

Isaiah 40:1-11 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. ² "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD's hand Double for all her sins." ³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; ⁵ The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh *is* grass, And all its loveliness *is* like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people *are* grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." ⁹ O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift *it* up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand*, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward *is* with Him, And His work before Him. ¹¹ He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry *them* in His bosom, *And* gently lead those who are with young.

The King Comes With Gifts

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I might have mentioned to some of you before that David and I sound a lot alike. We used to see how long we could talk on the phone before someone would know the difference. But it's not just the voice you have to imitate. It's also the mannerisms, the way of speaking, what you talk about. That is where I would fail if I stayed on the phone for too long. David loves talking about sports but I'm not that into them.

Here we have the opposite instead of two people that sound the same we have one person who sounds like two. So much so that anyone who dismisses divine revelation insists that the book of Isaiah must be written by two different people, chapters 1 – 39 by one guy and 40 to the end (66) by another. They can't possibly be the same person.

Such people don't understand the Word of God. Indeed it's not only Isaiah that they divide in this way. Have you heard someone talk about how they want "an old testament style god" or they might say "I want judgment old testament style." Such phrases presuppose that there is a difference between the old testament God and the Jesus of the new testament. Such people

presuppose that the God of the Old Testament is all about judgment and Jesus is all about love. Actually Jesus is far more judgmental in the New Testament than He is in the Old. The commandments say don't commit adultery, the Sermon on the Mount says don't even look at another woman.

So it's not Jesus versus the God of the Old Testament, but the vast difference between two different messages that both come from the same God, the Law which condemns absolutely and the Gospel that saves absolutely. These two could not be more different. They could not be father apart.

And it is this same difference that makes the vast difference between the first 39 chapters of Isaiah and the last 26. The message and therefore the tone of the second part of Isaiah is different not because a different person wrote it but because God has a new message for Israel.

Here is how the first half of Isaiah begins

Isaiah 1:2-4 ² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me; ³ The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; *But* Israel does not know, My people do not consider." ⁴ Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.

Compare that to the beginning of our text today. **"Comfort, yes comfort my people."**

It is easy to see why people think this must be someone completely different. But what a wonderful thing for us to know it is the same God. The same God, who condemns us because of our sin, also says to us, "be at peace, and be comforted, for I have forgiven your sins."

What is the comfort that Isaiah is to speak to the people of God?

First: That her service is ended

God spent the first half of the book, condemning Israel for their sin. But now it is as though He is saying we need a new plan this isn't working. Forget the law. Forget all that stuff you are supposed to be doing. I'm just going to do it all for you. All this hard labor with which you were burdened is gone now.

How happy my confirmation students would be if I told them, you don't have to do anymore memory work. This is ten times as good to hear.

Not many of have made a trip to Jerusalem, or sacrificed a sheep. We certainly are not under the law in that way but we have all certainly felt the weight of the law. We all know that we are not who or what we should be. We try and try and try to do what is right and we keep failing. We fail to be a good parent, a good spouse, a good child. It's this weight weighing us down.

God says I'll take this hard labor on myself. Jesus says "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

This hard labor under the law is done. Christ did it for us.

Second: You iniquity is pardoned

No more labor and your past debts are paid.

Third: You have received double

So you go to the bank where you owe a million dollars. And you plead with the banker I can't pay please forgive my debt. Of course he isn't going to do it, but imagine if he did. What would your next step be to ask for more? No you leave before he changes his mind. But as you leave he calls out to you wait, take this receipt. The receipt is for five million that he already deposited in your account.

That is what the Lord is saying here. You owed one million I forgave that now I'm going to give that same amount doubled. I'm going to give you far more than what you owed. Grace for Grace.

This is the triple gift that God promises at the beginning of Isaiah 40

1. No more slavery to the law
2. Sins forgiven
3. He will pour out His gifts upon you

This is the king who is coming. Not some evil King, not some terrible conqueror, but rather this one who brings such wonderful gifts. We want this king to come to our home, because He is coming there are two very important things we want to do.

One Prepare

Mark and Greta stopped by my house the other week. I knew they were coming but I forget. I told them its kind of nice to forget because then I wasn't frantically trying to straighten up my office.

Well we know the King is coming, we need to straighten up our hearts. We need to get ready. But this preparation isn't a sad dreadful thing. It's glad tidings; it's a great and wonderful thing. Preparing for Christmas is joyful thing. It's a lot of work, but its work you are happy to do.

The same is true here the king is coming. We are joyful that the King is coming. We are happy to get out and make everything ready.

The mountains have to come down, the valleys have to be filled in. That is everything that impedes the Kings progress has to be removed. Not for His sake but for ours. We don't want him to find our dirty underwear sitting around when He arrives. We want to repent and clean up our sin.

Two "Go Tell it On the Mountain"

This is such a wonderful thing the voice can't keep it to himself. He has to get up into the high mountains where his voice will carry. He's got to let everyone know the King is coming.

When we would drive through the villages in the Congo, then the children would run in front of us, "Muzonga, Muzonga." It was pretty exciting for them that a rich foreigner came. Partially because they thought that I was going to hand out candy or something, which I rarely had with me.

This is the attitude of the voice, run through the villages; let everyone know the King is on his way.

Of course the voice is John the Baptist, and when we think of John we think of the prophet in course clothing, shouting "Repent" but that was only part of his message. There was also great excitement the king is coming, and what is he going to do:

Behold, His reward *is* with Him, And His work before Him. ¹¹ He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry *them* in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.

What a wonderful picture of His love and care for us. Providing for His flock, any that are too young he carries in His arms, he waits patiently for the pregnant, helping them on their way.

This is the King we are preparing for. That is why we gladly prepare, rejoicing that such a king would come to us.

AMEN

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus