

# Isaiah 40:10-12

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 February 2010

Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[ 0 : 00 ] Could you turn with me now to that passage that we read in Isaiah chapter 40, and particularly verses 10 and 11? See, the sovereign Lord comes with power, and His arm rules for Him.

See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him. He tends 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. In recent times, the United Nations Children's Fund reported that British children were the unhappiest in the Western world because of the lack of social cohesion in the United Kingdom.

According to the report, British children are at the bottom of an international league table examining the physical and emotional well-being of youngsters in the world's wealthiest nations.

The research found that they regard themselves as less happy and that they drink more alcohol, took more drugs, and had more underage sex than children overseas.

[ 1 : 16 ] The authors of the report said there was a well-established link between family breakdown, educational failure, poor health, and reduced life chances.

Another survey, the Good Childhood Inquiry, which tracked the lives of the country's children for more than two years, concludes that British children are anxious, fearful of bullying, stressed by schoolwork, and wrestling with worries about family relationships, poverty, peer pressure, or physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Our wealth has not bought us the kind of childhood we want for our children, said the chief executive of the Children's Society. But there is another statistic about children which has not received the same kind of publicity.

The number of children going to Sunday school halved in the last 20 years of the 20th century. And this continues a decline throughout the century, which saw attendance fall from 56% in 1905 down to the current level of 4%.

And more worrying still is the failure of politicians and those in the media to see any connection between that almost total decline in the Christian education of our children and the terrible state that the lives of so many young people are in.

[ 2 : 59 ] Jesus said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. But hindering is exactly what our society has been doing due to secularism and political correctness.

Children are not introduced to Jesus in school or at home. And of course, most parents don't see church and Sunday school as being in any way important.

What an amazing thing it is to know as a child that no matter what trouble you may have, Jesus holds you in His arms. Our children, by and large, are being deprived of that experience.

Parents, the very best thing that you can do for your children is to introduce them to Jesus. Why is that? Who is this Jesus?

Well, here in this passage we're told in verse 10 that He is the Lord. Literally this expression, the sovereign Lord, is the Lord God. One of the great titles of God in the Old Testament.

[ 4 : 13 ] What is this passage about? What's it speaking about? Well, it is the great turning point in the book of Isaiah. Chapters 1 to 39 are mainly about the troubles the people of God were facing.

Not totally, but the overall picture of those chapters is about the mess that they were in, the trouble they were facing. And from here on in the book, from chapter 40, there is a great revelation of what God is going to do, pointing forward to Jesus.

Often, this book has been called the gospel according to Isaiah. Here in verses 3 to 5, of course, we see very clearly a reference forward to John the Baptist.

This is the prophecy that was fulfilled in him, the voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. And that was the great task of John the Baptist, to be, as it were, a pointing finger to Jesus.

Remember that day when some of his disciples were with him and Jesus was passing, and John the Baptist pointed to him and he said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[ 5 : 23 ] John the Baptist is a signpost pointing to Jesus, preparing the way for him. And so, there's here an announcement of great good news in verse 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. Do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, Here is your God, because Jesus is none other than the Son of God, taking flesh, living among us. But what is God like? Verse 18 asks that very question. To whom then will you compare God? For the people of that time, was God like one of their great bombastic idols, a great golden image set up like what King Nebuchadnezzar set up, or perhaps a pathetic little wooden doll, like is also mentioned here in this passage.

If someone couldn't afford the golden idol, they made a little wooden doll. Some kind of God made in our image, according to our resources and our wealth.

No, that is not what the real living God is like. He is absolutely sovereign. Here in verse 10, See, the sovereign Lord comes with power, and His arm rules for Him.

[ 6 : 53 ] See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him. This God is utterly independent of us. In verses 13 and 14 here, Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed Him as His counselor?

Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten Him, and who taught Him the right way? And so on. In other words, He's completely and utterly independent of our resources, our ideas, and our understanding, because He is the eternal God from everlasting to everlasting.

This is the God that we speak of. This is the God who the Lord Jesus Christ is, the eternal Son of God. He is immense, as we're told in verses 15 to 17.

Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. They're considered as dust on the earth. Now, all of this is not saying, in the final analysis, that the people of this world and the nations and so on are unimportant to God, but it's saying by comparison with God, they are mere trifles.

They're tiny, all the greatest powers of this world, all the great sort of kingdoms of this world, all the great military might of this world, all the superpowers of this world, are as nothing compared to the living God.

[ 8 : 15 ] He is immeasurable. That's what the word immense means. He is sovereign over the affairs of this world, verses 22 to 24.

Therefore, He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

He brings princes to naught. You know, all the great kingdoms of this world, I thought they were going to establish great things, all the ancient kingdoms of the world, all the more recent empires of the world, they are gone or they are disappearing, because all these are temporary, and they are all under His absolute sovereign control.

He is the Creator, verses 25 to 26. To whom will you compare me, or who's my equal, says the Holy One? Lift your eyes and look to the heavens.

Who created all these? Today, we have an even greater understanding of the vastness of this universe in which we are placed than they did in ancient times. And even then, it was apparent the glories of the heavens, just as like last night, if you stood and looked up at the clear sky, the stars sparkling, showing the vastness of what God has made.

[ 9 : 34 ] We today know something even more about that, how vast it is beyond our comprehension. And yet, He is the Creator of all these.

He is infinite in power and wisdom, as we read in verse 28. 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. But who is this one? Do you not know?

Have you not heard? This is none other than the one for whom John the Baptist was preparing the way. This is Jesus. Jesus to whom John pointed and said, Behold the Lamb of God.

This is the sovereign God. This is the one who walked this earth. This is the one who came for us. This is the one who came to be the Savior of grown-ups and of children.

[10:36] This is the sovereign God. But of what relevance is all this to our children as we think today of baptism and as we think of family responsibilities?

What relevance is all this to our children? Children need to know that there is someone greater than them. There is someone greater than the playground bully.

There is someone greater than their teacher, greater than their parents, greater than any human power, to whom all are answerable. There is one who is over all.

There is one who will do absolute justice. There is one who is sovereign over all the affairs of this world. Children need to know that there is someone who holds the whole world in his hands, that there is an intelligent design to the universe, that the world is meaningful, that life has purpose.

Because for so many young people today, it has neither meaning nor purpose. And any purpose or meaning that is taught to them is merely about acquiring wealth or fame or whatever.

[11:46] And these things will never satisfy. And what relevance has all of this to parents? Parents today are afraid of being authoritative.

Parents, you have authority, not granted to you by the state or by any human power, but by the Lord God himself, who is the ultimate authority.

Fathers, your fatherhood is based on the great fatherhood of God. Mothers, your motherhood is based on that maternal love of God of which Jesus spoke when he said he wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chickens, a mother hen gathers her chickens to her to protect them.

The great love of God is not exhausted by any one of those pictures of human love or even love in the animal kingdom. But our love is to reflect God's great love.

But it is an authoritative love. Honor your father and your mother. That commandment gives to us as parents authority over our children. And that involves also discipline.

[13:07] Remember what the Lord said, My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent this rebuke because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father, the son he delights in.

That's originally in Proverbs chapter 3, but it's quoted in the New Testament also in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 6. It's speaking about the way that the Lord disciplines his children.

In other words, his is what we call nowadays tough love. It's real love. It's powerful love. It's powerful love. But it's not love that just condones or just ignores wrongdoing.

We're going to think in a minute about the Lord as our shepherd in verse 11. But remember that the shepherd too has his rod and his staff to protect us, yes, but also to guide and to discipline us.

And so we need to know the Lord Jesus as the sovereign Lord, the one who has ultimate authority overall, and the one who delegates authority to us in particular areas of life and particularly as children.

[14:16] He has got the whole world in his hands. He is the ultimate authority and we are answerable to him. But then secondly, we see here that he is the good shepherd.

In verse 11, he tends 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. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.

I remember when I was a youngster helping my father, who was a shepherd, helping him at the lambing time. And often you had to do literally just this.

In a wild day of sleep and rain and wind, you had to rescue a lamb that was dying, a lamb that was weak. And what you did was you opened your jacket and you put him inside, right beside your heart, to keep him warm.

That's the picture that's used here. And that's what the Lord Jesus does. That's his attitude. That's his compassionate love towards us. Jesus gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.

[15:28] Those of us who are parents should know that his love for our children is far greater than ours. And those of us who are children, and we're all children in one sense, we should know that great, tender shepherd's love of Jesus to us.

Those who should have known better tried to keep children away from Jesus. But Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them.

And he took them in his arms and he blessed them. Jesus doing just what this text says about him. This speaks to us of the great fatherly compassion of Jesus.

There's no one who cares for children more than Jesus. And the greatest thing you can do for your child or to do for any child is to introduce them to Jesus. And the greatest harm you can do to a child is to prevent them from knowing him.

Children need to know that unconditional love. They need to know the unconditional love of their parents. The most horrible thing that parents can say to their children is, oh, if you do that, I won't love you anymore.

[ 16 : 38 ] That's not discipline. You always love your children, no matter what they do, no matter what they have done. You may point out what they've done that's wrong, but you never stop loving them.

Children need to know that there is one who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. They need to know that the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep.

He's the good shepherd who is also the lamb. These are the two pictures that he used of Jesus.

You might think they're contradictory, but they're not, because they tell us that here is someone who understands us, because he too has been in the place of a lamb, but a very special lamb, the lamb who is a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Children need to know that same self-giving love from their parents, not in mere material things, but in time and presence.

Presence, not presence. So often, people try to perhaps compensate for their absence or their lack of love in other ways by shouting material things, but it's the real presence and the real time given to children that's so important and the kindness and the tenderness and the compassion that Jesus has shown to us that we also too must show to our children.

[ 18 : 13 ] Here we're told in this passage that youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. Our children today and our society are stumbling and falling.

Our whole society is stumbling and falling. And we, perhaps as Christians, perhaps as churches, we're growing tired and weary. We need to place our hope and our trust where it rightly belongs, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great sovereign Lord, the one who's the good shepherd.

And then, and only then will we renew our strength. Only then we will soar on wings like eagles.

We'll run and not be weary.

We'll walk and not faint. This is the Jesus that we must introduce our children to. This is the Jesus that we must introduce our society to. This is the Jesus that we must introduce ourselves to if we don't know Him.

And we're invited to do so. the Lord God and the good shepherd. Let's pray.