

ISAIAH 40 “COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE!” – PART 1

The whole latter portion of the Book of Isaiah, upon which we are now entering, seems to form one connected prophecy. It evidently foretells the deliverance of the Jews from Babylonian captivity by the Persian king Cyrus (who is expressly named in chapter 45). But it just as plainly refers to the first coming of Christ, and to the blessings of His redemption – as we learn from the way in which several passages are quoted in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus is the great center of history, humanity, and prophecy. In Him, we see a demonstration of the character of God and His way of dealing with sinners; He delivers them from their sin and misery. But the same character and the same dealings are pictured and foreshadowed in many smaller instances throughout human history, such as the Exodus from Egypt and the deliverance of the Jews from Babylonian exile; and these and other instances may be very appropriately viewed as pictures of Christ and His great work of redemption. In the history of our own souls, each individual child of God will find exact counterparts between the details of these events and his own redemption from the bondage of Satan. And as he reads these prophecies regarding those great events, he will find that they also contain words of rich consolation for his own heart and conscience. He will hear the Lord speaking as distinctly to him as if he were the only being in the world to whom the message was addressed.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God!” The whole Bible – from beginning to end – is one message of comfort to the people of God. Time would fail us to enumerate even one-half of its comforting promises of forgiveness for our sins, of supply for our needs, of help for our infirmities, of guidance in our perplexities, and of abundant glory for us at last. Nor would it be easy to reckon up all of the instances in which God is recorded to have comforted His people. The whole earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ was one of comfort to His disciples. When He was about to part from them, He laid aside all thoughts of His own sufferings as He endeavored to comfort them. And after He had left them, He sent them (according to His promise) “another Comforter,” Who would abide with them forever (John 14:16) – namely, that Holy Spirit Who is the Comforter of God’s people to this very hour! Let no child of God despair! No matter how heavy his troubles are, or how dark his perplexities, or how severe his struggle with sin and infirmity – there is comfort for him! The Lord has spoken it; and not only has He spoken it, but He has also appointed a Comforter to bring the comfort home with power to his heart.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Comfort is proclaimed to God’s people through the preaching of the Gospel, and through the glad tidings of Christ’s first Advent – verses 1-11*
- ❖ *Words of strengthening encouragement are given to God’s children who imagine that He has withdrawn from His covenant-relationship with them – verses 12-31*

Do not overlook all the grounds of consolation that are implied in these few words: “my people” and “your God” (verse 1). “Fear not,” says the Lord in chapter 43:1, “for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.” The expression, “your God,” seems to be intended to call to mind the original covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7-9): “I will ... be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee ... and I will be their God.” Jehovah’s covenant-relationship with His people is the great foundation of their comfort. “This God,” says the Psalmist, “is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death” (Ps. 48:14). When the believer clearly realizes his relationship with the Lord, and the Lord’s relationship with him; and when, from the fullness of his heart, he can say, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Sol. 2:16) – then he is at peace, no matter what his outward circumstances may be!

Verses 3-8 are explained, in Matthew 3:1-3, as referring to the first coming of Christ; as well as of the preparation made for Him by the preaching of John the Baptizer, who was to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). When John came, he preached in the wilderness – a picture of this sin-ruined world of ours, which the Lord of Glory was coming to visit; and which, by His mighty power, He would cause to “rejoice and blossom as the rose” (chapter 35:1). It is through this wilderness that the Lord’s way lies, and it is through this wilderness that His people must follow Him.

The glory of the Lord, which is spoken of in verse 5, was revealed when Jesus came! “The Word,” says John (1:14), “was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” How the way was to be prepared for this glory that was to be revealed, we may learn by studying the preaching of John the Baptizer. He reproved the people for their sins, and he called upon them to repent. He endeavored to make them feel their need of that pardon and that help which Christ was coming to bestow. There were “valleys” of despairing unbelief which had to be “exalted.” There were “mountains” of pride and self-righteousness which had to be “brought low.” There were “crooked” prejudices which had to be “made straight,” and there were “rough places” of coarse sensuality and perverse self-will to be “made plain.” Whenever the glory of the Lord in Jesus Christ is revealed to any human being now, the way must be prepared in the same manner; and to each one of us who desires to see the glory of God and to have Christ revealed to him, the “voice” cries to us now, “Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for thy God!” High thoughts of self must be brought low, and low thoughts of Jesus’ power and love must be exalted. *(continued in Part 2)*



ISAIAH 40 “COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE!” – PART 2

Verses 6-8 tell us the message which is brought to us by the one who prepares the way of the Lord: “All flesh is grass.” We are prepared for the manifestation of God’s glory when we have taken off any dependence upon any created thing, and are led to rely simply upon the Word of God. We need not fear our enemies; for they are like the withering grass, and “the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon” them – just as it did upon Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Belshazzar. We shall most assuredly be delivered from our captivity in the spiritual Babylon, because the Lord has promised it; and “the word of our God shall stand for ever!”

The expression “good tidings” (verse 9) immediately turns our thoughts to the Savior of the World, and the angel’s announcement when He was born (Luke 2:10-11): “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!” What “good tidings” indeed! Do they bring joy to our hearts? Is the thought of Christ and His work as precious to our souls as Solomon’s picture of “good news from a far country,” which are like “cold waters to a thirsty soul”? (Prov. 25:25) And are we eager to spread these good tidings, as Zion is told to do in the verse before us? Are we eager to lift up our voices and say to all around us, “Behold your God!” The nature of all true Gospel-preaching is not the framing of a theory or a system of religion, nor is it the enforcing of a set of good moral maxims; but rather, it is a direct pointing to the Person of Christ in His own Divinity, and in His revelation to His people. This was exactly what John did when he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) And this was also the essence of Paul’s message: “We preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23). It is such preaching alone which will convert sinners and build up the saints!

Let us not forget to observe the wonderful union of strength and tenderness with which the prophet describes our Savior in verses 10-11. We read of the “strong hand,” and of the “arm that rules” (verse 10); but that very same arm “gathers the lambs,” and that very same hand “gently leads those that are with young!” (verse 11) What more can we say? Let us meditate upon the preciousness of this picture of our Good Shepherd, tenderly caring for the weakest of His flock! Some of His sheep are strong in the Lord, and others are weak in faith; but He is impartial in His care for all of them, and the weakest lamb is as dear to Him as the most advanced of the flock. Lambs are inclined to lag behind; they are prone to wander, and they easily grow weary. But from all the dangers

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of these infirmities, the Shepherd protects them with His arm of power. He finds new-born souls, like young lambs, that are ready to perish; but He nourishes them until life becomes vigorous. He finds weak minds that are ready to faint and die, but He consoles them and renews their strength. He gathers all of the little ones, for it is not the will of our heavenly Father that even one of them should perish. And the best thing of all is that He does this Himself personally – not delegating the task of love, but condescending Himself to rescue and preserve His most unworthy sheep! How shall we love Him enough? How can we serve Him worthily? O Great Shepherd, add one more blessing to Your mercies that You have already bestowed upon us – namely, hearts to love You more truly as we ought!



Was it a true thing that the Jewish exiles said, in verse 27? They suggested that they had worn out the Divine patience, that their ways were no longer open to His view, and that their well-being had ceased to be His care. They were ready to admit that he had been the God of their fathers; but they imagined that He had now withdrawn from His covenant-relationship with themselves, and would be favorable to them no longer. He does not forget or forsake His children, but they spoke as though they had never known nor heard some of the most rudimentary facts about the nature and ways of God. “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard?” Where have your ears been? This has not been told in secret, nor whispered in the dark places of the earth! It has been common knowledge with every generation of God’s people that “the Lord fainteth not, neither is weary.” He never begins to build a character, only to leave it half-completed. He cannot be exhausted by the rebellion, backsliding, or fickleness of His children. But there is another point upon which all the saints are agreed, and that is the fact that weariness or fainting in ourselves is not a barrier to the putting forth of God’s might. On the contrary, they possess an infinite attractiveness to His nature! It is the theme of Scripture that the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please themselves. Such is the law of God’s existence! All that He is and has, He holds in trust for us – and He holds most for those who need most. When your strength begins to faint beneath the burdens and the noontide heat, it is then that the Mighty One of Jacob will draw near to you and impart His power and strength. And those who wait upon Him shall renew their strength – that is, they shall receive new strength for each new duty and each new trial. Nothing – not even youthful genius and vigor – can be a substitute for this! God is all-sufficient. Never faint or weary Himself, He is able to infuse resistless energy into the soul that waits upon Him – so much so that if that soul mounts, it shall be on eagle’s wings; if it runs, it will not become weary; and if it walks, it will never faint.

Lord Jesus! We praise You as the Good Shepherd, Who tenderly gathers Your feeble lambs and carries them with Your gentle hands of love! Amen.