

God Prepares Your Heart

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Isaiah 40:1-11 NKJ "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.

On the south side of county road AW about halfway between here and Waupun, there is a house covered in Christmas lights. This house really stands out. There is a house that is ready for Christmas.

If we have the time and inclination we could prepare our houses similarly for Christmas, what we cannot do no matter how hard we try is prepare our hearts for Christ's coming. God tells us through the prophet Isaiah that our striving is over. He will prepare our hearts for the coming of his son.

God prepares us through the preaching of both the law and the gospel, but he does so by speaking tenderly, even when he is preaching the law.

God speaks tenderly to us. Not all that he has to say are things that we want to hear. God know the heaviness of our hearts, the weariness of this world, the weight of our sin. He has some harsh things to say and some very good things to say, but harsh or good he speaks tenderly

Verses 1-2

That her warfare is ended -

The warfare mentioned here is the warfare of the law. The prophet speaks about striving to be good enough, that striving is ended. It is ended because "your iniquity is pardoned." Further the prophet says your iniquity is not only pardoned but "you have received double for all your sins."

Here we have the teaching of the active and passive obedience of Christ. It was not enough that Jesus paid for your sins. This is his passive obedience. Jesus also lived a perfect life for you. This is his active obedience.

If someone is deeply in debt and living on the streets, and you want to help them, it is not enough to pay off their debt? You must pay off their debt and give them enough to rent an apartment and buy food. Whatever their debt is you must give them double. If we only paid off their debt, they would have to keep striving to gain enough to pay rent and food.

That is indeed what some teach about Christ, that he has paid your debt, but that you now must be good enough to earn heaven. That is not the case here for Isaiah, for what does Isaiah say, "Your striving is ended," and, "you have received double."

Christ didn't just pay for our sins. He also fulfilled the law. He gave us double, paying off our debt and giving us his righteousness. In this way Christ has prepared our hearts.

John's gospel has that wonderful reminder of this truth, when he says that we have all received "grace for grace" or "grace upon grace." However great our sins we have received double, enough to pay the debt and that amount again so that we are counted righteous before God

Concerning this verse Luther writes thus, "May you diligently learn it . . . I cannot sufficiently urge this passage upon you, because it is so necessary . . . Stop trusting in works, but seek righteousness in the kingdom of Christ"

Christ prepares your heart for Christmas because he has given you the double grace. Your sins are forgiven, and his righteousness is yours.

Verses 3-8

God cannot prepare us properly for Christ if he only preaches the gospel. The law must be proclaimed.

Last week I told Vanessa we would go today to get our Christmas tree, but before we go that corner where we put the Christmas tree must get cleaned up. Just so before Christmas can come, that is before Christ can come to your hearts, God knows your hearts must be cleaned up. So, through Isaiah God prepares our hearts preaching the law to clean out our hearts.

This law is bad news, which the world, if it could, would like to remove utterly from the holidays. Many will say that Christmas is a time to celebrate let's not talk about sin and death. Yet God knows the truth that you cannot celebrate unless you first prepare. This is why before the coming of Christ is the coming of John, John prepares the way through the preaching of the law calling men to repentance and baptism

God himself must do this, it is God who through his messenger John brings down the mountains and makes the crooked straight. This is not something that we can do. This is a thing that God does for us through the preaching of the law. This is why John did not just preach the law but also baptized, so that through that sacrament God could prepare the hearts of his people.

God prepares our hearts to receive his great gift, through the preaching of the law. He reminds us of our sin and the consequences of our sin which is death.

As proof of our sin the voice points to death, for "the wages of sin is death." Death is the result of sin. Death is a reminder of our sin. The voice in the wilderness challenges anyone who thinks they do not need Christ, anyone who thinks that they are good enough, to them the voice says ok you stand here next to the word of God and let's see which of you remains. All men die and wither before the word of God, but God's word remains, proving the truth of God's word. God prepares our hearts for his coming through the preaching of the law.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed –

After you have cleaned the corner and brought in the tree and hung all the lights on the tree and on your house, then you plug it all in and the glory of what you have done is seen.

The prophet says, after the Lord has prepared everything, then the glory of the Lord is revealed. This is the glory of the Lord, that he takes the proud and mighty and brings them low. This is the glory of the Lord that he takes the lowly sinner and builds him up. This is the glory of the Lord that all are even. The greatest saint and the greatest sinner in Christ are even. Even as Paul writes "all have sinned" and again "all are justified through faith in Christ Jesus."

And having prepared everything the glory of the Lord comes to the hearts of men. And filled with that glory the people of God ascend to the highest mountain to proclaim what God has done for each of us.

No matter how hard we try we cannot prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. God has prepared us. He prepares us through the preaching of the law. He prepares us by giving us double for our sins. He prepares us and when he has prepared us the glory of the Lord comes to us.