

## Comfort in the Coming Messiah – Isaiah 40:1-2

**Introduction** – I hear these verses and immediately think of the beginning of Handel’s glorious oratorio, “Messiah.” This section of Isaiah also is the beginning of chapter after chapter of glorious promises of the Messiah. While Isaiah was certainly comforting his generation with promises of future release from the coming Babylonian exile, it is obvious that something far greater was being foretold. *“Infinitely happy and glorious in Himself, God has provided for the comfort of those who were rebels against His government, and transgressors of His holy law”* – John Newton.

**Text - Isaiah 40:1-2** *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD’s hand Double for all her sins.”*

**Coming and Still Coming Comfort** – Jesus says of Himself, *“I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”* – Rev 1:8. While Advent is a time of preparation and even penitence, it is mostly to be a time of deep comfort, meditating on the deep provisions of our kind God. Even when imminent chastisements are before us, there is solace to be found in the One who is bringing those chastisements (Heb 12:1-11). And so, this season should be filled with celebrations of expectation; God not only desires to feed us, but to bring us *“A feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees”* (Isaiah 25:6). The prophet commands twice, “Comfort,” for emphasis, and the plural form calls on many to send this comfort. The Holy Spirit is the great Comforter. Angels are said to *“minister for those who will inherit salvation”* (Heb 1:14), and this is just what angels and even the stars did (Luke 2:10, 14). Finally, this comfort is to be proclaimed by God’s ministers (Isaiah 52:7, Rom 10:15). This is Good News – and God promises that it will just keep coming and coming (Rom 8:32).

**Words of Comfort: Your Warfare is Over!** – This pertains to the rebellion of those with whom God is making peace. This is what He does with His enemies. Jesus did not come for the healthy, but for the sick; He did not come for the righteous but for the unrighteous. Come – your warfare is over. It also pertains to the *“hard work”* (another translation of *“warfare”*) of the Old Covenant. The spirit of that institution was comparatively a spirit of bondage. Even though Israel was an heir, he was under the tutor of the law and not treated differently than a servant (Gal 4:1-4) and now, this New (or renewed) Covenant declares our adoption as sons and heirs to the promises of God. This is analogous to the gospel, where the Holy Spirit must first convince a man of his sin and misery. But then, none who wait on Him will be disappointed. According to His promises, it is only a matter of time until they are given *“beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”* (Isaiah 61:3). Men who have been justified by faith now have real peace with God (Rom 5:1).

**Words of Comfort: Your Iniquity is Pardoned!** – This doesn’t mean much to those who do not comprehend the height of the glory and holiness of God and the depth of man’s sin and rebellion. But when the Holy Spirit reveals this, it is unfathomable and wonderful – *“and she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”* (Matt 1:21). The expression *“double for all her sins”* is mysterious and is fulfilled in many ways. First, believers should understand that their blessings are double, much greater, than the afflictions which sin and misery had brought. Every sin is paid for in full, and every trial is now a means to only greater glory. Second, the work of Christ will far outreach the work of Adam (Rom 5:19-21) so that it might be said that the world was saved through Jesus Christ. Third, the efficacy of Christ’s atonement is indeed greater than the actual application; it is sufficient to save the whole race of mankind if they truly believed in the Son of God. Which brings us to one final phrase in this passage.

**Words of Comfort to “My People says Your God!”** – This comfort is, at rock bottom, the salvation of God’s people. Salvation is wholly of grace (Eph 2:5). It is not only undeserved, but undesired by us until He is pleased to awaken us to a sense of our need of it. This is the spirit of Advent as well. The comfort of Christmas is real but it comes with conditions. If the fudge and wine, the tree and lights, the presents and parties, the songs and stories, are received by self-made men and nations with no need for a Savior, then to hell with it for that is where it will take you. But if it is received by wretches who have been comforted, who have heard the words spoken *“in their hearts”* (Speak comfort = *“speak to the hearts”*) by the Spirit of God, it soon becomes unimaginable that one could celebrate too much. What have you received from the LORD’s hand?