

God's Tender Mercies

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes God's mercy and the call for believers to extend comfort and compassion to one another.

Duration: 1:03:07

Topics: "Mercy Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Isaiah 40:1-2, which speaks of comforting God's people and announcing the way of the Lord. The preacher emphasizes the importance of repentance and receiving forgiveness through faith in Jesus. He highlights the suffering of Jesus as a double portion for our sins and the blessings we receive through him. The preacher encourages the congregation to speak tenderly and offer comfort to those who have sinned and repented, even if their lives are in ruins.

Transcript

Shall we pray? We thank you for the mercy that we can meet together today and we ask you to be with us. Help us, Lord, and speak to us through your word. Anoint these words with life, with life-giving power, so that each one would be raised up and filled with light instead of being surrounded by darkness when they leave the service.

Amen. Today our text is from the book of Isaiah. I'd wanted to start in the beginning and stop in verse 8. But when I looked at it again, I got so involved with it and so absorbed, I thought, well I can hardly get beyond verse 3. And I'll have to leave it for another opportunity to be able to speak about it.

Isaiah 40, verse 1. Comfort ye, yes, comfort ye my people, says your God. Comfort ye, yes, comfort ye my people, says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

We'll read this far. Verse 2. I'd wanted to continue with the prophecy about the coming one who would announce the way of the Lord, John the Baptist, who would say, prepare ye the way of the Lord. But by verse 2, I was so captivated, I could not continue.

These two verses contain so much. Because I thought I'd like to look at all these words about John the Baptist, for the story of John is very great. Remember, Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were very old already and were childless.

Zacharias, being a priest in the temple, and how the angel Gabriel came to him and said, and how the angel Gabriel came to Zacharias and said, Your wife will be with child and he will be great, for he will prepare the way. His name will be John. John was to be his name.

Zacharias said, No, this cannot be so. It's just beyond me. This is impossible.

Elizabeth and I are so old already. But all Zacharias had to do was just to carefully listen to the name of the child, John, for no one in his family, among all his relatives, had that name. Because the name John means, God has mercy.

God is merciful. He should have listened more diligently because of this being revealed, that yes, I am old, so is Elizabeth, but God is great and he is merciful. I would like the theme of this service to be that it is a sermon about mercy.

John said, No. Zacharias said, No, it cannot be. And he went out the temple.

By then, quite a crowd had gathered, wondering what on earth had happened to John and their children. He was staying far beyond his time. And when Zacharias finally came out, he came out not being able to speak, just gesticulating with his hands, saying, Go.

He couldn't speak. He was struck dumb. God had tied his tongue.

They thronged around him and asked what had happened. He said, We'll bring a piece of paper and pen to write with. They brought him paper and pen to write.

And he wrote, Elizabeth is to be with child. She will give birth to a son. So when the time came that the boy was born, it was then that he asked for paper and he wrote that his name is John.

The people said, That's out of the question. No one else in your family is called John. But he persisted and he said, His name is John.

And it was at that point that God, untied, he loosed his tongue. Then his tongue was untied. God enabled him to speak again.

And he said, This is what God has done. He's given us the son and he is called John for God is gracious. And indeed it was so.

Wasn't it grace that this old man and wife should have a son who should be the greatest of all children born of men except the Lord Jesus? Wasn't it mercy that his tongue should be loosed? Wasn't it mercy that this John should go before the Lord preparing the way? Isn't it mercy that we can be here gathered together to hear the word of the Lord? Listening to what God has to say to us. So today my sermon is about mercy. So how does the story start? It is comfort.

Yes, comfort my people. Speak comfort and courage to Jerusalem. God's people and Jerusalem were seen as one thing.

These are God's words spoken through his prophet. Speak comfort. Yes, comfort to my people.

For thus says the Lord your God, the prophet said. Speak comfort and courage to my people. Why should God speak in this manner? For God saw his people in ruins, despair, hopeless, in darkness, utterly

vanquished by the enemy.

Jerusalem was destroyed. Many were in Babylon, in captivity. And God said, now comfort, speak comfort to my people.

May we hear this properly. Speak courage to Jerusalem, for she had lost all hope, she was in despair, had no boldness left, was just as weak as water. Speak to her that her warfare is ended, and that her iniquity is pardoned.

For she has received from the Lord's hand double. Now this wasn't just a matter for Isaiah in that specific instance only, it's still applicable today. God says speak to my people, comfort Jerusalem.

God has pity, he feels such compassion on his people who are utterly lost and in darkness and death. We walk by people and we just don't bother about them, we don't know them. Or we think bad thoughts, or we throw a stone at them, we have only critical thoughts about them, we don't remember, we forget, we remember their sins.

What would you think of a nursing sister who wouldn't feel compassion for her dying patients, and if she brings them some pills and a glass of water, she just puts it there and says, you drink it, after all, you're the one who's sick. What would you think of a nursing sister who wouldn't feel compassion for her dying patients, and if she brings them some pills and a glass of water, she just puts it there and says, you drink it, after all, you're the one who's sick. Not speaking about nursing and a patient, but spiritually, what do you feel about people who are in a hopeless state, in despair, don't you show any pity towards them, they're in darkness, they have no hope? In Zulu I said even the outsiders, but here it speaks to the insiders, to Jerusalem, and His people.

He speaks here to His very own, to Jerusalem, to His people. These words are the words of your God. What should be done about Jerusalem which lies in ruins, and God's people who are in captivity? And the children of God who are living the life of Romans 7, where they cry out, what I want to do that I cannot, what I don't want to do is the very thing which I do.

Children of God who are living a life of failure, who are always slipping up, always living a dismal, hopeless life. There are some theologians who say Isaiah 1-39 They speculate that from Isaiah 1-39 it might have been one section written by Isaiah, and that from chapter 40 onwards might have been written by somebody else. Isaiah 1-39 Because before chapter 40 the God described as one of vengeance and of wrath, but from chapter 40 it's of mercy and comfort, and it can't be the same thing.

Before that God speaks of revenge. And here from chapter 40 God speaks with pity, with comfort, encouraging words to His people. And well, that speculation of authorship doesn't trouble me in the least.

It is good that we children of God remember this. When we see children of God in ruin, we should not place burden upon burden and say, Well, they're getting what they deserved just as I predicted. Look at them.

No, we need to speak comfortingly to Jerusalem. I also have the Amplified Bible. There it says, Speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem and cry to her.

I think that's the thing. Many a prophet of God, many a preacher, many a child of God has got to learn. Think of the prodigal son.

He was a son. He wasn't an outcast. He was the son.

And when he had made that decision to repent and come back to the Father, the Father met him. His father spoke tenderly to his son, words of compassion and acceptance, and there was great joy and celebration. The elder son said, What's this noise reaching my ears? It was said to him, Your brother who was lost has returned, the one who was in the pigsty.

In Greek, it means that he was identified with the owner of the pigs. Using a similar word as we find in 1 Corinthians 6 where it says, If a person becomes one flesh with a prostitute, he becomes one body with that person. In the same way, they said this prodigal had made one person with the owner of the pigs.

His fall was very great. You find homosexuals, lesbians, where they crave for the same sex, flirting with each other, a perversion, something that is terrible and against nature itself. The elder son said, What's this noise reaching my ears? It was said to him, Your brother who was lost has returned, the one who was in the pigsty.

In the same way, they said this prodigal had made one person with the owner of the pigs. Have you gone to a person already who has sinned and repented and encouraged him, comforted him, strengthened him, quickened him, even if his life is in ruins, that you speak tenderly to his heart? That's what the Father says we should do. That's what the Father says we should do.

Have you ever spoken these words of comfort to the person who drowns in perdition, they feel condemned to such a degree that they say my sins are so great, they are so abominable, I can never be forgiven, it's just too much. Have you spoken comfort and said the Lord Jesus has paid the price, be comforted for the Lord Jesus has carried that burden, been punished double so that you receive a thousand fold blessing and justification. That's the gospel of conviction, repentance, forgiveness, cleansing, removal, being justified and that is all taken away.

That's the gospel of conviction, repentance, forgiveness, cleansing, removal, being justified and that is all taken away. Is there still condemnation towards that person in your heart, you say that person has sinned beyond measure, it's just unpardonable, but you don't have the attitude of your Heavenly Father, the one who says go to that person, speak comfortingly, speak courage to their heart. Speak tenderly to their heart.

When Simon walked in and he beheld the spectacle of a loose body, he said to himself, I'm going to die, I'm going to die. This girl, one who had lived a sexually immoral life, she had been in filth and here she was wiping the Lord's feet with her tears. Simon thought to himself, no, this cannot be a prophet, for surely he would have realized what type of woman this is.

Jesus was not identifying with her sin of this girl. Instead he said, Simon, you invited me to be here, and since I've come, you've never brought the traditional dish to wash my feet? Wash basin, but this girl, this one who has sinned so much, since I've come she hasn't stopped wiping my feet with her hair, wiping the tears away. Jesus said to himself, I'm going to die, I'm going to die.

Jesus did not speak harshly to this girl, instead he spoke with tenderness and he said, Simon, it's because she is so conscious of her sin, that is why she weeps so profusely. There is a marvelous matter which we find in the letter to Philemon. Philemon receives a letter from Paul.

He writes to him about Onesimus. Onesimus had been the slave of Philemon. Onesimus had been the slave of Philemon.

While Onesimus was working for Philemon, he was busy pilfering. Stealing didn't begin in Africa. It was known a long time ago.

After that, he ran away, he fled and found his way through to Rome. In essence, when he was there now as a refugee, for he had fled from his master, Philemon said, what a criminal of a man who has run away with stolen property which was mine. But then in Rome, he met with Paul.

I don't know how, but Onesimus came to repentance. And he began to visit Paul in jail. He began to help him and assist him, because when a person gets saved, they are a help to others.

And it doesn't matter who you are or what you are, whether you've been a slave or the saved master, whether you're a Jew or a Greek, Afrikaner, white, Zulu, it doesn't matter, French, whatever you are, but if you've come to Christ, we are one thing together. So Paul wrote a letter to Philemon. Philemon was also in charge of the church there.

Go and read for yourself this letter to Philemon, it's not long, it's wonderful. He said, now look Philemon, I'm sending Onesimus back to you. Yes, he's done wrong, yes he's stolen, yes he was a refugee, but I'm sending him back to you now.

And I request you to receive him as your brother. He's not your slave anymore, for he is your brother in the Lord. And you can send me his account, whatever he's stolen, whatever he's owing to you, you charge it to my account.

How marvellous, Paul is like Jesus. Who God sent and says, charge this to my account, he is the one who's come and the debt is on me. And he says, Philemon, I know that he was a nuisance to you in the past, and that he was just a negative influence there, but now, since he's converted and I've led him to the Lord, he's a son of mine in the Lord, you treat him likewise, and he'll be a help to you.

Oh, the Gospel, it says, comfort ye my people, encourage them and speak comforting words to them. And he says, comfort ye my people, encourage them and speak comforting words to them. And watch out, lest you don't forgive the one who's a penitent, the one who is so deeply sorry, for yes, they have sinned, yes, indeed, they have fallen greatly, but you hold it in your heart, and you hold this grudge, and you come into church, and you go out week by week, month by month, year by year, you still hold this, don't you realise you're unlike your Heavenly Father who says, speak comfortingly to that person.

Yes, there are different circumstances, as in the church at Corinth, there was the man who was living an immoral life with the stepmother, strong measures had to be taken, to such an extent that it was said, don't even eat food with that person. But if a person humbles himself, confessing their sin, go and speak nicely, and say, be courageous, oh Jerusalem, for your warfare has ended, your iniquity is pardoned. But you keep on hanging on to what you say are the facts of the matter, you say that person sinned, but they've repented in the meantime.

Well, one day, the feast will happen, God's Heavenly Feast, and you'll find yourself being excluded. This is similar. Comfort, comfort my people.

And I'd wanted to continue, but I could not, to the part where it says, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God, etc. But this, of comforting God's people, His mercy, I could not go beyond it. Have you been obedient in that, or are you still holding on to that grudge? Saying, I cannot forget, I cannot forgive that person.

And that person feels it. They are conscious of the fact that whenever they come to you, they feel terror and afraid of you because you hold this thing against them. Are you a person who listens, who obeys, and who is obedient, and you pay your dues to God? If not, you are a Pharisee, a hypocrite.

If you see that person, that particular person that you are holding that grudge against, because of their sin, which indeed they have sinned with, but they have repented in the meantime, and you hold it against them, and you find that you are the excluded one. I don't know, am I understood? Can I leave it at this point? Are you too a person of mercy? Are you able to speak God's tenderness? John was the mercy of God. If you had to read in Matthew 3 what John was like in his preaching, you would say, I don't see any connection to mercy whatsoever.

He is just a man of anger and condemnation. But you see, when sin is exposed, and is confessed, and is forgiven, God's compassion and tenderness is shown. The Bible says, He who hides his sin shall not prosper, but the one who confesses and departs from his sin shall obtain mercy.

You remember what this service of today has been about? About mercy. Let your life be the same. Be that.

Don't try and pretend to be better than somebody else. Show grace. Encourage the person whose life seems to have crumbled all around them.

Those who have failed, say to them, Don't die on your sin. Be strengthened, for God can make all things new. That they are strengthened.

And enabled to continue their journey with the Lord in uprightness. We have a gospel, young people, this gospel of mercy. Let us pray.

We thank you, oh Lord, for reminding us today about your mercy. And Lord, if we hadn't met up with this mercy, how far and how distant we would be from you. Lord, help us to pass this mercy on to others.

And that if we meet the prodigal son, that we would embrace him spiritually. And that the one who has sinned and failed, that we would encourage them, tell them to be released, for all is forgiven, all is made new. Amen.

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