

Comfort in the Chaos

Isaiah 40:1-11

Introduction

When things in your life are not going well, where do you turn? When the marriage is failing, when the kids are disobeying, when the boss is nagging, when the economy is struggling, when your health is declining, when your friends are leaving, who or what do you turn to? Where do you go in the chaos?

This morning, we are going to consider the comfort that God offers us in midst of all our chaos. Please look with me at Isaiah 40:1-11...

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Exposition

I. Background

At this point in the book of Isaiah, the people of Israel are prophetically portrayed as being in Babylonian exile because of their sin against the LORD. For those who are interested in the details, you can refer to the first 39 chapters of the book of Isaiah, which detail the prophet's attempt to dissuade the people of their persistent rebellion against God. In Isaiah 40, however, the people have received the consequences of their decisions. So, how does the LORD respond? He responds with comfort in their chaos. Note the first verse of chapter 40: "Comfort, comfort my people," says the LORD." Regarding the contrast of this verses to previous statements in Isaiah, John Oswalt wrote, "If dramatic effect is desired, the opening words of this verse can hardly be surpassed. Without any transition or preparation, the repeated imperatives strike the hearer with sudden poignancy." This theme of comfort is going to run throughout the next several chapters of the book of Isaiah. Now that the people's lives were in chaos on account of their refusals to follow their God, in mercy, the LORD will now speak comfort to them...

II. Words of Comfort (Vss. 2-8)

In verses 2-8, we find the contents of the LORD's message of comfort for His people. The message essentially contains three parts: a message about judgment, a message about salvation, and message about the trustworthiness of the LORD:

1) Judgment is ending. (Vs. 2)

Verse 2 captures the message about judgment. Judgment is ending. As a prophecy concerning the judgment of the Babylonian captivity, the LORD was letting His people know that the judgment would not last forever. In fact, the time of judgment was over. No longer would the people be under the curse of the covenant. God was about to show up, which is the message of salvation that we find in verses 3-5...

2) Salvation is coming. (Vss. 3-5)

Verses 3-5 are fairly well known by those who have read the New Testament because they are used in reference to the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus' earthly ministry. The message of verses 3-5 is similar to the message that we heard last week. God is going to show up and nothing will ever be the same again. Mountains will be razed. Valleys will be lifted. Crooked paths will be straightened. Of course, all of this language metaphorically describing the massive inbreaking of the kingdom of Christ on the kingdom of man at his arrival. Physical mountains may not have been razed, but every obstacle to God was removed in Christ when He lived, died, and rose again on behalf of sinners. While Isaiah's audience did not fully understand the details of Jesus' future birth, they at least knew in part that God was going to do a mighty work in the future through a special person, a descendent of David, who would be King forever. When this person appeared, "the glory of the LORD would be revealed."

3) God's Word is Sure. (Vss. 6-8)

Having promised that the Israelite's judgment was ending because salvation was coming from God, verses 6-8 stress the steadfast trustworthiness of God's promises. God not only makes promises about the end of judgment and the arrival of salvation, God keeps His promises. The Word of the LORD is sure! Do you have anyone in your life that does not keep their word? Whose promises are empty? Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's a spouse. Maybe it's a co-worker or a boss. You know one of the most glorious attributes of God is His trustworthiness. You can trust what He says because He keeps His promises. So, when God tells the Israelites that judgment was ending and salvation was coming, it's a great comfort to know that He keeps His word. As verse 8 declares, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

With this message of comfort in the midst of the people's chaos, Isaiah calls the people to respond. So, how should one respond to these comforting words from the LORD?

Conclusion

They should respond, according to verses 9-11, **by trusting in the LORD**. They should recognize the good news and believe it, even during the chaos of their lives. Notice what Isaiah does here. He preaches the grace of God, that salvation as coming, that God was going to comfort His people in the midst of their chaos, but Isaiah does not stop with a mere declaration of fact. He called the people to respond to the declaration about God. They were called to “Behold their God!” To “behold the LORD God who comes with might!”

So, when did this comfort come to the people? When did God “come with might?” When were the people able to “behold their God?” Well, we see it in one of the most familiar but most overlooked portions of Jesus’ birth narrative in Luke 2.

In **Luke 2:25-32**, we encounter “a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of your people Israel.’ Simeon found comfort in his chaos through the Christ! Through Jesus! Everything he was looking for and hoping in was fulfilled in Jesus!

Where do you find comfort in the chaos? Do you find it in the things of this world? Do you find comfort in your possessions? Do you find it in drugs, alcohol, or some other substance? Do you find it in sex? Do you find it in relationships? Do you find it in your health or your healthcare providers? Do you find it in your insurance policy? Do you find it in your government? Do you find it in your profession? Do you find it in food? Where do you find comfort when your life is full of chaos? Isaiah points us to Christ! The “consolation of Israel!” He tells us to “Behold our God!” This Advent season, this Christmas time, where will you look when your life spends out of control? Will you look to Christ?

Would you bow your head with me: As you sit there quietly with nothing but your own thoughts to wrestle with in your mind, I want you ask yourself: Where do I run for comfort? Do I look to God? If you find that you do not turn to God in your times of need, I want to ask you to pray to God right now and ask Him to forgive you for your idolatry. Ask Him to work in your heart so that when you do encounter the chaos, you will turn and run to the only One who can save you.

“I’m done running from you. I need your comfort. I need you forgiven. I want to believe that Jesus is my only hope for real comfort and peace in this chaotic world. I want my heart to change.”

As I close us in prayer before our song of response, I simply want you to speak to the LORD on these matters.