

# Living Expectantly: Expecting Tomorrow

Thomas Robinson, December 27, 2015

## Isaiah 40:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.  
<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received  
from THE LORD'S (Yahweh's) hand  
double for all her sins.  
<sup>3</sup> A voice cries:  
"In the wilderness prepare  
the way of THE LORD (Yahweh);  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.  
<sup>4</sup> 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.  
<sup>5</sup> And the glory of THE LORD (Yahweh)  
shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of THE LORD (Yahweh)  
has spoken."

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
**All flesh is grass,**  
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.  
<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades  
when the breath of THE LORD (Yahweh) blows on it;  
surely the people are grass.  
<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but **the word of our God will stand forever.**  
<sup>9</sup> 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!"**  
<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD (Yahweh) comes with might,  
and **his arm** rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.  
<sup>11</sup> He will **tend his flock like a shepherd;**  
he will gather the lambs in **his arm;**  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and **gently lead** those that are with young.

## Isaiah 52:7-10

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains | are the feet of him who brings good news, | who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness..., | who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" | <sup>8</sup> The voice of your watchmen ... | together they sing for joy; | for eye to eye they see | the return of THE LORD (Yahweh) to Zion. | <sup>9</sup> Break forth together into singing ..., | for THE LORD (Yahweh) has comforted his people; ... | <sup>10</sup> THE LORD (Yahweh) has bared his holy arm | before all the nations, | and all the ends of the earth | shall see the salvation of our God.

## Isaiah 53:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Who has believed what he has heard from us? | And to whom has the arm of THE LORD (Yahweh) been revealed? | <sup>2</sup> For he grew up before him like a young plant, | and like a root out of dry ground; | he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, | and no beauty that we should desire him. | <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men; | a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; | and as one from whom men hide their faces | he was despised, and we esteemed him not. | <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs | and carried our sorrows; | yet we esteemed him stricken, | smitten by God, and afflicted. | <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; | he was crushed for our iniquities; | upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, | and with his wounds we are healed.

## Philippians 3:13-14

<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Jesus.

## Expecting the Unexpected Future

We're looking into a new year that, as always, is full of unknowns. Politics, war, revolution, science, medicine, culture, economy, creativity, racial tensions, justice, decline, renewal.

A basic challenge of life is dealing with time. Our faith is very present-oriented. We are called to love and serve here and now. *"I was hungry and you fed me..."* (Mt 25:35) *"Do not be anxious about tomorrow..."* (Mt 6:34). I want to live this moment as a child of God, a follower of Jesus, and trust God for the future. Leave it in his capable hands.

But being able to do that depends on trusting who God is. Often we face situations that challenge that trust. Why is this happening? Broken family, betrayal, my own failure, sickness, death, prayer that gets no response from God, struggles with temptation.

The Advent texts from Isaiah 7, 9, & 11 that we've been reflecting on this year are all set in times of deep uncertainty and brokenness in the faith of God's people. Things were not going well and would get worse, Isaiah announced. But even at their worst, there could and would be times of grace and blessing. And through it all God was present working both short-term and long-term with his people for their good, by his creative power. *"To us a child is born..."* (Is 9:6); *"A shoot from the stump of Jesse..."* (Is 11:1). The king might be corrupt, sold out to Assyria, but God works toward an unfolding future for us.

## God's Surprising Grace Unfolding

Isaiah 40 comes generations down the line, nearly 200 yrs later, 540's b.c. Destruction of Jerusalem, exile, all have happened. Judgment, transformation. Broken hopes, new hope. A new Isaiah says God is with us right now, working with us into the unfolding future.

The intervention he promises shapes the hope and the direction with which we work today. Encouragement for Israel (1-2); God's glory revealed for all nations (3-5). Yes we are vulnerable & passing, but we participate in God's eternal work (6-8). God's mighty arm gathers us in his loving embrace (9-11). God has not given us up. His future begins now.

The understanding of the God of the future who shapes our lives and actions now is basic for the last half of Isaiah and lays the groundwork for Jesus' ministry and our faith. Isaiah knows the language of God's power and glory and how that was abused for national and personal glory in Israel's history. The image of God's mighty arm to strike down the enemy, was powerful. Here, "Behold your God!" reveals a tender shepherd.

In Isaiah 52-53, he celebrates good news of God revealing his Kingdom (as Jesus did). He bares his arm, shows his salvation, returns to Zion in glory. But the character of that might and glory, the arm of Yahweh, is seen in the mysterious role of the suffering servant who bears our griefs and heals with his wounds. What an astonishing God! An astonishing story! It was the promise of a grace that would shape all of God's future. It ultimately transforms the concept of glory, love, and service, embodied in Jesus.

## Finding Myself in the Work of God

Jesus knew that that God is the true God to whom the whole world belongs. He wooed his disciples toward him, invaded their imagination with stories and deeds, showed them God's reality in death and resurrection. Paul and others were captured by that reality.

We, like Paul, know our limitations of time and strength. But the call of God we hear in Jesus is real. This year challenges us to follow that call now into our unfolding future.