
Make God's Path Straight (Isaiah 40:1-11)
12/10/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



“They aren’t Christian.” That’s a hard accusation to hear about your fellow believers. But sad to say it can be quite accurate.

How easily our faithful church attendance can lead us to delusions of self-righteousness. How easily our clean worship space makes us think that we are clean in our hearts. How easily we mouth the words: “I am by nature sinful,” and we forget that this is one of the truest statements we’ve made all week. It doesn’t take much for us to show that sin still has a powerful hold on our actions and habits.

But this is why we are here: not because we are healthy, but because we are sick and Jesus is our doctor; not because we are strong, but because we are weak and Jesus alone can carry us along; not because we are so wise, but because we are fools and Jesus alone can teach us.

Today, the God who forgives us and so teaches us to forgive, today he speaks to us. He brings us comfort that we do not deserve. He calls us to remove all obstacles from his path into our hearts. He reminds us that we are nothing and he everything. And he gives us a message to share with the world. Today, we hear God’s message: Make God’s Path Straight.

Our own church has a history with that accusation: “They aren’t Christians.” Many of you remember that time of division, that time of rumors, that time when many people didn’t see our church as being very Christian. Many people left our church because of it. Many people don’t come to our church as frequently as they once did because they don’t want to go to church with a bunch of hypocrites.

That’s hard to hear. But why do we come to church? Do we come here to show the world how good we are? Do we come here because this group of people gives us a warm fuzzy feeling?

No. We come here to hear the Words of the Almighty God. We come here because we truly are sinful by nature and that sinful nature keeps rearing it’s ugly head in our lives day after day, second after second. We come here because our doctor, our strength, and our teacher has this to say to us.

This is what our God says to sinners like us: Isaiah 40:1–2 (NIV) Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

God gives us comfort that we do not deserve. He says: Your hard service of struggling to obey God's laws and yet failing again and again, your striving to be perfect as God demands and yet complete inability to do so, all of that is over. Your sin has been paid for, paid in full by the payment that Jesus made. There is no more payment for sin that you need to make, because Jesus has paid for you in full. Your sins, your sinful nature, your every sinful thought, word, and deed are forgiven.

This is why we are here: to hear our doctor, our strength, and our teacher. So God calls us to remove all obstacles in his way to our hearts. Make God's Path Straight!

Isaiah 40:3–5 (NIV) ³A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Has your pride lifted you higher than you should be? Has it put mountains in God's path? Are you so filled up on your own ego that you fail to see your need for Jesus while all along you can point out all the other people who need Jesus? Then hear God's law and make those mountains low. You are the sinner. Your sins deserved death and hell. You need to repent. You need Jesus.

Has your guilt sunk you down to the depths? Has it put a valley in God's path? Are you so ashamed of your sins and wrongs that you fear not even God can forgive, not even God can fix your situation? Then hear God's gospel and raise up those valleys. Your sin has been paid for in full. God has promised you salvation in his Word. He has guaranteed a clean conscience to you through baptism. He has given you the very body and blood of Jesus so that you might know that your sins, all of them, are forgiven. God has forgiven you. God has opened heaven for you. God has made you his child. God has given you Jesus.

These words from our God are trustworthy. We are nothing; he is everything. Isaiah 40:6–8 (NIV) ⁶ A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

Do not doubt his Word. What reason is there to doubt God? The heights of human reason, the mountains of our strivings, the strength of our doubts, the valleys of our sin, all we are and do is nothing but grass, Isaiah tells us. It will fade away. It’s here today and gone tomorrow. But God’s Word? God’s Word will never fade. It will never prove wrong. It will never go away.

Have you wronged someone? That wrong will fade away, but God’s promise that you are forgiven? That remains forever. God’s command that you repent and try to right your wrong, that you seek forgiveness from the person you hurt and do your best to repair what you have broken? That remains forever.

Have you been wronged? That wrong will fade away, but God’s promise that he will work all things for your eternal good and for the good of his Church? God’s promise that he will avenge? That remains forever. God’s command that you forgive as you have so graciously been forgiven? God’s command that you continue to treat others as you would like to be treated? God’s command that you love your enemies? That remains forever.

This message is for us and for the world around us. We have something to share! Isaiah 40:9–11 (NIV) ⁹ You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

This is why we come to church, not because we are healthy, strong, and wise, but because we are sick, weak, and foolish. Because in God’s Word, we hear Jesus

our doctor, we are carried by Jesus our strength, and we learn from Jesus our teacher.

We do not come to church because the people here are so good, but because they have received God's gracious promise just like we have. We gather with this church because we hear God's voice together. We gather with this church because our God is here! He speaks to us in the true teachings proclaimed and confessed here! He leads us to repent of all of our sins! He guides us back when our sins lead us astray! He rules with a mighty hand even in the midst of our weakness!

We come to church because we have a message to share with this world. We come to this church because all of us know people who are not here and who need to be here listening to God's Word just as much as we need to be here. We all have loved ones who are trapped by the same lies of sin that butt into our lives, people we care about who are trapped in their own pride or lost in their own guilt, people who are searching for something meaningful in their lives, people who need to hear the comfort that our God has given us.

They need the same good news that we so desperately need. They need the mountains of their pride lowered by God's law. They need to see their sin just like we do. They need the valleys of their guilt raised by God's message. They need to see their Savior Jesus just like we do.

God brings us comfort that we do not deserve. God calls us to remove the obstacles in our hearts and to make his path straight. God teaches us that we are nothing but he is everything. God gives us a message to share with the world. Your God comes. Make his path straight. Amen.