

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

²Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her.

Her warfare really is over.

Her guilt is fully paid for.

Yes, she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

(Isaiah 40:1, 2)

Be a Voice of Comfort

It's hard to know to who you should listen to when we hear so many different voices. Some assure you this, while another promises you that. One makes these claims, while another claims those statements are actually false! So much is divisive. So much is defensive. So much is negative and contradicts that it leaves us on edge towards other people and within ourselves. In the sea of voices tumbling over each other, how do you make sure your voice is being heard? Because, you have a message that needs to be shared. It's a message they need to hear. Against what we might witness, it's not about being right and they being wrong. It's not about who can scream the loudest. It's not about how many people "like" your witty comment online or what you have to say. It's not even about making better people. It's sharing God's message. But is it enough?

I wonder how many of God's people were wondering that in Isaiah's day. Up until this point in the book of Isaiah he has been making it quite clear that life was going to be anything but comfort for them. Because of their wickedness, sin, and little-to-no desire to turn from it, destruction is on the doorstep and inevitable. And still his message is, "Comfort, comfort, says our God."

Then the destruction comes. They watch their homes, their temple, beloved Jerusalem go up in flames. Off into captivity they go. Babylon the enemy looks strong and victorious. God's people seem so weak and defeated. "God has abandoned us," certainly was going through some of their minds. But the message hasn't changed: "**Comfort. People of Jerusalem, Her warfare really is over. Her guilt is fully paid for. Yes, she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.**" Yes, comfort is something they need. But this is it? It sounds all great and wonderful but we are still stuck here in Babylon. We are still not at home. We are still fighting to keep our identity. It seems like we are still suffering for our sins. It feels like God is punishing us for the sins of our ancestors. And this is all you have to say, Isaiah?

Times change. Situations are different. But we still struggle. And people are still looking for comfort. For some they look out and this is not the America, the home, they used to know. It feels like foreign land. For some you are missing a loved one. It feels strange and out-of-place without them as you look across the table and they aren't with you. Sin and temptation may have you feeling like a stranger in your own body; you can't you did something like that! Our way of life has changed so that many are not comfortable with doing things they once took for granted. Questions of how will we get through this, will we get through this, what is it going to look like when get through

this, leave you more uncomfortable and on edge. Times change. Situations are different. But the voice of God says the same: “Comfort, comfort, my people,” says your God. “Your victory is won. Your guilt is paid for. You have double God’s love.”

But in the sea of voices, is it enough? It feels like we need to say more. Because that pain still makes regular life difficult. You still hurt and miss that loved one. The questions still hang over your head and God hasn’t answered them. You’re still dealing with the fallout from the last argument as your relationship crumbles around you. Bills keep piling up and you aren’t sure how you are going to make it. That pet sin sticks around like a sick puppy and won’t leave you alone. The person still hasn’t listened even when you have warned them time and again. You share love and God’s message over and over and it still doesn’t seem like it’s doing anything. You are fighting the same battles, the same pride, the same stubbornness over and over.

And so we are tempted to find comfort somewhere else. And we find ourselves listening to these other voices that promise comfort. Why? Because, often enough, it does. We can see and feel it right now. So we try and find comfort in working hard, because you need to be doing something! You look for comfort in making more money so that it gives a more comfortable life right now. We put our relationships on a pedestal, because as long as there is comfort at home with the family all should be well. We look for comfort in scientific discoveries and hopes of vaccines. We try and find comfort in the promise of politicians or bills passed by the government. We try to find comfort in trying to be a good person and doing our best. We look for comfort in our things, in our reputation, our successes, those experiences we get to enjoy or things that help us escape the uncomfortable responsibility and reality of life.

The thing is, many of these things God does give and bless us with in order to have comforts in this life. But we are such wicked, crooked sinners, that we take these created things and replace the Creator’s comfort with them. We put our hope and trust in our comforts and not in the comforter. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

And so God sends messengers into the wilderness of this world who say: **“In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord. In the wasteland make a level highway for our God. Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The rugged ground will become level, and the rough places will become a plain. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh together will see it. Yes, the mouth of the Lord has spoken”** (Isaiah 40:3-5). Whether you are on top of the mountain and life is going well or you are down in the deepest depths of despair and you are having trouble crawling your way out, Christ is coming to level it out. Whether you feel lost on the path of life not knowing what to do next, or you are stumbling and tripping along the way, Christ is coming to make it smooth. He’s not waiting for you to be better prepared and ready. He’s coming when he’s coming. But if your focus is on making life the most comfortable today, you will not be ready. If your focus is comfort today, then I’m going to try to ignore the seriousness of my sin because the reality makes me sick and uncomfortable. If I’m not honest about my sin and sinfulness, then I

do not see the need to be in God's Word, in God's house, receiving God's sacrament. I'm my focus is my comfort in this world, then I will try and make those blessings do something they never can accomplish or will. Then you will only be left more disappointed and frustrated, always searching never finding. If I'm focused on right now, then I will fail to be ready when the glory of the Lord is revealed and all mankind will see him. Those who are not ready, whose trust is in the earthly comforts, who hold onto their sins and do not turn from them, they will be bulldozed off the road into the ditch of hell.

Understand correctly, this doesn't mean that we need to be miserable in this life. It doesn't mean go and sell all you have and live in a monastery far away from everyone with your head in the clouds neglecting the struggling people of this world. Quite the opposite. We need to be the voices that cry out. But, what shall we cry? The voice says: **"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the Lord blows on them. Yes, the people are grass. Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever"** (Isaiah 40:6-8)

Put those comforts in their rightful place. One day they are here, the next they are gone. We want, we need comfort that lasts. But they won't. Not just the things, but all people. The beauty of your good works. The best of your accomplishments will fade and be forgotten in the wind. We are nothing. Those comforts and things are nothing. It's not fatalistic. It's not being depressing. It's the reality of this sinful world and the consequences of those sins—the grass, the flowers, the people, these comforts all whither and fall.

But the Word of our God stands forever. It doesn't grow old or no longer apply today. The Word of our God stands forever. We are nothing. He is everything. Comfort, Comfort, my people, your God says. He has not abandoned you though we have often sinned and chased after other comforts. Comfort, comfort, my people. He does not leave you to simply waste away. **"Look, God the Lord will come with strength and his arm is ruling for him. Look, his reward is with him. The result of his work is in front of him,"** (Isaiah 40:10).

He who is God and Lord leaves the comforts of heaven have his glory dwell in flesh and blood baby. With his strong arm hidden underneath the weak arms of a baby who needs to be held, he comes to save. The conquering Lord of armies comes not to make his kingdom in this world, but to make it so God's kingdom will rule in your heart. That strong arm under weak human flesh goes to battle in your place. He deflects the devil's attempts to steal your eternal comfort. He resists the temptations that come along with living in a wicked, uncomfortable world. He shares in our weaknesses in order to help and to save. The final battleground will be the cross. The price will be his blood. And with those strong arms stretched out on that cross he receives the punishment for your sin and its guilt. But under that suffering servant is our conquering king. When this war

is over, his nail-marked feet will crush the serpent Satan's head. The payment for sin is paid in full. It is finished, he will declare from that cross. And with his rising from the dead on Easter morning we take comfort: Jesus lives. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

So take comfort, my people, your Lord Jesus says, "I won! And now, thanks be to our God, you too are given the victory. Look, my reward is with me: your sins are paid in full. I will never ask you to try and make up for them. Your guilt and its stain have been bleached away with my blood. You are clean. The devil can threaten all he want; the battle is already won. See the result of my work: you are God's people and he is your God. This forgiveness I won is not running out and still I'm giving you more."

And with those same mighty arms now tenderly reach out to make this comfort your own. Through water and the Word he draws you close to his breast and promises: "Your guilt is paid for. It will never be held against you from now until eternity." In the sea of loud voices in this world the clear voice of your Good Shepherd rings out, leads you beside quiet waters, and speaks to you through the Word and the voice of his messengers. He prepares a table before you offering his body and blood given and poured out for your sins in the Lord's Supper. And one day those strong yet gentle arms with nail-marked hands will bring you into Paradise and you will dwell with the Lord forever.

When that time will be, when he will return again, we do not know. But we do know he will. So comfort, comfort, your God says to you his people. With sin's debt paid and guilt removed we can because all is well between us and God. The end is already guaranteed, therefore, take comfort today as you face the struggles and difficulties of this world. They too will pass like the grass and the flowers. They will not follow you past the grave. Yeah, it's hard. Yeah, it's frustrating. But it's going to be okay. You have a God who continues to forgive and love you and his Word with its promises endures forever. So repent and turn away from those sins. Prepare the way for the Lord. Take comfort, brothers and sisters in Christ. Take it for yourself and then take it to others. We all need comfort. We hear different voices saying so many different things. Be the voice that doesn't succumb to fear and conspiracy theories. Be the voice that makes the path smooth. Speak tenderly to your friends and family and share that comfort that Jesus won and God alone gives. That's what you need. That's what they need. Be the voice of comfort. Amen.