

## Isaiah 40:9-31 Voices of Comfort (part 2)

As I read cp. 40, I think the overwhelming truth is the greatness of God. Let's read this chapter through responsive reading. What beautiful words for us today! God is great! And none compare to Him! And with this truth before us, I want to move back to vv. 9-11. And I want to focus on 1 aspect of God's greatness: His Power. And more specifically, as we take the Lord's Supper, the power of God displayed in the Gospel of Christ. Let me read those verses. This third voice says, "**Behold your God.**" Before looking at the power of God displayed in Christ, let's consider first what it means to "behold."

The word "*behold*" is often translated as "*look*," for this is what it means, "*Look.*" "*Look and see.*" But, there is more, at least in the English when we hear the word "*behold.*" There is something about the word "behold" that brings fascination or awe or surprise about something. It is much deeper than simply "look." Isaiah is not saying to merely look at God as we do when we look out the window see the landscape as we travel in the car. "*Look at that tree.*" "*Look at that car.*" "*Look at that person walking down the street.*" Isaiah is commanding us to "behold!"

In Psalm 63:2 the writer says: "**So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.**" Ezek. 44:4 we read, "**Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple, and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD. And I fell on my face.**" We see this throughout the Bible. In the Book of Revelation, often the Apostle John says, "***I looked, and then 'behold'***" (Rev. 4:1; 6:2, 5, 8, 12; 7:9; 14:1, 14). What if we replaced the words "behold" with "look?" The verses would lose their meaning. So, Isaiah is not merely saying, "*Look at God.*" He's telling us to look with consideration, with appreciation, with fixation, with conviction, with awe. To truly behold God means that the knowledge of Him flows from the very core of who we are in understanding and application. It means to let the "weight" of God rest on our minds and our hearts. And in "BEHOLDING" there is great comfort. With this in mind, let's begin.

1. The Power of God Displayed in Christ Brings Us Comfort. When we behold his power, we find comfort. Most of Isaiah's hearers were "looking" but not "beholding" the great power of God. Look at vv. 9-10: "**Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "**Behold your God!**" Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." These words seem out of place. Judah is not powerful. Israel to the north has fallen. Babylon is rising as the major world power. In the not so distant future, sinful Judah and Jerusalem will fall. Just this week, I've been reading in Jeremiah over and over that Israel was worse than the nations around them in their idolatry and sin. Yet, this voice of power and greatness is Jerusalem itself, saying to the nations, "**Behold your God!**" He is the victor. He comes in power. His own arm, not the arms of men, rules for him. And he brings rewards and gifts to his people. Only a conquering king brings rewards to his armies and his people. But Jerusalem will fall. Then, it will be rebuilt again. Then it will fall again, etc. And then in v. 31, Isaiah says to the people to wait. He says, "**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.**" So how do we understand this prophecy of power that brings comfort to God's people?**

You know the answer. The fulfillment of this prophecy is the person and work of Christ. Now, here you might say, “*Wait a minute Jon. This was written for those of Isaiah’s day. It was meant for their comfort.*” And you would be right. Isaiah wanted them to “**Behold their God,**” who “**comes with might**” and “**brings rewards.**” He wanted them to know that God would not forsake them nor leave them, but instead, protect them and, “**tend them like a shepherd,**” who “**gathers his lambs in his arms,**” “**carries them in his bosom,**” and “**gently leads them**” (v. 11).

Those with faith knew God would ultimately protect and save his people. But, this prophecy looks way beyond a battle or a war with Assyria or Babylon, and way beyond the exiles coming back to Jerusalem. This prophecy looks to Christ. In Hebrews 11 the writer tells us of all the great men and women of faith, and all the things they did by faith. And then at the end of the chapter, in vv. 39-40 we read: “**And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.**” This is why we see the words “*Wait*” in 40:31. You see, they were waiting for the Messiah. And their salvation through the means of faith, is just like ours. But, we look back. We have the fulfillment.

Heb. 12:22-24 is key. It says, “**But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**”

Today, we “behold” our God, who has come in power, though this power is veiled to the world. And to us who are being saved, we find comfort; v. 2 “**our warfare has ended, our iniquity is pardoned.**” And this we especially remember in the Lord’s Supper. “**This is my body broken for you.**” You see, NO ONE but God almighty could come in such power. For there was NO ONE who was worthy to do what He did. Look back at v. 10. “**His arm rules for him.**” This is a theme of Isaiah. Look at 59:16 for a moment. “**He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,**” declares the LORD.” There is nothing more powerful than the person and work of Christ. “*Behold your God.*” “*This is my body broken for you.*” This is the power of Jesus to save sinners! And this we remember as we “Behold our God.” And those who truly “behold” find comfort!

And we must not stop with simply his death and what it accomplished. He rose from the dead! He conquered death! “**Death is swallowed up in victory.**” It has no victory for the Christian. We proclaim: “**O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?**” “**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory**

**through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Cor. 15:54-56). And we can’t stop with the resurrection. For, the resurrection is just a foretaste of what is to come. This prophecy from Isaiah speaks of “rewards” and a “recompense” for his people (v. 10b). This fulfilment is yet to come (though there are rewards now). There is still a final resurrection from the dead. And this will happen at the return of Christ. In Matt. 24:29-31 we read: **“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”** And we can’t stop there either. 2 Pet. 3:13: says **“But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”** Where do you think Peter got the promise? What about Is. 65:17: **“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.”**

Now, our command today is to behold. We must not merely “look;” we must “behold.” Consider the one-dollar bill. How often have you pulled one of these out of your pocket book or wallet and given it to someone for payment? A million times? But, can you tell me, which way Washington’s face is facing. Can you tell me whose signatures are on the bill? Can you tell me how many Latin phrases are on the back? Probably not. Often, we look, but we fail to “behold.” We take Christ and his power for granted, etc. Maybe we are so busy with so much “looking” in life that we forget to “behold.” Of course we do! And this is sin. However, Jesus says, *“This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*

What we need is to behold Christ, not simply to look at Him. Consider the woman at the well. Throughout the conversation, she only wants to “look.” But, Christ reveals himself to her so that she “beholds.” Him. Really, this the special revelation of God, by the Spirit, applying Christ to our dead souls, bringing us life. The reason most young people leave the church when they go to college is because they have never beheld Christ in the Gospel. The reason many so called Christians continue in disobedience in both their heart and their actions is because they have never beheld Christ! The reason our witness is so weak is because either, we have never beheld him or He is so small. Consider John 1:29: **“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** And, v. 36: **“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”**

Let me end with some applications.

Application: Those who truly behold the greatness of God will “wait.” (See vv. 30-31)

Application: Those who truly behold Him know they are cared for. (see v. 11) He gathers, He carries, He leads. Jesus says, *“I am the good shepherd.”*

Application: Those who behold Christ are not fearful (v. 9)

Application: Sin: Maybe we consider Him as “small” (v. 10 “might,” vv. 21-23); We compare Him to other things, to man, to idols (vv. 19 ff.; 25 ff.); We think God does not see us (v. 27 ff.); We

Application: God’s desire is to bring comfort, ultimately to do good to you. And He will literally move heaven and earth to do it! Do you believe this? Heb. 11:16 says: “**And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**” Calvin says, “*no one will ever reverence God but who is confident that God is favorable toward him.*” Do you believe this? Do you believe this in spite of your sin? Do you believe this in spite of the evils that surround you? Do you believe this in the midst of ALL life’s trials and temptations? Of course you do . . . if you look unto Christ. For there we find All the promises of God! We await the new heavens and the new earth where this will happen! But for now, we look unto Christ who has won the war over sin and death. Our sins are forgiven! God is our God. We are his people.

Application: How do we become like Christ? We behold him. Look at 2 Cor. 3:18: “**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.**” Application: Look until you behold!