

Isaiah 40:1-11 Voices of Comfort (part 1)

These words of comfort come right after words of disaster in cp. 39 when Hezekiah puts his trust in Babylon. He allows representatives to come and see all the riches found in Jerusalem. And Isaiah says, **“Hear the word of the Lord of hosts. Behold the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon . . .”** (vv. 5-7). The rest of the Book of Isaiah must be read in the context of coming judgment upon Judah at the hands of the Babylonians, though we will not see this until we get to the next major prophet Jeremiah. These verses in our text today are amazing! They speak of REAL, TRUE, comfort. When a father or mother speaks tender words to their child when he/she is frightened in the night, saying, *“It’s ok, Daddy’s here, Mama’s here, you can rest now,”* comfort comes to the child, as sleep returns. This is the picture we are given in vv.1-2. But, the child is Jerusalem and the Parent is God Himself, which is their only hope. The same is true for us. Any hope of comfort comes from God alone, particularly from the “voice” of God. Our text gives us 3 distinct voices (v. 3, 6, 9). And each voice speaks of a different way God brings comfort to his people. We only have time for two today.

1. The Glory of God Brings Comfort to His People. Look at vv. 3-5: **“A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”**

These verses speak of the glory of God coming on the earth. And nothing can hinder Its coming! Mountains are made flat. Uneven ground becomes even. Rough places become smooth. There is nothing that will hinder the glory of the Lord coming upon his people. And this glory will bring great comfort!

Let me ask, *“Does the glory of God bring you comfort?”* Have you ever thought about this truth? Last week when the trials of life and the temptations to sin bombarded your soul, did you find comfort in the glory of God? Now, “glory” is a bit fuzzy by itself. It is one of those words that is “out there,” without some kind of explanation. When we say “glory of God” we need context. Let me explain. How do we know the sun is glorious? We know it is glorious because it brings light from far away. It brings heat from far away. It provides forces of gravity that keeps this solar system in order. Because of these things, the sun is glorious. In the same kind of way, EVERYTHING we see and experience in this world comes from our creator. And we look at such things, and say, *“God is glorious.”* Now, God is glorious ALL BY HIMSELF. But, we don’t know what this glory looks like without his works. And the world does not look to the works of God and say God is glorious. In fact, Rom. 1:23-25 says they **“have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images . . . they have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . .”**

But as Christians we know better. And we talk, and we sing about the glory of God. But, do we really understand what we’re talking about? John Piper says, *“In the church, our view of God is so small instead of huge, so marginal instead of crucial, so vague instead of clear, so impotent*

instead of all determining, and so uninspiring instead of ravishing that the responsibility to live to the glory of God is a thought without content. The words can come out of our mouths, but ask the average Christian to tell what they know about the glory of this God that they are going to live for, and the answer will not be long.”

For Isaiah, He wanted God’s people to know the glory of God. and be comforted. So, how did Israel understand the glory of God. Well, it wasn’t simply acknowledging the power of God in creation. It was so much more! It was very personal! It was the very presence of God! Do you remember Mt. Sinai? Exod. 24:16-18: **“The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.”** Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord in the form of a super war chariot coming down from heaven to establish the rule of God on earth (Ezek. 1:4-28). Do you remember the dedication of the great temple, the same one of Isaiah’s time? After Solomon prayed, **“fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple”** (2 Chron. 7:1). This was Isaiah’s context! The glory of God appeared and dwelt with his people. I am sure, the people of Jerusalem at that time, experienced unquestioned, immediate, clear, personal, comfort from this “glory” of the Lord!

Remember, I am still asking the question: *“Does the glory of the Lord bring you comfort?”* You see, Isaiah, by faith, looked to the “glory of the Lord” in those real experiences to comfort God’s people in that time. Now, fast forward to Luke 2 where some shepherds were watching over their sheep: **“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest’ (vv. 9-14).** And a little later the prophet John the Baptist says to the people: **“Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be made low . . . and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”** (Luke 3:4-6).

Brothers and sisters, “glory” is not out there somewhere! It is not merely in the many times and places in the OT when God appears to his people. The glory that brings comfort is Jesus Himself. He says, **“If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father”** (John 14:9). Brothers and sisters, we know what glory looks like. For we have beheld the Son, full of grace and truth. In Him ALL the fulness of God dwells (Col. 1:19). **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power”** (Heb. 1:1-3).

So how do we know the comfort of glory? The applications are infinite. But, we must start with the forgiveness of sins. Look at v. 2: **“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare has ended . . .”** My own war with sin and death has come to an end. I bare them no more! My **“iniquity is pardoned . . .”** For I have **“received from the Lord’s hand double for all my sins . . .”** If you are not a Christian, you are warring, your sins are a never-ending weight. And there is no real, lasting comfort! But, if you are a Christian, you have beheld the glory of God. **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Cor. 4:6). Today, the tender voice of God says, **“Take Comfort, I am with you.”**

2. The Word of God Brings Comfort to His People. Look at vv. 6-8: **“A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”** These words were spoken during times of great change in the nation of Israel. During Isaiah’s life and his prophecies through the tenure of four kings, both good and bad, the northern kingdom falls to Assyria. The state of politics and the wavering of these kings fluctuates up and down. Idol worship is always present, sometimes more prevalent than others. And now, Babylon is growing stronger and will eventually destroy Judah and Jerusalem and carry the people into captivity. So, Isaiah gives the words of comfort saying, though everything around you may change (and it will) **“the Word of God will stand forever.”**

Here we have another voice, a voice of comfort. And here, the voice contrasts the Word of God with man. We are compared to a flower that is beautiful one day, but the next it is gone. I love my day lilies. They are so beautiful! But, they last for only a few weeks out of the year. And how many of you have to work on your grass with great time, money, and effort, only to see it die with the lack of moisture or sunshine? This is an easy picture for us. We are flesh, but the word of God stands forever.

We live in an ever-changing world. Political powers come and go. Civilizations rise up and fall, only to be conquered by another. Major languages evolve and even become extinct. Morality in one country stays more consistent, while in others (like our own), changes very quickly. The culture my grandparents had, is definitely NOT the culture of my kids. In our own country, the rule of self seems to be the norm. And, it certainly seems to me that the VOICES of COMFORT (glory of God, Word of God, power of God) are not making it to the ears of so many. However, God does not change! And Isaiah 55:10-11 says, **“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”** This truth must bring us comfort! And how do we know this is true?

Fast forward to John 1:1: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”** Yes, we find comfort in the WORD (book). And we find comfort in the Word

because of the author of the Word. And how do we know this comfort is for us. He Himself came. Jesus is the word of God. Look unto Him!

Application: We are unreliable. God is not! Our family members and friends are unreliable. But, God is not! We are fickle; we change our minds and our positions, and our feelings move up and down with the wind. But, God does not change! In this we find comfort!

Application: I think one of the places to start are the specific promises of God. When I consider all the changes and uncertainties in this life, I can go to my office, close the door, pick up the Word, and as I read with the eyes of faith, looking unto Christ, I find comfort. When I am wandering, God will bring me back. When I feel He does not love me, I can see that He does. When I need help with my marriage, struggle with anger, hard time with patience, etc. Look to the Word. And know that in Christ, God will bring comfort.

In closing, I want to say again the ultimate cause of comfort. V. 2: “warfare ended, iniquity pardoned, double for all her sins”) This is so important! Our sins are forgiven! We have fallen short of God’s glory. We have failed to listen to his Word. We have considered God as “small” as we have committed idolatry in our hearts and in the things we esteem! Yet, in spite of these things, God is gracious to bring us comfort. And, every voice of comfort flows through the glory of God in the person and work of Jesus!