

Great Comfort, Great Savior

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11

Do you need comfort right now? Some of you may be thinking, "I wish the pews in church were more comfortable. I wish my bed was a bit more comfortable last night." Yesterday at 3:30pm, I was comforted when my wife and I finished our Christmas shopping. I told her that it was like a marathon, but in reality it was more like a sprint trying to get to the finish line as quickly as we could before the race was over. But, I am not talking about those kinds of comfort. For many people, Christmas is a joyous time where family and friends gather together, exchange gifts and share a good meal. For others, Christmas can be a painful reminder of some hurt or loss in their lives. For these people, they may long for some comfort. Some of you are perhaps going through some challenges right now that you just wish for some relief. The Good News from God is that He wants to give you comfort. In fact, Scripture refers to Him as the God of all comfort.

So far, we have looked at several prophecies in the book of Isaiah concerning the long awaited Savior. If you were reading through the book of Isaiah, you might notice a slight shift in Isaiah's focus as you go from chapter thirty-nine to forty. In chapter thirty-nine, Isaiah seemed to move from addressing the problems in his own day, to anticipating Judah's future exile to Babylon. When we reach chapter forty, Isaiah seems to speak to God's people after they had been deported to Babylon. Up to then, Isaiah was prophesying to God's people what was going to happen to them, but in this section, it is like he is speaking to them in the midst of exile. While the situation was bad, God's message through Isaiah is one of comfort. Isaiah opened this chapter with these words:

Isaiah 40:1–2 ¹ *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.* ² *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...*

God's purpose here in this section of the Isaiah's prophecy is to comfort His brokenhearted people. When times were bad, God's message to His people was that there is hope. That is good news for us. There is hope. There is comfort. This passage reveals four types of comfort that God provides to those who receive it:

- *Comfort with God's Amazing Grace*
- *Comfort with God's Glorious Presence*
- *Comfort with God's Dependable Word*
- *Comfort with God's Good Shepherd*

Comfort with God's Amazing Grace (vss. 1-2)

The reason for the Jewish people's exile was punishment for sin. Sometimes, we put ourselves in bad situations, just as the Israelites had done. Though God's people had turned away from Him, God still treated them as His people. He said, "Comfort my people." When children rebel against their parents, the parents will still reach out to them to restore their relationship. So it is with God. The Jewish people had turned from God and were justly punished for it, but God was now declaring hope to them. Their

hardship would soon be over. Peace would be a welcome comfort. God was tenderly speaking to them letting them know He was with them and they would see better days.

Peace was not the only comfort here. God's grace here included forgiveness. Their sin was pardoned. Doesn't forgiveness feel good? Isn't it comforting? We oftentimes have a difficult time extending forgiveness, but we love to receive it. When you find it hard to forgive someone else, just remember how you love to receive forgiveness when you have wronged someone else. Think about how much you desire forgiveness. When we turn from God, we can know that He is ready to forgive us and bring us back to Him. Scripture declares that when we were God's enemies, ungodly, and sinful, He reached out to us with amazing grace. That should be very comforting. You can never be so bad, or go too far from God that He cannot reach you. Some of you may need to hear that. God is there to comfort you with amazing grace and forgiveness.

Comfort with God's Glorious Presence (vss. 3–5)

In verse three, Isaiah proclaimed the following:

***Isaiah 40:3** A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

For God's people who were exiled in a foreign land, it may have seemed like wilderness. They were away from their home. They were away from the Promised Land that God had given to them. In some respects, they may have felt they were away from the presence of God Himself. To them, Isaiah's announcement to "prepare the way of the Lord" would have been welcome news. God was about to act. They were about to go home. Get ready for it. The immediate fulfillment of this prophecy was when the Jewish people returned home after their exile. The ultimate fulfillment, however, occurred much later, when John the Baptist prepared the way of our Lord, Jesus Christ. John preached a message of repentance preparing for the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus comforted the people by ministering to them - healing both body and soul. He comforted them by meeting both their physical and spiritual needs. Jesus also comforted the people by His very presence. When Jesus walked the earth, God in the flesh was with us. Then Jesus went back to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit in His stead. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit. That should be very comforting. No matter how bad things become, we know God is there. We know that God will never leave us nor forsake us. Those who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior enjoy the abiding presence of God. There will be another fulfillment of this comforting presence of God when we enjoy the everlasting presence of God in our home away in heaven.

One day, everyone will see God. Every knee will bow before Him. Will this be comforting to everyone? Will it be comforting to those who never trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? If your sins are forgiven and you have been adopted into His family, this will be a very comforting time. If not, then this will be most uncomfortable. People should prepare for the coming of the Lord when all mankind will meet God. The future will be

glorious, but it will not be glorious for everyone. That is why we must be diligent to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

Comfort with God's Dependable Word (vss. 6–8)

The fulfillment of God's comforting promise is based upon something that is dependable. It depends upon something that is unchanging and true. When my wife and I were dating, the first birthday present I remember giving to her was a parallel Bible with several translations side-by-side. If you are thinking about what to give someone this Christmas, I think the best gift is God's Word. One of the things that my wife and I really appreciated about one another and one of the main reasons I was so attracted to her was a strong trust and reverence for God's Word. We believe the Bible to be the very Word of God, not just some ancient book that happens to contain some of God's inspired sayings. This is a view not shared by some Christians. Thus, before I gave that Bible to my wife, I wrote the passage from Isaiah 40:8 in the front of the Bible:

Isaiah 40:8 *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

God's Word is true and it will be true forever. It will not change like the shifting sand. God's Word will also not change like the word of mankind. People will lie to you. People will break promises. People will say one thing to you and do another. Not so with God! Contrast God's promises to the former kings of Israel. They were weak in character. They were untrustworthy. They faded away. Far from fading away, God's Word is trustworthy and produces hope. One should not trust other people or put any hope in them, for God's promises are man's only solid and a sure source of strength. Flowers "fall," but God's Word "will stand." What He promises will happen.

The good news of comfort for God's people is that like the bloom of the flower, "all people, all flesh," is grass. People who oppose God will fade and wither away just like the flower fades. Those who oppose God will wither away like the grass of the field. No matter what challenge you are personally facing, no matter how much Satan seems to be winning, you can know that He will wither away and God will be victorious. That should comfort us when we doubt the future because the present is bleak. This should also comfort us when we face the fading of human life. Death may come, but the eternal life God gives us through His Son Jesus Christ will never fade or wither away.

Comfort with God's Good Shepherd (vss. 9–11)

While there is comfort in God's written Word which is totally true and dependable, there is one other comfort. Isaiah ended this passage by mentioning the care God would have for His people. God will take care of His people as a shepherd tends his flock. Isaiah described His care for His people with descriptions of gathering, feeding, carrying, and leading - various roles of a shepherd. This shows the intimate relationship God will have with His own people. It describes the intimate relationship He could have with you through His Son Jesus Christ:

John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

We are no longer a people without a leader. We have a Good Shepherd Who loves us and will take care of us. The Apostle John called Him the living Word of God that became flesh. Jesus took on mortal, withering, fading, flesh and became the Good Shepherd who will gather His lambs in his arms, carrying them as a loving Lord. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who “lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:1–18) Jesus faced a withering, death on a cross, but overcame death and sin, rising from the grave and making it certain that God’s Word will never die and can be trusted. Both the written Word of God and the living incarnate Word of God comforts us. He is our Good Shepherd. Isaiah suggested the following response to this good news:

Isaiah 40:9 *Go on 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!”*

The greatest comfort we can experience is the love and care of the Good Shepherd. But we are not the only ones who need to experience that comfort. Others need it, too. Isaiah declared that we should shout it from the mountaintops. We ought to boldly proclaim this comforting Good News to the world that there is a Good Shepherd. Say to others, “Here is your God. Here is your Savior. Don’t you want to know Him today?”

Conclusion

In closing, God was born in the person of Jesus Christ so that those who believe in Him may know God. God is offering a great salvation. It is great because there is great sin that requires a great Savior. The people during Isaiah’s time were comforted with the promise of God’s salvation to come. They did not see it but believed it would happen. They anticipated the long expected Savior. The greatest comfort we can have is to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We are comforted right now with Jesus Christ, with forgiveness and the hope of a better day, but we will not fully realize that comfort until Jesus returns to gather us together and take us home in heaven.

Knowing these things, how will we prepare for Christmas? I suggest that we prepare with repentance and worship. If you do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then certainly you have a need to repent of sin and turn to Jesus Christ. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, then you too can prepare for Jesus Christ by repenting. We do not become perfect when we accept Christ. Someone has once said that the Christian life is one of continuous repentance. We need to turn from our sin as long as we live in these mortal bodies. Another way to prepare for the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ is to worship Him. We ought to declare the mighty deeds of God’s salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. Praise Him and adore Him Who left heaven above to dwell with us as a human in order to die on a cross for our sins so that those who trust in Him will have eternal life. Jesus was born to die in order that we may have life. Worship our Savior for the great salvation He has provided. This is Good News. Thanks be to God. Amen!