

God's Passion for His Glory: The *Motive* for Mission Isaiah 40-49

Mission? Yes! But ...

God's answer ... Isaiah 40-55

1. "Comfort, comfort my people" Isaiah 40-49

- who we are

- who God is

- addressing our fears

2. God's plan for the nations

- "Be silent you nations!" Isaiah 41

- "Here is my Servant!" Isaiah 42

- "You are my witnesses!" Isaiah 43

3. Witnessing God's Passion for His Glory

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- ii. He redeems ... for his names' sake Isaiah 43.16-44.5
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Mission? Yes! No 'Buts'

Isaiah 42:8; 43:1-2,10-11, 49:6

Mission? Yes! But ...

- This Summer Encounter, I'm praying that as God speaks to us about mission from Isaiah, He will press our 'reset' button.
- Being at this conference, I'm assuming that all of us are committed to Christian mission (or at least interested in the idea).
 - The need is as great as it ever has been. This week I heard that the number of unreached people has increased over the last ten years (so it's time to put our foot on the accelerator - not take it off) -
- **but** there are **issues**, aren't there, which fuel our fears:
 - Global instability, Islamic terrorism
 - secular opposition that all of us feel, (as if belief in God is a defect or a crime);
 - And then there's the struggles that each of us face, when God can seem distant and silent.
- If any of that rings true for you, it was even more true for the first hearers of Isaiah 40-55 - the Jews who were exiled in Babylon in the 6th century BC.
- But God speaks to our need. And he takes our fears and our small views of him and he presses the 'reset' button. He gives us a vision of him and of his plans which put things in perspective and which speak to our fears and ... **comfort** us.
- God begins with my favourite chapter in the bible - Isaiah 40 - which functions like an **overture** to what follows.

- So, to help us hear God's voice - we could have read it, but to slow us down to take it in, I'm going to ask **Mark** to come up now, and sing it to us. Please follow along, but as you listen, open yourself to God. Let God remind you of who he is.

Comfort, Comfort my people

[Mark - Isaiah 40]

- God speaks a message of comfort.
- The first 39 chapters of Isaiah were a message of **judgment** to the Jews before their exile in 586 BC.
- But now - in chapters 40-55 - God brings a new message to his people suffering in exile: A message of **comfort**:
- The LORD is still God, He hasn't forgotten them, but the dominant theme that keeps emerging as the chapters unfold, is the **LORD's passion for his glory**.
- This is extremely relevant, because it becomes his motive for mission:
 - God doesn't just want his Jewish people to know him, he wants the nations to know him! He is passionate that this happen. And the energy of that passion pulses right through these chapters, and takes us to Christ - which we'll get to tomorrow.
- But bracketing the whole of tonight's section (from chapter 40-49) are God's words of ... **comfort**:
 - 'Comfort, comfort my people,
- God reminds all his people (whether they be exiles in the 6th century BC, or exiles today away from our heavenly home) that we are his people. That we belong to him. And we are forgiven:

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for

- (tomorrow we'll see how that sin's paid for - but for now) - there's comfort in knowing who **WE are** (his people). And in knowing **who God is**:
 - completely Sovereign (sitting enthroned above the earth),
 - wise beyond comprehension (because who has ever instructed God?),
 - incomparably powerful (measuring out the waters in the hollow of his hand),
 - the eternal God (who reduces the rulers of this world to nothing) - the one true God,
- who is **coming!**
 - And when he come his **glory** will be **revealed**.
 - And he'll tend his flock like a shepherd. He will come and bring his people back to him.
 - And all the people of the world will see it.
 - And this requires us to get ready -
 - And if we're weary, everyone who waits on him will renew their strength; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.

What an breathtaking way to begin his word of comfort!

You'd think He wouldn't need to say anything else. And yet he does. For the next 9 chapters, God

- keeps reiterating his uniqueness,
- keeps laying out his plans,
- keeps sharing his passion for his glory - Why? -
- Because he wants to convince us, to persuade us - Why?

Because we have a part to play, but we have real **fears**.

- (You stick your head up as a Christian, and it's amazing the disdain and level of vitriol which hits us. What if we went overseas? Last year, it's estimated that 90 000 Christians were killed for their faith).

- Fear can be paralyzing. And yet, God has a part for us to play.

God's plan for the nations

- ➔ And so He tells us his plans for the nations. **God is not going to let people keep opposing him indefinitely.**

At the end of time, he'll **judge** people who remain against him.

- In Isaiah 41, God tells the islands (the far flung nations most ignorant of Him) to be silent! and to come and meet him at the place of judgment'
- and then, he describes a judge from the east who will conquer the nations, which Cyrus the Persian (otherwise known as Darius) did, invading the Greek islands in 490BC,
- Cyrus being a forerunner of Christ, who will judge the nations of the world.
- God is not going to let people keep opposing him. He will **judge them**. But - that's not all he's going to do. Mercifully, his greater plan, his prior plan for the nations is to **restore the nations back to him**.
- And it all hinges on a new figure. Someone God calls his '**servant**'.
Chapter 42:
'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, [says God]
my chosen one in whom I delight
I will put my Spirit on him,
- (fast forward to Jesus' baptism, and he is the one on whom God puts his Spirit, He is the one whom God says out loud he delights in).
- In Isaiah 42, God says that his Servant will bring justice (or righteousness) to the nations!':

[and there'll be a determination in the servant:]
he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.

Here's God's greater plan for the nations:

In his law the island [nations] will put their hope."

- This is bigger than his plans for judgment. Bigger than our own plans for our own lives. His plan is BIG because He is BIG: the God of **ALL the nations** -

who gives breath to its people,
and life to those who walk on it:

[Muslim people. Buddhist people. Hindu people. Secular atheists] - they all belong to him, and his plan encompasses them all. He won't let them keep opposing him. That's why God says of the Servant —]

"I, the LORD, ... will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
to open eyes that are blind, (those that are blind to God)
to free captives from prison (of spiritual darkness)
to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

This is God's revealed plan. It is what He will do. It's huge.

And what's driving it? What's God's ... **MOTIVE?**

- Please see this. Next verse. Isaiah 42 verse 8.

"I am the LORD; that is my name!
I will not give my glory to another
or my praise to idols.

Listen to His *determination*:

"I am not no one!] I am the LORD .. (and)

**I will not give my glory to another
or my praise to idols.**

- God is passionate about this.
Our CMS workers all serve in countries where people - in their worship - have swapped God for idols (be it chocolate here, or Catholic saints in Chile, or Buddhist statues in Asia).

Last year I visited one of our gospel workers, who could no longer visit the Buddhist temple in his city, because he'd become so distressed that God was being dishonoured in favour of a statue.
- God says He will not let this happen forever. He - more than anyone - is jealous for his glory.
- We hear that and think that God's being big-headed -
- which would be a fair point if He was just one of us. But what God wants is no different to what any of us want: to be treated with respect for who we are. We hate it when we're looked down on, or ignored. We want to say, 'Treat me with respect!'. It's the same with God. Except that he is not just one of us. He is God. The Almighty. And the respect He deserves is the heartfelt worship of every person he's made.
- And **No one** is more passionately committed to making sure that He gets this than God himself. And rightly so! Amen?
- This - ultimately - is the motive that drives mission - for God, AND for us!

For **we have a part to play**. Look with me at chapter 43 verse 10: God says to us:

"You are my **witnesses**," declares the LORD,

"[you], and my servant whom I have chosen,

- Three times we're told in chapter 43 that we are witnesses. Who's he talking to? It's we who know God.
- In the flow of Isaiah, 'witnessing' doesn't first-of-all mean speaking. It means 'knowing':

"You are my **witnesses**," ...

that you may know and believe me

and understand that I am he.

[that] Before me no god was formed,

nor will there be one after me.

[that] I, even I, am the LORD,

and apart from me there is no savior.

[that] I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—

I, and not some foreign god among you.

You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God.

- 'Witnessing' (first and foremost) means seeing and being convinced that the LORD alone is truly God, and is to be glorified.
- Later on, 'witnessing' will mean testifying to this truth. It's the role Jesus - the Servant - had; it's the role he gave to his apostles; a role that's then passed on to us. In God's plan, we have a role as his witnesses.
- But that 'witnessing' (speaking witnessing) relies on the the first witness-ing (knowing witnessing). Obviously. (You can't speak of what you don't know!). But it's more than that.
- Speaking-witnessing that the LORD is God - requires courage. Which requires us to really know.
 - Those of us who were in church in the late 80's will remember the song 'Fear not' which isn't sung anymore because back then it was done to death.
 - The song came from Isaiah 43 verse 1 -
 - 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
 - I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you walk through the waters, I will be with you, and through the flames’.

- The context of that song is the fear we experience as God’s people in a hostile world, and the job God then gives us to be his witnesses.
- And he tells us: Don’t need to be afraid, because He - the God who is truly God - is with us.

Witnessing God’s Power and Glory

- ➔ But to help us know this and believe it deeply, in chapters 43-49, the LORD holds before us **ten reasons why He alone is God who is worthy to be glorified**.
- He wants us to **witness** (to see) these reasons; to become convinced by them that he alone is God and worthy of glory, so that we can **witness to others** about him!
- He’s witnessing to us about his Power and Glory (which he wants us to witness of him!), so we can Witness to others.

Ten reasons. Strap yourselves in. Here we go.

The **first** reason as to why He alone is God worthy to be glorified is that **No one can deliver from his hand**. Isaiah 43 verse 13:

‘... from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?’

- When the LORD decides to smash a power, no one is strong enough to save it. God decides to smash Babylon (in response for their overly heavy handed treatment of Israel), and no one could undo it.

Second: the LORD alone is God and worthy to be glorified because the reason he **redeems and forgives and pours out his Spirit is for his own glory**.

1. In chapter 43, verse 21, the goal of God's redemption is NOT first and foremost the people he redeems, but that - 'they may proclaim MY PRAISE.' *
 2. IN chapter 43, Verse 25 - He says the goal of him 'blotting out their transgressions and remembering their sins no more', is 'for my own sake'.
 3. Chapter 44 verse 3 - God promises he will pour out his Spirit on Israel's future children - the goal (verse 5) is that his name would be on his people.
- In other words, God is no violator of the first commandment. He is Passionate that He be worshipped.

The **third reason** why the LORD is uniquely God and worthy of Glory is because **only He has never been made.**

- Idols are made. Chapter 44 verse 9: people take half of a bit of wood and burn it to keep warm, and take the other half of it to make a god or idol and to bow down to it and worship it and to pray to it and say, 'Save me, you are my god') - but Verse 19:

'No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, 'Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals ... Shall I make a detestable thing from what it left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?'

- Idiocy. But because God has never been made, it's not idiocy to worship him. It's entirely right.
4. The **fourth** reason why the LORD alone is God and worthy of glory is that **he alone sovereignly shapes history for his glory.**

- Chapter 44 verse 24 - the LORD **alone** began history when He stretched out the heavens and spread out the earth, and -
- verse 25 - he **alone** determines and shapes history by foiling the predictions of the false prophets and fortune tellers and making them come to nothing, and then -
- verse 26 - He makes his own words come true. So when he says of Jerusalem,

'It shall be inhabited (again),'
of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,'
and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,'

God does it.

- And he's very specific in giving the details of what will happen ahead of time. In verse 28 - he names the pagan king who would conquer Babylon and let the Israelites return:

28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd
and will accomplish all that I please;
he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"
and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." ' '

- and he announces this even though, Jerusalem hadn't even yet been conquered, and even though Cyrus wouldn't be born for another 120 years.
- This is a God in complete control of world history.
 - In chapter 45, he secures Cyrus's rise to power by going before him, summoning and exalting Cyrus to be the most powerful man in the ancient world, even though Cyrus wouldn't know him.
- We speak of people 'making history' by doing something impressive as a participant.

- But the LORD makes history not by just participating, but by planning it, foretelling it, and then making it happen. And why would God tell us all this about Cyrus? Because - chapter 45 verse 5:

I am the LORD, and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God.

6 so that from the rising of the sun
to the place of its setting

men may know there is none besides me.

- In other words, the LORD wants people the world over to marvel that at his uniqueness because of his sovereignty over history.

I am the LORD, and there is no other.

I bring prosperity and create disaster;

I, the LORD, do all these things.

- No other god of the nations determines history like this. Which makes him uniquely God.
 - What about Allah? (In the Koran, Allah is Eternal. Sovereign. The Creator). What about him?
5. The **fifth** reason as to why the LORD is uniquely God and worthy of glory is because the LORD is the only one who **sovereignly reveals his salvation plans ahead of time before he carries them out.**
- Allah in the Koran doesn't give any announcement about any plan to say his people. He is not a Redeemer. And he announces no plans ahead of time to redeem anyone at all.
 - But the LORD of Israel is not only a Redeemer, he announces it ahead of time that he's going to do so, so that when it happens, people will know that he alone is God.

- Just a few verses to show this: Chapter 45 verse 13 - here's God's announcement ahead of time:

13 I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness:
 He will rebuild my city
 and set my exiles free,

- and the inescapable conclusion of that in verse 14 is that the people of Egypt and Cush (which is Ethiopia) will 'bow down before the redeemed exiles,

and plead with you, saying,
 'Surely God is with you, and there is no other;
 there is no other god.'"

- God's prophecy is not doctored. (He doesn't go back after the events have happened and re-write the prophetic message. He puts in on the public record 150 years before it happened. You can go to the British



museum today,

- and see the 'Cyrus cylinder', dated 160 years after Isaiah prophesied, which describes how a Persian King named Cyrus overthrew the last Babylonian King, became the most powerful man in the world, and sent the Israelites back to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

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- See that, and we're meant to agree with the LORD when he says in verse 18:

18 "I am the LORD,
 and there is no other.

19 I have not spoken in secret,

from somewhere in a land of darkness;
I have not said to Jacob's descendants,
'Seek me in vain.'

- And this sets God apart from any other God.
- In verse 21 God challenges all the people from other religions to come together and to do what only He can do -

21 Declare what is to be, present it ...
Who foretold this long ago,
who declared it from the distant past?
Was it not I, the LORD?

- The LORD is emphatic. No other God announces his plans of salvation ahead of time and delivers. Not Allah. Not anyone. Which means that none of the so-called 'gods' are God. :
- Verse 21:

There is no God apart from me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is none but me.

6. The **sixth** assurance the LORD gives as to why he alone is worthy of worship is that he swears He will make it happen.

- Isaiah 45 verse 22:

"Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.

23 By myself I have sworn,
my mouth has uttered in all integrity
a word that will not be revoked:

Before me every knee will bow;
by me every tongue will swear.

24 They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone

are righteousness and strength.”

All who have raged against him
will come to him and be put to shame.

25 But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel
will be found righteous and will exult.

7. The **seventh** reason why the LORD alone is God and worthy of glory is the application of the first six: that **only He sustains his people through his revelation of his plans in history.**

- In chapter 46 verse 4, the LORD says that he'll sustain the exiles, which he ties to his uniqueness as God, and him revealing his plans in advance. Verse 9:

9 I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me.

10 I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.

- And then Verse 11 ...

11 What I have said, that will I bring about;
what I have planned, that will I do.

- So it's by the advance telling of his plans that the LORD carries and sustains his people until they are saved. He gives people sure hope. No other God does this.

8. **Number eight**, the LORD alone is God and worthy of Glory because **he will bring down others who make god-like boasts.**

- In chapter 47, the LORD speaks to Israel's captors - the Babylonians, twice boast, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' (verses 8 and 10).

- That's OK to say if you're legitimately God. But it's not OK if you're not God. But they say it.

- And so the LORD prophesies the day when disaster will come upon her, when no amount of magic or astrology or incantations or spells are going to help her. And he's speaking about when Cyrus the Persian would defeat her.
 - And because God's announced it beforehand, on that day, there would be no shadow of a doubt about who really is God.
 - And of course, this is exactly how it will be on the final day of judgment, when God pays back with blazing fire those who have troubled his people.
9. **Number 9** - the LORD alone is God and worthy of glory because he **disciplines his people unashamedly for his praise and his glory**

Paraphrasing chapter 48, the LORD says:

- "The reason why I keep on making plans and telling them to you ahead of time and then making them happen is because
- you are so rebellious and thick, that by saying these things ahead of time, you won't be able to say your idols made them happen.
- They can't speak. I can. I do. And what I say happens. And I am passionate for my sake that you get this, and give me the glory I deserve."

Isaiah 48:11

'For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.'

- So God is passionate for his glory. Jealous that we give it to him.
- If he said this and didn't deserve it, he'd be out of line. But for all the reasons mentioned he DOES deserve it.

10. Last reason - reason 10 - The LORD alone is God and worthy of glory because **he sends his Servant for His worldwide fame as Saviour.**

Isaiah 49, verse 6 - the LORD says to his Servant:

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

And the reason for all this - last verse in Isaiah 49 - that the day will come when

‘all mankind will know that I, the Lord,
am your Saviour, Your Redeemer,
the mighty one of Jacob’

Mission? Yes! No ‘Buts’

- ➔ So in these chapters, the LORD has given us assurance after assurance that he alone is God and worthy of worship.
- In the New Testament, this focus becomes even more sharp. Jesus Christ, as God the Son, is uniquely God. And therefore worthy of glory.
- We’re out of time, but I’d have loved to go through each of the ten points and show how they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and how we see God’s passion with sharper focus: that God be glorified through his Son by all the nations:

that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Isn't that what you long for?
- Then we have a Godly motive for mission. Because God is passionate about proclaiming his Son to the nations, so that He may be glorified!
- This is worth supporting. This is worth getting involved in. This is worth giving our lives to.

- We have our fears. But God reminds us of who he is, God convinces us about Him - Why?,

- so that when we think, 'Mission', when we think 'Witness', there are no 'Buts' in our minds, only a shared passion for his Glory.
- Last week I heard from our unnamed gospel workers in South East Asia. They said,
 - 'What stands out for us in Isaiah 40-55 is God's compassion in wanting all people everywhere to know **who he really is** - his glory. That's what makes us feel privileged serving in South East Asia, though it is not easy.'

- One CMS worker wrote me an email in which she said,

'With His magnificent glory before our eyes, how can we let anything get in the way of proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord in every corner of the world? Jesus Christ IS Lord. There IS no other. We must carry this message to the ends of the earth. There are lots of human reasons that we can put up against this – our fear of uncertainty, our unease with the risk, our obligations to family, or own sense of inadequacy. But if we would put the glory of God in the centre of our vision, we might get to see God's word reach even the hardest of hearts in the darkest corners of the world.

Let's finish by reading together these verses from Isaiah:

PPT:

Is. 42:8

**"I am the LORD; that is my name!
I will not give my glory to another
or my praise to idols.**

Is. 43:1

**"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine."**

Is. 43:10-11

**"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD,
"and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.
I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no saviour."**

Isa 45.22

**"Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.**