

Christmas Comfort
Isaiah 40:1-11

Intro

In the past two decades with the rise of the internet and a myriad of news and media outlets - we have more access to news and information than any society in the history of the world.

While there are many advantages to the evolution of media, there are also problems and difficulties in conjunction with the advantages.

If we are plugged into the 24 hour news cycle, internet news outlets and so forth, we are bombarded with terrible tragedies one after another. Something new every day to chew on.

- 58 killed and almost 550 wounded in Las Vegas mass shooting
- Another celebrity accused of sexual misconduct or assault
- A terrorist detonates a pipe bomb in NYC subway station
- Devastating wildfires rip through SoCal

That's just in the past couple of months. To say nothing of international wars and genocide, ISIS, nuclear threats from North Korea.

Ya'll - we only have so much emotional margin. If we were to give ourselves to feeling appropriate grief for everything in the world we would be emotionally wasted and burned out - It would seem that advertising is set up to play off of our fears - here's the awful tragedy - cut to commercial - buy the Mercedes Benz, book the Sandals Resort vacation, Eat at Chik-Fil-A (good one) - provide comfort

If not outright fearful (some are) - Many of us walk around with a low-grade anxiety even below the surface of our joys and happy moments. Not only the chaos of the world but our own internal struggles with sin and suffering, familial conflicts, unmet longings for companionship.

It is in the place of fear, conflict, anxiety that God speaks to us. He speaks a word of comfort to us. Read our text and hear from God himself

Read text

This text points us towards comfort through what we celebrate at Christmas - who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us - and I trust that as we explore this text God intends to comfort and cheer our hearts in this Christmas season and every season. 4 Points - 1. The Call to Comfort - 3 means of comfort to us 1. Be comforted by glory of God, 2. Be comforted by the Word of God, 3. Be comforted by the arrival of God.

I. The Call to Comfort

- A. Coming out of chapter 39 and all that preceded - prophecy of destruction and bondage - discipline for their rebellion against God - idolatry
- B. Into a place of suffering and darkness - yes and sin - to an undeserving and helpless people - God speaks a word of comfort.
- C. Note v. 1 - double "comfort" - emphasis - "my" people - personal - even in sin
 - 1. This Word is to God's people who have suffered under the discipline of God for their sin - but that discipline will not have the last Word - the heart of God for his people revealed - the word of his

grace

- D. Oh prophet of God - proclaimer of the Word of the Lord - speak TENDERLY, gently, loving to Jerusalem - this prophetic word speaking to a people in captivity - no Jerusalem -
- E. Insight - Jerusalem central dwelling place of God's presence - the heart of God's people
 - 1. The center of God's presence now being the church of Christ
 - 2. Tenderly = speak to the heart
- F. Tender but loudly - CRY to her - make sure she knows - 3 things
 - 1. Your warfare is ended - God is bringing your captivity, your conflict to an end - lifting your burdens
 - 2. Her iniquity is pardoned!
 - a) Iniquity = sin = wickedness / rebellion against God = failing to do what is right and actively doing that which is opposed to conscience and the Word of God
 - b) The sin that brought the people of God under the discipline of God has been pardoned
 - c) In their day they would immediately have understood in the context of blood sacrifice of animals - sacrificial system - atonement for sin - iniquity can only be pardoned by blood sacrifice

[4] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

- (1) On this side of the cross of Jesus Christ - this pardoning of sin is only through the shed of blood of Christ.
 - (a) Can't just forgive - he is just - so he has sent his own willing Son to pay the price and bear the penalty so that our iniquity can be pardoned
- (2) But it is glorious to the people of Israel then - glorious for us now

Illustration: Witnessing to Matt - "what a relief"

[7] "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; [8] blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." (Romans 4:7-8)

- 3. She has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins - yes God disciplines his people for their own good but there is a limit to his discipline. Loved stands behind his discipline - our good and his glory
- G. Application
 - 1. So this Word of comfort comes to those who are undeserving, those who are sinners, those who are struggling - so it comes to each one of us
 - 2. This good news undergirds all other comforts - from this foundation of comfort in the gospel - from the river of grace in Christ burst the fountain of all other comforts - we are pointed specifically towards the great comforts of God

II. Be comforted by the glory of God

- A. A voice cries - not identified - In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD - points toward the coming of Christ does it not

[1] In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [3] For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" (Matthew 3:1-3)

1. valley's filled in, mountains flattened out, uneven and rough places smoothed out - not literally topography - picture of the reorientation and transformation of repentance (John the baptizer)
 - a) Prepare your lives, change, reorient, disrupt, remove barriers in preparation for v. 5 the coming of the glory of the LORD - that coming we know is in the coming of the Christ child that we celebrate this Christmas season

Illustration: We read in the Christmas account of Luke 2 - a man named Simeon was "waiting for the consolation of Israel" - comfort - he has the opportunity to see the Christ child and this is what he says:

[30] for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

- B. It will happen because "the mouth of the LORD has spoken" - done deal - never lies - always accomplishes his will - he has kept his Word in Christ
- C. Explanation
 1. We are hardwired to long for glory

Illustration: Art, music, canyons, sunsets - our hearts move towards beauty and transcendence - listening to a song this past week - longing and ache and beauty - all only dim reflections that point toward the one who is truly glorious

- D. Having received Christ by faith - yet there is more glories in him than even longings in us

Illustration: "glory cloud" - sparkly mist coming out of the heating vents. The glory of God is the weightiest, potent, spectacular reality in the universe - when the glory fills the temple the priests can't even stand

- E. How do we prepare for deeper and more powerful experiences of the glory of God - his power and presence - to build us up and comfort us? This text calls us to self-evaluation, contemplation, ultimately repentance
 1. Let this Christmas season be an occasion for renewed turning from and fighting selfishness, lusts, spiritual laziness - whatever the Spirit is bringing to mind
 - a) UP, UP MY FRIEND! PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE GLORY OF THE LORD WITH RENEWED ENERGY.
 2. Disrupt the sin in our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit to prepare ourselves for God's holy glory in Christ

III. The comfort of the Word of God

- A. Second voice - cry
 1. Job of the preacher - not to formulate out of his mind clever ideas or mere practical principles - WHAT SHALL I CRY
- B. 'humans are like grass that dies when the Lord breathes on them' - how's that for comfort? What's the insight?
 1. People are not ultimate - human life is transient and fading - we all know this but try to forget it

Illustration: Because of the curse of death we groan under - all of the universe is inclined towards entropy and breakdown. Our text directs us to look at the fading nature of grass and flowers - see this out the window right now as we come into winter - to remember that life is short and fleeting

2. People are not ultimate - God and his Word are ultimate - totally unlike our fading human existence.
- C. God's Word never withers or fades. More specifically the Word of the Gospel remains true in every season for those who trust Christ

[22] Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:22-25)

1. What’s the remedy to death? Being born again through the good news of the gospel - the Word of our Lord which stands forever

D. Application

1. The Word appears to be under attack - unassailable
2. All attempts to distort - remains immutable
3. Endeavors to relegate to the margins - transcendent
4. In our subjective experiences of shame and condemnation - the Word of his grace still gloriously holds true
 - a) What comfort for all those who cling to his Word - it stands forever
 - b) In the new earth - 10 TRILLION YEARS - we will still see forever

Rooted in the comfort of the gospel we receive the comfort of God’s glory and unchanging Word as we look to the comfort of God’s arrival

IV. Be comforted by the arrival of God

- A. Voice 3 - v. 9 - Go up to a place where your voice can be heard by the most people
 1. O Zion - now this proclamation is placed not in the hands of the prophet / preacher - this exhortation is for all the people of God to cry aloud
 2. “herald” - like an envoy bringing message of victory and joy - herald w/ strength- put your back into it - without fear - with courage
- B. Substance of the proclamation? Behold your God! The center of the gospel is God and the essential proclamation is Behold your God! Whatever you think God is like or even if you endeavor to suppress the knowledge of him in atheism - the people of God herald - behold - look - gaze upon - “YOUR” God
- C. For God does not stand static in heaven as a theological novelty - v. 10 HE COMES
 1. The comfort of Christmas is present here - behold - HE COMES
- D. Look at how he comes:
 1. Mighty Sovereign Warrior - w/ might - ruling and reigning bringing rewards and justice - his recompense is before him - it would appear that he comes to his own reward - his own inheritance - his people - WOW!
 2. To his enemies he comes as a dread warrior - but to them he is a shepherd
 - a) He gathers the vulnerable and holds them close to his heart
 - b) He leads the vulnerable into green pastures and still waters
 3. And this warrior shepherd we know - comes as a baby - to us a child is born, to us a child is given - the government will be upon his shoulders - of his kingdom of righteousness and peace there will be no end.

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

E. Application

1. This is who Jesus is for us now
 - a) Our mighty King - reigning in our hearts - Shepherd full of loving kindness - oh what great comfort is in the coming of our Shepherd King - trust him - entrust your sorrows and fears and griefs to him

**All praise to Him, the God of light
 Who formed the mountains by His might
 All praise to Him Who names the stars
 That sing His fame in skies afar
 All praise to Him Who reigns in love
 Who guides the galaxies above
 Yet bends to hear our every prayer
 With sovereign pow'r and tender care**

2. Expectation of consummation
 - a) He has come to set up kingdom in human hearts through his cross and resurrection - came as a babe - came to humble himself - returning in power and glory and splendor to set all things right
 - b) Lord haste the day - MARANATHA - COMFORT IN HIS COMING
3. Evangelism
 - a) HERALD - behold your God - behold and believe the Gospel of the grace of God
 - (1) Do so without fear - Holy Spirit boldness
 - b) Even in this Comfort enjoyed and maximized in the sharing - in praising God to others

The world rings with praise — lovers praising their mistresses [Romeo praising Juliet and vice versa], readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game — praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars...just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?"...I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*)

Share the Gospel with someone this Christmas season and be blessed and comforted in the sharing. IT'S REALLY TRUE

Close

Comfort, Comfort my people says your God
 Word of comfort comes to us this Christmas season as we remember that all of this comes with the birth of the Christ child whom we celebrate this Christmas

The comfort of the Gospel renewing and reviving bursting forth in us as the fountain of all other comforts

- The glory of God revealed in Christ - his presence and power for us
- His sure and enduring Word, pointing towards his coming again.

Note - All comfort located in God - outside of and beyond disaster and chaos - when we come to the end of all our options and resources - that is where we find the comfort of God.

Be comforted by God himself in this season - to his great name by all glory and honor and praise

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