

## Isaiah 40:1–11

### Comfort As Sure, Strong, and Loving As God and His Word

#### Wednesday, January 10, 2024 • Read Isaiah 40:1–11

Questions from the Scripture text: What does God now command (v1, cf. 39:6)? How many times? What does He call Israel here? What does He call Himself? How is this comfort to be delivered (v2a)? What comforting word is spoken (v2b)? How can the righteous God do this (v2c)? How many sides of the bill of punishment have been executed (v2d–e)? What is first to answer (v3a) the command in v1? Where is this voice crying? What does it say to do (3b–d)? What is one thing that must be done if this path is to be prepared (v4a)? What is another thing that must be done (v4b)? And another (v4c)? And another (v4d)? What, then, will happen (v5a)? When this is completed, who will see (v5b)? How sure is this (v5c)? What second answer comes in v6a? Of what is it unsure at first (v6b)? What is this new word of comfort about (v6c)? What is it saying about the oppressions of the flesh (v6c–8a)? What stands, when all of this flesh has withered and faded (v8b)? Whom does a third voice now address (v9a, c–d)? What sort of word is it speaking (v9e)? In what manner (v9f–g)? What is this good news (v9h)? In what manner is the Lord YHWH coming (v10a–b)? What is He bringing (v10c–d)? What does He do, to whom, with this power (v11a–b)? What is His manner with them (v11c–d)?

**What hope can there be for a people under the judgment of God?** Isaiah 40:1–11 prepares us for the first serial reading in public worship on the Lord's Day. In these eleven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **the only hope for a people under God's judgment is the good news of God Himself.**

**A call for comfort,** v1–2. Hezekiah had recognized the mercy in even God's chastening (cf. 39:8). But he had hardly seen anything yet! For, our God is a Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2Cor 1:3). No sooner has Hezekiah spoken than the call for comfort comes from God. v1 is a plural command. God is calling for a series of comforters, if not a chorus of them. There will be three answers in our passage.

The urgency of the comfort comes from Whom God has made us to be unto Him, and Whom He has given Himself to be unto us. The comfort is for "My people." They are bound to Him. They cannot, must not, be left in their pain. And the comfort comes from "your God." He will be theirs. He will not give them up. God has covenanted with them, and so they must be comforted.

But how? How can the Lord speak comfort to those whose sins demand wrath? How can these messengers speak this comfort (v1) to the heart (v2, more literal than NKJ's "comfort") of His people? How can her warfare be ended (v2b)?

Only if the iniquity is pardoned (v2c). But God does not pardon sin in a manner as if His justice or holiness are negotiable. No, it must be fully paid for. The "double" or "folded" payment for all her sins, refers not to duplication but completeness. Scrolls were ordinarily written only on the one side, so that any revisions or corrections could be made on the back. The idea of "double" here is similar to the two-sided scroll in Ezek 2:10. The sentence is so inalterable and full that the scroll is written on both sides.

In Ezekiel, the image had to do with judgment/sentence. Here, in v2, it has to do with payment! This, THIS, is how the uncompromisingly, infinitely holy and just God can pardon sin, put away condemnation, and speak comfort: by a payment from His own hand that is as complete as God's own holiness and justice! The only thing that could ever satisfy what is pronounced, promised, and prophesied in v2 is the cross of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 3:25–26), Hallelujah!

**Voice 1: Prepare the way,** v3–5. YHWH's coming and displaying His glory (v5a) is assured by His own mouth (v5c). The first word of comfort, then, is that everything must be made ready for that coming. Repent (be ye converted!) for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (cf. Mt 3:2–3)!

The preparations in v4 are the sort that are almost beyond human comprehension, making them a good analogy both for the ordering of history for the arrival of the Lord in the world, and especially for the preparation of a heart of stone for the arrival of the Lord by His Word. But the word that commands the preparation has the power to perform it. O, dear reader, when you hear either the comforts or the commands of God's Word (and, here, they are the same!), do so with confidence that the Word itself powerfully accomplishes what it says (cf. 55:11).

**Voice 2: Human love fails, but divine love is forever,** v6–8. The English versions do not help us much in v6. The word translated loveliness (NKJ, though others say "beauty" or similar) is actually kessed, the word for God's covenant love (often "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love" or "covenant love"). Of men, it usually means something like "loyalty." In this context, it is reminding us how very unlike the Lord we are.

Covenant love that fails? What a travesty! And, in the case of man, a certainty. How could the breath (Spirit!) of God do otherwise to such sinners as we are (v7)? But the Word of our God stands forever. And it is a Word that is determined to overcome both the condemnation deserved by our wickedness, and the failure made inevitable by our weakness. Our God's Word is a Word of almighty power, and it comes to us in covenanted love.

**Voice 3: Good tidings of God Himself,** v9–11. It is sweet to us that the Lord would bring us to Isaiah 40 so closely on the heels of the Spirit's use of it in Matthew 3. For, we know that YHWH, Whose coming is announced here is Jesus Himself. And the power and gentleness of the YHWH, presented here in poetic verse, we see supremely in our Lord Jesus.

Now, the instruction for the voice is to call out with strength and courage (v9). Why? Because the God Whom they are calling us to behold is Himself almighty and coming with the reward (v10c)/recompense (v10d) that He has decided to give His people.

And behold the tenderness and gentleness with which He gives it in v11! As if "shepherd feeding His flock" isn't tender enough in v11a, this is elevated to lambs gathered into the arms and carried in His bosom in v11b–c. And He has regard for His people, matching His leading of them to their place of difficulty in life. "Those who are with young" are in a place where everything is physically (and emotionally, for mankind) taxing, and His leading of them takes this into account.

*"E'en down to old age all My people shall prove My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love; and when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn, like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne."*

This is not just the flowery words and wishes of a hymn writer. They are the strong and sure words of the Almighty God. How far we have come in 11 verses! These that are carried close to the chest, bundled in the arms, are those who just a few verses ago were still under wrath and unchanged. Hallelujah!

When have you most felt the need for comfort with respect to your guilt? With respect to your failing? How does His Word meet you? What are some of the ways that He brings that Word near you and into your heart and mouth?

*Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You that You have come near to us in our guilt, failure, and fear. You have come near in Your Word, and by Your Spirit, who has ministered to us Your power and Your mercy in Your Son, our Lord Jesus. Forgive us, for His sake. Forgive, even, how forgetful we often are of Him. Forgetful of the fullness of His atonement for our sin. Forgetful of the compelliteness of Your pardon. How can we be forgetful of something so good and glorious? And yet, Lord, our love to You fades and withers like a flower. Oh, forgive our poor, pathetic love, even by Your own perfect and eternal love! Come, and give us according to Your love's own desire. Gather us into Your arms, and lead us in Christ, through Whom we ask it, AMEN!*

**Suggested songs:** ARP23B "The Lord's My Shepherd" or TPH243 "How Firm a Foundation"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via [hopewellarp.org](http://hopewellarp.org))

Isaiah 40 verses one through 11, these are God's words. Comfort. Yes, comfort. My peoples as your god. Speak comfort to Jerusalem, cry out to her. That her warfare has ended that her iniquity is pardoned for. She has received from Yahweh's hand double. For all her sins. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of Yahweh makes straight in the desert to highway.

Forgot. Every valley shall be exalted in every mountain, bitten till brought low, the crooked places shall be made straight the rough places smooth. The glory of y'allace shall be revealed and all flesh. I'll see it together for The mouth of Yahweh has spoken. The voice said cry out and he said, what?

Shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers. The flower fades because the breath of Yahweh blows upon it. Surely,

the people are grass, the grass withers. The flower fades. But, The word of our god stands forever.

Oh Jerusalem and you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain. Oh Jerusalem. You who bring good tidings lift up your voice with strength? Lift it up. Be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, the hold your god. The hold the lord. Y'all I shall come with a strong hand and his arm shall rule for him.

Behold his reward is with him and his work before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with his arm. And carry them in his bosom. And gently lead. Those who are with young. Amen. Since this reading of God's. Inspired and inherent worked.

Well, Hezekiah had recognized that. God, putting off the Babylonian exile and captivity of The people of Israel, 15 years. It was a mercy, a great mercy and he said the word of Yahweh, which you have spoken. Is good but the lord was not done speaking yet. He was not merely putting off.

For 15 years, the Babylonian captivity rather. The exile to Babylon and the 70 years there and the return from there. Are all part of a work. That as a small, there were all small part of the great work. Of bringing. To himself a people whose sins he would forgive, who would see?

And enjoy His glory forever and ever. Who would be carried by him? As baby lambs in his, in his bosom, held up, in his arms, to his chest. And whom he would lead, tenderly. The wonderful picture of course. In Psalm 23. With the lord, being our shepherd and taking us through whatever is necessary.

Even the value of the set of death, even the opposition of others. Um, Even correcting us. With his rod as well as leading us with his staff to bring us at last To have. Uh, to have our dwelling with him forever, our returning to him forever in his house.

And therefore his goodness and his steadfast love. Persecute us. They're hot on our heels. Our whole life long. And so, The word that Hezekiah had immediately heard from Isaiah was a momentary temporary. Um, Or temporal earthly. Uh, mercy. In the in chapter 39. But that which the lord is doing.

And speaking in particular, And so this language and the end of the last chapter, the word of Yahweh, which you have spoken is good. And now we have a command to speak verse two, speak to the heart of Jerusalem. The command is plural. You can't see that in the English but the imperatives comfort.

Yes, comfort. In verse 1, our plural. And we have a plural response in verses three through five. We have one voice that responds with a word of comfort. A divinely ordered word of comfort Versus 6 through 8, we have another voice. And then, In versus nine through 11, we have Zion commanded to be a third voice of voice to all of the cities, all of the people of Judah and all of the people indeed, then.

With Judah here. Uh, representing the people of God, being the people of God. Um, Zion being commanded to preach, good news. Uh, to all of God's people. And so we have these three voices. That are going to speak to the heart of Jerusalem that her warfare is ended and her iniquity part.

Well, how can this be? Uh, the Israel. As being. Corrected in large part of Um, For diminishing, the lord's power diminishing, the lord's holiness imaging. The lord's justice. Does the lord now? Uh, set aside the warfare that she deserves pardon the iniquity. That is upon her. Uh, by Uh, treating his holiness as Uh, somehow negotiable.

Uh, no. The end of verse 2 for she has received from you always, and double for all her sins. Uh, now this is foldedly or two-sidedly. When we just translate directly and try to pick, A word like two-sided. Um, A word to translates this word, that means something like two-sided.

It comes out sounding like Uh, like God is extra punishing as if God is. Um, As if God is unjust. But this idea of two-sidedness, It is an idea of Of completeness. And non-negotiability. Uh, we see it for instance in Ezekiel. Can't find it. Two verse 10. Where there's a scroll that's written on two sides.

So it's very unusual. Scrolls at the time were written, only on one side. So that if there was error, there was need to Make revision or new information. You could put that on the back side. When the scroll is written on two sides, that means there will be no revisions.

There are no imperfections. There is no negotiation. This is the way it is. And so, when he says, For she has received from ya, always hand, foldedly or two-sidedly. For all her sins. He's saying that all of her sins will be completely and totally paid for without question without Uh, without doubt.

And that of course, is going to be one of the great themes of the coming chapters. How the lord does that. Uh, perhaps the Uh the most explicit and full detailed explanation of Christ's attendant and the whole new new testament or hold old, testament will appear. If you chapters from now in Isaiah 53.

And so there's comfort and there's comfort that comes from God's justice being satisfied, not set aside. There's comfort that comes from the wrath of God being poured out. Um, not Um, negotiate it There's comfort that comes from the cross. And so, The three voices, the comfort that they are announcing.

Is comfort that comes to us. By and through the cross of Jesus Christ. Well, what do the three voices say, Well, voice one in. Versus three through five says, prepare the way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way. Of Yahweh. And here there is something in the conversion of a man, the work that God does.

And converting a man. Remember. Um, Matthew chapter 3 says that when John, the baptizer comes, Uh saying b e converted that that's the fulfillment of this passage. And yet, the picture of the passage is that, which is at the last today, the Undoing of the creation itself, mountains being laid, low hills, and valleys being lifted up for good places.

Uh being made smooth the glory of Yahweh revealed and all flesh seeing it together. And this is a great and almighty work, beyond anyone's imagining. But that is what needs to happen. Uh for someone to be united to Christ through faith, there is an almighty work. That needs to happen.

Now, think about Isaiah 40, and 2nd Corinthians 4 and 2nd Corinthians 4. He says that he who called. To light out of darkness, may it would make the knowledge, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shine in their hearts, in the face of Jesus Christ. And so he says that when, when God gives life to the heart to believe in Jesus, It is an almighty work on the order of creation.

When he says, let there be light Now, in Isaiah 40, he's saying that When God converts, someone you remember, John says b, e converted and then he turns around and says, you can't do it to yourself, I can't do it to you, but I only baptized with water, but he who baptizes with the spirit he can make children of Abraham soft-hearted believing children out of stone.

Just as the lord would promise to do in Jeremiah and Ezekiel by his spirit, in the pouring out of his spirit. Which is signified, especially in Ezekiel. By the pouring out of water. It is an almighty work. Uh, to make a heart soft. In order that it is ready.

To receive and believe in the lord Jesus Christ. This is almighty worth. To make the heart alive. And so the word picture here is this. If there are mountains in our hearts that need to be knocked down Um, And something that of course we are unable to do. But here comes the word of God saying that This will happen.

That the lord will come and the lord will prepare our hearts. Uh, to know him to see him to believe in him to belong to him. How sure is it? Well that, that last part of verse 5 is one of those. This is absolutely sure for the mouth of yahweh has spoken.

With the mouth of the lord has set it to, it shall certainly. Come to pass. Praise god. Is very similar in conveying the certainty, and without a doubt. Uh, aspect as that double or two-sided? Uh, in verse 2. So that's the first thing. Prepare the way and that the lord is the one.

Who will do it by his power but we are commanded to be soft-hearted to him, to believe in him. So as we, as we do that, of course, we must do so independent upon him. Um, but we must independence upon him, do it. The second. Second voice. Then. Announces that human love fails, but divine love is forever.

That yes we are to turn to him. We are to prepare the way. Uh, we do this independence upon him and did indeed. He is the one who does it in us but we must remember that it is god's love towards us. That is going to accomplish this not our love towards him.

And if we remember the whole book of isaiah, which just white bro, we say huge because the book of isaiah began with all the god had done for israel. And they did not stay steady in their love for him. They betrayed him and sinned against him and abandoned him trusted in themselves.

Trusted in a Syria. Trusted in Babylon. Trusted other gods. And so, So if God were just to give us a start, And and warm our hearts to love for him, but if it were then dependent upon our love for him. Then it would immediately. Fade away and with her and we would still perish.

And so, beginning verse 6, the voice said cry out. He said, what shall i cry? All flashes grass and all its And i don't know. Um, Y translations, do this nuking, james says loveliness. Uh most other translations. Say something like loveliness or beauty. Uh, but it has it. Covenant love.

Now, the covenant love of flesh is like the flower of the field, the grass, withers and the flower fades, our love to god. Our covenant love to god is not like his love to us. Which is always steady and perfect. Our love to him is so poor and we even in its best moments and those best moments are few and far between But here verses six, right?

Say if god has said That he is going to comfort that he is going to say that he is going to make alive. That he is going to To make us to love him. That is what we can rest, our hope on And so, Uh, all flashes grass and it's covenant love.

It's love to god is like, the flower of the field, it's loyalty. Sometimes. The word casa is used between men for their loyalty or love to one another. Um, And sometimes by god's grace. It is rich and strong. Uh, humanly speaking. Uh, For instance, when Uh when david after he had been established in his kingship was looking for a descendant of Saul.

He says, as they're not anyone left, From the household of salt to whom i may show some method. And, It's a word that sometimes means love between men, but david really does mean, doesn't he? I love towards someone from the house of saul that is like unto the love that god has shown towards me and that ends up being the fisheth.

The man who is lame and They do have cussed between one another just as there was tested between Uh, david and jonathan. Um, But our hazardous culpable, our best love verse 6 actually deserves the wrath of god. Verse 7 and yet. God has determined by his word to deliver us from his own wrath.

And to work in us by his grace. And so, You have the same sort of confidence, the confidence of the two-sided, writing at the end of verse two, And then the confidence at the end of voice. One and verse 5 for the mouth of yahweh has spoken and now the confidence.

That the lord's love is not like ours, because it stands on his word. Verse 8, the word of our god stands, Forever. And it is the strength of the word. Then, that is the, the main point in the third voice. The third voice with the glad tidings of god himself, zion here.

Being addressed as a sort of profit which continues today, the church. This scripture tells us is a pillar and buttress of truth. It is entrusted with the truth of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel and says Zion here is told zion you who bring good tidings. Uh, twice in verse 9.

Cyan has identified for zion. You who bring good tidings. And then, The second time jerusalem, you who bring good tidings. He says, get up into the high mountain lift up, your voice with strength, lifted up, be not afraid, say to the city of juda that is announced to god's people.

In the preaching of his gospel of his good tidings. Behold your god. And so there's a command in verse 9 to preach with strength. Because the one who is being preached and his gospel that is being preached. He is a god of strength and his gospel is a strong gospel.

And you see that in verse 10, then why verse 9 to lift up your voice was strength, lifted up and be not afraid because verse 10 behold, the lord, yahweh shall come with a strong hand and his arms shall rule for him. He's decided He is going to give his people good things and who can stop god, from giving good things to those whom he wants to give it to you.

Even they themselves cannot stop him from doing so by their sin. Because he's going to provide atonement for that sin in christ's cross and he's going to overpower their stone dead hearts by the ministry of his spirit, by the ministry of his word, in the hands of his spirit.

And so the end of verse 10 has reward is with him. His recompense is before him, the word is more with respect to wages than work. Although New King James says, work here at the end of verse 10. And so here is god, coming in almighty power, and what's in his hand?

What's he, what's he carrying as he comes the good things that he is, determined to give his people? And yet this almighty power that overrules, all opposition. Is exercised in tender. And gentle mercy. With those to whom he is bringing good things with you. To whom he is bringing good things.

You who have been brought to faith And the lord jesus christ. And the very Very stark contrast then between the strong hand and the ruling arm in verse 10. And then, The gentle. Hand. And arms. In verse 11. Feeding his flock, like a shepherd. Gathering the lambs. With his arm.

And so, you have the shepherd, finding the easiest place. Why? Because those he's taken care of our sheep. And so he's he's taking his sheep to the place with the richest food and the safest circumstances and the easiest place. And there's the flock as a whole and there are some that are That are young and less able.

And that quite able to make the leaps that they, it's the lambs. And so what he gathers, the lambs up in his arms verse 11 and carries them in his bosom. There are. Uh those that are a little too big for the gathering up into their arms, it's the the use who Are bearing young and they're fully pregnant and so he makes sure to lead the entire flock gently and it leads them especially gently.

And you see, That the almighty god who has made himself, our shepherd, Is. Uh, so careful. And accommodating, he knows our weakness, he knows our circumstances. Uh, he He leads us. Gently takes care of us. Personally. Um, this is where. By the way, the Wonderful line of the hymn comes from, In down to old age,

all my people shall prove my sovereign eternal and changeable.

Love you get the power of verse 10. And the facet of verses 6 through 8, that is not like our facet unto god, but his classed unto us, And then, and when hooi hairs, it's the the white hairs that start here on on your temple. Uh, when hoorie harris saw their temples adorn.

Like lambs. They shall still in my bosom, be born. And the tenderness and gentleness of god with each one of us. Is tender and gentle with you. My dear children. Praise god with me too and With your mother, with all of his people, they're not just flowery words and sentimental wishes.

Of a hymnwriter. These are the strong and sure words of the almighty god. The double-sided words of verse 2, the mouth of yahweh has spoken words of verse 5. The word of our god stands forever words, Of verse 8. How far we come in these 11 verses? From a people who are being exiled to Babylon.

And think rightly that, The lord's grace to them, the word that he has spoken in the 15-year delay. Is good. But by the end of verse 11, the almighty god Carrying his people. Leading them gently. And all. Delivered. From his wrath and all undergirded and established. By his absolutely sure word.

Indeed. That is great comfort. And it's the comfort that god commands to be preached to us. And his name. Me his spirit. Give us that comfort. Let's pray. Father in heaven. Thank you. Thank you for who you are. And Uh, your everlasting electing saving love towards us and your Almighty power in which you carry out.

The purposes of your love and salvation. And thank you for speaking. And proclaiming all of this to us in. Absolutely sure words. We pray that your spirit would indeed. Write the truth of it on our hearts, that he would prepare the way. By making our hearts. Alive and tender, and soft to receive and know and be sure of your word.

How we thank you for your great love to us. Oh god, help us. That we might become more consistent, and Um, more diligent, more zealous in our love to you. Thank you that you will. At last have done it and we look forward to beholding your glory. As those whom you have made suitable to do.

So, granted we ask then in jesus name, amen.