

Wednesday, May 21, 2025 | Isaiah 40: A Comforting Call

Week 1 | “A Comforting Call” (Isaiah 40:1-8)

Introduction

In Isaiah 40, messages of hope closely follow messages of despair. For nearly the entire book, God has leveled one judgment after another. The evil of the world, even that which was done by his own people, Israel, had to be dealt with.

One chapter before, Hezekiah, the king of Judah, is given a prophecy. Because of his ineptitude, carelessness, and selfishness, Judah would be hauled off into exile. God will use the Babylonians to exact his judgment of his people.

However, the Lord is not only just; he is also merciful. Though condemnation was coming, so too was redemption. Isaiah 40 lays out God’s message of hope for the Israelite people. And, as we’ll see, the truths revealed in this chapter apply to all of humanity. God gives Isaiah a comforting call to people near, far, and throughout all the ages, a call that brings reassurance and peace: the Lord saves.

Exegesis

READ: Isaiah 40 (ESV)

Vs. 1-2 – Exile was the sort of punishment laid out in the covenant.

READ: Leviticus 26:14:14-45

But, if one thing is evident from the OT, even though God's people may be unfaithful, God is always faithful. This is why, here in Isaiah 40, Isaiah is given words of “comfort” for future generations of Israelites. He’s told to tell the people, “**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.**” Though their sins were many, he was still their God. And though they did not deserve it, God wanted them to be comforted. In fact, the phrase “**speak tenderly to Jerusalem**” is literally, “speak to Jerusalem's heart;” **it is an idiomatic phrase that means encouragement (cf. Gen. 50:21; Ruth 2:13; Hosea 2:14).**¹

Isaiah is supposed to **encourage** the city of Jerusalem by telling her three things: (1) her labor/service is at an end, (2) her sins have been forgiven, and (3) she has received more than enough punishment for her iniquity. Given that the context is a covenantal relationship, this

¹ Oswalt, John N., *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 49.

turn of events has transpired because, as Lev. 26:40-41 stipulates, the children of Israel have confessed their sins, humbled their hearts, and made amends for their iniquity.

We can be so overwhelmed by our own sinfulness and God's holiness that we feel little comfort from the Lord. **But God is a comforting God.** He wants to speak to us tenderly, not harshly. He wants us to know that, through his Son, our labor is over, and our sins have been forgiven. Because Jesus Christ has taken our penalty, paying for it doubly, we have nothing standing between us and our God.

Vs. 3-4 – What's the reason for this comfort? How can the prophet be so encouraging? **Because the Lord is coming. His arrival is the solution to all their problems.** Isaiah hears a voice crying, **"In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord."** Such changes to the land's topography are symbolic of the heart. God wants the hearts of his people to be ready to receive him via a fourfold repentance:

- (1) Take the crooked desert highway and **"make [it] straight...for our God."** What was once a confusing freeway of twists becomes a wide-open expressway.
- (2) Take **"every valley"** and lift it up. A city worker might fill in a pothole, so the Lord wants his people to fill in the cracks in their lives.
- (3) Take **"every mountain and hill"** and **"the uneven ground"** and make them **"level."** God wants every prideful peak humbled.
- (4) Take the **"rough places"** and make them clear a **"plain."** Everyone is a work in progress, but the Lord wants his people to address those parts of their lives that are glaringly deficient. God wants those areas where the ground is clearly uneven to be leveled.

Over seven centuries later, religious leaders were sent to a preacher named John in the wilderness. And they asked him, **"Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"** ²³ He said, **"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said"** (Jn. 1:19-24).

Jesus is **"the Lord"** that Isaiah 40 prophesied about, just as John the Baptist was **"the voice."** Jesus came to comfort his people. Should they prepare the way of their hearts, he will come to them and make his home with them.

Vs. 5 – The Lord's arrival will not be secretive. Isaiah says, “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Not some, but “all flesh shall see [the glory of the Lord] together.” God will reveal his glory during his arrival so that only those who stubbornly refuse to see it will miss it.

In Isaiah 6:3, the seraphim who encircled the throne of God called to one another, saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Shortly after, Isaiah got a glimpse of that glory. In response, he said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). Only when his sins were purged could he say, “Here I am! Send me” (Isa. 6:8). God's glory is everywhere; it fills the earth. If every person could sense God's glory the way Isaiah did, they'd crumble. An actual realization of God's glory humbles humanity. The sheer weight of it is unbearable.

Yet, despite the sheer weightiness of God's glory, Christians are given a share of it through Jesus Christ. Speaking about Christians, Jesus prayed, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:22-24).

Vs. 6-8 – Isaiah hears another voice telling him, “Cry!” The Hebrew term means to shout, raise one's voice, or yell. In reply, the prophet asks, “What shall I cry?” He's told to proclaim, “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” A contrast is being made between people and God's word. Though a grassy plain or a field of flowers may appear to thrive, exhibiting beauty and covering the ground, it has little defense against “the breath of the Lord” (cf. Gen. 1:2). Oswalt explains, “The prophet probably has in mind here the imagery of the *hamsin* [also called *sharav*], a hot dry wind from the east that is likely to blow in May and that can turn the countryside from green to brown in 48 hours or less.”² Like bloom ripped from the ground during a storm, people “fade” and disappear whenever God turns his breath towards them and “blows” them away. Specifically, it is “the people,” a clear reference to

² Oswalt (1998), p. 53.

Israel, who are the grass.³ In contrast to Yahweh, the greatest nation on the planet is no more resilient than a blade of grass or a stalk of wheat. It is as transient as a field of wildflowers.

Unlike humanity, which is little better than a weed, the Scriptures “will stand forever.” It is often claimed that light is one of the constants in the universe, alongside things like gravity and electromagnetism. Scientists say that such forces will remain the same throughout time and space. But the truth is that the only true constant in the universe is the Bible. Kingdoms come and go, but God’s word is eternal.

READ: Psalm 90:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³ You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!”

⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. ⁵ You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

A man’s confidence in himself is, at best, a confidence that’ll last a single lifetime. But should he place his trust in the word of God, such a confidence will last for an eternity.

³ McConville, J. Gordon, *Isaiah*, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Prophetic Books, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2023), p. 449.

Video Description:

Isaiah 40 | Week 1 | “A Comforting Call” (Isaiah 40:1-8)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

In Isaiah 40, messages of hope closely follow messages of despair. For nearly the entire book, God has leveled one judgment after another. The evil of the world, even that which was done by his own people, Israel, had to be dealt with.

However, the Lord is not only just but also merciful. Though condemnation was coming, so too was redemption. Isaiah 40 lays out God’s message of hope for humanity.

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

Give here: <https://www.gracepointelife.com/give/>