

Isaiah 40:1-11(ESV) ¹Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak 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 sins. ³A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." ⁶A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense [work] before him. ¹¹He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

When God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, God made something very clear to Moses. If God's people will remain faithful to God and obey God's law then God's people would be able to keep the Promised Land. But if God's people continued to sin against the Lord God, disobeying the Law continually, refusing to repent of their sinful ways, then God's people would lose the Promised Land. Obey God and keep the land or disobey God and you will lose the land, putting in its simplest form. God was and is always true to His Word. In 722 B.C. Assyria invades and overcomes Israel. In 586 B.C. Babylon conquers Judah, including Jerusalem. The Babylonians take into captivity God's people and hold them in Babylon for 70 years. This is known as the Babylonian captivity.

For years I have told you that Isaiah is my favorite prophet and I gladly and loudly proclaim that. When God called Isaiah to be a prophet, I believe Isaiah was caught up into heaven and Isaiah got to see human history from God's perspective. He got to see Jesus and the cross. He saw the 2nd coming of Christ and all the in-between time. Most importantly He saw the glory of the Lord and it changed Isaiah forever. In Isaiah 40 God shows Isaiah what will

happen to the people of Judah and Jerusalem well over 100 years before it happens. Isaiah sees into the future because God gave him this vision. A few weeks ago I was reading John chapter 12, and this is what I read, "These things Isaiah said, because He saw His glory, and he spoke of Him." Isaiah saw the glory of Christ. I believe this is one reason why Isaiah stayed so faithful to God because he was granted such a magnificent view of God.

Friends, when your knowledge and vision of God grows, your faith grows. One of the reasons we have such a hard time trusting God is our view of God is so puny. I so enjoy Isaiah because not only was he blunt in calling sin, sin, his entire life was so caught up in God. In every chapter what Isaiah saw in God becomes clearer and clearer to the reader. Isaiah's messages were some of the most difficult given and still he never lost sight of God. Prophet's hearts would break when they would see judgment coming. Jeremiah, for example is known as the weeping prophet. No prophet enjoys seeing God's judgment on its way.

Isaiah is speaking to his contemporaries about something that will happen a century later. Isaiah is also speaking to the people who will hear these words over 100 years later when the scroll of Isaiah is read in Babylon. When God's people were taken into Babylon, the scrolls went with them and were well preserved. Ezra was one of the persons in exile who took care of the scrolls. We owe a lot to Ezra for the entire Old Testament.

When you leave chapter 39 and enter 40 it is almost like going from the Old Testament into the New Testament, stepping "out of the darkness of judgment into the light of salvation" (Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah Vol. 3, pg.17). Friends', being forced into exile was absolutely awful. The suffering was incredible, but what made the suffering even worse was the people realized why they were suffering. They had brought it all on themselves because they had forsaken the Lord God Almighty, the God of all glory. They relearned the promise given through Moses that if they rebelled against the Lord God without repentance they would lose the Promised Land. They had no one to blame but themselves for where they were, away from the

homeland, stuck in Babylon. Sometimes what makes our own human suffering unbearable is when we realize it is happening because of our own choices that could not have been more wrong.

In exile Isaiah said to them and to us, "God has not abandoned you. Your best days are still ahead. God has a purpose of grace before you better than ever. He is coming to save you. Believe it, and let this hope fill your sails" (Raymond C. Ortlund, Isaiah, pg.232).

I want to read to you those words again. But let's just say you have been to the doctor and you have been told that you have cancer. Or let's say you lost your job last week and you may lose your home soon. Or let's say you are struggling with a deep depression because you are fed up with your marriage. Or you just lost a person that you loved more than life. God has a word for you. "Don't give up." No matter what has happened, God will use it for your good and for God's greater glory. God has not abandoned you. Your best days are still ahead. God has a purpose of grace before you better than ever. He is coming to save you. Believe it, and let this hope fill your sails" (Ibid pg. 32).

It is so easy to sulk, brood, and fall into self-pity. We think God has turned against us. But God wants to breathe new life into you. The Gospel gives new life. Oh friends, let's delight in the Lord our God and we will soar. The Bible says, "If God is for us who can be against us." If you are a true believer in Jesus Christ. If you have truly been born anew, born from above, saved by grace through faith, having received the Lord Jesus into your life, then God cannot turn against you. God is always for you. But remember he disciplines those whom he loves, and the Bible says endure hardship as discipline. That being said, God will never turn against you because He turned against Christ when He died on the cross. Jesus bore your condemnation. God will not turn against you. You or I might forsake the Lord, but He will never forsake His own.

Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Friends, the Christian life is not always one of struggle. Yes, I know we struggle but there are wonderful times when God speaks to us and calms our souls. God comes to us and brings His much-needed comfort. For me personally it is when I am reading the Bible and then something about God makes sense to me and I feel myself being drawn closer to the Lord. Sometimes God will give to you a profound sense of His Presence and calmness overtakes your soul. The comfort here that Isaiah speaks of is the comfort that comes from the teaching God's word of encouragement to a broken people. He does not call them dirty rotten sinners. He tells them that the day of their punishment is over. He tells them all of their sins are pardoned for God had given to them a double punishment and now is the time for comfort.

I remember as a young child being spanked by my Dad. His spankings hurt. He would say, 5 hacks and if you flinch you will get 5 more. Sometimes I would cry, and he would leave the room. Then a few minutes later he would come back into the room and comfort me and explain to me why he did what he did. Yes it hurts to get punished but the love that came afterward, the comfort of my father was priceless.

When God bathes you with holy comfort, God's encouraging word, your soul is revived. Self-pity stops and you are renewed. God is not frowning at you. God is drawing near to you. Even when we fail, God still calls us "my people." He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Friends as long as you have breath, your mission is still unfulfilled even as God's mercies are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness. The Bible says God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). John Calvin writes, "No one will ever reverence God but he who is confident that God is favorable toward him" (Ibid. pg. 235). God's people had been flattened and now Isaiah speaks the Gospel and does it ever bring comfort. One scholar writes this about the word comfort found in verse 1. "Comfort brings the brightest hopes of the future and the highest incentives to present activity are the gifts of the Divine grace that is here bestowed."

God breathes new hope into you and motivates you to be active again and all due to God's Divine grace. Friends, it is time to get up again and walk closely with God. The Promise Land awaits.

In verses 3-5 Isaiah speaks of the coming of the King. The King is coming, and this will change everything. The King will accomplish his purposes. All things will be made new. John the Baptist found his calling in these verses as He announced the coming of the Messiah. God is going to do a brand-new work and establish a new covenant. Mountains will be brought low and valleys will be lifted up. God is not in the business of changing topography. God is the business of changing people. God will change us. We are here to honor the King and live for him. The glory of the Lord Jesus will be revealed to the whole world. God has spoken. This will happen. God's glory is the fiery radiance of his very nature as seen on Sinai (Ortlund, pg 237). When Jesus was born, the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds and they were terrified. Jesus showed his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. There is mystery here but Jesus on the cross is where we see his glory in his humiliation. In heaven that will make sense. When Jesus comes again, he will come in overwhelming glory and will share his glory with us. We will inherit an eternal weight of glory the Bible says (2 Cor4.17). And throughout eternity there will be no lights, no sun or moon for all will be lit by God's glory and somehow this emanates from Christ. Jesus makes all things right and he makes all things bright. No one has suffered more than Christ, and no one will be more glorified than Christ. Therefore, the glory of the Lord is God becoming visible to us. We will see his beauty before us, the true answer to our deepest longings (Ortlund pg. 237). This is the promise of the Gospel. This is all found in verses 3-5.

In verses 6-8 we are told that we are fallible, but God and his word are infallible. We will pass away, but the Word of the Lord is perfect and will last forever. God's promise of salvation is final, and we will see his glory one day face to face.

Verses 9-11 tell God's people to proclaim this good news real loud. Don't hold back. Say it on a high mountain for all to hear. Turn the volume to full blast. God's Presence is here, and it brings us joy. He is our conquering King, and He is our wealthy benefactor. He speaks of the cities of Judah which is a promise of their return from exile to Judah. They get to go home again. In verse 11 we see our Jesus tending his flock like a shepherd. He is our shepherd. We are the sheep. He gathers his lambs in his arms and comforts them. He carries the sheep and gives his gentle lead. He picks us up as sinners, saves us, and makes us into His saints. This is the Lord's doing.

Almost 30 years ago a pastor friend of mine fell into the addiction of alcoholism. The entire church knew what was going on. An intervention was done, and the pastor went for help. I know this is not always the case, but this pastor fully repented of his addiction to a false god, alcohol, and made right his relationships that had been so hurt because of his drinking. He became a new man. He experienced God's great deliverance. More than likely he would have died otherwise. When his life was restored, he referred to Isaiah 40 and told his listeners that he was one of those little lambs that the Good Shepherd, Jesus, picked up and held him to his chest and saved him. I know he can do the same for all of us, deliverance from sin and impart new life for our best days are always still to be. Amen and Amen.