

Please read this and pray for your church family. Join us, if you can, in reading this with your family and praying at 10:15 on Sunday, March 22.

### He Will Carry You

Dear Church family,

As we have been asked not to gather this Sunday morning, March 22, 2020, I wanted to provide for you some encouragement from the Word of God as we continue to endure these strange, new days. This morning, we'll look at Isaiah 46. As we prepare to look at this text, I want to fill you in a bit on the context of what's happening before this chapter in the book. It can be said that the theme of all of Isaiah is God, himself. Particularly, God's glory is on display in history, time, and space through His mighty works, His plans, His wisdom, and in all things. He's the center of all things.

With this in mind, the book of Isaiah begins with an Israel that has forgotten God, the center of all things. So much of their religious practice is vain and hollow. They serve God in the form of their worship, but not in their hearts. As the threat from the Assyrians and Babylonians bears down on the people of Israel, God chastises them for pursuing worldly wealth, prosperity, and security, rather than pursuing Him. They are confident in their military and political alliances, but they have forgotten to trust in the Lord. God warns them of His impending judgement upon them through most of chapters 1-39 if they do not repent of their sin and follow Him. The book shifts in chapter 40. In the midst of this turmoil, judgment, and uncertainty, God offers a glimpse of hope. The Lord's glory shall be revealed and His grace poured out onto all those who trust in Him. He shall send His Servant who will rescue the people from their sin and deliver them from worthless idols. It's in this setting that we find chapter 46, which offers us a unique look at the character of God and the worthlessness of idolatry.

Isaiah 46:1-13 says:

- 1) Bel bows down; Nebo stoops;  
their idols are on beasts and livestock;  
these things you carry are borne  
as burdens on weary beasts.
- 2) They stoop; they bow down together;  
they cannot save the burden,  
but themselves go into captivity.
- 3) 'Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
who have been borne by me from before your birth,  
carried from the womb;
- 4) even to your old age I am he,

and to gray hairs I will carry you.  
I have made, and I will bear;  
I will carry and will save.

5) To whom will you liken me and make me equal,  
and compare me, that we may be alike?

6) Those who lavish gold from the purse,  
and weigh out silver in the scales,  
hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god;  
then they fall down and worship!

7) They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it,  
they set it in its place, and it stands there;  
it cannot move from its place.

If one cries to it, it does not answer  
or save him from his trouble.

8) Remember this and stand firm,  
recall it to mind, you transgressors,

9) remember the former things of old;  
for I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me,

10) declaring the end from the beginning  
and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,

and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

11) calling a bird of prey from the east,  
the man of my counsel from a far country.

I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;  
I have purposed, and I will do it.

12) Listen to me, you stubborn of heart,  
you who are far from righteousness:

13) I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off,  
and my salvation will not delay;

I will put salvation in Zion,  
for Israel my glory.'

Notice verses 1 and 2 as they describe the helplessness of the gods of Babylon to care for themselves under the threat of the Persians. The image captured in this verse is that when Babylon was under attack and fell to Cyrus the king of Persia, the gods of Babylon, Bel and Nebo, were utterly powerless to save themselves. These "gods" are bowed and stooped, or humbled, who used to be bowed down to and worshipped. Their idols, representing them, had to be carried to safety by cattle

and the people who worshipped them as the city fell. They are a burden and cannot help their burdened people as they head into captivity.

In contrast to this, God reminds Israel of who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do in verses 3 and 4. God has upheld Israel, His people from their birth. He carried them through all of their days. Even in their old age, He sustains them. God carries them. Notice the difference. God made His people and He sustains them, carries them, and rescues them. The gods of Babylon are the exact opposite. They created metal images, Bel and Nebo, and when endangered Bel and Nebo must be sustained, carried, and rescued by those who look to them for security. The God of Israel is like no other “god” and He is the one who secures His people, even in their current plight.

God speaks through the prophet in verses 5 through 7 and makes this contrast clear. There is no one like God. None can be compared to Him. He stands alone in power, glory, and sovereignty. The peoples of the world create a god, an idol, out of metal and once it is created, it is at their mercy. It needs their help. They carry it. It is a burden on the people. Even though they serve it, it cannot serve them. It is utterly powerless to save them in their distress and, as in the previous verses, it must be rescued by them!

Here, in verses 8 through 13, God chastises Israel and reminds them again of who He is. He calls them to remember their history and His mighty deeds. In verse 9, He says definitively, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.” How can this be, proven? How does God remind His people of His uniqueness, and that He stands alone and distinct from all things? He tells them in 10 of his omniscience and in verse 11 of His omnipotence. He tells them from the beginning how things will end. From ancient times, he declares truly what will come to pass. Just one example of this, among many, from Scripture is Genesis 15:13-21. God promises to Abraham innumerable offspring, even though Abraham is very old and childless. He also speaks of Israel going down into Egypt during the time of Joseph, their enslavement, and then the Exodus. He also tells of how they will possess the land of the Canaanites. Those are three specific instances in one passage where God declares the end before the beginning. God stands alone in glory, power, and authority.

Not only does He know all things, but God accomplishes all that He determines to do. Again, in verse 10, He will do all that He pleases and His purposes will come to pass. Verse 11, He tells them of the coming of Cyrus, king of Persia, not as something outside of His control, but something that He will bring about as a part of His sovereign plan. This leads to a rebuke of Israel in verse 12. He chastises them and calls them to listen to Him. Consider the folly of turning from listening and trusting an all-knowing, all-powerful, loving God, to any lesser thing for wisdom, comfort, or security. Because of their lack of faith and trust, He calls them those who are “far from my righteousness.”

Even in this rebuke, however, there is a brilliant ray of hope. Notice the grace in verse 13. Though they are far from His righteousness, He will bring His righteousness near to them. Their idols cannot carry them or make them righteous. Their idols can’t even get them close to righteousness; however, the God of Israel carries His people to righteousness. He will bring righteousness to them. It’s far off from the idolater. It is near to those who trust in Him. It will be delayed, and hindered, and never come to the idolater. It will not, cannot be delayed from those who hope in God.

This chapter ends with God declaring that He will grant salvation to Zion and that His glory will be revealed to His people. As this section of Isaiah continues on, Isaiah prophesies of a future where,

though Israel is in terrible circumstances much of their own making, God will restore and redeem them. Specifically, God will send his Servant who will suffer in the place of the people. Though the people have sinned, the Servant will obey God. Though they will be spared the full cup of God's wrath, the Servant will drink it to its dregs. He will be crushed and they will be healed. He will receive their punishment and they will receive His peace. He will bear their curse and they will receive His blessing. The Suffering Servant of God, Jesus Christ, will reveal the glory of God. He will grant them God's salvation according to the plan and purposes of the Father. He alone is God and there is no other. God will reveal His glory and salvation. He will accomplish His purpose. He will carry us.

As we consider this chapter, let us think of how the message of God to Israel more than two millennia ago is relevant and applicable to us today.

- 1) In this tumultuous age, God is not surprised or caught of guard by the circumstances of our life. God is not reacting to the coronavirus. God is sovereign over it and every other aspect of our world. Let us not demean God by robbing Him of His knowledge, His power, or His wisdom in our day.
- 2) Let us heed the warning to not put our hope or trust in lesser gods. Our government authorities are woefully deficient due to a lack of omniscience and omnipotence. Instead of ultimately relying on them, let us pray for them to act wisely and for our good in these days. Let us put our trust in the incomparable God of the Bible.
- 3) In the same thought, let us not esteem ourselves too greatly in these days. We, in humility, must confess that we are also not omniscient. Let us pursue godly wisdom and guard our mouths and thoughts from repeating misinformation and folly.
- 4) Church family, let us in all matters, great or small, look to God to help us through these hard, confusing, and troubling times. Do not allow your fears or concerns to lead you to despair or some lesser god, but allow your fears and concerns to drive you in humility to seek God in prayer. He is not far. His salvation will not be delayed. We don't have to carry Him; He will carry us.
- 5) Remember that true salvation is our greatest need. Though there are many reasonable things that put us in need in the age of COVID-19, this virus is a parable of a much greater, much deadlier peril. The only way to be cured of sin and saved from the righteous judgement of God is to trust in Jesus Christ alone. In Him, though we may experience suffering and hardship, and even though we will all eventually succumb to physical death, we will have eternal life. His salvation cannot be delayed or thwarted. He will carry us all the days of this life and eternally in the next if we trust in Him.
- 6) Finally, let us not forget in this season of life to care for those in our body, and also that we are called to be witnesses of Jesus, today. Let us care for one another. Make some phone calls and check in with each other. Remember that this crisis is creating a cornucopia of needs. Please care for your neighbors as best you can. Your love to them in this hard season might be a means of them hearing about and believing in Jesus.

I have been praying for you all. I hope that these practical exhortations will prompt you most of all to pray. Please let me know if there is a specific way we can help you or pray for you in this time. God bless you, and may He alone receive all glory, honor, and praise from us, in Jesus' name. Amen.