

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**HOPE from Isaiah**  
**Isaiah 40**  
**March 23, 2025 - Rev'd Brad Henley**

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I recently bought my wife, Joh, some roses. They looked pretty good, they brought a splash of life and colour into our kitchen and ... and ... this is where my maleness shows ... and, despite the flower booster packet in the water of the vase, they quickly died.

Within days they began to lose their vibrance and beauty, and for the price, I think they dropped their heads in a very short time. It seems flowers are a waste of ... sorry. Getting sidetracked!

Flowers fade.

Even when they're on the bush, the trees, and the grasses. Flowers fade. They are here for a day, a week, a month, and then they're gone.

This is my girls and our very patient dog Angus who was happy to be turned into a mermaid dog. When we lived on the beach on Kangaroo Island we would see dog-maids, sandcastles, sand-palaces, man-made speed bumps and tyre tracks all over the beach each day. But the next day we'd come back to a clean slate. As Jimi Hendrix said, "Castles made of sand melt into the sea, eventually" ... or even very quickly.

Nothing is written in stone!

With a bit of sun, wind, rain, and the seasons passing on our planet ... with the passage of time, this stone, our homes, churches, cathedrals, our monuments and gravestones will decay and fade away.

How am I doing for a sermon on Hope from from Isaiah? It's a sobering start. But I assure you, you'll want to listen to the end.

This sobering news is exactly what God tells us through Isaiah.

Let's open up to Isaiah 40, and look at verse 6.

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"

'All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness 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. 8 The grass withers and the flowers fall...

Life is short. We might think that flowers die quickly, that sandcastles disappear in the blink of an eye, and even stones decay at an alarming rate. But that is our destiny too. We don't live forever.

When you're a kid it seems like an eternity between one Christmas and the next. But as you get older it seems you only need to lose focus for a second and you're celebrating Christmas again. Time flies by and we wonder, what have I done with my time?

The fact that life is short brings us perspective. Isaiah helps us to put our lives in perspective. Life is short. So where can we go for hope? For something more lasting than flowers quickly fading?

Verse 8 - "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but ... the WORD of our God endures for ever."

If you want something hopeful, something lasting, something eternal, you need to look beyond what your eyes can see.

Jesus agrees. He says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt 24:35).

There is great comfort in the certainty of Jesus.

The brevity of human life is like a flower that blooms and in a very short time falls. But this is in huge contrast to the word of God that endures for ever. With God there is certainty, something solid to grasp and with God, there is eternity.

When God spoke through Isaiah, God's people were in a lot of stress. As they looked around, they had some huge, powerful neighbouring nations. The northern 10 tribes of Israel were rightly looking at Assyria and fearing that they would be consumed. Assyria were a powerful, militaristic nation who had devoured other smaller nations as they expanded their borders.

God warned His people many times through the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and others. But his people continued rebelling against him, worshipping other gods, seeking political alliances and earthly power instead of repenting and trusting in God and His ways.

So, Assyria did come as an instrument of God's judgement, taking the northern 10 tribes into exile. Then the two southern tribes of Israel should have learnt their lesson. They saw their cousins judged for their idolatry and seeking earthly power. So, they should have repented of their idolatry and sin, and renewed their trust in God. But around 130 years after their cousins were taken, the remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin would be taken by the Babylonian empire who by that time had conquered and destroyed Assyria.

But, before this happens God speaks through Isaiah. He speaks words of hope and comfort. Words of hope that God's people would be rescued in the short term and the long term. Throughout Isaiah there are prophecies and glimpses of hope in the coming Messiah. But there's also hope for the people in the short term.

To the Southern kingdom God says from verse 1, "Comfort, comfort my people. Tenderly speak to Jerusalem. Tell her that she's been through the hard time and God has brought her through."

Isaiah is prophesying before the people have been taken into captivity in Babylon. When they haven't put their trust in God they will be judged by Babylon as an instrument in God's hand. The people will feel condemned, lost, troubled, and despairing. But God reassures them that the exile will end. He speaks in the past tense, "Your hard service **has been** completed."

For people who knew about slavery, this **hard service** was an image of having been enslaved for years to pay off a debt. But once the debt was paid, the slave was set free. For Israel, they would pay this debt in Babylon, but Isaiah says in the past tense, “your sin has been paid for, you have received from the Lord’s hand, the complete consequences for your sin. And now it’s over.”

Then, in verse 3, God says that He will come and deliver His people. It’s the classic passage that we know from Mark chapter 1, about John the Baptist! “A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

God is coming. In the wilderness of exile in Babylon, he’s coming. He’s coming as if there’s a 4 lane highway and nothing can stop him. He’s on His way to rescue His people.

Isaiah is pointing to the salvation that will come for Israel. This is partly fulfilled, after about 70 years, when Cyrus the Persian king conquered the Babylonians and set God’s people free. In a way the glory of God is revealed then and everyone sees it.

But God’s glory shines all the more brightly when the Messiah, Jesus comes. Then He liberates His people from much more than a 70 year exile in Babylon. He liberates us from the evil, death, and sin, the challenges that affect all of our lives.

Do you ever feel small and insignificant in life? I mean, apart from when you listened to the introduction of this sermon! Do you ever feel like the world, or the people, or the groups around you are scarily bigger and more powerful than you?

In Isaiah’s time, God’s people felt small, powerless and insignificant in their place surrounded by the powerful nations around them. But in verse 10 we see that God comes with power and rules with a mighty arm.

It was incredibly comforting to know that God comes with power and might. Today, for us who know that God loves us, His arrival with power and might is comforting.

Then, in a beautifully contrasting way, verse 11 tells us that God tends to his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young. That’s a great comfort for God’s people. For those who know he loves us.

He is like the fierce parent who stands between the predator and their children. To the predator the parent is angry, powerful, and scary, but when the parent turns around, to their children they are gentle, calm, pleased, they are powerful in their love. By all appearances toward the predator the parent is the polar opposite of the way they are towards their children.

We can have great hope and comfort from our God who is both the Sovereign Lord who comes with power and might ... and He is the gentle shepherd who carries us like beloved lambs in His arms.

The passage continues, the verses in between our top and tail of Isaiah 40. They tell us that, verse 12, God marked off the heavens with the breadth of his hand.

Back in the day, people often used their hands as a way of measuring things. A handbreadth (that is, the measurement of four fingers together was used to measure the

thickness of some of the Pillars of Solomon's Temple in Jeremiah 52. People still use handbreadths to measure the height of horses today. And Isaiah 40:12 says that the universe, this whole universe that science tells us is about 93 billion light years across. The universe is measured out by the breadth of God's hand.

Then God comforts us again. In Isaiah 40:15 God says, "Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust."

Israel has every earthly right to look on the nations around them with fear and trepidation. They are a small nation surrounded by big, powerful enemies. The Assyrians, and the Babylonians have consumed other nations like a tiny drop in a bucket. They have defeated nations bigger than Israel and it looks like they could do the same with God's people. Plus, God has used the Assyrians to judge the 10 wayward northern tribes who were worshipping idols, turning away from God and trusting in their own ways.

So, what does God say, "Israel, you're a drop in a bucket?" No, He says, "Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket." Get some perspective people. Instead of looking at how big and powerful your enemies are, look at how much bigger, and more powerful God is. Look at how much more loving, more gracious and merciful God is as a benefactor, a caring shepherd, a Saviour.

That's gaining true perspective. It is seeing the true reality behind what your eyes can see. God completely eclipses our troubles and challenges. When we step back and take in the whole picture, we are tiny, we live for a very short time, we have very little power, but then the nations around us, the enemies that seem scary and intimidating are also tiny, insignificant. They are like nothing from the perspective of God.

Do you ever feel small and scared in this world? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by troubles and worries?

Do you ever feel like the church is tiny, a drop in the bucket compared to global politics, wars, ideologies and evil? Are God's people just insignificant specks of dust in the history of the universe?

Let God give you some perspective. God's got this. God is bigger than you realise. Your troubles and worries are like a single drop in a bucket. God can throw them out, flush them away, whatever. Your stresses and anxieties are like a few spots of dust on the scales. God can vacuum them up, brush them away. God can take care of your troubles and worries. He eclipses, He completely dwarfs anything that we might find scary.

Into our troubled minds he says, verse 25, "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? V26, Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

God is huge, and he wants us to keep that perspective so we won't be afraid. And if we're still concerned, we are exhorted, encouraged, commanded to hope in God.

Verse 28

"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.”

God is big, loving, deep, tireless and powerful. We can and should trust Him.

Verse 29

“He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;  
But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

The comfort of God is palpable. He’s big and He’s got this. This verse is meant to make us remember the way that God delivered the people from slavery in Egypt. Exodus 19:4 says, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” This is about God being the strength and the salvation we need.

I have Meniere’s disease which makes me mostly deaf in one ear and gives me bouts of dizziness. So I love this precious promise of God that when I hope in God, He will renew my strength. I’ll soar on wings like eagles, I’ll run and not grow weary, I’ll walk and not be faint. It gives me hope and strength today. I can trust Him to hold me secure. And it gives me hope and strength for eternity. Jesus came and wore my weakness so I can have his strength.

Sometimes it will feel like soaring like eagles! Awesome. Sometimes it will feel like running a marathon, where God is with us and provides for us as we run. And, sometimes walking will be our limit, but through it all, Jesus is our strength and foundation.

When we hope in Jesus, we know that our future is secure. We will soar like eagles in the love, joy and strength of Jesus for eternity in His presence.

So, when life feels fragile, uncertain, or overwhelming—remember Isaiah’s words: ‘Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.’ Our God is great, our future is secure. Behold our God! What incredible hope we have in Him!

Let’s pray.