

Isaiah 40. December 6 2020.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² 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.

³ A voice is calling out: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord.

In the wasteland make a level highway for our God.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh together will see it. Yes, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Yes, the people are grass.

⁸ Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.

⁹ Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, you herald of good news.

Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, you herald of good news.

Lift it up! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

¹⁰ Look, God the Lord will come with strength, and his arm is ruling for him.

Look, his reward is with him. The result of his work is in front of him.

¹¹ Like a shepherd he will care for his flock. With his arm he will gather the lambs. He will lift them up on his lap. He will gently lead the nursing mothers.

I thought a long time, "How am I going to introduce this?" Then I realized: just say it. "Comfort." Comfort. That's what is needed. Someone to just bring the news to comfort people. Real comfort. Not a short-lived, fleeting kind. Lasting comfort.

Time of Grace is a devotion source I've mentioned other times. The series this past week ("Anxiety: Finding Hope and Joy") started off with various stats, like:

- 50 million Americans each year suffer through anxiety disorders and attacks. And that's prior to Covid-19.
- After the world wide pandemic hit, a statistic cited by *Christian Family Solutions* states that cases of mental distress increased 700%.

I don't know exactly what the criteria for "mental distress" was in that study. And so I won't try to directly apply how many of us, here or hearing this message online, may be included in that number. But I do know among us are...

- Those who have lost health
- Those who have gone through rejection
- some who have dealt with trauma from things said or done to you (and sometimes with pain resurfacing long after the initial traumatic events)
- some who have faced unexpected absence of loved ones (from moving away, or inability to travel or gather, or even death)

And now Christmas approaches. And it is marketed as a time of joy, anticipation, excitement and good cheer. And for so many, and so often, it is that. But as in other years - maybe even in greater degree this year - for many it's a time they struggle. Stress. Anxiousness. Sadness. Feeling emptiness, over loss or maybe over never having had something so desperately desired.

So I'll just say again what is here: Comfort. Comfort. You see with me – right? – how important, how needed, it is to have: Someone to just bring the news to comfort people.

I saw one thing this last week that I think helps to make this point.

In my FaceBook feed there was a post offering a free resource. And the Facebook page of the sender was titled: "Your Caring coach." Well, "not mine" was my first thought. But it brings up a point. Who then? Because I'm not saying that I don't need instruction and encouragement. Who then? Do you have someone as *your caring coach* – or someones? I know you might not use that name, but who is in your life as a voice that speaks truth and encouragement and comfort to you?

'Someone to bring the news to comfort people' is exactly what this whole section of Isaiah in front of us is about. That's our God's desire. And He makes that clear not just once. Listen to this string of mentions...

- vs.1 - Comfort, Comfort, my people, says your God...
- vs.2 - Speak to the heart of Jerusalem (that means, to God's people)
- Vs.3 - A voice calling out (this voice is one sent by God)...
- Vs.6 - A voice saying 'Cry out' (in this case the voice is God telling His spokesman to call out the message)...
- Vs.9 - Herald good news... say (it) to the cities

Those are all references to: someone being sent from Him, our God, to bring a message of comfort.

So what's the news of comfort that He has for us?

Well we might wish that it was news that from this moment you'll never experience the likes of... rejection, health problems, separation from loved ones, loss, or the sting of abusive words or acts.

But we don't hear that. And while that may in its own way be disappointing...

This news that God gives us is bigger, better than any of that could be. It's a message to bring comfort through all those realities which we will still face in life. It's a message that there is another reality awaiting for you as God's own through faith in Jesus. An awaiting reality where the present usual of all these ailments and problems is gone (and won't be ever possible again then – hallelujah!).

This is God's message to His people:

Vs.2 - Your warfare is over - your guilt fully paid for – you have received from the LORD's hand double for all your sins.

The battle, described here, is over. How? He, our God, fought it. And the guilt is fully paid for. This is guilt from sin. This is our guilt, which deserved hell. Who paid the price, and what was the payment to take the hell we had coming our way? He, our God, stepped in. Our Lord came.

Our Lord Jesus suffered the hell we deserved. And so the guilt is fully paid. And everyone who trusts in Him has peace with God now and eternal life of perfect peace to come. The "double," which is mentioned, is an assurance: everything we need is supplied by Him. It's "His reward" – it's "the result of His Work." And He gifts it to us. (Vs.10) Through faith in Him, you receive everything that He has done and won for you.

So now what? Don't take this for granted. Treasure the voices God has used and uses to speak His truth and encouragement and comfort to your heart. Be vigilant – constant – in your fight to identify every voice that challenges the enduring Word of God. Be ever watchful especially against the one coming from the sinful flesh you carry still with you. This is the ongoing battle that we face.

Grass-like humans not paying attention to the living and enduring Word of God is so common. ...and we admit the times we have been so bold as to raise our voice to object to, or wiggle our way around, or ignore the enduring Word of God. We confess our guilt.

And the answer for us ever remains? The Lord, our God, came. He came as promised. This whole section spills over with references to Jesus' coming:

- Vs.3 - prepare for the Lord, a highway for our God
- Vs.5 – the glory of the Lord revealed; all flesh seeing this
- Vs.9 – Here is your God; the Lord coming with strength

He came for you. He came for me. He came for ones who have wandered, who bear the guilt of sin. He takes it off our shoulders. For He has paid for it all. He died in the battle. But He came back from death, rose from His grave. He lives. And He brings forgiveness to us and the assurance of life with Him forever. And so we His people are brought...

"Comfort." Treasure the voices God uses to speak His truth and encouragement and comfort into your heart. Recognize you never would have known this otherwise. But by God's love and His power you know what it's like to be brought into God's family, to be cared for by Jesus – with a love that even carries you when you're weak. God sent someones to speak the truth and comfort from His enduring Word to your heart.

Someone to bring news to comfort people. "Comfort, Comfort, my people, says your God..." "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem ..." "A voice calling out (this voice is one sent by God)..." "A voice saying 'Cry out' (in this case the voice is God telling His spokesman to call out the message)..." Then at vs.9 "Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, you herald of good news..."

The last in the list includes the call to "Zion" to "herald good news." And Zion includes you. This is a reference to all God's people. So you are another voice, part of another wave, of His comfort going out as you speak His enduring Word to others.

Think how important of a message it is. There are definitely a lot of hurting people in the world. And they, and we, will keep going through things that bring sadness and pain and feelings of loss and emptiness – in this life, we will. Look for the ways that you can give voice to God's enduring Word, His saving news, to those who could use some comfort.

² *Corinthians* 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our trouble, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the same comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Amen.