

Comfort My People Isaiah 40:1-11

Introduction

Isaiah 40 opens with a declaration of comfort to the very heart of the people of God. One definition of the verb “to comfort” is “to ease the grief or distress of”. So, one of the key aspects of comfort is relief. Another way to think about it is a change of attention from something painful or agitating toward something else, something that gives relief and/or hope. After proclaiming comfort to God’s people, the next ten verses in Isaiah 40 show that His comfort, the way God brings relief, comes in two ways: through His reign and through His grace.

Warfare and Iniquity

God’s people are no longer at war and their iniquity is pardoned (v. 2). This is the first of three instances where God’s reign and grace are shown as the means by which He brings comfort. God is the only one able to put an end to the warfare between Himself and man. He is the King of the world and our hearts, and He exercises His reign by pouring His grace over our sins.

Mountains and Valleys

This comfort is realized by the coming of the Lord, and so God sends out a voice to call the people to prepare the way for Him (v. 3). When God does come, every valley is raised up and every mountain is brought low, and everything is smoothed out so that God’s glory is clearly seen (vs. 4-5). This passage is quoted in Luke 3, where we see God setting up His kingdom over the mighty kingdoms of the world. As Mary says, He is bringing down the mighty from their thrones and exalting the lowly. The mouth of the Lord has spoken. What has He spoken? “Comfort! Yes, comfort My people,” says your God, “because I am reigning and My grace, My gift, is sufficient for all your sins. See these mountains and valleys and crooked places and rough terrain—it’s perfect for a highway.”

Good Tidings

God is transforming the wilderness, but sometimes the wilderness is all we can see. All flesh fades (vs. 6-8). It fades like flowers and grass. This is what the voice cries out after describing the coming glory of the Lord. These verses are filled with bitter irony, but in the end, the voice gives great hope. The word of *our God* endures forever. He is our God, and His word to us is comfort. His word is the end of warfare and the pardon of sin, the mountains leveled and the valleys filled and the crooked righted.

Peter quotes this passage in his letter to the persecuted saints of the Dispersion (1 Peter 1:24-25) as he encourages these Christians to love one another and not be worried by the pressure and persecutions from the Judaizers and others. This is in some ways similar to the narrational situation in Isaiah 40. Jerusalem similarly shouldn’t worry about the political powers of the world. And so then the call Isaiah gives is to proclaim this good news, because it is good news.

King and Shepherd

Having given the exhortation to proclaim the good news (v. 9), Isaiah returns to the parallel forms of comfort that he has highlighted twice already: God's reign and God's grace. God first is described coming in strength to rule (v. 10). Then God is described as a shepherd (v. 11), much like in Psalm 23. God is the victorious King who rules by His strong arm, Jesus, His right hand. And He is the shepherd who cares for and protects His flock from the world, the flesh, and the devil. What can separate them from His love in Christ (Romans 8:35-39)?

Merry Christmas

So proclaim the good tidings, the good news, the gospel. Tell everyone. Jesus has come. God Himself came, and He has brought comfort. Are you worn down by the warfare in your heart and your relationships? Are you hurt and pained and wearied by the suffering in this war-torn-world? Are you burdened with your sin and your inability to please God? Are you simply tired with the work set before you? Then come to Jesus. He is the King enthroned, and He rules the world by both bringing down those who exalt themselves and exalting those who bow before Him. So come to Jesus, for in Him your warfare is ended and your iniquity is pardoned. Merry Christmas!