

Isaiah 40 - Comfort My People

by Mariano Di Gangi

God's message of comfort to his people emphasizes the completion of their hard service, the payment of their sin, and the call to return to a faithful relationship with him.

Duration: 22:26

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-6, Isaiah 40:11

Topics: "Comfort"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by reading from the book of Isaiah, specifically chapter 40, verse 1. The passage emphasizes the message from God to comfort His people. The preacher highlights that the true and living God of the Bible is not silent, but actively communicates with His creation through nature and scripture. The passage also reminds us of the temporary nature of human existence, contrasting it with the eternal nature of God's word. The sermon concludes by emphasizing God's role as a shepherd, caring for and leading His people.

Transcript

Reading from God's written word as it is recorded for us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the book of the Prophet Isaiah, the 40th chapter, and beginning to read at verse 1. 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. A voice of one calling, in the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness 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 mankind together will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says, cry out, and I said, what shall I cry? All men are like grass and all their glory 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 stands forever.

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings 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 his arm rules for him. 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. Right at the very beginning of this passage, we have the text that is basic to the solo selection that was so well rendered this morning in our service of public worship.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. 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.

What do we find in this text? The first thing that we should notice here is a message from the Lord. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. The true and living God of the Bible is not silent.

The true and living God revealed in scripture is a living God who speaks. He is a God who wishes to communicate. According to Psalm 19, God communicates, God speaks, God makes himself heard and understood in the book of nature and in the book of scripture.

Isaac Watts caught up the message of the 19th Psalm on the self-revealing God and he expressed it like this. Nature with open volume stands to spread her maker's praise abroad and every labor of his hands sows something worthy of a God. But in the grace that rescued man, his brightest form of glory shines.

Here on the cross, tis fairest drawn in precious blood and crimson lines. We have a God who speaks to us in the world of nature for the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork, but a God who also reveals himself to us in the word of scripture, culminating in the gospel of the redemptive work of Jesus who died for us that we might live. Here we have a message from the Lord.

The God of the Bible is a God who speaks. But here we also have a message to the Prophet. God tells the Prophet to comfort his people and to speak tenderly to Jerusalem and to proclaim to Jerusalem the message that the people need to hear.

The Prophet, in other words, is the one who having received a message from the Lord must faithfully transmit it to the people. That's what preaching is all about. It's not the spinning out of cunningly devised fables.

It's not the parading around of human doubt. It is not the artificiality of human eloquence, but the reception of a message from a God who speaks and the communication of that message with all its integrity to people who need to hear. And those who need to hear include the one given the message to proclaim.

That message which is received from the Lord and is to be communicated to people must not be subject to any subtraction. The work of subtraction goes on whenever one who is called to the ministry of the word and sacraments begins to have doubt about the great centralities and fundamentals of the faith. It begins to happen when a man has disbelief instead of commitment and conviction and there are whole sections of the Bible that he no longer preaches on because he himself no longer believes them.

We must not subtract from what God has given. The message must be delivered in all its integrity and purity with fidelity. Nor is the preacher at liberty to adulterate the message by adding to it his own slant on world politics and substituting those for the teaching of the Word of God.

Neither by subtraction that is due to doubt and disbelief, nor by the addition of that which is merely human and will only serve to adulterate and to cloud the clarity of the message of the Word, must the preacher proclaim what God first has made plain to him. A message from the Lord, a message to the prophet who must speak in a way that is appropriate to the needs of God's people. Here he is told to speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

There are times when the preacher of the Word must give forth thunder. There are times when from the pulpit there must come flashes of divine lightning. There are times when people need to be reproofed and corrected on the basis of the authority of Scripture to which we are all subject.

But the message must always be appropriate to the needs of men and women. And the Lord knows that very often we are bruised and we are broken and we need not only reproof but renewal. We need not simply correction, we also need consolation.

And therefore the Lord perceives that at this particular point Jerusalem, which is another name for his people, is in need of being spoken to with tenderness. There are times when the work of the ministry involves comforting the afflicted, just as at other times it involves afflicting those who were comfortable. And the Lord knows that his people need a word that is designed to meet their need.

And here he tells the prophet, speak tenderly, speak comfortably to Jerusalem. A message from the Lord, a message to the prophet, and above all a message for the people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, comfort my people.

The Lord is concerned for the conversion of individuals. He wants men and women to come to the place of decision and commitment, standing alone before the awesome presence of God, dealing on one on one with God, getting right with him individually, personally. The awesome loneliness of the individual in the presence of the Almighty, getting right with God.

I cannot do it for my children any more than they can do it for me. Each of us must stand in the presence of God and get right with him. But God is not only interested in the reclamation and the renewal of the individual.

God is out to form a people. God is out to build a church, a redeemed and renewed society. And so the word of God here is to my people, deliver to my people the word of comfort in an attitude of tenderness.

That's what the Old Testament means by the doctrine of the covenant. Israel was to live in a covenant relationship with God as his people distinguished from the heathen roundabout. Israel's glory was to mirror the faithfulness of God to his people by being a people faithful to God.

And the tragedy of the story recorded in the Old Testament is that far too often Israel gloried in a covenant relationship with God but lived in a way that was similar to that of its materialistic and idolatrous and immoral pagan neighbors. And is not that the situation with many today who profess to follow Jesus Christ but are really swept along on the tide of a world that is idolatrous and materialistic and immoral? And yet the Lord still speaks of this wayward group as my people. A disobedient people, a people that has forgotten God, a people that has forsaken God, a people that has rebelled against God, a people that deserves the judgment of God, and yet God says speak to my people.

We may be faithless but he is ever faithful. And he says deliver to my people a message of comfort. Tell my people that the time of chastisement and discipline on account of transgression is over.

They have been reduced to the point of brokenness, they have been reduced to the point of repentance, and now I freely and graciously forgive their sin. Their sins have been paid for, atonement has been made. Tell them that they are forgiven.

There's a small cemetery not far from the metropolis of New York where there is a memorable headstone over a grave. There's no date of birth, there's no mention of the date of death, there is no epitaph with wit or wisdom to confront the onlooker, there is certainly no eulogy of the one who died, but on that tombstone one single word, forgiven. That's the greatest thing that can ever be written across your gravestone or mine over your life and mine, forgiven.

Cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished and that her iniquity is pardoned. Martin Luther said that apart from the Word of God no genuine comfort exists and that the true comfort of the conscience is in Jesus Christ. Today we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior from the penalty and power of sin is welcome to partake.

Our iniquity is pardoned because another paid the price of our sin. Every time that we break bread, every time the fruit of the vine is outpoured, symbolically we remember what Jesus did when he paid for the penalty of our sin that we might be pardoned. The just died for the unjust that we might be brought back to God as his forgiven covenant people.

We who had forsaken God are welcomed back into fellowship with God because our sins have been paid for. Atonement has been made by the sinless sin-bearer Jesus Christ the righteous. Comfort, comfort my people with the comfort that comes from knowing that our sins have been atoned for and we have forgiveness, even redemption through the shedding of his blood.

Let us pray. Lord God of the covenant, we know that you want us to be in a real living wonderful relationship with yourself. We know that our sins separate us from you, but we also know that Jesus Christ was willing to bear those sins in his own body and pay our penalty, removing the barrier so that we might come back to you and find forgiveness and experience fellowship.

Prepare our hearts that we might not only receive bread and wine, but by faith receive the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

For the word of God not only teaches us that we are comforted by the Lord, especially with the great comfort that comes from a knowledge of sins forgiven, but that as we have been comforted, so we ought to become channels and means of comfort to others. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, reading verses 3 and 4, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. God's purpose is to comfort us and reassure us so that out of our experience we might be able to comfort others in their need and in their affliction.

The Apostle often used that phraseology, God has shown me mercy so that because of that marvelous exhibit of his grace in my life, you might be encouraged to hope for mercy in the time of your need. God, says Paul, has comforted me when I was hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, scarred. God comforted me when I was in trouble and experienced hardship and distress, beatings, imprisonments, and riots.

He was with me in sleepless nights. He was with me in shipwreck upon the sea. He was with me when I was beaten.

He comforted me when I was sorrowful. When I was flogged, pelted with stones, robbed, ambushed, and put on the edge of martyrdom, he comforted me so that I from my experience would then be able to comfort you in your time of difficulty, danger, and distress. This is the first day of a new week and as the days of this new week run their course, you and I will meet people who are sorrowing, who are hurting, who are broken, who have failed, who are filled with regrets, who will need the comfort of God.

What you have experienced, channel through to others, for this is God's will concerning each of us. And now we conclude with a praise of God, a hymn of doxology, selection 602.

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