

# Bible Study - March 18, 2020

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Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hey everybody, it's Pastor Tom Kraft from the Pendleton Center in First New Niagara Falls United Methodist Churches. And every week we have a Bible study and so I decided we have a Bible study as well tonight. It'll be a little different because we're not in person and we can't share and have the repertoire we usually have going back and forth. And I know some of you will miss that, but we still have the opportunity to look at God's Word and what it has to say for us at this time. Even though we've been in First Thessalonians, we're going to look at a different chapter and a different book tonight because right now I think there's some things we need to look at that the Scripture can help us with in this particular coronavirus situation. So we're going to be looking at Isaiah, Isaiah in the Old Testament, and this is going to be chapter 40. So if you want to turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 40, we're going to begin our Bible study. As we're waiting for everybody to find their spot in the Bible, I just want to say that we're doing everything we can to try and keep connected to each other and connected to God. If you think that you'd be able to help with that effort, making phone calls or maybe even something more like helping people and their needs, please feel free to give the call a call to the church at 625-8306 or contact Pastor Sherry Mehar online because we'd certainly love to have you help out with any efforts that are possible. If you have ideas for what we can do, feel free to let me know at tomkraft at pendletoncenterchurch.org. I think I said that right. It's probably pcumc.org, but you'll find me. Anyways, here we are in chapter 40.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. And we need comfort. We need God because we're going through some struggles and difficulties. The people in this passage are dealing with the idea that their country has been destroyed, that they've been taken away from Jerusalem and often in captivity.

And honestly, they feel their entire world has fallen apart. Right now, we feel our world could be falling apart, but it hasn't yet. And yet we still need God to comfort us and care for us, speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord double for all her sins.

It's a kind of interesting verse because it's saying to us that there is a sense of atonement, a sense of that when we do things wrong, God might even punish us for those sins. And he does that not because God likes to punish, but he does that because he wants to make sure that we understand when we do things wrong, that there might be a price to be paid. Our government's asked us to make decisions that will help us to slow the spread of this coronavirus. If we don't pay any attention to what they do, we're going to have consequences that are not what we intend.

So we're trying to work towards diminishing the unintended negative consequences in our country, in our church, in our communities. And if we don't, we will pay the penalty. When we sin, we have the exact same thing happen. God doesn't necessarily so much punish us for the sin, but there are consequences to everything. And when we bring evil, when we bring sin into the world, we bring that pain and that penalty to us. But in this passage, God is saying they've already had enough of a struggle that it's time for that to end. And he says that their sin has been paid for, or atonement, or that sense that there has been enough that it will no longer be held against them.

[ 4 : 02 ] And the one who pays that price is God himself. I know this is an Old Testament passage, but even in this, God is there to forgive the people for their sins, which is an act of God, not because of what they did, and not because they have enough punishment to make up for what they did, but because God loves us enough to take away that penalty of sin. It goes on to say, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley will be raised up. Every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plane. We remember this passage from Christmas time, don't we? John the Baptist, a voice calling in the wilderness, prepare a way for the Lord. And it's like God is making a super highway. And what we're saying is, God, take away all the things, all the barriers, all the clutter, all the anxieties, all the things that keep us from you, make the way straight. When they build a super highway, they bring the mountains down. They bring the valleys up. They take the crooked ways and make them straight. And they pave over it so it's smooth. I like the super highways. I travel on them, heading around our country and sometimes to other parts of the nation. And I'm glad we have super highways.

It makes travel easier. How can we make travel easier for our God? Do we take time apart where we can quiet our souls, where we can let the worries and troubles that distract us just melt away and make it easy for God?

And we'll see it together. And we'll see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. Starting at the end, you know, just like in the beginning in creation. And God said, and it was so. God said, let there be light. God said, let there be land. God said, let there be the heavens. God said, let there be the stars and the moon and the sun. And it was so.

God said, let's go. God said, let there be light. The word of the Lord has power. We need to open up our hearts and our minds to the word of the Lord.

The voice is crying in the wilderness. That's important because we go to the wilderness so that we can retreat, so we can take a time away.

[ 6 : 49 ] Because it's in the wilderness that we hear from God because the distractions aren't there. When Jesus wanted to hear from God, he went out to the wilderness. He went to a quiet place. The children of Israel learned about God in the wilderness.

We need to go out into the wilderness so we can hear the voice of God, which will change everything because instead of living in the fear and the concern and the worries and the troubles and the confusion that our culture and things like this crisis put on us, we will hear the glory of the Lord.

It will be revealed to us. It will be revealed to us. It will be made known to us and everyone will see it.

In the book of Acts, it says that in the latter days, which these are, any days after Christ, it says, I will pour out my Holy Spirit on all flesh. You know, God reaches out to everyone. God reaches out to those who love him, those who are close to him.

A lot of you are people from our church. God is reaching out to you. But God reaches out to everyone. You may be a person who's never even thought about God. God is reaching out to you.

[ 8 : 11 ] And the glory of the Lord can be revealed to you. If you take the time to listen.

A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry? What do I say? What do I do? I have been making decisions and decisions and decisions and decisions for a community of faith.

There's a lot of people, a lot of different ministries. What should I say? What should I do? We need to listen for God. Then the author goes on to say this, which is fascinating actually, especially under our circumstances.

It says, all people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

Because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

[ 9 : 20 ] But the word of God stands forever. We need to make sure that we're on the right side of eternity. Because the word of God is forever.

And if we're connected to that word of God, if we're connected to that presence of God, our hope is not in overcoming this short crisis. Our hope is not in trying to accomplish something in the next few months.

Our hope is not even in trying to accomplish something in the course of years. Our hope is in the God that holds all of eternity. Nobody, nobody is going to get out of this world alive until Jesus comes in glory.

I know that seems a little harsh. But it's true. We live for a little while and then we don't. And everything that we've done and all the glory and all the great things we may have accomplished, they'll disappear.

But the breath of God, the Ruha of God, breathes into us His Holy Spirit and gives us the ability to connect to the word which is forever.

[ 10 : 45 ] And this author is trying to tell us that God wants to keep us in His loving covenant, not just through this crisis, not just through the dark, shadowy valleys we're dealing with now, but forever.

And forever. And forever. You who bring good tidings to Zion, verse 9, go up on a high mountain, you who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout.

Lift it up, don't be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God. See, the sovereign Lord comes with power and His arm rules for Him. See, His reward is with Him and His recompense accompanies Him.

He tends His flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart. He gently leads those that have young. God is still caring for you and carrying you.

Don't let the fears that the evil one puts into this world overcome you because God is carrying you like a shepherd carries a tiny sheep. Tell everybody, we have too much fear.

[ 12 : 01 ] We need to have courage because God is with us. God is our strength. He's our rock. And He carries us even through the dark valleys of life.

Tell the world, don't be shy. God is here. And God will take us through this as He's taken us through Christ. This is after Christ. He says, for thousands of years, why do these things happen?

People ask that. Because our world is broken. And in this broken world, the design is not what we would make. It's not even what God would make.

But the new creation that God will make for us is forever and is good. And we can trust God for that. And it goes on to talk about this as the Creator.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand? Or with the breath of His hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket?

[ 13 : 04 ] Or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord or instructed Him? Or has been His counselor?

Whom did the Lord consult? Who enlightened God? And who taught Him the right way? Who is it that taught Him knowledge or showed Him the path of understanding?

God created the world. Job asked one time why there was evil in the world. And at some point God said, do you know how to make a world?

Can you measure it off from end to end? Can you put the stars in the sky? Can you build a crocodile? If you can't do these things, then why are you questioning God about what He built?

God created a good creation. It was good. People brought sin into it, and it became broken. God wants to make it good again. But in the meantime, we live in the brokenness.

[ 14 : 04 ] And there will be suffering. There will be struggle. And we personally bring a lot of it into the world. So we need to learn that God intends for good.

And even though this creation in some ways has patterns and things like viruses and earthquakes and tornadoes and storms that we don't understand, it doesn't mean God is not in the design.

It doesn't mean God doesn't love us. Actually, I don't even know, and I don't want you to take this too far, but I don't know, really, whether it would be a blessing to stay here longer or go to glory.

Now, don't misunderstand. I'm in no hurry. I've got things to do. I have people to take care of. I have things that I want to help with. But it really is better in the alternative.

It's better in glory, which is God's perfect creation. This one was perfect, but our sin broke it. And now we live with that.

[ 15 : 08 ] And we live in that. Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. They are regarded as dust on the scales. God weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. I'll stop for a minute. He's talking about how we get impressed by our countries.

We're looking forward to our nation trying to pull us out of this problem. And I appreciate all the work that everyone's doing in our country and our leadership to try and do that. But what he's saying is that these really aren't as impressive as sometimes we think.

And what he's talking about Lebanon is that's where all the wood came from. All, that huge forest. And they're saying, even if you took all those forests to make a fire, it'd be insufficient compared to God.

Before God, and this is verse 17, before God, all the nations are as nothing. They're regarded by Him as worthless and less than nothing.

[ 16 : 09 ] To Him, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare Him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. The things we make with our hands, the things we impress ourselves with, the things that others do that we somehow think are so amazing, they really aren't.

A lot of people are worried about how am I going to pay my bills. Our government's talking about trying to send us money. I want you to think about this. Some of you have heard me say this.

Money is green paper. The only reason why it has any power is because we say and believe it has power. It's just paper. God is the real power.

The things we make with our hands, they don't mean anything. The idols we hold up don't stand up to the coronavirus.

[ 17 : 23 ] What we think is most important gets tested at a time like this. Is God our God?

Are we relying on things we've made that are so, so inconsequential compared to God? So we look in verse 21 and it says, Do you not know?

Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.

His people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to nothing, reduces the rulers of the world to nothing.

No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground that God breathes on them and they wither. And a world one sweeps them away like chaff, which is the useless part of wheat, by the way.

[ 18 : 31 ] The nations of the world, the leaders of the world, and we do look to them and we're glad that they're there. The entirety of the world, all of creation, the people who look like little insects compared to God and that's actually given them credit.

From the very beginning, God has been everything. And as we go through these struggles, we need to remember what are the things that are most important?

Our God. The people we love and that love us. The community we belong to, be it a church or otherwise.

these are the things that matter. To whom will you compare, may God says? Or what is my equal? Lift your eyes and look to the heavens who created all these.

He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. God created the whole world.

[ 19 : 41 ] He even put the stars in the heaven. The interesting piece is when we talk about stars and he talks about the starry host. We could be talking about the stars in the heaven but in the Bible stars also sometimes are a symbolic word for the angels.

So he might be saying who calls out each one of the angels by name and knows them all? I don't know how many angels there are. I don't know the names of them all. I know a few archangels' names but that's about it.

God knows them all by name and he knows you by name. He even says in the Bible he knows the very hairs on your head and how many there are. So God can create the whole universe.

He holds the whole universe. He knows the whole universe and yet he cares about you and me. One of the Psalms says consider the heavens the glories and wonders of what God has made.

Who are we that God is mindful of us? And yet it says he's made us a little less than angels and he loves us. Now and always.

[ 20 : 50 ] So verse 27 it says why do you say O Jacob and complain O Israel my way is hidden from the Lord my cause is disregarded by my God. And that's what people are saying right now.

Where's God? Does God care about us? Does God care about those who are suffering? Does God care about those who are dying? Does God care about our economy? Does God care that I don't have an income?

Does God care about how I'm not going to be able to find food? Does God care? Does God care? And I'm not going to give you my answer.

I'm going to give you the answer that Isaiah shares. It says do you not know? Haven't you heard? Maybe you haven't. The Lord is the everlasting God.

The creator of the ends of the earth. God made a whole world. He is capable of all and everything.

[ 21 : 55 ] He will not grow tired or weary. He's not resting. He's not sleeping. He's not gotten tired. He's still working on us.

And his understanding no one can fathom. We don't understand all the things of God. We have the heart and mind of God through prayer and listening to what he says to us as we talked about earlier.

But God is beyond that. And this is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible. In verse 29 it says, God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. God cares about people that are struggling. Even youth grow tired and weary and young people stumble and fall.

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. Believe me, our strength will be renewed. Jesus said, the gates of hell will not prevail against his church and they will not prevail against his people, against the people he loves.

[ 23 : 11 ] They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Heck, I even get tired. We all do. When we take too long of a walk. Yesterday, I was working hard at some things, quite physical work. I got to the end of the day and I was trying to sit down with my wife and just watch some of the things going on in the news and I was out cold.

I get weary. But God gives me strength and renews it every day, day by day, as morning comes. God renews my heart, renews my soul, renews my strength and he will do the same for you.

Now, I would end there and most people would think I should, but I'm going to read a little bit more into chapter 41. Be silent before me, you islands. Let the nations renew their strength.

Let the nations renew their strength. Let them come forward and speak. Let us meet together at the place of judgment. Let's gather together before God, even as a nation.

[ 24 : 24 ] If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and call on my name, I will heal their nation and forgive their sins. That's what the Bible tells us.

Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword to the wind-blown shaft with his bow.

He pursues them and moves on unscathed by a path his feet have not traveled before. Who has cared for us and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning?

Who has cared for the world from the beginning of time? From before we even understood who we were, God was calling us and is calling you today. The Lord, the God, it says, it says, I the Lord, with the first of them and with the last of them.

I am he from the beginning of time to the end of time and beyond the end of time. God is with us, is our strength and our power.

[ 25 : 40 ] The islands have seen it and fear the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward. All creation understands this. It's only us people that don't understand. The creation groans and waits for restoration, Romans tells us.

The world is waiting. The creation understands God. It's people. In our arrogance, we struggle against our very own maker, the one who wants to love and save us.

They approach and come forward. Each helps the other and says to their brothers and sisters, be strong. Be strong. the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil.

He says of the welding, it is good. He nails down the idol so it will not topple. They work one another to each other counting on their own strength.

But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham, my friend, and by the way, everyone who has faith is a descendant of Abraham. If you have faith in God, you are a descendant of Abraham.

[ 26 : 52 ] The majority of the people that have any religious belief in the whole world believe in Abraham and follow Abraham. Think about that. Of course, we Christians consider ourselves children of Abraham.

I took you from the ends of the earth. From its finest corners, I called you. God called you. Before you were even born, called you and he anointed you for a particular purpose in this world.

I'm sorry, that's another sermon, another message. I said, you are my servant. I have chosen you and I have not rejected you. You have a purpose. You have a place. There is something God wants you to do and God wants you to do it now in the midst of this crisis.

I said it earlier. Maybe you can make a phone call. Maybe you can help with something. Maybe you can help somebody in need. Maybe you can run an errand. I don't know what you can do. You can all do something. Don't fear.

For I am with you, God says. Do not be dismayed. Don't be dismayed because I am your God. You're not alone.

[ 28 : 00 ] God is with you and God is with all of us. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

We're going to end there tonight. Now, I know that you have concerns and thoughts and I know that you have prayers and normally in our Bible studies we take time to hear those concerns.

We would invite you to contact the church at Pendleton Center Church or Pendleton Church or or you can contact me Tom Craft at PCUMC.org or contact any of the people that work for the church any of our pastors.

We'd like to hear if you have needs and concerns because we have people that want to pray. Maybe that's something you could do. Maybe you have the time or the space. It's something you can do in your own home and so we can pray for people.

Pray for your church. Pray for your nation. Pray that this will pass and pass soon without any more damage than it needs to make and that we'll be blessed to someday be able to do this again face to face in the same room breathing on each other as God breathes on us.

[ 29 : 14 ] May God bless you and be with you tonight and always watch over you and your family and care for you this day and always in Jesus name Amen.