



NOVEMBER 28, 2021 | PASTOR TIMOTHY SONG

“Comfort for God’s People” (Isaiah 40:1-11)

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.

3 A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

6 A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. 7 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

9 You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” 10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. Please open your bibles to Isaiah 40:1-11. Today marks the first Sunday of Advent. We celebrate from the fourth Sunday before Christmas day. So very quickly, what is the origin of Advent? The early church began a tradition of encouraging new converts to spend time preparing for baptism. The Latin word is “adventus” meaning “coming” or “arrival”. Therefore, Advent is a season of preparation and an opportunity for new Christians (and old) to both look back to the long-foretold first coming of the Messiah, and in turn to learn to look forward to His coming again.

Advent marks a season of hungering and longing. But why bother with Advent? Listen to this quote by Harrison Warren: “To practice Advent is to lean into an almost cosmic ache; our deep, wordless desire for things to be made right and the incompleteness we find in the meantime.” By focusing our hearts in the first and second coming of Jesus Christ, Advent is an opportunity to confront the darkness to appreciate the light.



It's a season where we can face up to this darkness and brokenness. The world might try to dull the pain of our suffering, but the refreshing news is that Scripture never does. So, as we look into God's Word today, may all of us be refreshed, renewed, and our response be rejoicing as we read of God's faithfulness and cling to His promises. So with that, let's read Isaiah 40:1-11. Please follow along as I read.

[Read the Text]

And this is the word of God. Isaiah 40:1-11 can be described in one word: Comfort. This passage is a word of tenderness after a very long and dark night of judgment. God makes it very clear though that what happened to Jerusalem happened because of the city's sin. In verse 2, God says that "she [Jerusalem] has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins". However, even though it is because of their sin that calamity and destruction came upon the people of Judah, that's not what God ultimately intends for them. For the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, we read about the disobedience and sin of God's people. And we also read about the coming judgment that God will bring upon them. The prophecy concluded in chapter 39 is devastating. Everything will be carried away to Babylon. Isaiah 39:6 says, "The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD."

It's interesting to note that the fall of Judah to the Babylonians and exile into Babylon has not happened yet. God is fore-telling His people through Isaiah what He is going to do. Fellowship with God will be severed. God will no longer be with His people. The covenant with God has been broken by the people. Sin has ruined everything. It will be rough and painful for the people of God. There will be much hurting, a lot of sorrow. Their own sin and rebellion against God will lead them to being conquered and driven out of the promised land. And we know, that's exactly what happened. That's the situation we see through today's text. There is a great need for the people of God who are troubled and defeated.

But chapter 40 marks a shift: It shifts from destruction and punishment to redemption and grace. Notice that from the very beginning of today's text, in verse 1, we read and see God's heart: "Comfort. Comfort my people, says your God". Now, whenever you read in Scripture a word repeated twice consecutively, pay close attention. It's usually something that God wants us to pause and listen to. For example, there are times when God calls out someone's name, "Abraham, Abraham", "Moses, Moses", "Samuel, Samuel". It's to call to attention something. Here, God says, through the prophet Isaiah, 'Comfort, comfort'. The sense here is to encourage or strengthen. Comfort is emphasized. But it's also a command! We are commanded to comfort His people. God is telling His people to comfort one another.



I've been going through our Bible Reading plan this year. I admit I'm a little behind. But for a while now, I was in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And right in between those major prophets is a shorter book: Lamentations. And I think the placement of this book is very intentional. It's a book in which the prophet Jeremiah is mourning and wailing for the fall of Jerusalem and the loss of the nation because of their sins. Just in the first chapter of Lamentations, the author declares four times that there is no comfort for the people. There is no comfort for our sins. There is nothing that we can do for our sinful condition. So then, what will God do? What will God do with a people so deeply rooted in their sins and deserving of His wrath? What will God say? This is His response:

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” God is going to comfort His people despite the disaster they have brought on themselves. Did you notice two declarations in verse 1? Comfort MY people says YOUR God. God says that He has a people. He has not forever forsaken them. God is willing to be their God. God is willing to take possession of these people. This is covenantal language: “I will be your God and you will be my people”.

As God continues, He says, in verse 2: “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...” To speak tenderly here is translated to “speak to the heart” of Jerusalem. God wants an important message to be delivered to the heart of His people. And in His word and message, there is comfort. Brothers and sisters, let us listen to what God is saying through His word because this applies to us here today. We, too, have sinned. We, too, have experienced the consequences of our sin. We, too, need the comfort that God's word speaks of and provides us with.

Today, I want to address four questions about the comfort that God speaks of:

1. Why do we need this comfort?
2. How do we receive this comfort?
3. How does this comfort come to us?
4. What is this comfort?

So let's quickly address each of these questions: First, Why do we need this comfort?



QUESTION #1: WHY DO WE NEED THIS COMFORT (40:6-8)?

I'm going to be skipping around today's text so keep your bibles open and follow along. Let's go to verses 6-8 which says:

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." (40:6-8)

All people are like grass. That's us. Think back to the month of May. The weather gets warmer, and the grass grows and is all green and alive. But now if you go outside, it's all brown, withered and dead. That's a picture of us and our lives. This is what is happening and will happen to us. We wither and fade and die. There is no one in this world that can escape the mortality that we all share. But at the root of this withering, dead grass is sin. The reason we die is because we sin. Every human being shares this. We have all been born with this, which has been passed down from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Our sinful nature is a killer. And yet, even though sin is killing us, we indulge in sin. At times, we even enjoy sin. We disobey God. We don't want to listen to God. We'd rather live our own lives our way. But look what happened to Judah. That's the same recipe for disaster and the trajectory we are headed.

We are like grass that withers and flowers that fall. BUT! Don't you sometimes love that beautiful 3-letter word? Look with me in verse 8: "The grass [that's us] withers and the flowers fall, BUT the word of our God endures forever". The word of our God. It's God's grace that we even know the Lord as "our God". But it's also the grace of God that He reveals His word to us! His word is something we can trust and count on. His word endures forever; it is sure and certain.

Here's why we need this comfort: We are unreliable, But God is reliable. That's why we must never depend on ourselves but rely on God's word and promises. God's word is trustworthy because His words never fade or fail. Our confidence must be in God and His word! Therefore, these words are a message of hope! "Comfort!" His desire is not for His people to be destroyed. No. His desire is redemption. The word of the Lord will endure forever. God keeps His promises and covenant. Praise God! We are unfaithful. We are not dependable. We fail. We do not keep our word. We perish. We cannot save ourselves. But brothers and sisters, hear God's Word. He is faithful. He is dependable. He does not fail. He keeps His word and promises. God does not perish. Only He can save us from our sin and deliver us from withering and dying like grass. And that's why we need this comfort. Now, question two: How do we receive this comfort?

QUESTION #2: HOW DO WE RECEIVE THIS COMFORT (40:3-5)?

Look with me starting from verse 3-5:

A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and

hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (40:3-5)

“Prepare the way for the LORD”. Isaiah prophesies these words of John the Baptist’s ministry (Matthew 3). John was the preparer, the forerunner of the Lord. He came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And if you read the early accounts of the gospels, people came confessing their sins.

The wilderness portrays the land that has suffered judgment for its sin. It’s in this wilderness that something amazing happens: God is coming! “Prepare the way for the LORD; a highway for our God.” This highway is described as a “road”; it speaks of the idea of easy access. In the wilderness, in our sinfulness, God will come! And we will have access to God and His deliverance and redemption. It’s a straight path to God as He comes to us! Here’s the key point: In view of the coming Lord, we prepare for His coming by recognizing our sins and confessing them to Him. We repent of our sins, acknowledging that we have sinned against God and deserve nothing but His punishment and wrath.

APPLICATION: Do you feel your brokenness? Do you know your sins and your sinfulness? Those who don’t know will not desire God’s comfort. Repentance is a daily dying to sin.

How we receive this comfort is through repentance. As we read in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”. Brothers and sisters, do you mourn over your sins? Do you mourn that we disobey God and sin against Him? We find God’s comfort in repentance. And this comfort is all by the grace of God. So, we addressed why we need this comfort and how we receive it. Third question: How does this comfort come to us?

QUESTION #3: HOW DOES THIS COMFORT COME TO US (40:9-11)?

Now skip with me to the end of today's passage starting at verse 9:

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and He rules with a mighty arm. See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him. He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young. (40:9-11)

Like it was mentioned earlier, God Himself comes to us! He initiates! He comes with power and a mighty arm. There are two mentions of God's mighty arm. First, His arm is the manifestation of the power of the Sovereign Lord who comes to accomplish His redeeming

purpose. He is the King who comes to rule over us and fight against our enemies. Yes, the people of God have sinned against Him and there will be consequences of their sin (the Babylonian exile). For years God will turn away and be silent. But, He promises that He will come with His mighty arm to deliver and redeem His people. The second mention of God's arm is in verse 11 when it says He gathers the lambs in His arms. God comes with power and might. But He also comes with gentleness and care. He comes as a shepherd; a good shepherd. And we know who this is. It is Jesus. Jesus, our Good Shepherd comes with humility and gentleness. Remember what Jesus says in John 10:11-16:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:11-16)

Jesus, who is our Good Shepherd, knows us and laid down His life for us. Think about that. Jesus knows us completely. And yet, even though He knew of our sin, He died for us so that we would be redeemed and restored; saved for God's wrath. Would you lay down your life for someone like you; a sinner? Jesus did. Romans 5 reminds us that we have peace and hope in Christ because "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus, in His compassion, tenderness and love, gathers His lambs/sheep and carries them close to His heart as He gently leads and guides them.



APPLICATION: Jesus said that He has other sheep that are not in the sheep pen yet. And Jesus must bring them home. He says that they, too, will listen to His voice and become a part of His flock, under His care. There are two kinds of sheep. Sheep that are with the Shepherd in the sheep pen. And there are sheep that are not and wandering. But there are sheep that have wandered but hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling them. And the Good Shepherd is saying how much He loves that sheep, to the point of laying His life for that sheep. He wants to carry you in His gentle, loving arms and promises to be with you always, leading and guiding you along the way. If you are here or listening online and not yet a Christian, this invitation is for you. Jesus is calling out to you saying, “I love you. I gave up my life for you, even though you are a sinner who has rebelled against God”. He wants to carry you in His arms. And all that is required is that you hear His voice, believe that He did die for your sins; that He is your Lord and Saviour. Repent of your sins and He carries you in His sheep pen. Jesus makes you one of His sheep and He is your Good Shepherd. Won’t you confess and believe in Jesus today?

For those are Christian, this grace has already been given to you. And each and every day, we can experience our Good Shepherd. Then how must we respond? Surrender each day to Christ. Just because we have been saved doesn’t mean we are free from sin. John Owens said, “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you”. Every day, look to Christ’s mighty arm to give you the strength to fight against sin but also to carry you as He leads and guides you. But also, verse 9: “You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” Brothers and sisters, it is our duty to share with others about Christ. I mentioned last week, it’s selfish to know the Gospel and Christ’s saving power and grace and not share that with others. Especially those have not heard the Good Shepherd’s voice. We have a mandate. It should flow from our gratitude for Christ.

Let me conclude with the last question: What is this comfort?

QUESTION #4: WHAT IS THIS COMFORT?

For this final question, let’s go back to verses 1-2: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” The people of God’s hard service, other translations say “warfare”, has been completed. Brothers and sisters, this comfort is victory. Victory over sin. Victory over death. We are at peace with God. Our sins are no longer held against us. This comfort, this peace, this hope, is ours in and through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. His death has paid the penalty for our sins. His sacrificial love won our forgiveness. We have life in Christ. What greater comfort can there be? More than anything this world can offer, we have



Christ. Our sins are pardoned. We have received from God double for all our sins. Yes, double! Not double the punishment. No. Double the comfort. “Comfort, comfort my people”.

May all God’s people find great comfort in His word today. As we enter Advent, let us look back, with gratitude, for the Messiah’s first coming as a baby over 2000 years ago. But also look forward, with longing and anticipation for the second coming of Christ. And as we wait for the Lord, let us find comfort in Christ and the word of God which endures forever. Let’s pray.