

REACH|24

Behold Your God

Isaiah 40:1-11

Mark Vroegop

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 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 hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." 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. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. 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. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young (Isa. 40:1-11).

One of my favorite things about our church is the value that we place on "The Call to Go!" Here's how we define it:

All of us are called to be Spirit-empowered catalysts for life change in our areas of personal influence. We approach ministry with a passionate resolve to equip the saints to engage our culture, addressing the most pressing problems and reaching the neediest people in our city and the world. While the body of Christ is made up of a variety of gifts, the calling is the same: Go!

This Core Value is the "why" behind things like:

- \$1.2 million allocated in our annual budget for Global Outreach
- An annual Christmas offering that has exceeded \$1million since 2013—last year with \$1.7M to help Heart for Lebanon
- Our decades-long holistic investment in the Brookside neighborhood
- This year's surplus giving that surpassed \$600,000
- Connection events like Truck or Treat and the Christmas Concert
- The launch of Luma, Family Advocacy, and a growing relationship with College Park Elementary—trying to determine how to minister to our neighbors

It's also why we take two Sundays each year to talk about global missions and our passion to reach unreached people around the world. That includes:

- 43 missionaries serving in 15 countries
- 6 strategic partners on 3 continents
- 32 Barnabas Teams
- 16 Vision Trips with 201 participants this year

These are important Sundays for us to reconnect with our heart for missions and especially with reaching unreached peoples. Our theme for this year's REACH is Isaiah 45:22, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

This is one of the many things for which I'm deeply grateful for our church. I remember my first Vision Trip to India with Nate in 2008. Hayden and Joseph were twelve years old, and it profoundly shaped how I think about global missions. When you see firsthand the spread of the gospel into an area that hasn't received gospel witness in generations, it's life-changing.

So, I hope to help all of us lift our eyes to the nations today as we consider 1) the what and 2) the why of missions.

The What

In short, the "what" of missions is the hopeful proclamation of the gospel. It is the life-changing message to the world that there is a way to be right with God through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The book of Isaiah points to this hopeful proclamation. It's not the complete picture, but it lays the foundation.

1. Hope

This first section introduces what God is going to do for his people because he loves them. What you are going to see here is the connection between God's love for his people and who he is as God.

The first two verses of chapter 40 are filled with compassion:

- "Comfort, comfort my people . . ."
- "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem . . ."

Why is Isaiah writing this way? The first thirty-nine chapters called Israel and Judah to turn from trusting in their idols and living disobediently as the pressure from Assyria grew. Both kingdoms failed. God used Assyria to bring divine discipline upon Israel in 722 BC. The southern kingdom fell to Babylon in 586 BC.

Now, in the sixth century, God comes to his people with the promise of comfort. Here is the announcement that God's purposes are being fulfilled. In verses 3-5 we find the promise of glorious transformation. Luke 3 cites this text in reference to the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. It

refers to the spiritual restoration connected to the reign of Christ. Valleys are lifted up. Mountains are made low. Everything hard and broken and challenging will be changed. And the glory of God will be on full display. In other words, the world being the way it should be when the glory of God covers the earth like the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).

That's a day yet to come, but we get glimpses of it now. John described in his gospel as seeing Jesus "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). But we also get a taste of it when the church gathers together. It's as close to heaven as we get right now!

In verses 6-11 we find another promise: That the Word of our God will stand forever (40:8). While everything else is unstable, fleeting, temporary, and frail, God's Word is not. In fact, the Word has power to change people's lives.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Rom. 10:12-15).

2. Proclamation

Isaiah gives instruction for the people to proclaim the message of good news: "go up to a high mountain" (9a). They're instructed a second time to proclaim this message: "lift up your voice with strength" (9b). What's more, they are to boldly and fearlessly herald this message: "fear not." It might be tempting to cower back from a message of hope when life seems dark, but the people of God are told to proclaim it.

What are they to say? "Behold your God!" (9c). This means that God is here! God is coming to us. He's here to help and rescue us. This is amazing news to a people who were hopeless. Commentator Gary Smith says, "God will not just watch over his people in some general way by watching over the course of nature; he will personally be present in power, accomplishing his will among his people."¹

Notice the description that follows in verses 10-11:

Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young (Isa. 40:10-11).

¹ Gary Smith, [Isaiah 40-66](#), vol. 15B, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 99.

Notice the image of a strong and mighty shepherd. He will be strong and kind; powerful and caring. It's an incredible picture and a compelling message, isn't it?

And all of this was fulfilled in the person of Jesus. According to Matthew 1:23, Jesus is Immanuel (God with us). The apostle John described it this way: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). And John offered this promise: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God . . ." (John 1:12). Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

This is the gospel message, hinted at in Isaiah, fully revealed in Jesus. It is the message that must be proclaimed so that men and women can be right with God.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16-17).

This is the message that makes a difference between judgment and forgiveness, between damnation and eternal life, between fear and peace. And that is the message that needs to be taken to the ends of the earth.

The Why

Once we have the message and mission clear, then we need to consider again "the why behind the what." In other words, why should there be a sense of urgency with this? I'm sure that it's not surprising to you that the gospel is good news. But why is it urgent?

1. Command

First and foremost, we have to remember that reaching the world was/is the command of Jesus. It sounded like this:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

This is the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. It's not to stay on the mountain and set up a safe and comfortable life based upon knowing where you are going when you die. The Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations and ethnic groups.

2. Discipleship

The second reason relates to discipleship or how we think about what it means to follow Jesus. The end goal is described for us in Revelation 7:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev.7:9-10).

That's the goal, and how do we think about this when we live in the wealthiest nation ever known to mankind with more communication possibilities and mobility than ever? Paul couldn't have imagined the kind of technology and opportunity that we have. There are far more ways to reach people today. People are coming to us from all over the world as students and refugees. And there are companies who will pay you to work for them in a nation where no missionary can live. Discipleship can't just mean growth. It also means going and multiplying.

That's why we dedicate these two Sundays to this topic. It's easy in "gray-zone" moments to only focus on survival or personal spiritual health because life is so confusing and hard.

3. Need

Ralph Winter coined the term "unreached" in 1974, and it was a term that describes people who don't have access to the gospel. In other words, they won't know a Christian because Christians aren't there. And they won't hear the gospel message because there's no one to tell them. They live in a Jesus dessert. As David Platt reminded us several years ago, your co-worker and your neighbor are not unreached. They may be unsaved, but they're not unreached. Why? Because you are there. They have access to you.

There are 3.2 billion people in the world who will never hear the gospel unless something radical is done to reach them. Many of them live in the 10/40 window in some of the most difficult and closed countries. But that number represents one third of the people on the planet. The trouble is that we don't feel the weight and priority of this. It's easy to have it be out of sight, out of mind.

We have to fight against the gravitational pull of allowing this mission and need to be forgotten because of neglect or eclipsed because of cultural comfort.

4. Challenge

We dedicate these Sundays to this theme because it's that important. And I'd like to make it personal with a challenge to every one of us. Do something to connect your life (the who?) to the what and why of missions. What could you do?

Pray

You could make praying for the nations and unreached people groups a greater priority. You could use our annual missionary prayer guide and renew your efforts in praying for our strategic partners and those serving overseas. You could join a Barnabas Team and pray for a specific person or family. You could participate in First Friday, a monthly prayer time for the unreached.

Give

Did you know that the book of Romans is a support letter? Paul was letting the church know that he was coming to see them because he needed their support to continue on to Spain. Money makes a difference. That's why we work hard to prioritize global outreach in our budget. It's why our Christmas offerings are so important. They help to move the needle. Just read the article in REACH magazine about what we've been able to do in Bihar, India, where 130 million people live in a state about the size of Indiana. Our state population is 6 million. In Bihar, there are 459 unreached people groups, and one group, the Yadav, represents 22 million people. Money moves the needle.

Go

We have fourteen Vision Trips planned for 2025. They're all wonderful and helpful. But consider going on one that takes you to a country in one of the red zones. Others of you could consider how to minister to the nations that are here in Indianapolis, at your workplace or in your neighborhood. Some of you can move your job short-term or long-term to an area of the world where you can just be a Christian while in a red zone. Some of you might consider if the Lord is redirecting your path into full-time overseas work.

My challenge is simply for you to find your role in this season of life.

Pray. Give. Go. Which step do you need to take to reach the three billion people who've never heard and won't hear the gospel?

And finally, what needs to change about your life in order to be part of the mission to reach the world?

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

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