

Comfort is used 17 times in Isaiah –  
mostly in this second part of Isaiah.

It is most famously used in chapter 40, verse 1 (twice) –  
“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”

Then in 49:13 – at the transition of part 2

And now five times our text tonight – in chapter 51:3 (twice), 51:12, 19, and 52:9

In other words, we have come to the fulfillment of the promise of Isaiah 40  
of the comfort that God has promised to his people.

As we saw last time, Isaiah 49-55 opens “Listen to me, O coastlands,”  
echoing the call of 41:1.

Chapters 38-55 focus on the restoration from exile,  
which will come about through the Servant of the Lord.  
Hence these chapters are sometimes called “the book of the Servant.”

The refrain of “listen to me, Jacob/Israel” was common in 41-48.

But here in chapter 51 we have a different call.

The three calls in verses 1, 4 and 7 speak not to the whole of Israel –  
but to the remnant of Israel.

### 1. Three Calls to Hear (51:1-8)

#### a. You Who Pursue Righteousness – Look to Abraham, the One Man (v1-3)

51 *“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,  
you who seek the LORD:*

*look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
and to the quarry from which you were dug.*

<sup>2</sup> *Look to Abraham your father  
and to Sarah who bore you;  
for he was but one when I called him,  
that I might bless him and multiply him.*

<sup>3</sup> *For the LORD comforts Zion;  
he comforts all her waste places  
and makes her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the LORD;  
joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song.*

I have been suggesting that Isaiah is reminding us of the importance of the *one man*.  
Israel, my servant, started off in chapter 41 as a collective – Israel, my people.  
But Isaiah is driving us toward the conclusion that Israel, my servant,  
can only succeed at God’s mission –  
if Israel becomes *one man*.

And now in Isaiah 51, verse 2, Isaiah speaks to the faithful – those who pursue righteousness,  
and says Remember Abraham?  
He was *but one* when I called him.

“Listen to me you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord.” (51:1)  
Remember whence you came!  
Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you.  
If you are looking for righteousness,  
then remember that he was but one when I called him.  
If I can bring a whole nation through one man,  
imagine what I can do through my Servant.  
God will comfort Zion.

And God says that he is the one who makes Zion’s wilderness like Eden –  
her desert like the garden of the LORD.

God will make her desolate wilderness into a Garden of Eden.  
A day will come when the seed of Abraham will inherit the earth.

**b. My People – My Righteousness Draws Near (v4-6)**

<sup>4</sup> “Give attention to me, my people,  
and give ear to me, my nation;  
for a law<sup>[a]</sup> will go out from me,  
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.

<sup>5</sup> My righteousness draws near,  
my salvation has gone out,  
and my arms will judge the peoples;  
the coastlands hope for me,  
and for my arm they wait.

<sup>6</sup> Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
and look at the earth beneath;  
for the heavens vanish like smoke,  
the earth will wear out like a garment,  
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;<sup>[b]</sup>  
but my salvation will be forever,  
and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

“Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation” (51:4)

The first call was to those who *pursue* righteousness.  
This second call promises that God's righteousness is indeed drawing near.  
Salvation is coming—it will not be thwarted.

God's righteousness will never be dismayed!  
Heaven and earth will pass away –  
but the salvation of the LORD will be forever!

**c. You Who Know Righteousness – Do Not Fear Man (v7-8)**

<sup>7</sup> *“Listen to me, you who know righteousness,  
the people in whose heart is my law;  
fear not the reproach of man,  
nor be dismayed at their revilings.  
<sup>8</sup> For the moth will eat them up like a garment,  
and the worm will eat them like wool,  
but my righteousness will be forever,  
and my salvation to all generations.”*

And so in the third call, the LORD says:

“Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law” (51:7).

This call is not merely to those who seek.

This call does not merely promise righteousness.

This call is to those who *know* righteousness.

God calls to the remnant—those who have God's law in their hearts:

Do not be afraid of the reproach of man.

Scoffers will say “when will he come and rescue you!”

Remember what God has said:

“The moth will eat them up like a garment,

And the worm will eat them like wool;

But my righteousness will be forever,

And my salvation to all generations.”

These three calls emphasize the remnant—those within Israel who still seek the Lord.

Chapters 41-48 show that Israel is the Servant of the Lord—

but Servant Israel is blind and deaf.

He does not see what God is doing.

He does not hear what God is saying.

Therefore, chapters 49-55 explain that God will send one servant who will redeem the servant.

The Servant is indeed Israel, but Israel will be reduced to one man.

Jesus will be the remnant of One.

**2. Three Calls to Wake Up (51:9-52:6)**

This threefold call to the remnant is followed at the center of our passage

by a threefold cry to wake up!

Each of these three cries are doublets:

awake, awake  
wake yourself, wake yourself  
awake, awake

But the first call is the call of the righteous remnant to God.  
After all, we need *God* to arise and act!

**a. The Arm of the LORD Will Awaken as in the Exodus (v9-11)**

<sup>9</sup> *Awake, awake, put on strength,  
O arm of the LORD;  
awake, as in days of old,  
the generations of long ago.  
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,  
who pierced the dragon?*  
<sup>10</sup> *Was it not you who dried up the sea,  
the waters of the great deep,  
who made the depths of the sea a way  
for the redeemed to pass over?*

“Awake, Awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord” (51:9)

Wake up, O God!

Remember your promises, and come do to our enemies what you did in days past.

Remember how you cut Rahab to pieces?

Rahab here is the name of an ancient mythological creature.

In Babylonian myth, the god Marduk slew Tiamat the dragon,  
(or sea-monster)

God is frequently portrayed in scripture as the true slayer of the dragon.

In Isaiah 30 Rahab was used as a code-name for Egypt.

And here Rahab is again connected with Egypt.

Egypt is like a monster that held captive God’s people.

Yahweh rules the seas—as was demonstrated at the Red Sea.

Any power that stands against him will be destroyed.

The seas frequently represent the power of the nations.

We’ve seen that Isaiah uses the image of the rushing sea

to describe the coming of the Assyrian armies in Is 1-37.

Now Isaiah uses that image

to speak of God’s power over the nations.

And Isaiah declares that God will do this once again.

Using the imagery of a Babylonian myth,

Isaiah declares the glorious truth that the Babylonian captivity  
is no more final than the Egyptian one.

When God redeems his people,  
(read verse 11)

<sup>11</sup> *And the ransomed of the LORD shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

The people of God—the righteous remnant call out:  
Remember how you delivered us from Egypt through the Red Sea?  
Do it again, O God!

But this time – do it so that *everlasting joy* shall be upon their heads –  
not just a little relief here and there –  
but make sorrow and sighing flee away!

But then God replies to Zion:

**Centerpoint: I Am He Who Comforts You (v12-16)**

<sup>12</sup> *“I, I am he who comforts you;*

This doubled use of the pronoun was used in chapter 43  
to emphasize God’s sovereign power in salvation.  
Its use here calls us to remember what God has already said.

Verses 12-16 look pretty straightforward in English,  
but that is only because our pronouns don’t include gender!  
Verse 12a is addressed to you (masculine plural)—in other words, “all of you.”  
But then immediate in the next two lines “who are you that you are afraid”  
the you is feminine singular.  
This is fairly easy—that refers to Zion/Jerusalem  
Why are you afraid, O Zion, of man who dies?

*who are you that you are afraid of man who dies,  
of the son of man who is made like grass,*

But then in verses 13-16 it switches to masculine singular.

<sup>13</sup> *and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker,  
who stretched out the heavens  
and laid the foundations of the earth,  
and you fear continually all the day  
because of the wrath of the oppressor,  
when he sets himself to destroy?*

*And where is the wrath of the oppressor?  
<sup>14</sup> He who is bowed down shall speedily be released;  
 he shall not die and go down to the pit,  
 neither shall his bread be lacking.  
<sup>15</sup> I am the LORD your God,  
 who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—  
 the LORD of hosts is his name.  
<sup>16</sup> And I have put my words in your mouth  
 and covered you in the shadow of my hand,  
 establishing<sup>[c]</sup> the heavens  
 and laying the foundations of the earth,  
 and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’”*

The LORD “your” (masculine singular) maker.

You fear all the day

Here the “you” is not all Israel, but the Servant.

The movement is from the fearful Zion and the fearful Servant  
 to the restored Servant and the restored Zion.

If Yahweh is the God who comforts his people,

“Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies?”

Why are you afraid of the Babylonians?

I could ask you the same thing:

Why are you afraid of radical Islam?

Why are you afraid of political extremism of the left – or of the right?

Or closer to home:

Why are you afraid of what others think of you?

Why are you intimidated by others?

Who are you, that you should be afraid of them!

To be afraid of them is to forget Yahweh, your Maker.

The city of God has no business fearing the city of man.

You fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor.

If you are my people, then you should fear me.

I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar.

The noise of the nations is due to God.

They have been sent to test you.

Will you follow me?

Yahweh of Hosts is truly the sovereign Lord.

And what is more,

the Servant of the LORD should not die and go down to the pit,

but should declare the Word of the Lord:

“I have put my words in your mouth and covered you in the shadow of my hand,  
establishing the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth,  
and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’”

The righteous remnant had called to God in verse 9, “Awake, awake!”  
But having revealed who he is, God replies,

**b. Jerusalem Will Awaken from Her Drunken Stupor (v17-23)**

<sup>17</sup> *Wake yourself, wake yourself,  
stand up, O Jerusalem,  
you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD  
the cup of his wrath,  
who have drunk to the dregs  
the bowl, the cup of staggering.*  
<sup>18</sup> *There is none to guide her  
among all the sons she has borne;  
there is none to take her by the hand  
among all the sons she has brought up.*  
<sup>19</sup> *These two things have happened to you—  
who will console you?—  
devastation and destruction, famine and sword;  
who will comfort you?<sup>[d]</sup>*  
<sup>20</sup> *Your sons have fainted;  
they lie at the head of every street  
like an antelope in a net;  
they are full of the wrath of the LORD,  
the rebuke of your God.*

“Wake yourself! Wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem,  
you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath,  
who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.”  
You want me to wake up? – God says.

The problem is that you are still asleep!  
Jerusalem is in a drunken stupor,  
from having drunk from the cup of the Lord.

This whole passage is constructed in twos:  
two calls to wake yourself,  
two references to the cup (verse 17)  
two statements of the lack of sons (verse 18)  
Devastation and destruction  
Famine and sword (verse 19)  
The wrath of the LORD and the rebuke of your God (verse 20)

Zion has received a double portion for all her sins (Is. 40),  
not twice as much as she deserved,  
but the full inheritance—the double portion of the firstborn.

Notice the problem here:

The cup of God's wrath has been drunk deeply by Zion  
She has no sons to guide her (the Davidic line has failed)

And she is desolate and comfortless due to the wrath and rebuke of the LORD.

But even in the midst of this desolation, God speaks comfort:

*<sup>21</sup> Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted,  
who are drunk, but not with wine:*

(in other words, who are drunk with the wrath of God's cup)

*<sup>22</sup> Thus says your Lord, the LORD,  
your God who pleads the cause of his people:*

(it is God himself who will speak for his people—not a son of Zion)

*“Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;  
the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more;*

Isaiah himself may not have understood the implications of this.

God says that he himself will take the cup of staggering.

It is no accident that our Lord Jesus Christ said,

“If it be your will, take this cup from me.”

He held in his hand the cup of staggering—the cup of God's wrath.

He had come as the Servant of the LORD,

but no ordinary son of Zion was this.

He was the Word of God incarnate.

And yet he too would faint after drinking that cup to the dregs.

He too would be “full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God”

because he who knew no sin became sin for us.

The only way that God could take the cup of staggering from us,

was for him to drink it himself.

*<sup>23</sup> and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors,  
who have said to you,  
'Bow down, that we may pass over';  
and you have made your back like the ground  
and like the street for them to pass over.”*

But because he has drunk that cup to the dregs,  
he now will put it into the hand of our tormentors.



The nations will now drink the cup of God's wrath.  
Indeed! Who are you that you should fear the nations!

And because of this, again God calls:

**c. Zion Shall Awaken and Arise from the Dust (52:1-6)**

*52 Awake, awake,  
put on your strength, O Zion;  
put on your beautiful garments,  
O Jerusalem, the holy city;*

As the arm of the LORD put on strength in 51:9,  
so now Zion puts on strength in 52:1.

*for there shall no more come into you  
the uncircumcised and the unclean.  
<sup>2</sup> Shake yourself from the dust and arise;  
be seated, O Jerusalem;  
loose the bonds from your neck,  
O captive daughter of Zion.*

Desolate and abandoned Zion is now beautiful and glorious Zion.  
The uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer enter Jerusalem.  
Wake up!  
The day is at hand when the people of God will be glorified!

<sup>3</sup> For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money." <sup>4</sup> For thus says the Lord GOD: "My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>5</sup> Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised. <sup>6</sup> Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

The explanation in verses 3-6 returns to the themes and images of Egypt and Assyria.  
As God delivered his people from Egypt, so he will do it again.  
And as God sent a messenger to Egypt from the desert before (Moses),  
so also will come one from afar to bring good news to Zion.

**3. All the Ends of the Earth Shall See the Salvation of Our God (52:7-12)**

**a. Beautiful Feet: The LORD Has Comforted His People (v7-10)**

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,  
who publishes salvation,

*who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”*

How many times had residents in Jerusalem seen a single runner,  
coming over the mountains from the battle to report on the news (2 Samuel 18)?  
There will be another runner.  
One will come to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God.  
And when the watchmen see the coming kingdom,  
when they see the return of Yahweh to Zion,  
they will sing for joy.  
(Think of Zecharias, Simeon, and Anna):

<sup>8</sup> *The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;  
together they sing for joy;  
for eye to eye they see  
the return of the LORD to Zion.*

<sup>9</sup> *Break forth together into singing,  
you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the LORD has comforted his people;  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*

<sup>10</sup> *The LORD has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.*

“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word.  
For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared before the face of all peoples.  
A light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

Simeon said that in the temple as one who had waited patiently for the kingdom of God.  
He understood that Israel was still in exile.  
They had been restored to the land.  
They had rebuilt the temple.  
But Zion was still desolate.  
Israel did not see what God was doing,  
Jerusalem did not hear what God was saying.  
But the righteous remnant still clung in faith to God’s promises.  
“All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God!”  
And when Simeon saw Jesus,  
he knew that this baby was the herald—the runner—  
who would bring the news of God’s victory.  
Paul cites 52:7 in Romans 10:15 to speak of the work of the preacher today.  
It is my task to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom.  
Your God reigns!  
The kingdom of God has triumphed.

The king is sitting at God's right hand,  
and he will be coming soon to judge the living and the dead.

**b. Depart, Holy Priesthood! The LORD Will Go Before You (v11-12)**

And so Isaiah calls to the Exiles,

<sup>11</sup> *Depart, depart, go out from there;  
touch no unclean thing;*

*go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves,  
you who bear the vessels of the LORD.*

<sup>12</sup> *For you shall not go out in haste,  
and you shall not go in flight,  
for the LORD will go before you,  
and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.*

Yes, this is speaking to those in exile in Babylon.

Like in the days of the Exodus,

they will go forth openly with the full consent of the Babylonians.

But they must still maintain their purity—especially those who bear the sacred vessels—  
the priests and the Levites.

But in the context of what Isaiah is doing in chapters 49-55,  
we must see that Isaiah is speaking beyond Babylon.

This is why Paul cites 52:11 in 2 Corinthians 6:17

The call to depart and be separate (holy) is God's call to us today.

You may not live in Babylon.

You may not find your identity and purpose in the city of man.

There is a strong economic component in Paul's usage of Isaiah 52:11,  
blended with the language of worship:

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

What accord has Christ with Belial?

Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”

He then goes on to cite Isaiah 52:11—go out from their midst and be separate from them

“Do not be unequally yoked” – in Paul's usage –

is not talking about marrying an unbeliever.

It's talking about being yoked together in business with an unbeliever.

If your business dealings are leading you away from Christ –

leading you into idolatry –

then you need to change your business!

John also quotes 52:11 in Rev. 18:4 with a similar focus.

Babylon the great is portrayed as the great economic and religious power of the age.

But the people of God must not be ensnared in her traps.

(Read 18:4-8)

<sup>4</sup> *Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,*

*“Come out of her, my people,*

*lest you take part in her sins,*

*lest you share in her plagues;*

<sup>5</sup> *for her sins are heaped high as heaven,*

*and God has remembered her iniquities.*

<sup>6</sup> *Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,*

*and repay her double for her deeds;*

*mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.*

<sup>7</sup> *As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,*

*so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,*

*since in her heart she says,*

*‘I sit as a queen,*

*I am no widow,*

*and mourning I shall never see.’*

<sup>8</sup> *For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,*

*death and mourning and famine,*

*and she will be burned up with fire;*

*for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”*

The cup of wrath will be given to Babylon—just as Isaiah had said.

Babylon will now receive the “double portion”—the full inheritance that she deserves.

Because God has established his kingdom,

and restored the glory of Zion,

therefore we may not live as citizens of this age.

Isaiah’s point – and John’s point – and Paul’s point –

is that we are to live in the midst of this age

by the power of the age to come!