

Godology

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Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[0 : 00] This morning is going to be on the initial verses of the chapter of Isaiah chapter 40 and the first 11 verses which Andy read for us earlier on I don't know if you've heard about the lost boys of Sudan But there was a civil war that lasted for over a decade in Sudan between sort of the 9th mid 1980s up to around 2000 and In that civil war there were there were lots of young boys some of them not even ten years old and these young boys found themselves orphaned because of the war and They will get they began a very long journey on foot from southern Sudan down into Ethiopia and Kenya where they lived in refugee camps and

They weren't in the refugee camps for a few weeks or a few months They were there for years and these were massive camps and The refugees workers were the ones who christened them the lost boys these children Who'd lost everything and had to run away from civil war and ended up dislocated lost isolated in these refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya There's a very famous and excellent book written about the lost boys of Sudan It's called what is the what by somebody called Dave Eggers If you ever get a chance to read the book it's really worth a read because it gives you such an insight Into how people in other parts of the world suffer and really grave terrible ways that often we just forget about so On on the blurb for the book it says this At the heart of this astonishing soul wrenching novel is a true story of courage and endurance in The face of one of the most brutal civil wars the world is ever known

It's the story of Valentino Ackchak Deng Who is just a boy when conflict separates him from his family and forces him to leave his small Sudanese village Joining joining thousands of other orphans on their long long walk to Ethiopia Where they find safety for a time along the way Valentino encounters enemy soldiers liberation rebels and deadly militias hyenas and lions disease and starvation These are except but there are experiences ahead that will test his spirit in even greater ways than these So book worth reading the story of this young boy from southern Sudan if you're looking for a holiday book What is the what might be a good choice?

But I wanted to talk about the lost boys of Sudan for a little bit because the situation That Valentino found himself in as a young boy is very similar to the kind of situation that the people of Jerusalem find themselves in when we read about their circumstances in the book of Isaiah so chronologically time-wise it's about 700 BC and in In the fairly recent past the the kingdom of Israel has split in two between the northern and the southern kingdom There's been a lot of tension and rivalry Conflict and then in 720 BC the northern kingdom falls and disintegrates and Refugees travel from the north and settle in Jerusalem. So Jerusalem had a refugee population and many of the people in Jerusalem lived with the shock and the horror of war and the experience of war and they still faced a lot of enemy threats economic uncertainty and poverty and so

In those kind of crisis situations People often ask How do we react? What's the answer? How do we respond? How are we going to find our way out of this crisis and When people are in crisis what God wants to say to them is you don't need to find your own way out because I I'm here I'm Present and I'm the one who's going to act to rescue to save to find you to deliver you To keep you and to strengthen you. So that that's what the focus is here in in Isaiah chapter 40 on what God is doing to help people who find themselves in lost and difficult and distressing circumstances and That's an important message for us today because often we find ourselves feeling bewildered by life confused uncertain anxious afraid because of our health because of family problems because of our economic situation because of traumas from the past and we find out that we look for answers we try to create answers and

[5 : 34] We forget that first and foremost what we need is God to intervene and to act in our lives and so that's where I want to point you today and I called this sermon Godology and Somebody asked me what Godology means the other day. I said it's theology for thickos Because the word

theos just means God So it's just all I want to say to you really is look at God study God think about God Fix your eyes on God get your gaze on God because in all the circumstances of your life The one thing you need to do above everything else is just lift up your eyes and see who God is if you think about your life as a story or a drama Then the main character in that story is God and yet too much of the time We just kind of keep him in the background as a minor player when really we need to have God Center stage and the main voice the main speaker the main player in the story of our lives and so Godology simply means

Look at God think about God study God He's the most important person in the world in the universe and in your life and to know him is the key to so many of the things that you question and that trouble you so three things I want to say to you about Godology about God from the chapter and The first thing is this The in Isaiah 40 we see God comes to us. So when you go away home, and you think what did Neil speak about this morning?

He spoke about Godology looking at God first thing was God comes God comes he comes to us the second thing will be that God's Word we're gonna have a little bit think about what God says God's word and the last thing will be about God's arm So three things God comes God's word God's arm God comes so Isaiah and Gives a message to his prophets here or God gives a message to Isaiah and the prophets here in chapter 40 comfort my people comfort comfort the emphasis on comfort says your God speak tenderly to Jerusalem and Proclaim to her so here is God Coming and he's coming to people who've made a real mess of things who've pushed God away Kept him in the background refused to hear what he's saying Chosen other ways than God's ways and how does God respond when they make such a mess of everything?

Well God responds by saying I'm coming to you and I am coming to comfort you Not to break you I'm coming to help you and not to harm you Speak tenderly verse 2 says and tell this to my people Your hard service has been completed your sin paid for you've received from the Lord's hand Double for all your sin now. It doesn't mean God pays us back double for every sin God is just and his judgment is measured just means you've had ample Repayment for all your sin and And so the the idea here is that you're suffering as an endless Sometimes we find ourselves locked in a situation where we feel it There's no way out and the difficult things are just going to keep going and keep going and keep going and God says listen There is a limit to how much you will suffer and there is an end to how much you will suffer and

God promises in his Bible in his word that you'll never let us suffer more than we can bear So if you just flip over to Isaiah 42 So keep your Bible open, please as we do this sermon this morning Isaiah chapter 42 Is about God's son Jesus the servant of the Lord here is my servant It says in verse 1 who my uphold my chosen one and whom I delight I will put my spit on him and he will bring justice to the nations He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets And then this promise a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out That's a promise that God is not going to let you be broken. He's not gonna let you suffer more than you can endure and That he is going to deal with you well and gently So Jesus comes not to break us

[10 : 27] But to help us and to comfort us and Jesus comes to us as a saving king so go back to verse 40 and in verse 3 we get this idea of a messenger or a Herald somebody who's who's got news to proclaim so a broadcaster and He's shouting out if you're out in the desert Prepare the way for the Lord Make a straight in the wilderness a highway for our God So what's happening here? Well the idea is that God is coming like an ancient king from the Near East and The highway maintenance in the ancient Middle East or Near East was poor Okay, very poor you think that roads in Edinburgh have got into a terrible state you can just imagine 700 BC what the roads were like in and around Palestine?

so the roads were only ever really in good condition when There was a royal visitor expected and if the king was visiting your city or your town or your village Everybody had to get out into the desert and start civil engineering Get the excavators and the wheel barrows out and the spades and the shovels and make as Smooth and straight a highway as they could because a great important royal Visitor was coming so that's the idea in verse 3 The description of the civil engineering process in verse 4 every valley raised up every mountain and hill made low The ground becoming level the rugged places a plane So they're creating a kind of elevated highway through the desert for the smooth arrival of the royal visitor And the idea then that God is coming and he's not coming Quietly he's coming in majesty is coming in glory. He's coming with power

And so when we think about God's coming we've got a God who's coming to us in this great majestic glory That is his and what we're told to do is be ready for his coming if Jesus Christ says he's coming to Comfort to strengthen you. Are you ready to receive and accept him? So That calls for not civil engineering, but what we could call spiritual engineering and Are there obstacles in your life?

that are keeping God from coming near to you Are there things that you need to clear out of your life?

So that you're ready to receive Jesus Christ the King Now these things might be a sense of rebellion towards God a sense of anger towards God a sense of bitterness It might be your own pride There are so many things that kind of build up as rubble in our lives and sometimes we've got to say what are the blockages?

[13 : 35] What are the things? that are preventing me from Meeting with God and receiving the presence and the blessing of Jesus Christ in my life clear it out and then Verse 5 also speaks about God coming to us and it says the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind Together will see it for the mouth of the Lord has spoken and that's a kind of projection Way way into the future. We're 700 BC here In Isaiah we're 2000 AD now a lot later But Isaiah was actually forecasting predicting seeing something even much further beyond that what he's saying is The glory of Jesus Christ fully revealed to all people all flesh the whole world the whole universe When he returns at the end of time to judge the world all flesh will see his glory

All mankind together will see it so and that that Speaks about the final coming of Jesus Christ and That's the greatest coming of all. Do you know what we're told?

When we see him in his glory, we will marvel at his beauty That's an incredible thought marveling How beautiful Jesus turns out to be you may think Jesus is beautiful, but you have no idea You may have seen many things that are gorgeous in this world and none of them are like Jesus All the world will marvel and worship at the appearance of his glory And on that day, what does Jesus do? Well, he says to some people come Come you who are blessed and to others he says depart and those who come they come into the new creation the new heavens and the new earth and There there is no more lostness no more distress no more suffering There is just the perfect beautiful rain and person of Jesus and for those who depart then there is

Just the most immense loss to be separated from the beauty of Jesus forever So God brings That into our focus. He's coming to to us through the cross through Jesus He's coming to us now in the Holy Spirit and he's coming to us again At the end of time so God is coming God has come to you second thing is God and And his word God speaks So this is verse six down to eight so verses six to eight have a look at them as I speak about them to you I was once Away with a bunch of guys I used to be a minister in a church in Fife and Kirkcaldy and a bunch of the guys went hill walking for two or three days and Camping in Glencoe and Glen Etiv and then the last day we walked a section of the West Highland Way We were at Tindrum at the Green Welley stop if you ever driven up that road

Towards Fort William or Glencoe and one of my friends jumped into his lovely French made automobile and Just as he drove off the engine blew up the turbo failed it was a diesel engine The engine did something called hydraulic in which means it sucks all the oil out and then it runs It dry and smashes all the valves to pieces so his car was destroyed in seconds in the middle of nowhere He was greatly Distressed at cost a fortune Well, I am a smart and wise man So I bought a car with exactly the same engine about six months later and about six months after that I was in in voves with this car when Exactly the same thing happened the turbo goes and the engine BAM 9,000 pound bill so fortunately, it was under warrant and All right, and the garage ordered me a new car and it was coming new to me second hand coming from Wales With 24,000 miles in the clock and as it was being driven up to five from Wales

[18 : 00] Guess what happened? So engine blew up car destroyed they had to put a brand new engine in it So I won't tell you the make of car, but compare that with the Honda V tech engine Which the all-wise Jeremy Clarkson tells us has never had a warranty recall in all the millions of a V take engines ever made So you get something that's completely useless and unreliable and frail Or a V tech engine which will go forever apparently and I always choose Weak and frail now the comparison here then is between weak and frail and strong and enduring and That's there's a kind of dialogue inverses six to eight so think about the dialogue Line one or actor one says a voice says cry out So somebody goes cry out and the other guy goes what am I gonna cry?

Have you seen these people? They're like grass their glories like the flowers of the field They're great the grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them now What what's since what's been said here? Well one voice says speak to the people tell them about God and The other guy says what's the point? Have you seen them?

Why should I cry out these people? They're so frail. They're so broken now. I don't know about desert flowers I've never met a desert flower or seen a desert flower, but I know about lettuce and I've put lettuce in the fridge with good intentions of eating it eventually I'm gone back a couple of weeks later ready for my lettuce and sort of psyched myself up for the green experience and You take the lettuce out two weeks later and it's sort of shriveled up and it's gone damp and sort of limp and Horrible and you just take that bag of lettuce and with a quiet rejoicing in your heart you throw it in the bin I'm thinking okay. I don't need to do lettuce again till next year. So So That's like a desert flower God is saying we're like limp lettuce Moldering at the back of the fridge Yeah, just Weak and so the guy says listen that's what people are there limp lettuce. Why should I?

There's no point in saying anything to them. They don't listen. They can't do anything. They're so weak. They're so powerless So what's the response that he gets to that? Well at the end of verse 7 the guy says sure the people are limp lettuce or sure the people are grass The grass withers and the flowers fall People are frail and weak, but the word of God stands forever So in our lostness what we find is that our hope isn't in ourselves or our capacity or Our strength Because actually we turn out to be very frail we're frail morally we're frail Physically we're frail intellectually we're frail emotionally and spiritually we're frail in all kinds of ways But into that situation of weakness God speaks a powerful and enduring and life-giving word

His word stands forever his word is a V tech engine that will go on and on and on forever and That's very important because what they what the people in Jerusalem were doing is they were looking for human solutions to complicated problems without realising That their greatest need was for God So they try to form political alliances and military alliances that would give them greater security They teamed up with the people that they thought would make them feel better about life and better about their circumstances and They thought that those people would be the key and God is saying look you're looking for solutions in the wrong place because ultimately Your problems have a dimension that no human being can resolve There's a spiritual dimension to the issues we face and so we need the God of spiritual life and and power to address the crisis now it might be

[22 : 48] Our crisis could be all kinds it could be about relationship. It could be physical. It could be mental. It could be social and Of course we we we need to nuance this just a little bit and say where there are helpful people and helpful ways of and wise ways of addressing our situation we do apply our human understanding and abilities and we look for the help of other people But the nuances that we don't put all our confidence in that Rather We put our confidence ultimately in God and we rest in him and what he can do through human intelligence and other people and so on and the and the problem with Israelites was that they actually They looked for human solutions that were really contrary to what God had said So he was saying listen this is the way you're to live and they said well look over here are a bunch of Egyptians who could really help us out and You know, perhaps if we just worship the Egyptian gods along with them then their gods will add strength to our situation

And so they took a really wrong turn And that and if we're looking for solutions outside of God to our need then sometimes that takes us away from God in a very unhelpful way and Leaves us further adrift and more lost than we were and so all the time we're going back to the word of God It's a living word. It's like sweet bread, you know that we want to eat and consume so God comes to us as a king God speaks to us with a living powerful word get into God's word hear what God has seen Last thing briefly is God's arm Verse 9 through to verse 11 Now I want to say three things about God's arm There's another threefold thing in verses 9 to 11 which is about looking or beholding Which doesn't come out too well in the translation in front of us the very last line of verse 9 if you look at it says He behold or or observe your God and then verse 10 says see the sovereign Lord Comes with power and his arm rules for him see his reward is with him Some of us are good at looking but not seeing so, you know, I'm not an observant person You may have had a haircut. I won't notice for three weeks or four weeks or ever Or you may have bought a new car and you know, it just doesn't register And lots of us are like that we look but we don't really see and what God wants us to do is to observe carefully Observe observe observe who are we to observe? Well back to the beginning of the sermon. We're to observe him Look at God Godology study God in his word Three things that are at God's arm First of all, it says he comes with power as arm rules for

him Now what the Bible often talks about the arm of the Lord or the arm of God? What does it mean?

Well, it's taking a very familiar picture of somebody's arm and the arm of God speaks of strength So in this context it says his his power is with him And he comes with power as arm rules for him but the arm of course is maneuverable and extendable and retractable and Helps us to grasp and so when the Bible speaks about the arm of God it's speaking about the application of his power about the action of his strength The arm doing all these things so one When we speak about God's arm, we're saying God is coming to act for you He'll use his strength and his power and apply it into your life situation and on your behalf and He'll use that arm to rule in your situation to take control of your situation and to exercise

His power in that situation So that's the first thing about the arm is it's the application of God's strength to your situation The second thing about the arm is that with this arm God holds out salvation in verse 10 the second part it says see behold observe His reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. So he's in his hand. He's holding something in his hand in This picture. What's he holding? He's holding salvation now salvation is God's reward. What do we mean by that?

[27 : 42] Well, Isaiah will go on in chapter 53 to talk about the suffering of the servant of God the Lord Jesus Christ and That suffering comes true in the experience of Jesus and his life is incarnation his death and resurrection and God gives his son Jesus to suffer death on the cross in this very particular way and God is rewarded For giving his son in this way With salvation He's now able to save If God didn't give Jesus to the cross God wouldn't be able to save but the reward of God giving Jesus to the cross is that God is able to save No cross no salvation So God's reward is that now he's able to save that tells us this very clearly

Salvation is God's possession He holds it in his hand and that then means that salvation is in God's gift If we want salvation We have to receive it from the hand of God and that's the second picture of the arm of God here his arm Reached out with salvation. So we just want to picture that for a moment here In our in our service this morning God's arm is reached out To you and to me through his word in his hand what is God holding out to you he is holding out salvation Deliverance rescue forgiveness and freedom through the cross of Jesus Christ And as God holds it out to you God is asking for a response He's saying are you going to take the salvation or leave it?

Are you going to take what I'm offering through Jesus or reject it? And so God places that responsibility on you today As he reaches out the third thing about his arm He holds us there's a really great picture in verse 11 he tends his flock like a shepherd He gathers the lambs in his arms and that That is a sweet picture a Shepherd Cradling a little lamb Crail shivering hungry frightened and the shepherd carrying it and that's what God says I Lift you into my arms And I hold you close to my heart And that's a great relief often we find where or feel we're carrying a lot of burdens in life And God says you may be carrying a lot of burdens, but I am carrying you I

Have you in my arms and So there's this great tender picture of God and his mercy and his kindness and his involvement in our life so Luke to God that's what Godology means look to God remember this great God who comes who speaks and his arm And I want to say that what we find in Isaiah is that the more we see of God the more we want to worship God and the more we want to thank God and The more we want to celebrate God and delight in God and so please as we finish this service Just recognize that God is really deserving your worship deserving your thanks and your praise today and take away from here that intention through grace to make God

The main focus of your life. I'm gonna pray we're gonna sing Lord God hear us as we come to you today to ask for your arm of salvation to reach out in this church Lord we have many difficulties in life But we have a God who comes to us who speaks to us who reaches out his arm to rescue us and we Ask that that process will be at work in our lives today to your glory. Amen. I