

ISAIAH 40:6-11

GRASS / FLESH / SHEEP ---- AND THE SHEPHERD

The voice said, Cry out! And he said, What shall I cry?

“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”

O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain! O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”

Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with His arm and, carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

What do ornaments, lights, and presents have in common? They are all items having to do with the Christmas tree; they are a part of Christmas. What about all three—ornaments / lights / presents—and the Savior? Jesus, who was born at Bethlehem, Son of God and son of Mary, is what Christmas is all about! He far surpasses them all! His crucifixion and resurrection wash away our sins and opens heaven to us. ----- So then (switching to our text) what do grass, flesh, and sheep all have in common? They are quite insignificant and helpless. What about all three—grass / flesh / sheep—and The Shepherd? Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the one who sustains, strengthens, and saves, whether physical grass, sinful flesh, or wandering sheep.

Our text begins, *The voice said, Cry out! And he said, What shall I cry?* God makes it clear to Isaiah that He, God, has a message for His people and for all people. The message is to be declared by the prophets and messengers of God—really by every believer in God’s Promise. Who is this God? God is not just some remote abstract “force” out there in space. He did not just get things started, and now is far removed from us and our needs, allowing things to go as they will, until He wants to end it. That’s an incorrect view of God—not just because my opinion or someone else’s opinion says so, but because the Bible says so. “God” is a personal being, concerned about this world and every person in this world. He is active every day, in every life, through His Son, for our eternal best interest! Nothing is beyond Him. *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14).* In the best interest of man, He has a message for men, women, and children everywhere. *Cry out!* The message has to do with each one’s sin/sins, which God will punish with eternal death in hell; and with God’s compassionate love and pardon for each one’s sins—through Christ.

God told Isaiah, *All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades.* Tell me about grass. Grass, green grass, is attractive to the eye and soft on the hands and feet. Is it strong?—anybody can walk it down. Is a single blade significant? One blade more or less means nothing; there’s another to take its place; grass is less than “a dime a dozen.” Flowers are similar, whether wild or cultivated. They are attractive and pretty; but not strong, and nobody misses one. Grass and flowers are frail. How much hot, dry wind does it take to wilt them?

God says, to our self-pride, “That is exactly what sinful flesh is like!” In spite of all the health remedies, health aids, medicines—whether natural or synthetic—and all exercise routines, what is bound to happen? Age and the aging process, to the point of death. Will you be here to celebrate Advent and Christmas next year? You like to think so, especially if you’re under 80, under 70, under 40. But you don’t know. Some of us may not. *Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fade.* I saw my parents grow frail. I see my wife grow old before my very eyes. Have you had children taken from you at a young age? *The breath of the LORD blows upon it.* God’s “breath of death” blows upon us all for sin. We will not last.

But, as our text goes on, the word of our God stands forever. Unlike the downward spiral of sinful human flesh (more easily recognizable after age forty, and for which there is no fountain of youth), *the Word of our God stands forever!* God's Word, His Truths, Decrees, Ordinances, etc., are permanent. The outward format of God's Word, as written in the Bible, may change—German, Norwegian, English; hand-copied, printing press-copied, photo-copied; or digital words on a computer driven screen; or kept in the memory and passed down by word of mouth. The outward form of the Bible may change, but nothing of God's Word changes. His truths and statements do not change!—not His condemnation for sin, not His promise of forgiveness in Jesus, nor any other aspect of will and message. No change. His message is Truth. We need to respect and treasure it! No where does God say, "If one person says My message means one thing, and another says it mean a different thing; then that's still ok." One or the other is wrong. Or both could be wrong. Both can't be right. The Truth is the Truth. The problem is on man's end.

Why is it that God's Word does not change? Because perfect God does not change. If parents make a rule for the family, how long does it last? Until the children leave home? Until the parents dies? Any rule or law—even government law—lasts only as long as the rule-maker is there and able to enforce it. Perfect God never passes out of existence. His perfect decrees and Truth never change.

These verses would describe a sad scenario indeed for Isaiah, and us all, except that Isaiah has already heard from God, a few verses earlier: *Comfort ye, comfort ye My people!*" says your God. *"Speak comfortably to [to the heart of] Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received of the LORD's hand double [double blessing] for all her sins"* (Isaiah 40:1).

That is why Isaiah continues by saying: *O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain! O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"* The great news is that there is Comfort for God's people! The ultimate battle with sins and Satan is over. God's pardon has been won in Christ! Such news is to be proclaimed! "Go up on the heights of the mountains, and shout as loudly as you can, without fear or intimidation, *"Behold your God!"* Even radio transmissions are broadcast from towers on top of hills or mountains. "O, people of God, reach as many as you can, as clearly as you can. Let nothing stop you. God is here with rescue!" It puts us to shame—and I include myself—how shy we are about proclaiming Christ—even at Christ-mas. *"Behold your God!* The Savior is born! No longer are we mere blades of frail grass and flower blossoms. We reign with Him!"

Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. When the Lord arrived the first time by way of His birth at Bethlehem, He knew exactly why He had come. It was evident when He was but 12 years of age at the Temple: *And He said to them [Joseph and Mary], Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business? (Luke 2:49).* Jesus came to lay down His life for His sheep. That was His assignment and task—willingly taken. He came with the power and authority "to lay down My life AND to take it up again" (John 10:18). He came with the goal and reward of rescuing His people forever. "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28). He came to be strong for us who are weak. The familiar hymn "Jesus Loves Me" says it well: "Little ones to Him belong; they are weak, but He is strong!"

He came in strength. *He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with His arm and, carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.* What a tender picture! Frail, weak, and insignificant sheep is what we are--not aggressive wolves, not powerful lions, not an in-assailable hulk-like elephants. We are just helpless sheep, struggling lambs, and often wayward at that. Jesus has come for you. He is a shepherd who does not send His sheep out to pasture on the open range, and go on to something else. Each day the shepherd is with them, watching them, and leading them. He cares for you. Whether you're young or grown up, when you need someone to carry you, He does. (Did your parents carry you in from the car at night when you were young?) He doesn't just carry you under His arm like a bundle of hay, or on His shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He carries you in His bosom, close to His heart. If you are a sheep able to walk, but walk slowly, like an ewe with nursing lambs, or an old-age sheep with trembling steps, He leads you slowly with tender love and compassion. Jesus does not "push" or "drive" His sheep.

Such a striking picture. Grass, flowers, sheep, frail sinful flesh, is what you and I are. Yet there is a Shepherd who meets all the obstacles of your life—even the guilt of sin and the death sin brings. Jesus. He is your Christmas, your best and only Christmas! *"Behold your God!"* this Christmas.

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---