

Our Three Comforts

Isaiah 40:1-2

Isaiah 40 is probably the most tremendous chapter in all of the Bible. It is the prologue to what is rightly called the *Book of Comfort*. It brings us into the light dawning of a new day of grace and hope in 41-66.

This is what many, many hearts and lives are hoping for today, a day of threat, of uncertainty, depression, and above all, a day of fear. Who does not daily, nervously watch the rising count of infections and deaths? Will it happen here at home? To me? To my loved ones?

What can help us in these fearful times? We are praying and fasting that the Lord would lift this disease from his world. We pray for our leaders, our scientists, our medical people.

But it is heart comfort, soul comfort we need here and now; a comfort to keep us through the storm. Not just any comfort will do.

That brings us to this terrific opening to this chapter; you need the comforts of your Creator, your Lord, and your King!

Do you need God, or don't you? And is God able to comfort you? Or do you push his hand away?

If you get nothing else out of this message today, know that the God you need is a God of comfort; He is a God of great comfort, of eternal comfort, the God of ALL Comfort!

And that is what we need most in Him.

Creature comforts have their place. But man is such a bundle of need, brokenness and sickness, a far deeper comfort than the physical is demanded

In “A Book of Comfort for Those in Sickness,” PB Powers outlines the comfort we need from the Lord:

1. A comfort in pain,
2. a comfort as to our being useless,
3. comfort in felt unworthiness,
4. comfort to counter envious thoughts about others.
5. We need such help in our being a trouble to others,
6. in fear that our affliction will be long,
7. in the thought that we shall have to be alone,
8. a comfort in our fears that we shall fail and dishonor God at the last,
9. and a comfort in the thought of our departure from this world – for death.

We are here today to say: “there is a God, a true God, who has promised us – “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death – I will fear no evil – Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.”

Come with me to this chapter – to this medicine chest, this hospital room, this full remedy for you.

It begins with the gentle Hebrew word repeated for emphasis and beauty – *Nahamu, Nahamu* – Comfort – Comfort! Like a healing breeze upon a fevered brow, this word has the idea of ‘*give breath – give breath*’ to my people!

Why? Because you and I are out of breath, gasping, panting. God must give us new breath where we cannot breath.

Take that awful word, ‘pneumonia’ – it comes from later Greek which means inflammation of the ‘breathers’ – the *lungs*.

We need spiritual CPR; spiritual ventilation.

And with the same breath, at verse 2 – we read, speak kindly to Jerusalem. This is a line full of kindness, gentleness, goodness.

But that word literally in the Hebrew is “speak to the HEART of Jerusalem” – my discouraged, disheartened and trampled people.

The heart is not just our desires or feelings, but in the Bible, our thoughts, our emotions and our wills are wrapped up in the heart.

So how does this God of comfort touch your heart? How does he reach the depths of your soul, your inward life? To hold your heart and shape it with comfort and strength and peace? Or, what are his lips which breath into your mouth and lungs his kind grace, mercy and comfort?

That is clearly his living Word: “Comfort my people, says your God!” “Speak to to the heart of Jerusalem!” That word “call” is the same as in Is. 6 where the angels cry out, Holy, Holy, Holy!

A couple of things here then:

1. “Says your God” has the idea of repeatedly saying; not saying once and done, but God continues to speak to his people today in his living Word, the Bible. You need to hear him not just once and a

while, but all your days, every day! Your hearts need to be bathed and soaked in the Word – to become one with us.

2. This is a covenant Word – God speaks *to his people*; the people hear their God. This implies a relationship with the Lord. God is not a bartender that we come and visit once and while and listen to. He is our God day and night, and we want his word hid in our hearts.
3. Then see how the this call and Word are very rich. God speaks to us in many ways. Look at the first 11 verses.
 - a. We have just seen this gentle, kind call in 1-2; the gentle, kind whisper with a firm announcement.
 - b. Second, a voice calls in the wilderness – 3-5. This is a living voice transforming the desert into a garden, building a bridge over the depths, and knocking down every mountain. This is the voice of John the Baptist, heralding the coming of King Jesus! What life and peace he brings – His glory to the whole world, that all flesh sees it!
 - c. Yet another voice arises in 6. See our weakness, like grass we are; the best in us, the flower, invariably fades away, withers and dies and is no more. God’s creating and destroying breath stands over it all. And yet there is hope in the everlasting Word – the word of God stands forever! That is where the little grass finds it root – in the everlasting gospel! That is what Peter writes – that we have been born of incorruptible, or eternal seed!
 - d. And that comes out in 9-11. The voice of God in His church, in His heralds, in His rich kingdom ruled by His arm; in his shepherding His people so lovingly, calling them all by name.

We stop here even though there is more in the chapter:

His is a sovereign Word over all the nations, where all are like dust before him – 12-17; His is an incomparable Word – not like the foolish religions of idols – 18-26 – see this God hold all the stars in his hands, and calls them all by name! Why people of Isaiah’s day called the stars gods! And the chapter closes with His invincible Word: “Those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up *with* wings like eagles!”

Is this not all comforting? to you and me? We need his gentle word and his mighty word, his personal word and his eternal word; his gospel word and his shepherding word. His words are not mere words, you see – they are life-giving, death-conquering, saving, helping, keeping words – Words of Comfort and Relief.

And this is why His Word does not get through to everyone – because people reject Him and His Word. Many, many souls are found looking to the creature rather than the Creator for life and comfort and satisfaction. They are yet in their fallen state – yet in their sins – falling short of the glory of God!

What is the opposite of this comfort? This too is found in Is. 40-66.

This phrase: “*There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.*” Repeated three times! At the end of 48, the end of 57, and in substance, at the end of 66.

That brings us then to the **content** of this comfort. What is cried out to the heart are three things in verse 2 – your warfare is ended, completed; your sins, your iniquities, are forgiven, removed; and your reward has been given of the Lord’s hand double!

Understand that this isn't some kind of a jumble of blessings from the Lord. This is the very outline of the rest of Isaiah's Book of Comfort. These are headings of three great mountains which follow. This like a map for us!

Chapters 41-48 – Mount Comfort of Triumph after War

Chapters 49-55 – Mount Comfort of Gospel Forgiveness – the centerpiece of our comfort

Chapters 56-66 – Mount Comfort of Full Reward from Jesus

Massive Mount Everests – all of them! All we can do is point you to their peaks.

The announcement of warfare ended in 41-48 centers on the Lord calling Cyrus of Persia to overthrow the great city of Babylon – where Jerusalem was held captive.

Cyrus is a picture of King Jesus, who comes to our rescue and plucks us right out of Satan's hand; and brings us into His kingdom.

The ease with which Cyrus won is evident. If you study the fall of Babylon, Cyrus was able to enter the city without a battle, and the people welcomed him.

We see Jesus our Rescuer coming in such victory, not with swords and horses, but by His Spirit and love.

Look at your Rescuer in 42:1-6 (read).

No idol, no false god could do this; prophecy ahead what he would do – even naming Cyrus 150 years ahead of his conquest!

What a mighty redeemer have we in Jesus! He is your King of comfort, holding you in his mighty hand, and no one able to pluck you from there!

Like the mighty Exodus out Egypt, the church has been raised out of terrible bondage – a prison term our own sins had put us in; and the Lord bring us – where? HOME!!

As Babylon fell in a day, so you too can have this victory, this triumph in a day – even today! Behold, **now** is the accepted time, **now** is the day of salvation rising upon you!

With such salvation, rescue, deliverance – our hearts are well comforted, stabilized, leaning upon Him – to face what foes await us tomorrow! Even death is no match for the living God, whose Son's name is Life, whose name is Risen One, who is the Resurrection!

Then come forward now to the center and central chapters – 49-55.

Now Jesus speaks where it was the Father who spoke in 42. Read 49:1-13.

How does he bring this about? Again, not with sword, fire, horses and armies. He and He only treads the winepress alone.

This phrase in 40, verse 2, is remarkable. “Her iniquity is removed.” In the Hebrew, literally, it is “her iniquity has been approved” – God has favorably accepted or received your sin!!

Now God does not accept sin, does he? He is holy, holy, holy! He is of purer eyes than to behold sin; sin is opposite to God; He is neither the author nor approver of sin.

But here it is! He has received, approved, been satisfied with your iniquity. Iniquity is the word for sin in its twisted perverseness!

Has Isaiah lost his mind? No, not at all – this is a phrase that means God has been satisfied with the payment for your iniquities; the sins of all his Jerusalem, brought back to himself.

This gets to what Jesus has done on His cross, and that is what we find exactly, precisely in Is. 53! The great prophet writes as if he stood at the foot of the cross 700 years before Jesus died!

You see, dear friends, there are worse problems than disease. We have a body of death already, made up of mortality, cursed because of sin!

But the Son of God, our Last Adam, has come and drawn out the poison. Isaiah 53:6 says: “All we like sheep had gone astray; each one to his own way; but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity (there’s the word again) of us all” – all our sins were placed upon His perfect and pure and holy head, and he has carried it away into his tomb!

That is how this phrase is understood in 40:2 – God approves of you sinner, when Jesus pays for all your sins. He says well done all because of the “well done” of Jesus! The Father is satisfied, well-pleased, on account of the payment Jesus gave for your sins; and what was that payment? His precious blood!

Isaiah 53-55 lifts high the forgiveness and acceptance for our sins in Jesus! And that is the biggest comfort!

1. God is satisfied – Jesus is the **finisher** of sin for us, 53;

2. the **fullness** of forgiveness is found in 54 – the once rejected wife is received and recovered, dressed in jewels and made forever to sit with her dear husband.
3. in 55, the **freeness** of forgiveness – “Why do you spend money for what is not bread and your wages for what does not satisfy?”
Come to this banquet that is free, free, free!

This brings us to the third comfort – another oddly phrased line in 40:2: “She has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

The right understanding of this is given in 61:7. Read.

Our God intends on comforting us by giving twice for all of our troubles in this life. If he let his bride go through such captivity and hardness in Babylon, he will lift her up and out with such joy and wealth to make her forget her chains, her dishonor, her lowly place.

As our hymn has it:

Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay
from His own fullness all He takes away.

The true centerpiece of 56-66 is chapter 61; as with the other sections, it centers on Jesus; in the first mountain, the Father spoke; in the second, Jesus; now it is the Spirit of God that is central.

Look at these famous lines in 61:1-3.

These words were the first text Jesus preached as he began his public ministry. But see how they point to the Spirit!

In 41-48, Jesus your **King** comes to your comfort; 49-55, Jesus your **Priest** becomes the victim in your place to comfort you; and here, 56-

66, Jesus your **Prophet** shines forth in his kingdom, calling the nations from the wrath that is sure to come, and flee to Him and His heavenly city!

Whatever this world says it has to offer, whatever this temporal, creature life might take away, is not worthy to be compared to the blessings of eternal life and fellowship with the Lord in a new heavens, a new earth, the coming Kingdom of God!

Here are lines to hang upon your troubled hearts – read 65:17-66:2.

It is my hope that with this painful visitation of this plague, that all in the world would feel their own mortality and their our own need of eternal comforts. We are living on the husks of the corn, when our Father holds a banquet at his house. May this plague show this pig's food for what it is, that we might come to ourselves, and rise up and return to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.

God promises a better life than the one you are sure to lose here below; he promises a far, far better family than even the best in this world; there is a far more glorious city and president – with a far greater economy – in Mt. Zion that is above, where Jesus is seated, the Mediator of the new covenant, with the sprinkled blood of his cross calling you to hide there.

Come to him today!

²⁸ *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.* ³⁰ *"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mat 11:28-30)*

Let us by these three blessed mountains of comfort sing with assurance:

*Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side;
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to thy God to order and provide;
in ev'ry change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend
thro' thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on
when we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.*