



Prepare the way of the Lord Isaiah 40:1-11

TITLE

PHOTO 1

Where were these photos taken? The Haugley Bends. Even before they upgraded what was then the A45 in the early 80s, the bends were already a major bottleneck so it was decided to turn it into a dual carriageway. Except that they did it on the cheap by keeping the bendy old road and just putting a straight new westbound one. At the time it made the right turns on at the section safer.

Unfortunately when the whole road was improved, they decided to absorb the Haugley Bends into it rather than improve them. The high speed traffic on it made the right turns very dangerous. There were fatalities. After lots of death and injury, they finally started on what they should have done in the first place – a proper bypass.

BYPASS

All the latest building technology went into this. It's quite a hilly route so it had to be shaped into the environment with cuttings and embankments.

PHOTO1 then PHOTO 2 – And the old road. They kept the straight carriageway and now its a really nice gentle country road. The bends are gone – turned into a cycleway.

STRAIGHT ROADS

Most modern roads are built to excellent standards. They are wide, straight, have gentle gradients. They re easy to drive on, will fit any vehicle and are designed to be fuel efficient. One of the biggest problems is that improvements are often so expensive that no-one does anything about them unless they have a jolly good reason to do so.

Today is the first Sunday in advent. Advent is the time of year we remember the coming of the Messiah which is why I had Isaiah 40 read to us. As we'll see in a moment, it's a passage that was a prophecy, and encouragement, a warning that God was coming. It's Messianic as it foresaw the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. It encourages us to get ready and remove all the obstacles in our lives as we seek to worship and serve Him because we are coming to the season when we shall be reminded how important Jesus actually is.

Here's a few of the verses again.

VERSE

"Prepare in the wilderness a road for the LORD! Clear the way in the desert for our God!
4 Fill every valley; level every mountain. The hills will become a plain, and the rough country will be made smooth.

VERSE

10 (C) The Sovereign LORD is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued. 11 (C) He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers.

GET RID OF THE OBSTACLES

The simple message of the passage is that the king is coming. In the days of the Babylonian Empire, the king rarely visited the outer regions. When he did it was in all his finery, or with his army. Either way, in order to take his entourage, his engineers had to make sure the roads were up to the task of getting the king and everything he brought quickly, safely and efficiently. That's why Isaiah talks about the route being levelled, obstacles removed, allowing the king to come and care for his people.

PROPHECY IN THREE AGES

As I've said, Isaiah 40 is a prophecy and to understand prophecy fully we need to know who it is aimed at. This one is more difficult than most as other scriptures allow us to see that we can view it in three ways. Here is a mountain vista. It looks impressive. But look more closely. It isn't one range, it's three, each with a valley we can't see in between. Unless we have a map, we can't see how far the third range is. This prophecy was written to cover three events.

RETURN FROM EXILE

The first event was the return from exile for the Jews. This happened from 530BC onwards. The true King, God Himself was going to be returning His presence to Jerusalem. The temple was going to be rebuilt. The call was coming – prepare for the arrival of the king. And they did prepare and they were allowed to return in a few waves.

COMING OF JESUS

But we know from the gospels that this passage has a longer prophetic element to it. John the Baptist applied these verses to himself quoting verse 3: A voice cries out, "Prepare in the wilderness a road for the LORD! Clear the way in the desert for our God! Why? Because the Messiah was coming.

THE RETURN OF JESUS

But we also know that the coming of the Messiah was a game in two halves. Jesus came. We shall shortly be reminded of the fact that Jesus died to deal with our sin. He rose again, but He's going to come again soon.

BE PREPARED

What is the message of our prophecy in three parts? It's rather like the scout motto. Be prepared. Scouts Christmas Post 20p but you only have until 15th December to do it. That's a good picture of what we should be doing. We should be prepared because what's coming is time-limited. Let's go back to the prophecy and see how Isaiah 40 challenges us.

BE PREPARED FOR THE RETURN OF GOD'S PRESENCE

At the time the people were being called to prepared for the return of the Lord's presence. They were to be prepared and to remove the obstacles in their lives that were preventing His worship and their service. Are you a Christian? Most of us are. This morning we are in the presence of our risen Lord. By His Spirit He's here. We are His family gathering around His table. Are we prepared? Have we removed all the obstacles in our lives that are preventing us worshipping and serving Him? Unforgiven sin. We are going to get an opportunity to deal with these in confession in a few moments. Why? Be cause we are in the presence of a Saviour and Lord who's holy.

BEING PREPARED FOR THE COMING MESSIAH

The second thing the passage tells us about is that we need to be prepared for a coming Messiah. When John the Baptist preached the Jews sent messengers out to him in the desert: 22 *"Then tell us who you are," they said. "We have to take an answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"* 23 *John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "I am "the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!"*" 24 *The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees,* 25 *then asked John, "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptise?"* 26 *John answered, "I baptise with water, but among you stands the one you do not know.* 27 *He is coming after me, but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."* 28 *All this happened in Bethany on the east side of the Jordan River, where John was baptising.* 29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Jesus - He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We prepare for Christmas at this time because we remember why Jesus came – in order that He might die to deal with the issue of our sin.

Are you ready for Christmas? When it comes to presents and turkeys, probably not. But Christmas should be an exciting time as we remember how God broke into our history by becoming a baby. The rest we have in front of us as we come to communion. When we say O come let us adore Him, that what it should be if we know Him. But if you don't know Jesus, the you're not ready for Him.

Yet it doesn't have to be that way. The same invitation rings out today as in the past. Will you trust Him? Will you find forgiveness? Will you follow Him.

BEING PREPAED FOR THE RETURNING MESSIAH

Finally, the third part of the prophecy is very much for us. It isn't fulfilled yet. Jesus is coming again. He will becoming in glory. The only thing is we don't know when. We only have pointers in Scripture. What we need to be is ready for His return. How can we be ready? By following Him in obedience. Seeing to do His will. Seeking to tell Good News to others.

ARE WE READY FOR JESUS?

And that's the challenge of scripture this advent season. Are we ready for Jesus? Are we ready for Him right now? Are we ready to adore Him this upcoming Christmas season. Are re ready to follow Him as He calls us until either He returns or we are called to be with Him.

TITLE Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 2/12/12
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40:1 "Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them! 2 Encourage the people of Jerusalem. Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven. I have punished them in full for all their sins." 3 A voice cries out, "Prepare in the wilderness a road for the LORD! Clear the way in the desert for our God! 4 Fill every valley; level every mountain. The hills will become a plain, and the rough country will be made smooth. 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it. The LORD himself has promised this." 6 A voice cries out, "Proclaim a message!" "What message shall I proclaim?" I ask. "Proclaim that all human beings are like grass; they last no longer than wild flowers. 7 Grass withers and flowers fade when the LORD sends the wind blowing over them. People are no more enduring than grass. 8 Yes, grass withers and flowers fade, but the word of our God endures forever." 9 Jerusalem, go up on a high mountain and proclaim the good news! Call out with a loud voice, Zion; announce the good news! Speak out and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah that their God is coming! 10 The Sovereign LORD is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued. 11 He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers.