

Isaiah 40:1-11

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[0 : 00] Isaiah chapter 40. There it is. You know me, I like to kind of move around. I don't like being kind of like stuck right here.! Got that mic. Isaiah chapter 40. So today, we're going to start in Isaiah 40 and the next week we're going to finish it.

So we're going to break it up into two different Sundays. But unless you live under a rock, it's a great way to start a sermon. Unless you live under a rock, you're aware that we're living in very troubled times.

And when efforts to comfort ourselves fall and fail, I find that there's no greater encouragement, no greater comfort, than to visit the reality and put our heart and souls and minds on the greatness, sovereignty, and power of our God.

When you are overwhelmed, when you are anxious, when your soul is troubled, when you are depressed, there's no greater remedy, I believe, than to put yourself, your mind, your heart, your soul on the greatness and glory of God.

And so in Isaiah 40, it's a rather long chapter. And I've read it out loud several times and it took me over five minutes.

[1 : 32] And so since our time is short, I don't want to, we're going to eat it piecemeal, if that makes sense. I'm going to maybe read through the whole thing next week. But just for sake of time, we're going to go just from verse 1 to verse 11 today.

But before we do that, many people feel like they're visiting a foreign land when they go to the Old Testament. Things are unfamiliar. They don't quite know where they are.

They feel a little lost. And so they're really quick to want to dive back into the New Testament. But I encourage you to fall in love with the Old Testament that points forward toward Christ.

But a little bit of historical context. You have to know or none of this will make sense. But after the death of King David, after the death of Solomon, the nation split into two different kingdoms.

There was Israel to the north in the capital of Israel, where is Samaria. And that's like where we get the term Samaritans from in the New Testament. Then there was Judah in the south, and that capital was Jerusalem.

[2 : 43] They split mainly due to a lot of economic issues, as well as just like inflammation from old tribal divisions within the nation itself. And each kingdom had its own king, its own army.

But in late 700s BC, God's patience was growing thin with both nations, if you can imagine that. And each nation was guilty of some of the same sin. I would say it was characterized by four main sins.

All right? And without getting much into it, you will see a lot of the same things going on in our nation, and in the church, and in individuals' lives as well.

One was a lot of political corruption. Kings, courts, officials of the nation abused their power. Instead of serving their nation and the people, they did it for selfish gain.

[3 : 52] They twisted things, the government, in a way that served their own ends. So corrupt leaders and corrupt government officials from top to bottom, from the king and below.

Number two, another sin that characterized these two nations was excessive, gluttonous living. As a whole, both Israel and Judah enjoyed a long time of wealth and prosperity.

For a long time. And it got to a point, though, where they forgot who actually blessed them. They didn't remember those who were in need.

And they were just concerned about their comfort, their luxury, and their safety. That's all that really mattered to them. Thirdly, and I'll have to clarify, social injustice.

And I mean biblical social injustice. While many lived high on the hog, there was a lot of great poverty as well. And people had no problem neglecting the needy.

[5 : 00] And these are for legitimate reasons. The poor, this isn't entitlements or equity or handouts. They were at the bottom of the chain. And so the people's prosperity, they had little to no regard for those who were in need.

And justice didn't prevail because it was common to pay judges in the courts bribes to have a certain outcome in a trial.

And so the poor were abused by the rich. They had no problem abusing them and using them if it meant like they could get ahead and gain. And they would end up either in jail or dead a lot of the time, the poor would.

So they were neglecting God's law of love. And God's law was not being obeyed. Justice did not prevail.

But there was little or no compassion shown towards those in need. And then lastly, this is a major one. If this one was in place, all the other ones would be okay. But there was extreme religious hypocrisy.

[6 : 08] The nation's worship of God had been greatly distorted or lost completely. Kind of sound familiar to some degree? Those who still follow the tradition of Yahweh, a lot of them worshipped outwardly in ritual and in ceremony.

But their hearts were still far from God. They would go through the outward signs and then go home and then send it up for the rest of the week. And so others had turned completely away from God and worshipped the pagan Canaanite gods and idolatry.

So this was all rampant. So those four types of political corruption, gluttonous living, social injustice, and religious hypocrisy. And so there's impending judgment.

When you start reading the book of Isaiah, it starts with this idea of God's impending judgment. God sends prophets, many of them, to speak to the nations, both Israel and Judah, calling them to repent of their sins, destroy their pagan idols and their wickedness, and turn back in faith to Yahweh.

But most rejected them. Most continued the corruption, the gluttonous living, the real social injustice. They only got worse. And they actually would say to themselves, you can read it in Hosea, Amos, other places, they would say things like, God is for us.

[7 : 37] He's on our team. Look at the wealth and prosperity He's given us. If you say there's judgment, like where's the proof? Like look around us. It's so nice. And man, our military can seriously clean house.

So no one's going to mess with us. And so they would make those kind of claims. And even if we're wrong, they would say, even if we're wrong, God will allow us to repent.

God will forgive us. So it was like a cheapening grace throughout the nation itself. And so prophets came, by and large, with messages from God.

They were rejected. So finally, God says, all right, enough. Enough. If you can imagine God saying that. And He warns that judgment not just might be coming, but is coming.

To the nation that God will use, that He will allow, He will unleash on the northern kingdom, is Assyria, which is the ancient superpower in the 8th century.

[8 : 45] And so they were called to turn to God and repent, but they didn't. They continued to look for other alliances with other kings, other nations to withstand Assyria.

But they failed. God was saying, don't look to these pagan nations. Look to me. Look to me. And they failed. So around 722 B.C., this resulted in Israel's tragic destruction and exile of the northern kingdom.

Completely destroyed. It's kind of known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. So a brutal time. And Judah survived a little bit longer, about 135 years, roughly.

There was three more kings, mostly not great kings, but Hezekiah, kind of a toss-up. And Hezekiah was a king during the time of Isaiah.

But then eventually, God's patience worked in with Judah. And then Babylon, the new superpower, destroyed Judah and Jerusalem.

[9 : 55] So Isaiah, what a beautiful name it means, Yahweh saves. His ministry seemed to take place in Judah, predominantly around Jerusalem.

If you read, it says from the time King Uzziah died. That's about 739 B.C. And so Isaiah uses the title of Yahweh nearly 60 times in the book.

And the New Testament cites this book more than any other except Psalms. One Old Testament scholar said, For sheer grandeur and majesty, probably no book in the Hebrew Bible can be compared with Isaiah.

So the prophet served as God's mouthpiece. He spoke through them. And it was not a fun role to be in. You were often called to disrupt the status quo.

And you were called to, in a way, God told them, like, See what I see and feel what I feel. To the prophets, at least in a finite human way.

[11:01] It was really, really difficult. They carried out their ministries with heavy hearts. Not always excited, like I said, about the assignments they were given. And though they knew God's truth and they proclaimed it, Though they loved God even more, their hearts still broke for their nation and their communities That were about to be destroyed by judgment.

It ripped their hearts out to see God judge their beloved nation for sin. It killed them to see them carried off into captivity amidst blood, carnage, and ruin.

Brutal time to live in. So, from chapter 1 all the way up to chapter 39, It's mostly pronouncements of judgment against the kingdom of Israel and Judah.

So when we get to Isaiah, there's a huge shift. Where it goes from divine judgment to divine comfort. And almost in the blink of an eye, Isaiah moves from the present day that he's living in to the future.

God starts addressing his people in the present day, Speaking to them in the future. He has a strong message of comfort and consolation.

[12:24] He knows that they will be in exile in Babylon. So he basically sends this message to them in the future. Sort of kind of like how the apostle John did so in Revelation.

He spoke to the future. And so, God is aware that his people that are going to be in exile in Babylon are going to be thinking a lot of things.

They're going to be wondering a lot of things. They'll have concerns and fears. And so, against the background of that dire prediction of judgment, he speaks this strong message of comfort to his future people in exile.

And this is basically some of the questions they might be asking, because they're answered in this chapter. God made promises to Israel. He promised to make all the nations of the world blessed through Abraham's descendants.

Has God failed? Has his promise failed? Does God even want to deliver us? Because, of course, we don't deserve it. Does he even care about us at all anymore?

[13:37] Furthermore, even if God wants to deliver us, can he do it? Does he actually have the power to deliver us? Is our sin too great or is Babylon's armies too strong?

Suppose he wants to, and he can, but will he actually do it? Those are the sort of questions that they would be thinking about further into the future while they are captives in Babylon.

So, at the darkest moment, the call goes out into the future to speak a word of comfort. So, we're going to outline this entire chapter with three areas.

We're going to do one today and two next week. But, number one, this is today, the glory of God is the comfort of his people. The glory of God is the comfort of his people.

Next week, it will be the uniqueness of God is the assurance of his people. Then, also, the greatness of God is the renewal of his people.

[14:39] That's what we'll get into next week. But, as we get into our chapter today, let's begin to read in the beginning of chapter 40. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 1-4 Comfort Comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, and that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

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, every mountain and hill be made low.

And 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. A voice says, cry, and I said, what shall I cry? All flesh is like grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

[15:49] The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows on it. Surely the people are like grass. The grass withers, and the flower fades.

But the word of our God will stand forever. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift it up, fear not, says to the cities of Judah. Behold your God. Behold the Lord comes with might, and His arm rules for Him.

Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense is before Him. He will tend His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arms.

He will carry them in His bosom. And gently lead them. Lead those who are with young. So we're going to stop there.

[16:50] So we're going to break this up into four different points. Number one, the occasion of God's consolation, or comfort.

The occasion of God's consolation. And we see this in verses 1 and 2. So when Babylonia took Israel into exile, their grief was great.

God had like severely disciplined, severely disciplined them. Like seeing their families and friends slaughtered before their eyes. And the siege of the Babylonians was so gruesome and so cruel. You can read about it in other historical sources. And then whatever was left of them, they were carried into captivity away from their homeland. And so Jeremiah, who was alive during that time, and probably saw this, he wrote in Lamentations, you know, full of sorrow, mourning, and loss. He says, Jerusalem has no one to comfort her. No one. But now, we see the prophetic voice coming to them in the future.

[18:03] And he charges, if you notice, the voices of verse 3, verse 6, and the heralds of verse 9. He tells them to repeat, to echo his deep, true affection for those, his people.

And the phrase, my people, your God, my people, your God, is sort of repeated throughout this chapter. So he begins with speaking comfort, and not like warm, fuzzy comfort, but consolation to encourage, strengthen someone who is weak and fearful.

That's what that means, to come alongside someone, to strengthen them, encourage them. He says it twice for emphasis. Comfort, comfort my people.

He mentions, they have received from the Lord's hand double all their sins. And that word actually implies exact payment.

Which I think, when I was studying this, it just really struck me. Because it means that God was not unjust or overly harsh.

[19:13] But that would be hard to imagine, like how much worse could it get? Right? But it's hard to imagine that. It could have been far worse. God didn't utterly destroy the nation.

He didn't judge them and send them to eternal damnation. The Babylonian exile would be the final payment for Judah's sins and transgression. And that exile would not last forever.

So therefore, though God had greatly disciplined them, there was still so much mercy, so much grace that he showed them. And that's why he can say her iniquity is pardoned.

Her perversion, her twisting of things has been pardoned. And though Judah's sin and unbelief had brought them very low, very low, God still lovingly identifies with his people.

So, if you remember, if you're a parent particularly, when you severely discipline your kids for a real wrongdoing, it might cause them to recoil a little bit when you come back.

[20:23] Right? They're like, hmm? What's about to happen? But how do we, as parents, after we've lovingly disciplined our children for a wrongdoing, how do we bring them back?

How do you give them reassurance that though they have done something bad, and you've punished them for their own good, that you still love them and that they are yours?

And that's not changing regardless. You do so by kindness and gentleness. You tell them, you're mine. You belong to me. And that's what it says in verse 2.

It says, speak tenderly. In Hebrew, speak to the heart. The way an ardent lover woos their beloved. So, God aims to win their hearts back.

Speaking tenderly to them after this severe discipline. He wants them to know that he is with them, that he cares for them, and that he will one day restore them to their homeland.

[21:24] So, while in exile in Babylon, they are far from Jerusalem, God dignifies them by proclaiming their true identity. You are my people. And that's not changing. Regardless of your sin.

Regardless of Babylon, you are mine. And he comes to them in overwhelming comfort. So, we see in our text, the comfort to Jerusalem, if you're writing your notes down, the comfort of Jerusalem prefigures the comfort that true believers will find in Christ.

Think about verses in the New Testament. How are we comforted by the presence of Christ?
Maybe 2 Corinthians?

2 Corinthians? Chapter 1 comes to mind. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort we ourselves have been comforted by God.

So, that comfort looks forward in Christ to the comfort that broken sinners can experience through knowing Jesus Christ.

[22 : 38] And just as we came to know God originally as believers, as sinners, remember Romans 2.4? Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and the forbearance of His patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

So, there's that speaking tenderly part like, come. Come and be close. John Calvin said, No one will ever reverence God, but he who is confident that God is favorable towards him.

If you think that God is against you and your enemy, we're speaking as the people of God here, you won't come close to Him if you don't think He's favorable towards you.

And the blessing is that in Christ, we have been made favorable toward God so that we can approach Him. So, just like Judah, the people of God, we fail to live and act like the people of God all the time.

We fail to represent Him as we ought to. But still, He patiently bears with us, identifies with us, and speaks tenderly to us.

[23 : 54] He doesn't disown us or reject us and say, No more. You're not mine anymore. He never does that to those He set His affection on that His Son died for.

So, what about you? Do you have glad expectations of your God? Does it comfort your soul to know that the price of your sin has been paid for?

And that now you can be brought close to the heart of God. Close to His heart. Not just His arms, but His heart.

Pretty different. So, let's get back to the point number two. That is going to be seen in verses three through five. This is the content of God's consolation.

The content of God's consolation. Number two. And this is in verses three through five. So, Yahweh, in verses three through five, commands another voice, saying, In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.

[25 : 00] Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. So, a king or a monarch traveling through a barren wilderness land would have workers go ahead of them, way ahead of them, and clear out every single obstacle that was in the way.

And like even set soldiers to kind of guard the way. Everything would be moved. Debris, hazards, obstacles. And it says here that valleys will be raised and mountains will be made flat.

So, if you can imagine the Andes, the Himalayas, the Rockies, just going, This is the power of God. But, Isaiah is not speaking in the literal here.

He's not speaking of topography. He's speaking and referring to the clearing away of sin. The upheaval that His presence will bring to a corrupt, fallen world.

There's going to be a lot of upheaval. The fallen world is not going to be moved willingly. But, God is going to clear the way. He's paving the way to bring sinners to repentance.

[26 : 04] Paving the way of salvation and bringing about a new kingdom on the earth. And so, in verse 5, God promises to replace His people's misery with His own glory.

Bringing them supreme comfort to their souls. So, they will see that Yahweh's glorious salvation. But, listen to this. Not only Jerusalem, but all flesh, it says.

All flesh will see this together. So, later in chapter 52, verse 9, it says, The Lord has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has barred His holy arm before all the nations. All the nations. And all the ends of the earth. Shall see the salvation of our God.

So, God is coming. His message of hope will be spread to all nations. And so, Isaiah is saying, in summary, The King is coming.

[27 : 10] He will accomplish His purpose. And the glory of Yahweh will be spread throughout the earth. It will be there for all flesh to see. Ringing any New Testament bells?

All fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We sin, we suffer, but God does not leave us there. He brings us overwhelming comfort by His grace.

And we know that all these things were fulfilled in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Isaiah foretells of John the Baptist. The New Testament prophet who came to clear the way, prepare the way for the true Messiah.

The Son of God. And He quotes Isaiah to tell them, this is who I am. Who Isaiah spoke about. This is me.

And He does that in Luke 3, verses 3-6. And He preached in the wilderness, if you recall that. And He cleared a path for the Lord to come.

[28 : 13] John the Baptist said this, I baptize you with water.

You're either going to be for Him or against Him. Saved by Him or destroyed by Him. There's no middle ground. And John says, I am here. I'm that voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord.

So Isaiah foresaw a time where all flesh would see God's glory. Which would have been a crazy thing for many people to hear. God's glory, in short, if you can, I'll try, okay?

Is the fiery radiance of His own nature. It's Godness. It's probably the best way we could say it. But because of sin, no man, including Moses, including Elijah, or Isaiah, could fully come face to face with God and His glory.

Our sin would destroy us. Until God's King, the true Messiah, showed up in Jesus Christ, that glory had to be shielded from us. But when Christ came, it says, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

[29 : 48] And we have seen His glory. Glory is of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1.14 So the glory of the Lord, therefore, is God Himself coming visible, bringing His presence down to us, displaying His beauty and His grandeur to satisfy our soul's deepest longings.

And all of that fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Number three. The certainty of God's consolation. So it all sounds good.

Is it going to happen? What's the certainty? This is seen in verses 6 through 8. So, in short, to save some time, He's saying man is temporal, God is eternal.

The message of all humanity is like we are like grass. We are here and we are gone. Death, all of us will die. Some soon, some not so soon.

But we are transient. Death is God's way of saying to sinful human beings, you are not me. You are not immortal and invincible as I am.

[31 : 08] You will die. If you open up any page in Scripture, there is not a reference too far. A page may be a reference to death in some way. And that is a reminder that we are here and we are gone.

That's it. Vivid imagery all throughout Scripture. Real quick. Job 14. Man who is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble.

Isn't that right? He comes out like a flower and withers. He flees like a shadow and continues not. Job 14. Job 14. 1 and 2.

So in contrast, Yahweh and His Word endure forever. Forever. It says in Psalm 102, verse 27, But you, O God, are the same, and your years have no end.

And since God is eternal, His Word is eternal. His Word doesn't fade away. It's lasting, stable, trustworthy. Right?

[32 : 13] Just because it's in His nature to be that way. So all these things, in verses 6-8, also fulfilled in Christ. The New Testament writers cite this passage to contrast the fading of human life with God's eternity.

An eternal salvation in Christ. And that's why the greatest Word that God has ever spoken is the message of the Gospel. It's actually called in Revelation the everlasting Gospel.

Or the everlasting good news. Our salvation is secure and imperishable because it was spoken by the Almighty, omnipotent God.

Peter wrote, 1 Peter 1, verse 23, He's talking to Christians, Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.

For all flesh is like grass, Peter says, and all is glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.

[33 : 23] So Peter cites this passage as a reminder of the eternity, the certainty of God's consolation that we find in Jesus Christ.

Number four, and lastly, this is seen in verse 9-11, is the spreading of God's consolation. So meaning this good news isn't just meant to sit, it's meant to spread, it's meant to take over, it's meant to go all over the world. So, in verse 9, he says, Herald, he calls a herald to scale a high mountain, and to shout from the top of his lungs with all his strength the good news to Jerusalem. And the message is simple, but yet deeply profound and unending glory. He says, Behold your God.

Behold your God. In short, look. Look at your God. How many of us need to hear that today and tomorrow? Like, quit.

[34 : 31] Look in here. Like, look at your God. What deep words. Protestants in 1560 who fled persecution, who wrote the Geneva Bible, wrote about this verse.

He shows us in one word, the perfection of all man's happiness, which is to have God's presence. In verse 10, we see that Yahweh's power is unmatched, absolutely sovereign.

His mighty arm will accomplish whatever he aims to do. No one's going to stop it. Nothing. Assyria didn't stop it. Babylon didn't stop it.

Corrupt government in America won't stop it. No nation around the world will stop it. It's going to be achieved. Job 42. Job says, I know that you can do all things, that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

And so with his mighty, omnipotent hand, he gathers his flock. You see that in the last part? Like a shepherd, a tender shepherd, holding helpless people in his arms.

[35 : 43] Doesn't that blow your mind? Like the omnipotent, holy God can actually, not just kick sheep around, which is easy to do, but actually gather them up in his arms.

And actually says that he would hold them close to his bosom, meaning near to his heart. Isn't that crazy? So he gathers them up and holds them near to his heart, his affection set on them.

So he is an unstoppable conquering king, a wealthy benefactor, and a tender shepherd. Again, any New Testament thoughts?

I haven't asked you to turn anywhere else other than here, but flip over to John chapter 10 as we're closing here. John chapter 10. We see all this perfectly fulfilled in Christ.

Christ is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. And that his sheep are brought into the fold and they hear his voice and they follow him.

[36 : 51] John 10. We'll start in maybe verse 11. We'll skip around because there's a lot. But check out all the promises. If you are in Christ Jesus, these promises are yours.

If you are not, they're not yours. But we are desirous for you to come into the fold of God. So come and speak with us later if needs be.

But John 10 verse 11. Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Jump down to verse 14. He repeats it. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Even as the Father knows me, I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. And then last little part of this. Look at verse 27. Just go down. Jesus says, My sheep hear my voice.

[37 : 49] I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. Beautiful. Spoken by Isaiah.

Foretold way before Christ came on the scene. But Christ is the good shepherd. And so this good news must spread. The gospel is referred to in many different ways.

And I love the richness of it. Romans 1.9 is called the good news of his son. Romans 15.16, the good news of God. 1 Corinthians 9.12, the good news of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4.4, the glorious good news. 2 Corinthians 5.15, the good news of peace. So we are to shout this message from the mountaintop.

[38 : 53] Good news is to spread. If you were with us in the Lord's Supper time earlier, Cody mentioned that we talk about what we love. Plain and simple.

So what comes out of your mouth during the week? What's in, comes out. And that's straight from the mouth of Jesus. But think about it. It's very easy for this good news to spread.

If you truly believe it and you love it, you'll talk about it. With others who believe it and with those who don't. C.S. Lewis kind of summed this up well.

Now, so much to say here. I'll kind of cut the quote down a little bit. But he said, The world rings with praise. Just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge others to join them in the praising of it.

Isn't she lovely? Wasn't that glorious? Do you not think that magnificent? I think, he says, we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment.

[40 : 07] Beautiful. So we will praise what we love. We will talk about what we love. And if we love Christ, we love the good news, it will spread. So just as Judah, though, failed to trust God, they paid a price for it, but God did not forsake his people.

But remember in this passage that the grace and glory that we have in Jesus Christ is our comfort when we fail. God is undefeated by our most grievous sin.

It's not going to stop him. He is undefeated by even our most grievous sin. And he calls us back to the word he has spoken. His purpose will be fulfilled.

So you can trust him. You can trust God. You can trust him more than yourself. You can trust him absolutely. So the glory of God is the comfort of his people.

So next week, we will get into the other two parts of this. A lot. But beautiful stuff for us to gain great comfort from no matter what we're walking through.

[41 : 16] So let's pray together.