

The bridge which God has built from Scripture into our lives is actually much bigger than we might think. Recall roads washed out and homes destroyed in Vermont's various flood events. Sometimes, the very bridge which people relied upon for travel proved to be too small and weak for the deluge of floodwaters. In the same way, how we should thank God from the depths of our hearts when we recognize how the connections between our lives and the pages of Scripture are indestructible. No matter how the waters of temptation, physical sickness and societal evils may rise in this violent world, the Word of God – whether in the Gospels or Paul's letters, Old Testament or New – proves sufficient to withstand the flood of human ills in this world.

In particular, it is my prayer that we will be greatly fortified as we see that God's shepherding care spans the ages, always a safe bridge for our passage through this world. We will look both at John 10 and Isaiah 40 to see how God's shepherding care is a bulwark that stands strong even in the worst days for God's people.

### **Mon/Tues: Read John 10:14-28; Isaiah 40:1-8 and Mark 1:1-8 The Good Shepherd finding His Own**

The Good Shepherd is God Himself. He is the great Shepherd Redeemer who leads His people "all their lives long and redeems them from all evil," (Genesis 48:15-16). So, when Christ claims in John 10 to be the Good Shepherd and to be in possession of His own flock given to Him by God, He is claiming absolute equality with Jehovah, as the Jews correctly recognize in John 10:33. Only the Lord Himself is able to shepherd us in this evil world.

Further proof that the Lord who shepherds His people throughout the Old Testament is the Son of God in the New is found when we turn to Isaiah 40:3 and see this verse fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist and then Jesus Christ.

We know Isaiah is speaking about the Lord Jesus because the forerunner (John the Baptist) is sent to blaze His trail in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3). Amazingly, the Lord whose way John is sent to prepare is none other than the Christ. Mark begins by declaring that the Gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that Jesus' arrival was prepared for by the ministry of John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-8). But what exactly is the testimony of John to Christ? Mark 1:4-8 makes clear that *it is to Christ's unique greatness* that he bears witness. Compared to Jesus, the Lord, John is not worthy to perform the most servile of duties.

Both John's message in Isaiah 40:3 and Isaiah's message beginning in Isaiah 40:5 is that this Lord, who will be revealed 700 years later, is uniquely great. How unique is the Lord (who we know now to be our Savior Jesus, co-equal in power and glory with the Father and the Spirit)? Consider Isaiah's words in Isaiah 40:

**He is the Creator** (Isaiah 40:12 & 40:25-26) into whose mighty hand can fit all the glories of the created world, whether stars, oceans, mountains or the dust of the earth.

**He is the Conqueror** (Isaiah 40:15-17 & 40:21-24) who accounts the nations as a mere drop in the bucket and views the inhabitants of the earth as mere grasshoppers.

Isaiah wrote chapter 40 a couple of hundred years before the exile to Babylon happened. But his words were meant to give hope to those who thought God had rejected them. Their way was not hidden to the Lord! He would not forget them (Isaiah 40:27)! Stop to consider what hope Isaiah's words about the Lord as mighty creator and defender of His people would give to those in exile.

**Meditate and Pray:** Sing about God's power to remember us in dark days, no matter how far into sin we may have wandered. Our names are written on the palms of His hands. He cannot forget us.

The work which His goodness began,  
The arm of His strength will complete;  
His promise is Yea and Amen,  
And never was forfeited yet.  
Things future, nor things that are now,  
Not all things below or above,  
Can make Him His purpose forego,  
Or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands  
Eternity will not erase;  
Imprest on His heart, it remains  
In marks of indelible grace.  
Yes! I to the end shall endure,  
As sure as the earnest is giv'n;  
More happy, but not more secure,  
When all earthly ties have been riv'n.

*A Debtor to Mercy Alone vs 2&3* Toplady

### Weds/Thurs: Read Isaiah 40:12-27

### Doubt Lifted

The experience of exile produced deep despair in God's people. This 4/9/13 article from *Tabletalk Magazine* well sums up the huge challenge which faced Isaiah as he sought to comfort Israel:

As much as it is obvious to us that the Lord has the power to redeem His children, it was certainly not self-evident to the exiles that God could save them. They were small in number and lived among those who seemed to have stronger gods—after all, these nations had conquered both Israel and Judah...

Today, let us put ourselves in the shoes of those to whom Isaiah 40 was first addressed—the exiles of Israel and Judah. This was a future generation for Isaiah, who wrote nearly two hundred years earlier. He knew this would be a demoralized people consisting mainly of the descendants of the people who had been captured by Assyria and Babylon. It would be hard for them to imagine that they would ever go home, as they had grown up outside the Holy Land. They would find it difficult to believe their covenant Lord could rescue them, for He had not prevented Assyria or Babylon from capturing their forefathers ... This people had two main questions for the Lord: was He willing to save? and was He able to save?

Isaiah answers the question as to the Lord's power to save with a resounding declaration of monotheism. God is not one deity who exists alongside many others; rather, He is the only God, the Creator of the universe. None other has held the oceans in his hands or weighed the mountains (v. 12). He consulted no one in creating the world, and before Him the nations are nothing (vv. 13–15). The Lord is no mere idol of wood and gold, and earth's inhabitants are "like grasshoppers" in His eyes (vv. 16–23). Consequently, God's people should never doubt His power to redeem or believe that He grows weary. They are, instead, to believe His Word, trust His power, and wait on Him to save. Though the Lord seems to tarry, He renews the strength of His children as they wait for His mighty arm to be revealed (vv. 24–31).

**Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Isaiah 40:9-11****Omnipotent Shepherd**

Though our breath is taken away as we in awe behold the Lord's greatness as Creator and Defender of His people in Isaiah 40, let's not overlook the tender, pastoral picture of the Lord carrying His lambs in Isaiah 40:11. After all, Isaiah 40 is the beginning of the second section of Isaiah – commonly known as the “Book of Comfort.”

Hear the Puritan John Owen on the Lord's pastoral care in Isaiah 40:11 and note how he describes Christ as determined to go slow enough with His flock as to carry even the most diseased and sin-sick among us (Vol 2 Owen's *Works*, page 142):

Yea, we have both (of Christ's attributes towards us in our sin) here together – tender compassionateness and assistance.

The whole frame wherein He is here described is a frame of the greatest tenderness, compassion, condescension that can be imagined.

His people are set forth under many infirmities; some are lambs, some great with young, some very tender, some burdened with temptations – nothing in any of them at all strong or beautiful. To them Christ is a shepherd that feeds His own sheep and drives them out to pleasant pasture; if He sees a poor, weak lamb, He doth not thrust him on, but takes him into His bosom, where He both eases and refreshes him: He leads him gently and tenderly. As did Jacob them that were burdened with young, so doth our dear Lord Jesus with His flock, in the several ways and paths wherein He leads them.

When He sees a poor soul, weak, tender, halting, ready to sink and perish, He takes him into His arms, by some gracious promise administered to him, carries him, bears him up when he is not able to go one step forward.

Hence is His great quarrel with those false shepherds, Ezek. 34:4, “Woe be to you shepherds! The diseased have you not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost.”

This is that which our careful, tender husbandman Jesus would have done.

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank God that His uniqueness lies not just in Power and Creation. He is unique in Compassion and Care. With Him there is no compassion fatigue; he continues in gentleness and restoration for each in his flock. He is omnipotent in his Shepherding of each one.

**Further Reflection:** Many other Scriptures are used to the same effect, to stress the Godhead's omnipotent compassion for wandering, erring, sin-sick sheep. Look up the following references and underline the reference to God's unique, all sufficient care.

Exodus 15:26; 1 Samuel 24:4-6; Isaiah 43:22-25; Isaiah 57:17-19; Hosea 14:1-8; Zechariah 1:11-12; John 17:12-15; Hebrews 4:16 and 2:18.