

Isaiah 40:1-11

"Comfort & Consolation"

There is a paradigm shift that takes place at this point in the book of Isaiah. We're lifted out of the minor key of *condemnation* & heavy *exhortation* to the major key of *comfort & consolation*. Our focus transitions from the *Sovereign's crown* to the *Savior's cross*. From the *government of God* to the *grace of God*. From the *law of God pointedly proclaimed* to the *love of God powerfully portrayed*. From the "*burden of the Lord*" to the "*blessing of the Lord*" & from the *judgment of God* to the *joy of God*.

Vs 1-2

I trust that if you've been w/us throughout the previous Ch's of the book of Isaiah, you catch the shift in tone beginning here in Ch 40. Let's recall that as Ch 39 came to a close, it was w/the ominous announcement of Babylonian captivity looming on the horizon for the nation of Judah. They would be delivered from the snare of the Assyrians only to wind up in the net (so to speak) of the Babylonians.

Because of Hezekiah's pride, the fact that he sought to impress these ambassadors from Babylon by showing them all the nation's treasures. He allowed their flattery to inflate his ego after he'd promised walk carefully *before* the Lord & intentionally *honor* the Lord. Today we might say that Hezekiah took Judah out of the proverbial *frying pan* of *Assyrian* captivity & into the *fire* of *Babylonian* captivity. **Oh, it would be 100 yrs or so later, but how discouraging is it to know (as a nation) that you may've escaped captivity, but your sons/daughters, your grandchildren are going to be carried away & taken captive by a pagan nation?**

But there's a transition that takes place here. Because God wants them to know, that's not how the story ends. Yes, judgment is coming, the sins of God's people will be dealt with. But those sins will also be *done away with!* Their iniquity pardoned; they'll be released from the bondage of Babylon & a glorious restoration of the nation will take place.

So the word goes out *to the people, through* Isaiah, "*Comfort, yes, comfort My people! Says your God.*" Family, it's an important principle that we latch onto here. Isaiah knew what it was to warn, rebuke & instruct God's people. But of equal value is the fact that God wanted His people to receive *His* comfort. & God wanted His people to know that they could receive comfort because it wasn't simply an empty gesture, perhaps the spiritual platitude proclaimed by some well-intended individual w/no real power or ability to do anything for them.

It's not the comfort of a friend or a neighbor, a work associate or even a parent or grandparent. * I'd never seek to devalue anyone's efforts or intentions to bring comfort. But sometimes there's just nothing any *person* can do for you. They may try (& again they *mean well*) but it just falls short of the deep needs of the recesses of your heart.

But your Creator, *your God* sees what's happening, *He will* comfort you, He is moved w/compassion toward you, & will bring true healing & hope to the hidden hurt of your heart. God is saying here that He will not neglect the deep-seated hurt in the hearts of His family. The Psalmist said it like this, "*The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.*"¹ Note the familial terms of Vs 1, "My people" "Your God." There's relationship there.

God sees you; He knows what's happening *in* you & He's not indifferent toward your pain, your anguish of soul, the hurt of your heart. What a *precious* ministry... & a much *needed* ministry among the people of God today. Bringing comfort, consolation to others in the name of J.C. W/all the confusion out there, so much fear & uncertainty, the people of God are all too ready for a word of comfort & encouragement. *

& That's what this word "comfort" means. It means to ease one's sorrow, to strengthen emotionally, to console & encourage compassionately. * I think all too often, God is either (intentionally or inadvertently) portrayed as the Man w/the giant flyswatter in the sky & He's just waiting for the opportune time to swat you down. & Though I'd never for a second seek to diminish the holy/righteousness nature of the Living God. Let's be careful that we not neglect the fact that God's heart is equally full of compassion, tender in mercy & longs to bring healing to the hurting! * In fact, * God is the *wellspring*, the very *origin source* of all comfort.

Ladies and Gentlemen: The Bible is clear. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*"²

Family, I want you to understand what we just read. The Holy Spirit (through the apostle Paul) wants you to know that there are times you're going to go through things. He calls them "troubles", he calls them "tribulations". & You're going to wonder, "Why?" (We're always trying to wrap our head around the "why" & the "what for" in life.)

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 34:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 1:3-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Why did this happen *to me?*” “What did I do to bring this *upon me?*” But God wants you to know that there are going to be times that you are allowed to pass through things that have *nothing to do w/you*. He’s got someone else on His radar that He wants to minister to *through you*. & He wants you to be able to testify of the faithfulness, the comfort, the healing power of God upon the deep hurt of your heart to that person who needs a word in due season. & It won’t be an empty, “hang in there, I’m sure it’ll get better.” It’ll be. “Hey, I’ve been right where you are & I want to tell you how God ministered to me. How He brough healing to me.” & It will resonate in them, it will be real to them & God will reach out to them through your life... Are you open to God taking you through deep waters to further *His reach through your life?*

Family, He is the God of all comfort & He needs His messengers to speak comfort to His people. 🌱 We come to a place like this & everyone looks so nice. We all do our best to put forth our best countenance. But I know there are hidden hurting hearts in this room & it’s important that you hear a word of comfort from the Lord. & He ministers comfort through the power/Person of His Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16) as the “Helper” or “Comforter”.

Btw, as long as we’re speaking about relationship between our heavenly Father & His people, (His children), let’s throw this out there. As parents, there are times we need to speak a stern word or take an action that’s severe. But even as we see here. After conviction, after correction, there should always be comfort, restoration & reconciliation.

“Speak comfort to Jerusalem...” *This word “comfort” is different than the word translated “Comfort” in Vs 1. Literally what this says is, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem”. & It’s not that we never challenge the mind, never appeal to the intellect, but to comfort someone you need to speak to the heart... & Look at the word God speaks to the heart of His people, “Her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned...” Now, from the practical perspective, the Assyrians were still knocking on their door. The Babylonians were looming in their future. But from the prophetic perspective, the warfare was already over.*

(We’ll touch on this in a little bit so I won’t linger on it here. But this is the confidence, the certainty of the word of God. God can speak of those things yet to happen as though they’re already past.) We’ll see in Isa 46, *I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’³*

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 46:9-10] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But the word of comfort, “the warfare is ended.” – & There are obviously a couple of applications here. From the perspective of evangelism, * you have good news, a word of comfort to share w/mankind. “The warfare is ended.” There’s no reason to be at enmity (in a state of warfare) against God. Iniquity has been pardoned.

(Now—we’re going to break stride w/our text for just a moment because the pardoning of *your* iniquity differs from what happened w/Judah historically. The warfare I’m talking about has nothing to do w/Assyria or Babylon, but the war mankind wages w/God through sin.) The sin dilemma has been pardoned, not by any payment we made, but by the payment *He* made through J.C. upon the cross! Rom 5:1, *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”*,⁴ & Again Col 1:19-20, *“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”*⁵ In Christ, your “iniquity is pardoned.”

So guard against the trap of thinking that somehow or in some way, you still need to “pay” for your sins. You can’t. Christ did... Now, you may need to make things right w/someone you’ve hurt or something like that. But pertaining to your relationship w/God, we can’t add anything or supplement in any way the work of J.C. upon the cross... When He uttered the words, “It is finished”. That’s exactly what He meant. “Paid in full” the penalty of sin fully satisfied. * (That’s application #1, Pertaining to Evangelism).

Application #2, Pertaining to the Equipping of the Saint. I seem to bring it up on the regular around here, but I don’t believe it to be overly redundant. As believers we have been enlisted & engaged in a war. A spiritual war, & you & me, we’ve been called to the frontlines. But from the eternal perspective, as far as God is concerned. The warfare is ended. You are more than a conqueror through Him who has loved you. *Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. You don’t fight for victory; you fight from victory. You’re already seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, the warfare is ended...*

Back to our text, *“For she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”* Couple quick things. This could be speaking of the principle found in the law stating that when someone stole something they were to pay back double & so God is saying, you’ve paid double, restitution has been made.

But the word “double” here also carries the idea of doubling over or being folded in 1/2.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 5:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Col 1:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Think of a piece of paper being doubled by being folded in $\frac{1}{2}$. One side corresponds exactly w/the other side. What's being said here (regardless of which way you understand it) isn't that they received more for their sins than they deserved. The thought is a perfect correspondence between the sin & the payment. The exact payment needed has been made.

So to w/you & so to w/me. God didn't pardon our iniquity because He was in an above average mood, so He decided to let us slide... That would make Him *unrighteous*. Our sin bearing Savior has received "double" from the Lord's hand for all *our* sins. J.C. is the One who received the cup of wrath from the Father's hand on our behalf. & He paid in full, the exact payment demanded of our sin...

Vs 3-5

We note that the comfort of God's people is ultimately connected to the coming of Christ! "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord!"

Now if there's something that rings familiar about those words, it's because you've read them before in your N.T. Matthew, Mark & Luke all apply them to J.B. in preparing the nation for the coming of J.C. & In the gospel of John, J.B. himself said that he was the fulfillment of this passage when the religious leaders were grilling him on who he was & what he was all about! "Are you the Christ?" No. "Are you Elijah?" No. "Are you the Prophet?" No. Then who are you!? What do you have to say about yourself? "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."

The idea is that the Lord is coming to His people as a triumphant King & there needs to be a little (or perhaps a lot) of roadwork done so that He can travel in glory & w/ease. In the ancient world (& still in places today) when the king was going to come & make his presence known in a certain place, there would be a crew that would proceed him to make sure there were no potholes in the road. No limbs in the way, valleys filled, crooked areas made straight, rough areas smoothed over. Every obstacle removed.

So this is something that they were easily able to grab hold of as a word picture. Because the *real* preparation takes place in our hearts! The environment of the human heart can be very complex. There can be all kinds of problems & difficulties that need tended to & made right that people might be readied to receive the Lord... It could be taking those who are sinful, unworthy & all too aware of it (they're living in the valley of depression/discouragement & defeat) & building them up.

It could be dealing w/people who have mountainous pride & overwhelming egos, so full of themselves (thinking their better than everyone else) & bringing them low... Crooked areas that need straightened out. Rough patches that need smoothed over... But here we are, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness of humanity, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Turn from your sin, trust in J.C. get ready for the coming of the Lord!”

Ladies and Gentlemen: The Lord is coming, & behold, every eye will see Him. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, & all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord (for whom it is impossible to lie...) has spoken.”

Vs 6-8

The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord! W/such an important task the messenger wants to know, “What exactly should my message be?” Here it is. Be it for J.B. *historically*, you & me *presently*, the message is the same. “All flesh is as grass.” The message is the frailty, the vulnerability, the transient, temporary, transitory nature of humanity. In light of eternity, we don’t have long on this earth... **We’ve kind of entered into the drought season for our area. What was green a few weeks ago is turning brown, dying off, fading away... God says, “That’s a picture that He’s ordained for you & me, that we might glean an understanding of just how fleeting the beauty & strength of man is. How quickly we pass from this life... & It’s because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. God has established it this way & it’s for His glory. The grass withers, the flower fades, *but* (in comparison/contrast) the word of our God stands forever.”**

You & me, we are at best (in this world) temporary. The word of God (on the other hand) will carry on eternally, permanently. — Perhaps you’re thinking, “Gosh, I don’t see how that’s much comfort... I mean, ‘yay’ for God’s Word (no cynicism intended), but how does *that* comfort me?”

BTW, allow me to remark on this while we’re here. I just want to point out that for thousands of years skeptics, critics, doubters & disbelievers alike have all tried to find the irrefutable piece of the puzzle that completely destroys the integrity of the Word of God. None have succeeded & no one ever will. Because the word of our God stands forever... Philosophies change. Governments come & go. Global superpowers rise & fall. The word of our God stands forever.

How does that comfort you? I’m glad you asked. Peter picked up on this passage of scripture & the Holy Spirit gave him a beautiful insight & application on exactly that.

Let's look at it together. *1 Peter 1(22-25).

Don't miss it family. Your flesh is weak, it's frail, it's feeble, your life (physically) will fail. But the word of the *Lord*, endures forever. Here's the key, "Now *this is the word* (the word of the Lord) by which the gospel was preached to you."

Guys, the comfort of your soul is that you've been born again, not by man's word, (or by the corruptible, temporary, fleeting seed of man) but by God's incorruptible, enduring, *eternal* word. As sure as God's word is eternal, the life He's given you through His word is eternal... The gospel isn't a *temporary* hope, it's *eternal life* because the grass withers, the flower fades but the word of our God (through which you've been born again) stands *forever!* (I wish I could say that right... Because if I could we'd all get on our faces & worship God right here & now...) Salvation *is* forever because it's wrought through the word of God which *stands* forever.*

Talk about good news! Talk about glad tidings! Look at Vs 9.

Vs 9

*God wants this message shouted from the mountain tops! Reach as many people as you can! "Snap" it out, put it on an Instagram reel, share w/everyone you can. Do the work of an evangelist. *That's the idea, "You have good tidings (good news) lift up your voice w/strength! Lift it up, don't be afraid!" Say, "Behold your God! Look what He's done for you! Christ has died for you, the offer of eternal life is there for you!" It's Matt 5:14-16 (write it down, read it later) be a city set on a hill, let your light so shine that God might be glorified in your life...**

Vs 10

What's falling into focus for us here is the 2nd coming of Christ. "Behold, the Lord shall come w/a strong hand, & His arm shall rule... Behold, His reward is w/Him, His work before Him." God pays attention to our lives. & When the Lord returns He will settle each account. Matt 16:27, *"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."*⁶ **Close**

Vs 11

We'll pick up on this point next time. Suffice it to say for now that our Lord is the Good Shepherd who leads us, who feeds us, who tends to & takes care of us... & Notice that it's those of us who are the weakest that He carries closest to His heart...

Those who are bogged down w/cares & concerns He *gently* leads. He doesn't scold us, kick us aside & tell us to get our act together. A bruised reed He will not break, a smoking flax He will not quench. He draws us in closer, carries us close to His heart...

Family, this is the comfort, the consolation of Christ... He's coming again, He offers forgiveness of sin, His protection, His provision, everlasting life. Your life is temporary, the life that He gives will last eternally. Because all flesh is as grass, it's loveliness like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever...

Prayer Points:

God, we thank You for Your Word to us today. Words of comfort, of tender care & compassion. May we be those who in turn get up "into the high mountains" who lift up our voice w/strength & share the good news of Your gospel w/the world.

Is your heart prepared for the coming of the Lord? Let the Spirit of God bring low those high places, lift up those low places & straighten out those crooked areas. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, & the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory & grace.