

Christmas Comfort

Isaiah 40:1-2

Introduction - These inspired words open the famous oratorio “Messiah” by Handel. More importantly, they open up the glorious section of prophetic promises by Isaiah. He writes in a day where sin abounded and God’s judgments were impending, and yet at the same time insensibility and a false-security prevailed. Having announced the impending time of captivity, Isaiah declares the future return from Babylon. And yet it is obvious that something much greater is being prophesied as well. “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.

The Text - *“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.”* – Isaiah 40:1-2.

Comfort – The Prophet turns to the spiritual Israel, the true Jerusalem, and speaks. These promises are certainly only for those who have faith, and they are to be real words of comfort to those in the faith. Not only words of life, or truth, or doctrine, God desires to bring words of comfort to His people. These are the descendants of “Abraham, My friend” (Isa 41:8). He likes to feed His people, but even more, He likes to bring them “wines on the lees, well refined” (Isa 25:6). Christmas is not only to be the gospel of truth, but of comfort and joy. *“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* The stars break out in song – *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”* (Luke 2:10, 14)

Speak Comfort – The Hebrew is ‘speak to the heart’, or ‘speak comfortably’. In prophetic style things far distant in the future are spoken of as present. Messiah is at hand (verse 3).

Who is Commanded? – In the Authorized Version, we see this command is in the plural – ‘comfort ye’. Who is to bring 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 message of comfort is to be proclaimed by God’s ministers (Isa 52:7, Rom 10:15).

The Comfort of Grace – It is only a message of comfort if it is grace from God’s Word. Carried off into exile, the only hope true Israel has is in God, never in themselves. We cannot preach a doctrine where men can fall out of God’s hand, because left to ourselves, we will fall. Salvation is all of the Lord.

My People, Your God – The comfort is limited to ‘my people’. It is for those who have by faith grasped the swaddling cloths of Jesus and cried ‘my Christ’. Jesus said *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27). And while God is God of all, He is only specially ‘Our God’ when we are in covenant with Him (Gen 17:7, Luke 1:46, 2:29-32, 1 Pet 2:9-10).

Her Warfare is Ended – The Old Covenant is coming to an end. This institution was, compared to the New Covenant, a spirit of bondage, distance and fear. Now, because of the mission of this baby we celebrate, there is an outpouring of grace by the Holy Spirit. 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”* (Isa 61:3). Men who have been justified by faith now have real peace with God (Rom 5:1).

Her Iniquity is Pardoned – *“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). Those who are in Christ have received ‘double for’ all their sins. Not that they have been overly punished, for we always are treated better than we deserve. Rather, we have received an overflowing abundance of grace and mercy, and these are words of comfort. Because of this, we have been adopted, and call God, Abba-Father. Because of His ongoing love for His children, we know that all trials are producing for us an eternal weight of glory.

Gospel Comfort, Optimistic Hope – There is real comfort offered to all, but the comfort of Christmas comes with conditions. Your soul and mind must be in a particular condition, because this comfort implies guilt. There is only one of two options here this morning. Honesty about why the Christ-child will only cause you to be offended, or will be heard as a true offer of pardon, peace, and comfort. *“Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many...”* Luke 2:34.