not be weary*
4. *walk and not faint*

- "Wait" – "*qavah*" – wait, hope, expect; to look eagerly for; to lie in wait for; linger for. The idea behind wait on the Lord is not a passive sitting around until the Lord does something. It is a feeling that is as consistent with the most strenuous endeavors to secure the object; it is a seeking with a clinging expectant trust and hope in Him.

Here it properly refers to those who were suffering a long and grievous captivity in Babylon, and who had no prospect of deliverance but in Him. The phrase is applicable also to all who feel that they are weak, feeble, guilty, and helpless, and who, in view of this, put their confident trust in "*Yahweh*."

"Shall renew their strength" – That trust in "*Yahweh*" brings about a change; it will cause a change in your life. The Hebrew word:

- "Renew" – "*chalaph*" – means to pass on or away; to change, substitute, to alter, change for better; and then to revive, to renew, to cause to flourish again. It's the idea of changing clothes, taking off the old stuff and putting on new ones. It's taking our weakness and exchanging it for God's strength.

The people of God who trust in Him shall become strong in faith; able to contend with their spiritual foes, to gain the victory over their sins. They shall lay aside their strength and put on, as a garment, strength from God.

"They shall mount up with wings as eagles" – It has been a common and popular opinion that the eagle lives and retains his vigor to a great age. The eagle lives to a very advanced age; and in shedding his feathers, his youth is renewed with his new feathers.

⁶Eagles and other raptors generally do not pluck their feathers. All birds, including raptors (bird of prey), do go through a process of losing feathers and this is called a molt. A bird's feathers do suffer regular wear and tear so, ultimately, the quality of the feathers will decrease and it will need to be replaced. The feathers are not lost all at the same time. If this were true, the bird would be unprotected from natural elements and more importantly it would not be able to fly. Raptors and all other birds molt in a symmetrical pattern. If a primary feather is molted, simultaneously it is also on the right wing. This can ensure balance in flight for the bird while it hunts during this molting period.

⁶ <http://www.snopes.com/critters/wild/eaglerebirth.asp>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwn-sundayschool.html>

(The Speculation): It is said that the eagle sheds his feathers in the beginning of spring, and with fresh plumage assumes the appearance of youth. The belief that an eagle renews its strength and youthful appearance after shedding its feathers gave rise to Psalm 103:5 and Isaiah 40:31. Eagles do have a long lifespan, living 20 to 30 years in the wild, and longer in captivity [Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary].

- "*Mount up*" – "*alah*" – to go up, ascend, climb. Their climb is swift and strongly.

What does that mean? Why as eagles? Why not with wings as doves? The eagle is the king of birds, it soars the highest into the Heavens. Believers are to live a heavenly life, in the very presence and love and joy of God. They are to live where God lives; they need God's strength to rise there. We see a metaphor of an eagle used to describe how with God we can soar through and above difficulty.

Eagles are able to cover incredible distances, rising thousand of feet into the sky, reaching speeds of 60 miles per hour. But these beautiful birds may flap their wings only once or twice over the course of hours in doing so. They let the thermal updrafts carry them along.

It's hard to mount up, climb, or go up higher if you try to go before your time of renewal. That period of waiting on God is a must. It's always best to soar under the shadow of the Almighty as He covers you with His feathers under His wings while you trust in Him.

"They shall run and not be weary." "*Running*" is a continual going, a continual execution in spite of. Yes, you sometimes get weary when you run. "*Weary*" means exhaustion because of the hardness of life (Motyer). However, this passage is expressing the idea that they who trust in God would be vigorous, elevated, and unwearied; that God would sustain and uphold them.

"And they shall walk and not faint." This was at first designed to be applied to the Jews in captivity in Babylon to induce them to put their trust in God. But it is as true now as it was at that time. This is the purpose of the strength the Lord gives us - strength to move forward and progress in Him. It isn't strength to show off, but strength to go forward in Him. Walk in Him, take one step at a time in Him; allow your actions to be controlled by Him so you won't become weak along the way and give-up.

Notice what happens when we wait on the Lord. God says He will renew our strength. We will begin to take flight like the eagle. We will run and not be weary. We will walk and not faint. Notice the order, because it seems strange. But remember how it was when you first came to Christ. You were "*gong-hoe*" and ready to do it all. There was such a change in your life; you were soaring to new heights. First we mount up with wings like eagles. Then we run. Finally we walk. Does it seem out of order? - Not at all. As things go up, they come down. God wants the landing to be smooth. First, we recognize that we soar up into heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). Then we set ourselves on the course to run the race (Hebrews 12:1). Then we are in the good place to walk the walk (Colossians 2:6).

SUMMARY:

⁷True comfort comes from the Lord when His people know that God's judgment has been effectively turned from them even though they have messed up. Once God's purpose through discipline is accomplished, it is ceased. Now, they will find comfort and encouragement. God had declared judgment upon His people for their wrong doing. He uses difficult circumstances to bring His people back to Himself. Without being part of His covenant, there is no discipline. There is no comfort. People just listlessly go along in the world until a final judgment. A clear understanding of salvation is important or we will waver back and forth under the subjectivity of our feelings our whole lives. God has done this major construction behind the scenes of each of our lives in tender love with the express purpose that we can share in His inheritance.

The goal is always the same: "*Clear the way for the Lord.*" God's purpose is to make room for Himself. He does this through lifting the valleys and lowering the mountains. This is sanctification - setting apart to Himself. He does this in two chief ways: (1) He helps us overcome the lack of faith where we have given up hope, and (2) He helps us get rid of different manifestations of pride and self-confidence. This can be summarized by a reshaping of our lives.

⁷ <http://www.snopes.com/critters/wild/eaglerebirth.asp>

John the Baptist clearly was the voice crying out in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3). Jesus Christ was the glory of God that was proclaimed. Jesus, "*manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him.*" God's work of healing precedes the work of humbling. God always has the plan first. Healing is needed for spiritual wounds that spring from doubt. Trust or faith must be rebuilt. Many of course fail in this because they rebuild "*self-confidence*" rather than "*God-confidence.*" God fills in the valleys. He rebuilds our hope not in ourselves but in Christ. The hill has to be flattened out because there is no room for the glory of God as long as man seeks honor for himself. Removing mountains is hard work. God will be disrupting the lives of His people until Christ returns. So, by confessing your sin and repenting from disobedience, you can find forgiveness and freedom in Christ. After clearing the way, the goal of our faith is to bring glory to God.

Construction sites have one purpose and goal. They always have something greater in mind than the project itself. A person might have a building or a road built. They are elated when the project is finished on time and within budget constraints. But they are more eager to see the building or the road to be actually properly used. There is no sense in having an empty building or deserted road!

So it is with God's construction in our lives. Forming a level road is important, but it is not the end goal. The larger end purpose is that the glory of God might be revealed. His revealed presence is what makes all the construction hassles, detours and waits worth it all.

Twice the challenge is here made, "*To whom will you liken God?*" v. 18, and again v. 25. ⁸When the Assyrians were defeated, the Lord had proved that He alone was the one true God, the maker of the heavens and earth. This is the God who created, held together and remembers all of creation. He is so great that it is by His power that all things are sustained. He did not just make the stars in the heavens, but He is actively holding it all together. God did not make the universe and then leave it to exist and run by itself. Every moment of existence is sustained by the power of God. If God's ongoing sustenance were removed for even a second, the universe itself would disappear. To say it more poetically, God does not just make the stars, but He keeps them shining. He is incomparable.

In stating it this way, Isaiah is drawing a sharp contrast between the Lord and the gods of Babylon. The Babylonians were great astronomers who saw authority and power in the heavens. Isaiah is declaring here that the planets and the stars are not gods. They are merely a part of the One "*True*" God's creation. They exist not just because He made them in the past, but also because He continually wills them to exist. Therefore, the gods of Babylon are nothing in comparison to the One "*True*" God.

⁹Those who were in exile lost hope, and because of that they lost their strength and desire to go on. Even the young were beaten down, weary and defeated. But those who placed their hope and trust in God did not lose heart, and they did not lose strength, regardless of their age. Their hearts and minds soared as they thought about what God was going to do. As new strength and courage entered their hearts, it began to affect their bodies. They gained a new enthusiasm for life and a new strength to go on. But you never gain that strength unless you are willing to wait on the Lord and place your hope in Him! God has infinite strength. He can empower us when we are weak. He never runs out of energy. He can give us strength when our circumstances have drained us of our energy. Therefore, the great power of God brings comfort to His people (40:1). He renews our strength. He takes the weak and the lowly and lifts them up by His power. This is the consistent theme of the book of Isaiah. The kings and the nations who boast of their own power will be brought low by the incomparable strength of the Lord (40:23). Those who think they are something will be revealed as less than nothing (40:17), like fading flowers (40:6-8), grasshoppers (40:22) and the dust of the earth (40:15). However, those who humbly trust in the strength of the Lord will be lifted up. He will care for them like a Shepherd who tends His flock (40:11). He will comfort His people (40:1), forgiving them of their sins (40:2). For those who patiently wait on the Lord through pain and hardship, God will give strength to endure (40:31). They who 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 (Isaiah 40:31 ESV).

APPLICATION:

Many people have not at all thought about the purpose God has in mind for their lives. They are constantly thinking what they want of their lives. What a shame they miss out on the true fulfillment of their lives! Let's try to better understand this concept of God's glory in our lives. As it is in heaven, let it be done on earth.

⁸ <http://www.gcfweb.org/institute/isaiah/isaiah.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.ob1st.org/sermons/10-24-10.pdf>