

Behold Your God

by Carl Armerding

The sermon emphasizes the importance of God's comfort for His people, drawing from Isaiah 40 to illustrate the need for hope and reassurance in a troubled world.

Duration: 23:23

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Romans 15:4, Ephesians 1:3

Topics: "Revelation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of becoming like little children in a complex world. He highlights the difficulty of hearing God's voice amidst the noise and distractions of the world but assures that God knows how to make Himself heard. The preacher then focuses on the message of comfort found in Isaiah 40:1-2, stating that the fighting is over and God's people have received forgiveness for their sins. He also addresses the different needs of Christians, including the responsibility to spread the gospel and the need for restoration. The sermon concludes by emphasizing God's care for His people, regardless of their social status or background, and the promise of being lifted up and given a place of honor.

Transcript

If you will please, friends, turn to the scriptures in the book of Isaiah, chapter 40. I'd like to read for you just the first two verses of that chapter. Isaiah 40, verses 1 and 2. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received the Lord's hand, double for all her sins. In spite of the fact that Christians have been blessed with all spiritual blessings, they are still a needy people. But they don't all have the same needs.

There are those who need to be stirred up with regard to the responsibility to spread the gospel both at home and abroad. Others who may be in a backslidden state need the ministry of restoration, such as our Advocate with the Father is always ready to bestow. Still others require the high priestly ministry of our Lord Jesus.

But the one thing that almost every Christian seems to need these days is a ministry of comfort and cheer. We live in a world that is seething with unrest. Many churches are in danger of dividing and disintegrating

because of internal strife and dissension.

The number of broken homes increases daily. One is but to mention these things to show that there is much need for comfort and encouragement on every hand. It is for that reason that I am turning to this scripture at this time.

And even though some who hear these words may not stand in need of such comfort, we trust that the scriptures which we are going to consider herein will furnish them with words of hope, comfort, and cheer for those who need it. Some may wonder why we have chosen an Old Testament text for this purpose. We know, of course, that this part of the word of God belongs by right to Israel.

And we have no intention of spiritualizing these scriptures in order to apply to the church that which God has given to his ancient people. Nevertheless, we are taught in Romans 15, verse 4, that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. There can be no reasonable doubt that the Apostle is here referring to the Old Testament scriptures.

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that many Christians use the Psalms without ever questioning their right to do so. And they are certainly a part of the Old Testament. As Christians, we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings, according to Ephesians 1, verse 3, and therefore we may claim a spiritual blessing whether we find it in the Old Testament or in the New.

In so doing, we shall not rob anyone any more than we rob another of the gift of eternal life, when we accept it as a gift from God through faith in his beloved Son, our Savior. There are some things which are the heritage of all of God's children, and we believe that the comfort he has spoken of is one of them. The fact that questions have been raised as to the authorship of this part of the word of God seems to hinder some from making full use of it.

For the encouragement of such, we need only to point out that the Lord Jesus, when quoting from different parts of the prophecy of Isaiah, as he does in John 12, never even hinted that he was quoting from two different writers. We believe that every word of God is divinely inspired, regardless of who may have been used to write it. The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

That there is a difference between the two parts of the book is freely admitted. In the first part of this book, we find some strong and even hard sayings, but they're in keeping with the object in view, namely, that of reaching the consciences of God's people. In the second part, the purpose is quite different, hence the difference in tone.

Here he speaks to the heart of his people. Accordingly, we read, Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. The very fact that he addresses them here as his people is in itself a cause for comfort.

For a long time, he had to treat them as if they were not his people. And are there not times in our own case when it becomes necessary for him to discipline us in the same way? As a result of disobedience and waywardness, we may have lost the joy of our salvation. Thank God that that does not break our eternal relationship to him.

And when the rod of correction has brought us to repentance, how sweet to be reassured from his word that we are his very own and that his love toward us is ever the same. The repetition of the word comfort

seems to make it emphatic. He wants to impress it upon us so that we'll never forget it.

As I say this, I'm reminded of a teacher I had when I was just a young lad at school, very fond of repeating a Latin phrase which seemed to sum up her method of teaching. Repetitio est mater studiorum, she would say. Repetition is the mother of studies.

And it may be that the divine teacher here repeats this word because he knows that none of us learns a thing very well the first time we hear it. Some of us need only to think back to the time when we were learning our multiplication tables. What a temptation at times to use our fingers instead of our brains to make sure that we were right.

And we do not seem to learn much better in spiritual things. Hence the need for repetition in order that these precious truths may be impressed upon our hearts and minds. Strictly speaking, this should not be necessary in the school of God.

But it's quite possible that the people of God had heard so much of the other side of Isaiah's ministry that they could hardly believe their ears when they heard him speak these words of comfort as a spokesman for the Lord himself. On the other hand, they might have become dull of hearing. And we all know how easy it is for those of us who've been brought up in Christian homes and in the church to get so accustomed to hearing the most precious things out of the word of God and not respond to them as we should.

I know it's been my own experience more than once. Take, for example, that loving invitation of our Lord Jesus who said, Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I've no way of knowing how many times I may have quoted those words.

But one day as I read them over, they struck me with new force. It was one of those days when I really needed rest or quietness of spirit. I knew that my sins had been forgiven, for I had long before that trusted the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior.

But now my heart was restless, and here I discovered afresh the invitation to come and find rest for my troubled heart. I knew the words so well I could repeat them from memory. Again and again I had urged others to come to the Lord Jesus for rest of both heart and conscience, but now the Spirit of God was urging me to do for myself what I had exhorted others to do.

And thus did the Lord repeat for me, as it were, the words that he had spoken so long before in other ears and to other hearts. And how wonderful it is that even though he has countless numbers under his care, he reminds us that so minute is his care for us that even the very hairs of our head are all numbered. And therefore we may confidently say we're his people and the sheep of his pasture.

It matters not what our social status may be or what the color of our skin or the language we speak. All those whom he has saved by his grace are his people. He raises up the poor out of the dust and lifted up the beggars from the dunghill to set them among princes and to make them inherit the throne of glory.

Such are they whom he calls my people. Perhaps some of us need to be reminded that our blessed Lord was commissioned not only to preach the gospel to the poor, but also to heal the brokenhearted. When I first began to preach the gospel more than fifty years ago, a dear servant of Christ said to me, Always speak as to broken hearts, and you'll never lack an audience.

And I have found that to be true. We know that the whole creation groaneth and travelleth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, have the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption to wit, as a world of comfort in knowing that we shall not be disappointed. The second verse of our chapter, that is Isaiah 40, continues the theme, Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem. This may be rendered, Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem.

This is an alternative reading, which may be found in the margin of some editions of the Bible. Who these unnamed messengers are, we're not told. No doubt there's design in that.

The servant who knows his master's voice will instinctively respond to the summons to speak, as he directs. And, of course, Jerusalem here stands for the inhabitants of that city. It was to this same city that our Lord came one day when he was here on earth.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it. We may be sure that he was not weeping over buildings, institutions, and the like. He was weeping over people.

Under the roofs of their homes he saw them. And it is to them that he now sends his unnamed messengers with a message for their homes. The fact that they needed such a message shows how little the city has lived up to its beautiful name of peace.

It has probably known less of real peace than any other city of its size in all the world. No doubt our Lord had all that in mind when he said, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes. In one sense, Jerusalem is typical of many another city with its thousands of heartsick inhabitants.

It's typical also of many of the Lord's true people at this very time. But he anticipated all of that, and before he left this world to return to the Father, he said to his own and to us, Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God? Believe also in me.

It is to the heart that he addresses himself rather than to the mind. It is only as our hearts trust in him that our minds will find peace. Out of the heart are the issues of life.

Perhaps that is why so many simple people understand the things of the Spirit of God much better than those who boast of their much learning. How true it is that the Lord preserveth the simple. Oh, that all of us knew more about what it means to become as little children in a world that becomes more complex every day.

Inviting his servants to cry unto Jerusalem, it was seen as though the Lord anticipated just such a time as this when so many others are clamoring to be heard. We live in a noisy world. At times the noise is so loud and distracting that it is difficult to hear the still, small voice of him whose spake is never man's spake.

But he also knows how to make himself heard, and so he bids his servant to cry unto Jerusalem, and thus he overcomes both the noise of this world and the dullness of our hearing. This message of comfort has three notes which together form a lovely chord. The first of these notes tell us that her warfare is accomplished.

In other words, the fighting is over. But that statement may be understood in two different ways. It could mean that Israel will not have to go to war anymore.

If so, then all of the military preparation she is making just now because she fears Egypt and the other Moslem nations, Israel will need all of the preparation she is now making and more. According to Gesenius, a highly recognized authority, the word for warfare in the Hebrew is figuratively used of a wretched and miserable condition. On the basis of that statement, I would like to suggest that this word may refer to warfare from within as well as from without.

This may be one of those designed ambiguities of which we have other examples in the Bible. But when we say ambiguities, we hasten to add that that does not necessarily mean that such words are purposely deceptive. It's quite possible for a word to have two legitimate but wholly different meanings.

Take, for example, the message of Jonah when he went to Nineveh. He cried, yet forty days of Nineveh shall be overthrown. One is but to consult the Hebrew dictionary to discover that the word overthrown may mean to turn or to change in a good sense.

It was in this way that the word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he rose from his throne and laid a robe from him and covered him with sackcloth and sat in ashes. But the word also means to overthrow in the sense in which Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown. And as Nineveh itself was overthrown according to the prophecy of Nahum, this shows us how the Lord uses a word which enables him to carry out his purpose of grace on the one hand and his judgment on the other without contradicting himself.

Take another example of this in the New Testament. In John 12, verse 32, we hear the Lord Jesus saying, And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. Did he mean by that that all men would ultimately be saved because he was lifted up on a cross? That the lifting up of Christ does refer to his crucifixion is clear from the passages in which the expression is used.

I know there are some who use the expression when they mean the faithful preaching of Christ. But strictly speaking, to lift up Christ means to crucify Christ. And that explanation is given us right here in the context in John 12.

Says this, he said, signifying what death he should die. But it is to the word draw that I wish to call attention just now. This word may mean to draw in grace, and it is so used by the Lord himself when he says, No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.

And every soul will rejoice forever because of having been drawn by such love and grace divine. But the word may also mean to drag in judgment, and is so used in the book of Acts where we read that the enemies of the gospel caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers. All men will indeed be drawn to Christ because he was lifted up at Calvary.

But some will be drawn in grace, and some in judgment. After this lengthy digression, let us now return to consider the word warfare as found in Isaiah 40, verse 2. We have already suggested that it might refer to warfare from within as well as warfare from without. If we take it to refer to warfare from within, then this statement could mean that God's people had ceased fighting him.

It will be recalled that Gamaliel warned his colleagues that in persecuting the apostles they might be found even to fight against God. Likewise, the scribes who came to Paul's defense said, We find no evil in this man, but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. No doubt every true child of God can recall how he also fought against God.

Well, do I remember the night my father took me to the gospel meeting where I came under deep conviction of sin? I didn't want to go at all, but I knew better than to argue with my father about that. It was a five-mile walk to that meeting. That gave me a lot of time to build up even more resistance to what I was about to hear.

Consequently, when I got there, I had already decided that I did not like the preacher nor anything about him. I even pulled my watch on him as he was offering the closing prayer. And later as we were returning home, I heard from my father about that.

His stern reprimand made me more determined than ever not having anything to do with that preacher and his preaching. And so the struggle went on until I got into my bed and then I realized that God himself had been dealing with me, that I was not fighting man but God. And then I prayed the publican's prayer, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

The answer seemed to come before I had finished the sentence, and immediately I began to sing as I had never sung before, happy day when Jesus washed my sins away. The fighting was over. The warfare was ended.

Of course, I did not realize at that time how much it meant to have my sins washed away. And that brings me to the second note which we have in this chord. The message to Jerusalem is that her iniquity is pardoned.

But that involves far more than we understand when we use the word pardoned. That is why we find the word expiated or atoned for in some other versions of the Bible. The truth of the matter is that a holy and a righteous God has been perfectly satisfied with regard to the question of our sin.

His sinless Son bore all of our guilt and our sins in His own body on the cross. And because of that we can sing, Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain.

He washed it white as snow. What a comfort to know that. Iniquity which has been expiated or atoned for will never have to be faced again.

The matter has been settled and settled forever. By the same token we know ourselves to be eternally saved and secure. I know there are some Christians who do not like the expression eternal security.

But I've noticed that some of these same people have no objection to social security. They feel themselves secure because the government has pledged itself to make certain payments in the future for their well-being and support. How much more secure they who trust in the one who can never fail.

The third note in this divine chord is struck in that final statement. She hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. There are those who believe that this means that Jerusalem had received twice as much punishment as she deserved.

But one can hardly reconcile that with the righteousness and judgment of God. So we shall let Israel speak for herself. In the ninth chapter of the book of Ezra we read, And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great trespass, seeing that thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments? Note that expression.

Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve. Then again in the well-known 103rd Psalm, listen to these words. He hath not dealt with us after or according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. And yet again in Romans 5 we read, But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Surely with such words in mind we can see that our text might very well refer to grace rather than to punishment.

And the fact that the text speaks of that which had already been received does not contradict that thought. Every child of God reading these lines has already received infinitely more than he ever deserved. I said more than once, if the Lord were to take everything I hold dear, I would still have to say with Job, The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. And now we trust.

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