

# High and Exalted (9): Like a Drop in the Bucket

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(Isaiah 40)

## I. Introduction

- A. John ends his gospel by admitting that he left out a thing or two from story
1. He sets out to write a true account of the life and teaching of Jesus
    - a. If he wrote everything important Jesus said or did, world could hold book
    - b. Everything Jesus said or did was important, but it's OK to leave stuff out
  2. We're leaving a lot of stuff out of our study of Isaiah, "*High and Exalted*"
    - a. It has 66 dense chapters; it'd take 66 weeks to cover (*check my math*)
    - b. Well, were not taking 66 weeks, so a survey of the book will have to do
- B. Survey takes a dramatic turn in **Isaiah 40**, but let's review the structure of book
1. Book's center is the historical section on Sennacherib's invasion (**Isa 36-39**)
    - a. We spent two weeks here on Hezekiah's illness and Babylonian alliance
    - b. We saw those as run-up to the actual invasion (*though recorded after*)
  2. First section (**1-35**) is mostly negative in nature; prophetic "*turn-or-burn*"
    - a. Isaiah introduces the prophetic theme of "*Day of the Lord*" in **Isaiah 2**
      - 1) God's judgement is aimed squarely at Judah (**Read: Isaiah 3:1-4, 8-9**)
      - 2) Isaiah also lights-up some pagan nations, but it's mostly about Judah
    - b. Why is Isaiah so negative? God told him that was his job (**Isa 6:11-12**)
      - 1) Bus driver in NYC cussing out taxi driver, "*Hey, it's part of my job*"
      - 2) Warning Judah about a bleak future was part of Isaiah's job
  3. There have been glimpses in this section of a brighter and happier future
    - a. "*The Lord himself will give you a sign; a virgin will conceive...*" (**7:14**)
    - b. But Isaiah will not earn his "Messianic Prophet" moniker until later
- C. The next section of the book (**Isa 40-55**) looks into a more distant future
1. Many scholars are convinced this is a different book and author (**II Isaiah**)
    - a. Isaiah's ministry ends with Hezekiah and Assyrian invasion (701 BC)
    - b. Talmud says that Isaiah was saw in half by Manasseh, Hezekiah's son
    - c. Christian tradition is the same, connecting Isaiah to **Hebrews 11:37**
  2. **Point:** Last section of the book is then likely written in Isaiah final years
    - a. God gives him visions of what will happen in a more distant future
    - b. It is here that Isaiah, the Messianic prophet, will earn his nickname

## II. A Drop in the Bucket

- A. We see the immediate change as Isaiah grows more hopeful... or maybe less
1. Isaiah not only saw the need for Judah to repent; he also saw they would not
    - a. Her knows destruction would come, so now he speaks to the destroyed
    - b. He's writing to Jews in captivity, which wouldn't happen for 100 years
    - c. The tone changes from strident to gentile, from hell-fire to forgiveness
  2. Isaiah is no one-trick pony; he can preach grace/hope and well as destruction
    - a. We tend to stress one and ignore the other; in the past we ignored grace
      - 1) The church I grew up in thought you lost salvation by any slip-up
      - 2) Play a piano? Get baptism wrong? Have a sip of wine? You're lost
      - 3) We were the only ones going to heaven (*most of us wouldn't make it*)
    - b. Now (praise God) we discovered grace; we don't have to get it all right
      - 1) But the pendulum swings, and we now see sin as kind of old fashion
      - 2) Sin once annoyed God; now He's more sophisticated and less picky
  3. Isaiah reminds us that salvation is no big deal unless you're really lost!
    - a. Israel has spent 70 long years in captivity; they were really and truly lost
    - b. That's why Isaiah's announcement here is such wonderful and good news
- B. There are four things that Isaiah says in his opening that are important
1. **First**, despite their "*hard service*," God calls them "*my people*" (**40:1-2a**)
    - a. When a child is punished, they need to be assured they're still loved
    - b. Babylonian captivity challenged Judah's view of themselves and God
      - 1) "*If God loved us, he wouldn't let us suffer like this.*" That is not true
      - 2) Dad would say, "*This will hurt me more than you.*" Wasn't true either
    - c. Hebrew writer tells us God's discipline is an expression of His love
    - d. When you go through hard times, don't doubt God's love— look for it
  2. **Second**, Judah's sin really was forgiven, and they were pardoned (**40:2b**)
    - a. Judah had received a double-portion of God's judgement and justice
    - b. But she also will receive a double-portion of forgiveness (**Isa 61:7**)
      - 1) When you are forgiven by others, you are often tentative around them
      - 2) They SAID they forgive, but you wonder and walk on egg shells a bit
    - c. Not God! Our sins are removed as far as east is from west (**Psa 103:12**)
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3. **Third**, there was not only forgiveness, there was reconciliation (**Isa 40:3-5**)
    - a. Forgiveness and total reconciliation don't always go together, right?
      - 1) We'd forgive a treasurer that stole money... and get a new treasurer
      - 2) If I cheated on Lynn, she'd forgive me... if I ever got out of hospital
      - 3) Forgiveness doesn't always mean reconciliation... except with God
        - a) God is coming down the highway through wilderness back to Zion
        - b) It is here that Isaiah uses a familiar word, "good news" (**Isa 40:9**)
    - b. You can't really repent before God without feeling real and true guilt
      - 1) Our apologies often turn into justification, "Sorry I said that, but..."
        - a) True repentance ends with an "O God" not with a "but" (**Psa 51:10**)
        - b) Paul says that it is godly sorrow that brings about true repentance
      - 2) We're not "technically" guilty of sin; repentance can't be pro forma
      - 3) But when we have truly repented from our sin, we must let go of guilt
    - c. God doesn't just forgive us, but He restores us as His son or daughter
  4. **Fourth**, God's promise to forgive and reconcile can be trusted (**40:6-8**)
    - a. We can trust God's promise of forgiveness because it is God's promise
      - 1) It's OK not to feel forgiven... that is emotion and emotion is fickle
      - 2) It's OK to doubt the sincerity of repentance... we can go thru motions
        - a) Repentance requires two things– deep sorrow and intent to do better
        - b) But it also requires a faith and trust that God can and does forgive
    - b. It's one thing to doubt my repentance; it's another to doubt God's word
      - 1) If God says He "*delights to show mercy,*" then we'd better believe
      - 2) The grass withers and we are grass, but God's promise is forever
- C. Isaiah ends by reminding us of the power, wisdom and glory of God (**40:12-14**)
1. The imagery here is striking– He holds the water in the hollow of His hand
    - a. How much water can your hand hold? *God can hold all the oceans*
    - b. How broad is your hand? *God's hand stretches across the whole sky*
    - c. How many people taught you what you know? *God had no teacher*
  2. All of the nations are just a drop in a bucket in the eyes of God (**Isa 40:15**)
    - a. In case you don't get the imagery, he repeats the point plainly (**40:17**)
    - b. Do you really believe that God is that big, that powerful, that mighty?
    - c. For a God like that, I assure you that your sins are a drop in the bucket

### III. Conclusion

- A. G.H. Charnley gives us an important warning in story *The Skylark's Bargain*
1. A young skylark discovered a man who would give him worms for feathers.
    - a. Worms were his favorite food, but they required a lot of work
    - b. It's the early bird that gets the worm (*but second mouse gets the cheese*)
    - c. Skylarks spend all day hunting worms and are only occasionally succeed
  2. The young skylark thought he had found the secret to a better life
    - a. The man offered two worms for one feather; he immediately accepted
    - b. There'd be no more hunting, no more working, no more getting up early
      - 1) Skylarks father warned that what mattered was wings, not worms  
*Skylarks should be the happiest of all birds. See our strong wings! They lift us high in the air, away from danger, and they bring us nearer to God."*
      - 2) But the young bird was too busy trading to get more and more worms
    - c. Autumn came, and it was time to fly south for the winter with his family
      - 1) Young skylark couldn't go; he had to stay and face the harsh winter
      - 2) Slowly, day by day, he had traded the power of wings for worms.
- B. We can be like the skylark, looking down when we should be looking up
1. Spending our time and attention entranced by the things of the world
    - a. Maybe not by things that are evil in themselves, but things that distract
    - b. Things that cause us to forget that we are called to fly, to focus on God
    - c. And if we are not careful, we find ourselves trading wings for worms
  2. Isaiah reminds us of the majesty of the God we serve (**Isa 40:21-22, 25-26**)
    - a. All the world is nothing but a drop in the bucket before this God
    - b. But you really need to see Isaiah's point in bring all of this up, OK?
    - c. It is NOT so we will feel small and insignificant before God (we are)
      - 1) It is so we can know that He is powerful enough to lift us up
      - 2) The God who raised up the starry host is the One who raises us
      - 3) He raises us, not on the wings of a skylark, but of an eagle (**40:29-31**)
  3. That is the promise of God for those who believe, and that is our invitation
    - a. If God can create the cosmos out of nothing, then he can lift you up too
    - b. God can forgive and redeem you, but you must be willing to trust Him
    - c. Don't wait another day to begin to wait upon the Lord!
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