

## Sermon for December 10, 2023 – Advent 2

Isaiah 40:1-8 EHV

### Theme: Our Comfort is Coming!

1. Hear God's intent (vv. 1, 2)
2. Prepare with repentance (vv. 3–5)
3. Trust his everlasting Word (vv. 6–8)

*<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her. Her warfare really is over. Her guilt is fully paid for. Yes, she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup> A voice is calling out: In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD. In the wasteland make a level highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The rugged ground will become level, and the rough places will become a plain. <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh together will see it. Yes, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. <sup>6</sup> A voice was saying, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry out?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. <sup>7</sup> Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the LORD blows on them. Yes, the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.*

Many people in the world are suffering the horrors of war. Keeping that in mind, I want you to imagine what it would be like if you lost your home, possessions, family, and freedom all at once through war. Imagine God made it clear that it was his judgment because you didn't heed his call to repent. I don't know about you, but I would feel hopeless if something like this ever happened to me.

The situation I described was not hypothetical for the Jews. Around 586 BC, the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and exiled all but the most destitute to Babylon. Why? Because the people continually refused to repent of their idolatries. How did they feel when this judgement finally took place? In a word, hopeless.

But the LORD didn't want them to lose hope. No, He loved his lost people – just as He loves his lost, wayward people of today. God wanted them to turn from their evil ways and return to him in repentance for forgiveness, healing, and life. For this reason, God gave his people hope even before he sent his judgement, promising to forgive them and restore his favour with them.

The hope God promised his wayward people in our sermon text doesn't just apply to the Jews of old; it also applies to you as you wait for Christ to deliver you from your exile on this evil earth to himself in heaven. Let us consider this truth under the theme: **Our Comfort is Coming!** 1) Hear God's intent. 2) Prepare with Repentance. 3) Trust His Everlasting Word.

## Part One: Hear God's Intent.

In the 39 chapters leading up to our sermon text, Isaiah issues a dire warning for Judah. Because of their continual idolatry, the LORD would send the armies of Babylon to exile them. Their situation would have been hopeless if not for God's undeserved mercy. But, as the Scriptures say, the LORD takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants everyone to repent and live!<sup>i</sup> Therefore, He commanded Isaiah to write:

*<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

What wonderful words! Even though God's people were grossly unfaithful to him and needed to be disciplined, the LORD emphatically desired their salvation. Though they rebelled against him, even going so far as to worship other gods, the LORD remained faithful. Look, he still calls them his people. He is not ashamed to be their God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, like the rest of humanity, you have been unfaithful to the LORD. Every sin shows the idolatry of your heart: that there are things you fear, love and trust above God. Just like everyone else in the world, you deserve God's wrath and punishment. But your merciful LORD does not want you to die in your sins apart from him. No, he loves you with an everlasting love. Therefore, he sends out heralds – faithful ministers of the Gospel – to call you back to him. Their message is one of comfort: that is to say, a proclamation of forgiveness, life, and salvation, as the following verse of our text indicates:

*<sup>2</sup> Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her. Her warfare really is over. Her guilt is fully paid for. Yes, she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*

What wonderful news for the Jews living in exile: the war would really end. They could go back home. Why? Because their sins were paid for. By whom? Not themselves – that's for sure. A lifetime in hell could not even begin to repay God for our rebellion against him.<sup>ii</sup> No, someone else paid for their sins – someone that the rest of Isaiah's book refers to as the LORD's special servant: the promised Christ, who would suffer and die for the world's sins!

Because of the forgiveness Jesus would win through His sacrifice on the cross, God could promise his wayward people an incredible exchange: in place of punishment, they would receive mercy and blessing. Instead of being condemned to hell as traitors, the LORD would make them his children and heirs.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: understand that this promise doesn't just apply to the Jews. It applies to everyone who looks to the LORD in faith. The Christ who saved the Jews is the same Jesus who saved you, as John the Baptist proclaimed: "*Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*"<sup>iii</sup> Because this is true, God's promise of double grace applies to you. Instead of damning you to hell as his enemy, God adopted you as his child. Through faith in Jesus, he makes you an heir to his eternal kingdom.

These are God's intentions for you. It is the comfort Jesus won for you at his first coming. It is also the comfort the LORD will perfectly fulfill for you when He comes again at the end of time, for which He wants you to prepare, as we read:

### Part Two: Prepare with Repentance

<sup>3</sup> *A voice is calling out: In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD. In the wasteland make a level highway for our God.*

Oh, what marvellous news: God is neither sending a human nor an angel to rescue us from our sins. No, He – the Almighty God himself – is coming to visit and save.

In ancient times, building an excellent, level road for a visiting King wasn't uncommon. What more extraordinary King is there than God? And who is His herald - calling for a direct way through the desert for the LORD? The Bible reveals him as John the Baptist, whom the Holy Spirit used to prepare the people through his preaching of repentance, as the next verse indicates:

<sup>4</sup> *Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The rugged ground will become level, and the rough places will become a plain.*

Could you imagine levelling a whole mountain or filling an entire valley yourself? That would be impossible. It is just as impossible for you to knock down the mountains of self-righteous sin and pride or fill in the valleys of guilt and despair lurking in your heart. Yes, left to yourself, you could never get rid of the sin that separates you from God. But the LORD can. How? Through the proclamation of His Law, He blasts through your mountains of self-righteous pride by getting you to recognize your sinfulness and need for salvation. Then, the LORD applies his comforting Gospel – filling in all the valleys of hopelessness, guilt, and despair you have over your sins by pointing you to Jesus and the salvation He won for you on the cross.

The Holy Spirit himself is the one straightening out your crooked and perverse heart. He prepares you for Jesus by making your unwilling heart willing to receive Him. And what tool does the Holy Spirit use to accomplish this work? His Word that his humble heralds proclaim – just like John the Baptist did in Judea before Jesus was revealed to the people.

Our text continues:

<sup>5</sup> *Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh together will see it. Yes, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

Jesus is the fullness of God in the flesh,<sup>iv</sup> as his first disciples once boldly confessed: *We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*<sup>v</sup>

Jesus' glory as our LORD and Saviour was first revealed by angels who heralded his birth, and it continues to be revealed through His Church's worldwide proclamation of the Gospel today.

Everyone will see Jesus coming down from the heavens for judgment on the last day. It will be a day of both rejoicing and mourning: mourning for those who refuse to believe in Jesus and rejoicing for those whom the Spirit led to repent of their sins and trust in the LORD to save them.

### Part Three: Trust His everlasting Word

Therefore, it is vital for us to be like John the Baptist and get God's message out. What message is that? The truth about His salvation and humanity's desperate need for it, as the last verses of our text indicate:

*<sup>6</sup> A voice was saying, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry out?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. <sup>7</sup> Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the LORD blows on them.*

God wants his representatives to preach the truth about humanity and its accomplishments: they are all like grass and wildflowers in a field. As pretty as humanity's ideas and accomplishments may seem, they don't last before the LORD. As history proves, even great and powerful nations often fall overnight. Why? Because the LORD determines it. Judah experienced this firsthand, as did Babylon. Who's to say Canada or the United States won't soon share a similar fate as those nations? Regardless of how rich, consequential, or enlightened people consider themselves to be, those who exalt themselves over the LORD are destined to fall.

*Yes, the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.*

Sinful humanity, with its fading glory, is destined to fall. But just as such falls from glory often leave us stunned, even more stunning is how the LORD keeps his promise to save – regardless of how impossible the circumstances seem. Take the Jews, for instance: when Babylon exiled them and destroyed Jerusalem, it seemed as if they were finished. But the LORD kept his promise – guiding history to allow his people to return and rebuild.

Even more importantly, the LORD kept his promise to Adam and Eve – rescuing humankind from their slavery to sin by sending Jesus into the world. Because of this, we can be sure he will keep his promise regarding the future. He will come again to deliver believers from their exile on this earth, taking them home to himself in heaven.

And so, brothers and sisters in Christ, as you prepare to celebrate Jesus' first coming this Christmas, joyfully look forward to the future. Because he fully paid for your sins at his first coming, you can be sure he is coming again soon to deliver you from the hopelessness of this wicked world to the everlasting paradise of peace with him in glory. Now that you know his

intentions for your future, prepare for his return in repentance: joyfully trusting in his Gospel promises and making them the foundation for everything you do in life. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 18:23,30-32

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Psalm 49:7

<sup>iii</sup> John 1:29 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Colossians 2:9

<sup>v</sup> John 1:14 EHV