

Good morning, Fellowship. How are you this morning? It's good to see you. As we near Easter, we're continuing our study of Isaiah to look at some of the prophecies about Jesus so if you have a Bible turn to Isaiah 39.

Like many of you, Erin and I try to stay current on the newest, most popular releases on Netflix and Amazon Prime. A few months ago, we needed a new show, so Erin took suggestions from friends on what to watch next, and someone told her about a show called, "The Man in the High Castle." Have you heard of this one? Before I tell you anything else, we never got into the show, so I don't know if it's appropriate or not – so this is not an endorsement of the show! I merely want to read you the description per Wikipedia.

The Man in the High Castle is an American alternate history series depicting a parallel universe where the Axis powers win World War II. In the parallel universe, Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan have divided the United States into the Greater Nazi Reich in the east and the Japanese Pacific States to the west. These territories are separated by a neutral zone that encompasses the Rocky Mountains. It says a bit more, but you get the idea – Germany and Japan win WW2 and now rule our land.

Now, just for a moment, I want you to pretend that this isn't some made up tv show but is actually true. Can you imagine waking up every single day knowing that you're powerless to another country who runs your life? That an evil power has taken over our land, taxes our income, creates the laws, and reigns with terror with guards on every corner, nation-wide curfews, road blocks between our states, no international travel. Imagine being trapped in our own country – desperate for freedom. Sounds terrible, right? I mean, I am ¼ German and that sounds terrible.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel didn't have to imagine that scenario – it was a reality throughout their history and in Isaiah we're told captivity is coming for them again. In chapter 38, King Hezekiah – one of the kings in Israel's history who attempted to be faithful to the Lord is told he's dying and, in his desperation, prays for God's healing. God graciously answers Hezekiah's prayer by granting him 15 more years of life and confirms his extension of life through a miracle. Hezekiah, in his pride, doesn't thank God for what He's done and so God removes His presence from Hezekiah to further test his heart for pride.

And in Chapter 39, the Babylonians, who saw that miracle take place, send their king's son to Hezekiah. He brings letters and gifts – congratulating Hezekiah on his healing. While there, Hezekiah shows them everything in his kingdom. He shows them all of his silver and gold, his precious wines, oils, spices, and even his armory. Hezekiah is showing off. Look at MY wealth, MY riches, MY military, the expanse of MY kingdom. Isn't it glorious? Aren't I great? Can you sense his pride? That's what God was testing for. Unfortunately for Hezekiah, God opposes the proud. And because He opposes the proud, He gives Hezekiah a devastating prophesy through Isaiah. Look at verse 5.

⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD of hosts, ⁶ ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,’ says the LORD. ⁷ ‘And *some* of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.’” This is the captivity that is coming for Israel.

The Babylonians are going to take the nation of Israel captive. Hezekiah’s sons will be made eunuchs so his kingdom and reign end with him. The Israelites will suffer punishment, captivity, and bondage to another nation because of Hezekiah’s pride. They will be an exiled nation. That’s how chapter 39 ends. A few weeks ago, Kurt told us that the book of Isaiah for the first 39 chapters is like the Old Testament and chapter 40 on is like the New Testament. In chapter 39, we’re left with the people of God being trapped in captivity and then we get to chapter 40:1.

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.

Here’s the first thing to know this morning. **God sees our need for comfort.** God sees the situation of His people. He sees them and understands their need for comfort and relief during their captivity. Back then, scribes didn’t have a bolding or italicizing function on their computer so they would write a word twice to signify importance. Comfort. Comfort. God knows the urgency and significance of comforting His people.

He knows the impact and pain this sin-torn world has on us. He knows we need comfort and relief. He knows what takes us captive. He knows what we need. He sees us. I know that’s not always easy to believe but it’s true. The cause of the circumstances doesn’t matter – your sin, the sin of someone else, or just the consequences of living in this sin-destroyed world – God sees you. He’s knows what you’re up against even when it doesn’t seem like it.

When I was in college, I served on staff at a very small, rural Baptist church in Arkansas. My first summer there I took the Kindergarten-5th graders to a Children’s Ministry Camp in the woods of Arkansas – you know – where the mosquitoes are so big you can ride them. On that trip I got to hang out with two sisters, Dusty and Julie Anne – ages 10 and 6. These two precious girls would come to church on their own. They became Christians at the summer camp and were baptized a short time later.

A few weeks after their baptism, I showed up to the church on Sunday morning and was called into my pastor’s office so he could tell me tragic news. The day before, the girls were on a day-trip with their mother when another car crossed the center-line, hitting them head on and killing all 3 of them on impact.

The following days were rough. I spent days laying in my bed in a puddle of tears – questioning where God was in all of this. Why did He let this happen? Why didn’t He prevent this? Where

was He? It was hard to believe that God saw any of us. It was hard to believe He saw me, our church, or the husband and father left behind.

You can imagine for the Israelites in captivity there were times they would scream, “God – where are you? Do you see us? Will you liberate us? Will you rescue us? We need you!” And with just two words, God let’s His people know He sees them.

Comfort, comfort. I see you, my children. I know what you’re going through.

I don’t know what has taken you captive. I don’t know what depresses and discourages you. I don’t know what causes your suffering. But the Lord does. If I could walk around the room this morning and look you in the eyes and say anything to you it would be this, **“God sees you. He knows what you’re going through. He knows what you need. He sees your need for comfort. But He does more than that. He responds. He promises comfort is coming.”**

God promises a comforting king. Let’s get back into Isaiah 40:2-8.

²“Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” ³A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴“Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see *it* together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” ⁶A voice says, “Call out.” Then he answered, “What shall I call out?” All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

Anyone listening to these verses back then would have picked up on something here. They would have zeroed in on the phrases, “Clear the way for the Lord and make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.” When a king or royalty would come to a town for the first time or maybe for the first time in a long time, he wouldn’t use the regular roads or highways. He would have a new road or path built. Roads then weren’t paved, so in some findings the phrase you would see would be, “Make the path smooth.”

Archaeologists have discovered that the Babylonians used similar phrasing, “Make his way good. Renew his road. Make his path straight. Hew him out a trail.” In other words, make the entrance of the king as clear as possible – it was a respectful and honorable way to usher in the king’s presence. These roads symbolized the king’s authority and made his entrance possible.

But this entrance wasn’t just about authority. It was also about healing because now, any road that has been created FOR and BY the king can now be used by anyone. They no longer had to use a treacherous or difficult path in and out of the city, they could use the path of their king.

With just a few words, “Clear the way – make smooth” Isaiah has let his listeners know, a king is coming to free you from captivity. There is hope. God has a plan and in verse 5, we learn that this king is bringing with Him the presence of God. And when people lay eyes on this king, people will marvel at Him.

But he’s not a human king. Our relief can’t come from the temporal. That’s what verses 6-8 tell us. The flower fades. The grass withers. And we, people, are grass. We’re going to die along with everything else on this earth. As my father-in-law always says, “The statistics on death are startling – one out of one people die.” But there’s one thing that lasts forever – it’s the Word of God. The forthcoming king is eternal. We learn more about him in Isaiah 40:10-11:

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. ¹¹ Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry *them* in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

This king is strong. He is fierce, majestic, and incredibly powerful – powerful enough to free his people from captivity. He is bringing rewards for those under his reign. As we might expect, His people will benefit from his kingship. That’s what we’d expect of a king. What we might not expect is what we read in verse 11. ¹¹ Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry *them* in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes. This isn’t a man in the high castle. He’s not a king shouting orders from his throne. He’s a shepherd. He tends his flock. He draws near to them. He knows them. He scoops them up when they’re injured and carries them close to his chest. He is tender, compassionate, and comforting. He is gentle and he knows his flock intimately.

He is full of grace and full of truth. He is a gentle warrior. He is the comforting king. He is perfectly balanced.

As a man, in my own home I long to be balanced but, I ultimately fail. In some moments, I can be too gentle, sensitive and tender – especially in my relationship with my kids. And there are other times, I can be too harsh. I can have this “suck it up” mentality. Thankfully, my 3-year old doesn’t let me get away with that.

There have been times that he gets hurt – and you know – it doesn’t seem like a big deal. He tripped on the carpet or bumped into a wall or electrocuted himself by sticking something metal in the outlet. And sometimes I’ll say to him, “Rhett, you’re okay.” In other words, “Get over it.” And you know what he says back to, or better yet, what he yells at me: “I am NOT okay!” In that moment, I know he needs a hug. He needs comfort from his strong dad. I try to be as balanced of a man as possible – tender and firm. Strong and gentle. But I am an imperfect father. The good news for us today, this king isn’t like any of our fathers. He isn’t just a better father or king. He is completely new. He is perfectly powerful and perfectly comforting. He is

perfectly gentle and perfectly fierce. He is the comforting king. For the record, I comforted Rhett when he electrocuted himself – that’s a true story.

God sees our need for comfort, and He promises us a King – an eternal, powerful, glory-carrying, compassionate King whose pathway will bring healing to His people. But Isaiah doesn’t tell us the identity of that king. We don’t find that out until the New Testament – in John 1 specifically. This is where Isaiah 40 and the New Testament connect.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” ¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

And when the religious leaders of the day began to ask John the Baptist who he was this is what he says back to them...

²³ He said, “I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” Notice that – John the Baptist is saying he was the voice in Isaiah – he was the one meant to cry out and let people know the king was coming.

And then in verse 29 he reveals the identity of our comforting king...

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Friends, Jesus is our Comforting King.

Jesus, the Comforting King, brings the glory of God to us. He brings God’s presence to Earth. God’s presence is no longer just in the temple. He is here with us in Jesus who then sends His Holy Spirit to be with us. He saw our greatest need – forgiveness of sins – and came to free us from that captivity – He brings healing, comfort and relief to our weary souls. He came to give us comfort and strength because He knows the challenges of living in this world and the impact sin has on all of us. **King Hezekiah’s pride led to the captivity of his people. King Jesus’ humility leads to the freedom of His people.**

God sees our need for comfort. He promises us a Comforting King and Jesus is that King.

And as with any king, we must decide whether or not to pay him homage – to devote our lives to His Kingship and reign. If you have been around here very long, you know I like to make our time together practical. And so today, I need to ask you a question. Do you know the Comforting King?

Have you ever placed your faith in Him – in Jesus – for salvation – for ultimate comfort – freedom from sin and the punishment of death. If not, that's your response to this message today – **Devote your life to the Comforting King.** If you haven't done that – you are still in captivity and I hope today, you will give your life to Him.

If you already have a relationship with Him, then your practical response comes from the end of Isaiah 40:28-31.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary, and to *him who* lacks might He increases power. ³⁰ Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, ³¹ yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up *with* wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

The response is to **wait, rest, and trust.** No matter what you're up against and no matter how tired and weak you feel from living in this world, wait with expectation. Wait with hope. Wait with prayer. Rest in his character. Rest in the goodness and perfection of the comforting king. Trust He is good. Trust He has a plan, that He loves you, that He is strong and compassionate. Trust He sees your need for comfort. We have a Comforting King who loves us and one day is coming back for us for eternity.

Give him every worry, every anxiety, every sin, every issue in your life – knowing He's got everything under control. Maybe right now you're not in a difficult situation, but one day you will be, and I hope you'll remember what God promises Israel, what He promises us, that He came for us, and that He's coming again.

When I was laying in my bed crying out to God about the death of those two girls, there were times I simply had to say, "God, I don't have any clue what you're doing here or what's going on – but I trust You. I trust that you're good. I trust you have a plan. I trust your sovereignty."

A few weeks later, I was in our church before the services had gotten under way and I began to hear commotion in the back of the worship center. The people of our church were walking up to a man, giving him hugs, shaking his hand, and ushering him towards a seat in our church. It was the husband and father of the woman and her kids who died in the car wreck. That day, I watched him go forward and grab the hand of our pastor and place his life in the hands of the Comforting King. A King so incredible, that He was trustworthy in the most difficult moments of life. A few weeks later, I watched that man get baptized in the same waters his daughters were baptized. The Comforting King was working even when I didn't see it. He knew what He was doing. He was freeing another one of the captives.

Friends, we serve the King of Kings. We serve the one and only Comforting King and His name is Jesus.