# Looking Beyond Lockdown

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[0:00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Isaiah and chapter 40. Isaiah chapter 40, and if we just read again, at verse 28, near the end of the chapter.

Isaiah 40 at verse 28, have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength. Even youth shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.
They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. At the beginning of last week, we entered phase one of looking beyond lockdown, because as our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said, we need to start looking beyond lockdown. We need to start looking beyond lockdown. And in order to start looking beyond lockdown, our Scottish Government has set out a four-stage route map of their plans to restart society, while also suppressing the coronavirus. And this four-stage plan, we're told at stage one, which we've just entered, it allows us to meet up with friends and family outside, and also at a safe distance. And as I'm sure you know, some tradesmen have also returned to work, and recycling centres have also reopened. And then, and if and when we get there, we'll enter stage two, where we'll be allowed to meet indoors, and we'll see that transport will increase and some shops will start reopening. And then stage three, we'll see schools and shops and barbers and hairdressers and restaurants and hotels. They'll all start reopening. And then stage four of looking beyond lockdown will be when all these restrictions are lifted.
Of course, there's no fixed time scale, because progressing onto each stage, it all depends upon keeping the R rate, the reproduction rate. It all depends upon that being below one. But you know, as a denomination, there's this COVID-19 working group, which has been closely monitoring all the developments of the government guidelines. And with the Scottish government's four stage route map unveiled this past week, we can now expect our churches to begin reopening in stages three and four. Of course, when the churches do reopen, there will be lots of precautionary measures in place in order to ensure cleanliness and also social distancing. But as we know, stages three and four could be months away yet. And so until then, we have to be patient, don't we? We have to be patient and just wait upon the
Lord. And you know, in many ways, that's what Isaiah was encouraging the church in the Old Testament to do as they started looking beyond lockdown. The church in the Old Testament was wondering what the future would hold for them. And so Isaiah, he encourages them to patiently wait upon the Lord. And Isaiah encouraged them by bringing them comfort in the wilderness, comfort from the word and comfort on the wings. Isaiah brought comfort and he brought comfort in the wilderness, comfort from the word and comfort on the wings. And there are our headings this morning, comfort in the wilderness, comfort from the word and comfort on the wings. So first of all, comfort in the wilderness, comfort in the wilderness. We'll look at verse 25.
[4:16] It says to whom then will you compare me that I should be like him, says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these. He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. Now the book of Isaiah is one of the most well known and much loved books in the Old Testament, especially because of Isaiah's vivid prophecy about the cross of Jesus Christ, where Isaiah foretold the horrors of Calvary in Isaiah 53, where the suffering servant would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. But you know, Isaiah wasn't just a foreteller who foretold what would happen in the future. Isaiah was also a foreteller. Isaiah was a preacher of the gospel. He was a herald of the truth.

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He was a minister of God's word. And Isaiah's ministry, it was a long ministry. It was a ministry spanning the reigns of four kings, King Josiah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah's ministry was a long ministry, and it was also a Christ centered ministry. Because for an Old Testament prophet, Isaiah proclaimed so much about Jesus Christ that you'd be certain that he was actually writing his book at the time of Jesus. But in fact, 800 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah wrote about the birth of Jesus, the anointing of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, the rejection of Jesus, the sufferings of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the burial of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, and even the kingship of Jesus. Isaiah wrote so much about Jesus in this book that it has often been described as the fifth gospel. But you know, even though Isaiah's ministry was a long ministry and a Christ centered ministry,

Isaiah's ministry was a difficult ministry. And what made Isaiah's ministry difficult was the sin and rebellion of the people. Because when Isaiah was called to be the Lord's prophet, he wasn't called to just please and pander to the Lord's people. No, Isaiah was called to preach and to proclaim to the Lord's people. Isaiah was called to faithfully foretell and foreth tell the Lord's solemn message of judgment. And the thing was, judgment was coming. Because as a nation, Israel worshiped the Lord with their lips, but their heart was far from them.

They had this outward appearance of religion, but they didn't love the Lord in their heart. Israel as a nation, they paid lip service to the Lord while running off to serve other idols. And you know, it should always be a reminder to us that we can easily fall into the same trap of worshiping the Lord with our lips while our heart is far from them.

But you know, Isaiah's warning of judgment, it wasn't something new, because the nation of Israel had been warned many times by many prophets. In fact, the first 39 chapters of this book, they are all taken up with the solemn message that judgment is coming. Judgment is coming. You need to repent because judgment is coming. And judgment was going to come in the form of lockdown. Because through his prophets, the Lord promised that the nation of Israel would be invaded by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and that the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed, that the temple would be left in ruins, and that the Israelites would be taken into captivity and live in lockdown in Babylon. The Lord promised the nation of Israel that he would bring judgment and that they would live for 70 years living in lockdown in Babylon. And it was also that the Lord would teach his people to love him.

[8:44] It was to teach the Israelites to love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. And you know, as a nation, the Lord has brought us into lockdown, hopefully not for 70 years. But the question that comes to my mind is, has this lockdown affected us in any way? Has it affected us spiritually? Has this lockdown taught us that nothing is safe or secure in life apart from Jesus Christ? Has this lockdown challenged us about our love for the Lord, that we're to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength? Has this lockdown caused us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?

My friend, has this lockdown reminded us as a congregation and as a community and beyond, has it reminded us that we need to turn from our sin and turn to our Savior in repentance?

Has this lockdown taught us anything? And you know, if it hasn't, then it should. It really should have taught us that we need to turn away from ourselves and we need to turn back to the Lord. Now, that's what Isaiah's message was. His message was to turn away from self and turn to the Savior. You know, as we said, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, they're taken up with this solemn message of judgment and lockdown in Babylon. But you know, what's remarkable about this chapter is that Isaiah's solemn message, it was given around 800 BC. But you know, it wouldn't be for another 200 years until 586 BC, that judgment and lockdown in Babylon would actually come. So Isaiah, he's speaking to a future generation.

And even the part of lockdown, it wouldn't be for a further 70 years after living in lockdown in Babylon, that the message of looking beyond lockdown would be relevant to the nation of Israel. And so Isaiah 40, in Isaiah 40, Isaiah's prophesying to this future generation, and he's encouraging them to be looking beyond lockdown. In fact, you could actually say there's a change of tone in the book as it moves from the first 39 chapters then into chapter 40.

Because the first 39 chapters, they're all about judgment. But then when you come to chapter 40, there's this great promise of comfort. That's why the chapter begins with the words, 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

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sins. Even though the Lord was going to bring judgment through lockdown, the Lord sought to comfort his people in the wilderness, so that they would be looking beyond lockdown. And you know, in many ways, the Lord was graciously giving this sinful and rebellious nation, he was giving them their own route map out of lockdown.
[12:28] And it was a route map that would include a 900 mile wilderness journey from Babylon all the way back to the promised land of Israel. You know, my friend, the Lord wanted his people to find comfort in the wilderness by looking beyond lockdown. And the Lord gave comfort in the wilderness, he gave it there in verse 25, where he says to whom then will you like compare me that I should be like him says the Holy One, lift up your eyes on high and see who created these, he who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

I don't you just love that. The Lord says, lift up your eyes on high and see, lift up your eyes on high and look beyond the lockdown, look beyond your circumstances, look beyond your situation, look beyond this wilderness journey, lift your eyes on high says and see.
And what the Lord wanted his people to see was that despite their failure to faithfully love and obey him, and despite their failure to obey his laws, despite their judgment and their lockdown in Babylon, despite their sin and their rebellion, the Lord says that he knows them. He knows his people, and he calls them by name, and not one of them will be missing because he will bring them all home to the promised land. And as you know, as I know what the Lord went on to assure his people in chapter 43, when he said, fear not, fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine. My friend, you know, the Lord is assuring us this morning that even though we may be struggling, struggling with sin or sickness or stress or suffering or sorrow, even though we may be struggling, the Lord says we need to lift our eyes on high and look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen says Paul, they are temporal, but the things that are unseen, they are eternal. My friend, there's comfort in the wilderness when we're looking beyond lockdown. There's comfort in the wilderness because there's comfort from the word. There's comfort in the wilderness, because there's comfort from the word. And that's what we see. Secondly, comfort from the word. Look at verse 27. It says, why do you say, Oh, Jacob and speak, Oh, Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God. Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. By looking beyond lockdown, Isaiah sought to bring comfort in the wilderness by bringing comfort from the word. Especially because as we read in verse 27, the Israelites, they were constantly complaining. They were complaining against the Lord, saying, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God. The Israelites were constantly complaining that the Lord was being unfair and unjust and unfaithful to His covenant. In fact, the Israelites thought that they were getting a raw deal from the Lord. And they even questioned the Lord. They said, how can the Lord do this to us? How can the Lord bring judgment upon us? How can He send us into godless Babylon? How can He make us live in lockdown? Does He not know who we are? We are the people of God. We're the people of Israel. We're the Lord's covenant people and the Lord's overlooking us. He's too busy for us. He's not interested in us. He's disregarding us. He's forgotten us. Do you know, my friend, the Israelites, they had fallen into the snare of self-righteousness because they thought they deserved better.
They thought they deserved better. But what was so sad was that they'd forgotten their sin. They'd forgotten their idolatry. They'd forgotten all their rebellion against the Lord. But more importantly, they'd forgotten the Lord himself. And you know, there's always the danger of falling into the snare of self-righteousness. We think that because our life didn't turn out the way that we wanted or hoped or planned, that the Lord is somehow unfair or unjust or unfaithful and that the Lord owes us. My friend, there's always the snare of the danger of falling into the snare of self-righteousness. Where we have this heart like the Israelites where we're constantly complaining against the Lord and questioning the Lord and maybe even blaming the Lord, thinking that he doesn't care about me. He's not interested in me.
He's too busy for me. He's forgotten about me. But you know, we have no reason or right to complain against the Lord. In fact, complaining against the Lord was one of the chief sins of the Israelites when they were in the wilderness. They were constantly complaining. When they were in the wilderness for 40 years, they were complaining saying, why did you bring us here? Why are we

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going this way? Why can't we go back to Egypt? Why do you keep feeding us this manna? Why, why, why? But you know, like the Israelites, we have no right or reason to complain against the Lord. And yet the reason we do is often because we're not finding satisfaction with our Savior and we're not content without Christ. Instead, we're seeking to find comfort from the world and not comfort from the word. We're seeking to find comfort from the world and not comfort from the word. That's why Isaiah responds to the constant complaining of the Israelites. He says in verse 28, have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. Isaiah responds to the constant complaining of the Israelites by saying, you've already heard this. You've already heard this.

[19:36] You don't need to know why. You just need to know who. You don't need an explanation for your circumstances. You need a revelation from your Savior. You don't need to find comfort from the world. You need to find comfort from the word. And Isaiah assured the Israelites and us that the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. We may set out our plans, our paths and our purposes for life. But Isaiah assures us that his plans, his paths and his purposes are perfect because they're all according to his providence. And the thing is, we don't need to know why, my friend, because we never understand anyway. We never understand why this was his plan. And this was his path that he brought us on. We never understand why these were his purposes. And this was his providence. We don't need to know why. We just need to know who. We need to know that our God is the everlasting God. And as Matthew

Henry says, he's from eternity to eternity. And with him, there's no deficiency or decay. His perfections are boundless. He's without beginning of days or end of life. And with him, there's no change. My friend, our lives are full of challenges and changes. Therefore, we don't need to know why. We just need to know who. We just need to trust the everlasting God who never changes and never grows weary. And as Isaiah says, he says, have you not known? Have you not heard? In other words, you do know and you have heard. You've heard it from the prophets. You've heard it from the priests. You've heard it from your parents.

And Isaiah says, you need to trust him. You need to trust him because your life is just like the flower of the grass. Is that not what Isaiah said in verse six? A voice says, cry, and 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.

You know, in these verses, Isaiah, he highlights the unmistakable contrast between the comfort from the world and the comfort from the word. Because the comfort from the world, my friend, will tell us how beautiful and how bountiful we are. But the comfort from the word, it will tell us the truth. It will tell us that our beauty will fade and our bounty will perish. But the book will remain. Our beauty will fade. Our bounty will perish. But the book will remain. All flesh is like grass. And all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers. The flower falls.

[22:52] But the word of our Lord stands forever. My friend, there's comfort from the word. Because no other book will do. And no other book will speak into every season and every situation and every circumstance in our lives. And the thing is, Isaiah says, you know this.

You've heard all this before. You know this to be true. You've seen it in your own life. And you've seen it in the lives of others. Therefore, Isaiah says, by looking beyond lockdown, you need to patiently wait upon the Lord. Because there's comfort in the wilderness.

There's comfort in the word. And there's comfort on the wings. There's comfort on the wings. And that's what we see lastly. Comfort on the wings. We read in verse 30.

Over the past two months, homeschooling has been good. But it's also been very challenging. Because one thing I'd forgotten is that having three young boys in the house all the time, they're full of energy. School usually tires them out. And they come home grumpy at the end of the day. But having boys at home all the time has reminded me that from the moment they open their eyes in the morning, until they go to sleep at night, they're constantly on the go. Because they don't sit. They don't wait. They don't walk anywhere in the house, whether it's inside or outside the house, they're always running. They have so much energy. But thankfully, their energy it eventually runs out at the end of the day. And they have to go to bed. And that's what Isaiah affirms here, that youths shall faint and grow weary. And even young, strong men will eventually become exhausted. But not so for our everlasting God. Not so for the God who is from eternity to eternity. Not so for the God who

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is infinite, eternal and unchangeable. No, he doesn't grow faint or weary. No, he provides comfort in the wilderness. He provides comfort from the word.
He provides comfort on the wings. And you know, this closing version Isaiah 40, it's one of the most comforting verses in the Bible. And it's a verse that many of us learned in our youth.
[25:35] I learned it in campaigners, when I was part of that youth group called Eagles. And it's a wonderful reminder that when we wait upon the Lord, and when we hope in the Lord, and when we trust in the Lord, we will mount up with wings like Eagles, and we will run and not be weary, and we will walk and not faint.

But you know, the thing about Eagles wings is that, as you know, they're said to span about two meters in length, which as you know, is the social distance that we have to keep. That's the wingspan of an eagle. It's massive. But the fascinating thing about Eagles is that like many birds, they migrate south for the winter. And the type of eagle which was and is common to Israel is the Eastern Imperial Eagle. The Eastern Imperial Eagle, it breeds in Southeast Europe, and also West and Central Asia. And then the Eastern Imperial Eagle, it would migrate south for the winter towards North Africa. And it's what's interesting is that it's fly path. The fly path of this eagle is the nation of Israel. In fact, for many migrating birds, the nation of Israel was this and is this junction between Europe and Asia and Africa. And it's said that Israel's airspace is crossed by about 500 million birds twice every year. And so seeing an eagle migrating thousands of miles, it would have been a common sight in Israel, which is probably why the eagle is mentioned so often in the Bible.
And as you know, the eagle, it's particularly mentioned in Psalm 103, where David says that he longs for the grace of God to renew him like the eagle. He says that just like an eagle would molt and become youthful by shedding its old feathers, David says that he wants to be renewed and refreshed and revitalized by the grace of God. Because as Isaiah has reminded us this morning, there are times when this wilderness journey, it seems too much and too far for us to travel.
There are times when we feel weak and feel tired and worn out, where we're tired of fighting with sin and fighting with Satan. We're tired of the divisions at home and in the house of God. We're tired of the oppression and the opposition from the world. My friend, there are times when we faint and grow weary and we just want to wind down and ease off and let others take over.
But as you know, that's not what the Christian life is all about. Because as David reminds us in Psalm 103, which we'll be singing shortly, David says that the God of all grace continually forgives all our inequities. He heals all our diseases. He redeems us from the pit. He crowns us with His covenant love and mercy and He satisfies us with good. The Lord continually pours His blessings upon us. Why? So that we won't retire, but so that we'll be renewed and refreshed and revitalized and re-energized just like the eagle. It's also that we'll be able to mount up with wings like eagles and serve the Lord with more passion, purpose and perseverance.
[29:08] But you know, the only way an eagle can migrate across three continents twice a year is because of thermal soaring. Where the eagle, it would find these warm air pockets that would lift it high into the sky so that the eagle would be able to soar for miles over the wilderness. And you know, in a spiritual sense, we also need thermal soaring. We need the warm word of God to lift us and uplift us, not twice a year, not even twice a week, but twice a day. We need the warm word of God to lift us and uplift us so that by looking beyond lockdown, we'll have comfort in the wilderness, we'll have comfort from the word, and we'll have comfort on the wings as we soar through our wilderness journey. And you know, whenever I think of an eagle, I'm always reminded of the beautiful illustration that I heard of what happens when an eagle dies. I'm sure I've told you this before, but with this I'll close, because it's said that an eagle knows when it's nearing the end of its life. It has some sort of premonition that it's not going to live for much longer.

And so early in the morning as the sun is rising, the eagle would set its nest in order, and its nest would be hidden in the cliff face of a high mountain somewhere. And it said that once the nest is in order, the eagle would just tip out of the nest and fall towards the ground. And as you would expect, the eagle would plummet descending rapidly towards the ground. But then just before it hits the ground, the eagle would open its wings for one last time, and it would begin to soar and climb higher and higher, and it would keep on rising until it reaches the top of the cliff. And then the eagle would place its talons on the rock and then look to the rising sun and die. The eagle, my friend, would die, clinging to the rock and looking to the sun. The eagle would die, clinging to the rock and looking to the sun. And you know, is it not a beautiful picture of a Christian that in life, in this life, a Christian has comfort in the wilderness and comfort from the word and comfort on the wings. But in

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death, a Christian is clinging to the rock and looking to the sun. In death, a Christian is clinging to the rock of salvation and looking to Jesus Christ, the sun of God. My friend, that's the hope of the Christian, that both in life and in death, we have this great sure and steadfast hope. And I hope and pray that you'll know this for yourself. Because the thing is, you've heard this so often. And you've heard it so often that you don't need me to tell you that when you commit your life to Jesus Christ, you'll find comfort in the wilderness. You'll find comfort from the word and you'll find comfort on the wings. And in death, as a Christian, you'll be clinging to the rock and looking to the sun, clinging to the rock and looking to the sun.

My friend, Isaiah is reminding us this morning that they who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray together.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the comfort that is able to be found in thy word. And Lord, we give thanks to the Lord, our God who does speak into every season and every situation and every circumstance in our lives. The Lord, one who reminds us that though it's still there, that despite all the changes and all the circumstances that we face, that the Lord, one who remains a God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, help us then we pray as thy people to mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint. Help us even in this time to be looking beyond the lockdown and to know that even when we get there that the Lord will be there, sustaining us and keeping us every step of the way. All our doers good and we pray, bless us we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing in the words of Sam 103. Sam 103 in the Sing Sam's version and we're singing from the beginning down to the Varsh Mark 11. In Sam 103 it's a Sam that emphasizes and re-emphasizes the grace of God and how gracious God is with us. It says, praise God my soul with all my heart. Let me exalt his holy name, forget not all his benefits, his soul, his praise my soul in song proclaim. The Lord forgives you all your sins and heals your sickness and distress, your life he rescues from the grave and crowns you in his tenderness. We'll sing on down to the Varsh Mark 11 of Sam 103 to God's praise.

[36:37] The Lord is no more righteous than, and justice to, and rather than God's, the Lord's mercy may known his ways. There's mighty deeds to his crowns, there's mighty deeds to his crowns.

The Lord is merciful and kind, too angered, slow and full of grace. He will not constantly be reprewed, for in his anger height is fixed. He does not want his services, our deliverings and our sins there just reward, and raises the last high as hand, to arch all those who fear the Lord.

To arch all those who fear the Lord.

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