

Behold Your God

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Bible Text: Isaiah 40:1-11

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Well, do take your Bible and let's turn in our Bibles this morning to Isaiah chapter 40. The early service I forgot where I was and I called it Isaiah. People were looking rather bemusedly and I remembered half way through the sermon that I had forgot where I was and to translate myself. Usually I can be able to be my own translator when we are speaking another language and so I am remembering, ok? I am trying. So, but if I do revert back, do forgive me. It is Isaiah. I keep telling myself that. It just doesn't come naturally at all. There you go.

We are reading Isaiah 40 and we are reading at verse one very familiar words.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;

surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Behold your God!”
Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.¹

This is the Word of the Lord.

I have noticed in my frequent trips over there that Americans are quite humble when it comes to speaking about their television programs. Totally unnecessary and no need to be humble. One of the best shows, in fact, most of the best shows in British television are actually American. In fact, I can honestly say that I don't think I ever watch any British shows on British television because they are so abysmal.

But one of the best—I don't have strong opinions about these things, but there you go. One of the best shows that is on at the moment—obviously the sanctified among you won't watch it—but it is called *House*. And it is about Gregory House, MD who is a diagnostician. I worked hard at pronouncing that. He is a world famous, supposedly, a world famous diagnostician. He has a team of people around him to whom he is totally abominable and those of you who are interns or who are working up to that have that as your goal, please do not learn from his manner. He is an absolutely obnoxious character, but he does get the job done. And one of the things that is interesting about the program is the process, really, through which he comes to a diagnosis, then gives prognosis and then the treatment and so on and it is a highly entertaining watch and perhaps is even informative.

But the thing that struck me as I was thinking of that this morning, fondly enough, in the middle of the night actually when I couldn't sleep, I thought of you and I thought of it and I thought there is no greater contrast, I think, between Gregory House, MD and Isaiah the prophet, whatever it was he got for being a prophet. Similarities in this sense, when, I suppose, as a diagnostician the thing that gets you reputation is that you usually get your

¹ Isaiah 40:1-11.

diagnosis right. I mean, you want somebody in that position as a physician to be getting it right most of the time. I mean, maybe I don't know what the percentages are, but you really want to be confident that they are getting it right most of the time.

When you are a prophet, however, you have got to get it right all of the time without any ifs, buts or ands. It is written into the job description in Deuteronomy chapter 18 that a prophet must get it right all the time without any ever getting it wrong.

And what Isaiah has been doing in the first half of this book is setting out his credentials, if you will. He has been showing us that he has, in fact, been called as a prophet and as a prophet in giving prophecies from the midterm then the middle term and then the long term, at each stage he has been speaking quite specifically about incidents that are going to happen in history of Judah and Israel and at each point his prophecies have come true.

What he is doing is establishing his reputation as a prophet of God. And in his diagnosis of what is wrong with Judah, he is quite specific. He points to the course of the problem or to the reality of the problem. For example, right at the very beginning of Isaiah in chapter one he tells them that they are a sinful nation.

By the way, one of Gregory House's features is that he is always giving his staff a hard time. He tells them all kinds of hard stuff. He calls them names and all the rest of it and I won't repeat any of those names here, but Isaiah begins just a little bit like that in chapter one by telling his own people that they are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evil doers, children who deal corruptly. He tells them they are forsaking the Lord, they are despised the holy one of Israel, they are utterly estranged. The whole head is sick. The whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and raw wounds. That is his diagnosis.

The situation within Israel is abysmal. And the presenting symptoms of this sin situation in the nation was basically two fold. On the one hand they were not trusting God alone. There is a lot of faith goes on in the first part of Isaiah, but the faith is not in God. The faith is in other people. For example, when they find themselves hard pressed by enemies where do they look? They look to foreign alliances. At the beginning of the book, for example, when they find themselves being harried by enemies they try to negotiate a deal with Assyria which is to the north. And Isaiah says to them, "Don't trust Assyria. Assyria is going to turn on you and bite you. He is going to destroy northern Israel and then he is going to come down and attack you in Judah. And when you get scared about that," when they got scared about that, they started to make alliances with Egypt to the south of them. And Isaiah comes back to them again and he says, "You know, Egypt will not turn up. They will sign the treaty, but they will not be there when they are needed. They just will not turn up."

The South learned that about England in the late unpleasantness, that England just never turned up to help. And that is the way things go. Alliances cannot be depended on most of the time.

But they were depending on these foreign alliances. And Isaiah says, “You know, not only will Egypt not help, but Assyria will come down, will destroy all your cities and when they are surrounding Jerusalem you will think the end is come, but I am telling you that they will stop right there, amazingly, miraculously.” And that is precisely what happened.

Now a little later on Isaiah says to them, “You know, the real person to watch for us that little kingdom of Babylon there on the edges of civilization. They are not a big player at the moment, but within about 100 years,” he doesn’t give the details of the years, but he says, “They are going to become the big player and they are going to attack Assyria and Assyria is going to fall and then they are going to come and they are going to attack you. So don’t put your trust in Babylon. Don’t trust in Babylon. Don’t be looking around to others to be your strength and your security, to be your Savior.”

The whole first part of the book Isaiah is teaching them about salvation by faith alone that is in God alone. But they weren’t looking to God alone. They were always looking somewhere else.

Not only that, the second presenting symptom in the first part of the book and which is developed as we go into the second part is that they were looking to the idols of the nations round about. Idolatry was the big issue in their corporate life, their national life.

They had never really got idolatry out of their system. For about 1000 years they had been worshipping the Lord God, the God who had delivered them from Egypt, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses. They had been worshipping him. They had never stopped worshipping him. But in order to make sure that everything was ok, they were still worshiping the other gods around.

So they go to the temple, they worship God there, but they were still pinching their little bit of incense to the gods of the Canaanites. They never got idolatry out of their system. They were still trusting in something other than God for their salvation. And in the first part of the book Isaiah says, “That is your core problem. That is why the whole body, the whole corporate body of Judah is sick.”

And here is the prognosis. God is going to come to you and he is going to take the land away from you. Everything that is precious to you is going to go. Back in chapter 39, verses five and six, Isaiah said:

Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”²

² Isaiah 39:6-7.

So there was Isaiah's diagnosis. There is his prognosis. Things are going to go from bad to worse. And Isaiah spent the last years of his life writing into the future, writing for the people who would see all of this come to pass. And what we have from chapter 40 onwards is his word, not just for the people who had returned from exile in Babylon, but his word for the ages, his word for us this morning. Because what you have in Isaiah 40 you will notice—and if we had read it all—you would notice that there is no historical reference there. There is no reference to history at this moment because he is speaking for the ages here. He is referring to the gospel here and to people who are conscious that it is their own fault that has led them into this catastrophe, that it is their own rebellion against God that has brought them into the judgment of God to people who are beginning to wake up to the fact that their lives are not the way they should be and that the reason they are not as they should be is because of their own sin.

Maybe that is you this morning. To people who are waking up to that reality Isaiah comes to speak this word, a word from God. And it is an amazing word because it has the echo, it has the idea, the concept of coming right from the throne room of God himself. And Isaiah speaks as if he has been in the heavenly chamber where audience chamber where people gather to hear from the king on his throne. There are records here in chapter 40 of that encounter that he had given us in chapter six when he saw the Lord high and lifted up with his train filling the temple. Here is Isaiah again and he is in the heavenly audience chamber listening to the King of kings.

1 Kings 22 puts it like this. "I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said..."³

The Lord has taken counsel and now calls his ambassadors before him. He charges them with his message. That is the whole background to this voice says and voice cries and so on that you read in this section that we have just read.

The prophet Jeremiah says about a prophet, a true prophet, he is a man who "has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word."⁴ And that is what we are hearing as we listen to this great Word this morning.

Cotton Mather, the Puritan pastor in New England wrote, "The great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher is to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men." That is what Isaiah is about here.

And I want you to notice the message as we unpack it. What is it? First of all, God is gracious. Do you notice the intensity and the emotion in this message, an emotion that is captured by the repetition of these opening words?

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."⁵

³ 1 Kings 22:19-20.

⁴ Jeremiah 23:18.

⁵ Isaiah 40:1.

Do you see who is speaking? It is a message that comes from God. God, your God is the speaker. In other words, this good news message—because that is what it is. It is gospel that is being proclaimed. Comes to us primarily from God. It is he who is the originator. He is the speaker of this message. No one else has dreamed it up. No one else has speculated this message into being. This is not the fruit of Isaiah’s research over many years. This is God breaking in to history, addressing his people.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.”⁶

The gospel message is always, first of all, from God to us. And it is always a Word that is spoken to us. Yes, God speaks in nature. We see his handiwork in nature. We see how great and vast and able and powerful and ingenious God is in nature. We see his creativity, but in Scripture we hear his voice. We hear his voice speak to us.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.”⁷

And this word “comfort,” by the way, is not one of the great set piece words. This is an intimate word. It is an ordinary word. It is a word from every day. Here is the doctor, as it were, coming to the bedside and speaking gently to his patient. Here is God coming beside his people and speaking gently.

“Speak tenderly...”⁸

In fact, God orders us to do this.

“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,”⁹ he says.

So there is affection in this voice, tenderness in this voice.

And who is he speaking to? His people.

You see, among the covenants that God has made with people there was that great Mosaic covenant, the covenant of law. Well, they had broken the law. They had broken the Mosaic covenant. They hadn’t kept that covenant. They had lost the land because they had broken that law. So when God comes to speak to these people he takes them back, do you notice? He takes them back to two everlasting, not conditional, but unconditional covenants that he had made. That phrase “my people,” for example, in verse one, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God,”¹⁰ takes them back to the language he had used to Abraham.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Isaiah 40:2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Isaiah 40:1.

When God had spoken to Abraham that word of comfort it was an unconditional word of promise. And here when he says in verse two, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,”¹¹ he is reminding them of another covenant that he had made with King David, a covenant that through one of his offspring, David’s offspring, an eternal kingdom would be established that would rule over all the earth.

So here is God coming reminding these people of two unchangeable, unalterable words of God, words of promise, words that were not conditional upon their obedience or disobedience, but which were freely proclaimed by God to his people. Here is God reminding his people that his actions are now built upon these unconditional gracious covenants that he had made with Abraham and David.

God is speaking graciously to his people about what? Well, look at what he is saying to them. He comes to speak three blessings into their lives. First he says there, “Here warfare is ended.”¹²

Well, I imagine the first people who really would grasp this message of Isaiah, really see it for what it was would have been those exiles in Babylon reflecting back, living 150 years into the future, perhaps, when Isaiah from Isaiah’s time reflecting back on this Babylonian captivity that they were experiencing. Remembering the stories of the devastation of Jerusalem when their fathers had last seen it 70 years before.

Jerusalem had been destroyed. Some of you guys might have seen the movie *Stalingrad*. Girls probably have avoided it. But *Stalingrad*, the very first images that you see in that picture is of this devastated Russian city, absolute devastating with the German armies camped around, the Nazi armies camped around and there is the city absolutely devastated, apparently anything is standing. The people are hardly, barely living, barely surviving. That was the way it was. That was etched into the memory of these Jews in Babylonian captivity that they had been eating excrement they were so desperate in those days. They had seen the judgment of God fall.

If ever a people needed to know that their warfare was ending, it was them. Because what they learned the hard way was that the first and foremost the object of God’s wrath was then his people, that God was at war with them. You see, this is what every human being must come to realize at some stage in their lives. They must come to this point where they see that the real enemy, the real enemy of humanity is the very God that they have made their enemy, that we are enemies of God by our disobedience, by our sin.

Here is the God whom we have made our enemy by our sinfulness coming and saying, “Your warfare is ended.”

Now how can this be? How can this be? That is like the physician coming and sitting at the side of your bed and saying to you, “Look, your sickness is gone. Your disease is

¹¹ Isaiah 40:2.

¹² Ibid.

cleared away. There is nothing left. There is nothing for you to be afraid of any longer. It is gone.”

Well, how can this be? Look at how Isaiah presses it.

“Her warfare is ended... her iniquity is pardoned.”¹³

Her iniquity, this seat of disease at the heart has been taken out, removed, totally removed, pardoned all together. It does not exist any longer. Her sin has been pardoned. The language here is used in Leviticus of offerings of blood sacrifice.

Later on in Isaiah in chapters 53 we are going to discover the basis of the sacrifice on which their iniquity had been pardoned. It was to be the basis of the sacrifice of the servant, the suffering servant who would carry what? Their iniquities. And be bruised for their iniquities and have the punishment that was due them cast upon him and borne by him in his own body. That is how their iniquities had been pardoned. It had been removed by this servant who was to come.

And all this has been done, we are told at the end of verse two because they have “received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.”¹⁴

You can take that one of two ways, that last phrase. Either way, the emphasis is that it has all been done by God and nothing by them. One way is to say that this, that the punishment that they deserve has been exalted in all its force somewhere.

And that would have raised a question in their minds. Surely, surely the devastation of our city wasn’t enough, wasn’t enough to appease God because of our rebellion against him. Surely, surely the judgment had to be even greater than no matter how bad that was.

And, again, Isaiah 53 is the answer here. Yes, that is absolutely right. For sin to be pardoned it would take more than simply having your cities devastated. It would take the son of God himself bearing our sin in his own body on the tree, taking the wrath of God on our behalf. It would take that.

The other way to take it is that the receiving double for all our sins is that they have received double pardon, as it were, double the amount of grace that God has come to them with unprecedented, unmeasured, unmerited grace.

Either way the emphasis is that God has done everything that is required, everything that is required to deal with their sin. God is gracious. He is gracious to you, to me. This is the message of salvation. It is the message of the gospel. Here it is proclaimed by Isaiah.

But that is the second thing here. Not only is God gracious. Do you notice he goes on to

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

say God is coming. Yes, he is coming. The God who is gracious is going to come and visit them.

“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD.’”¹⁵

The way of who? The way of the Lord.

“Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.”¹⁶

In other words, God is coming and nothing can stop him coming, no obstacle can stop him coming.

I can think of obstacles that could have stopped God coming. Isaiah later on in this chapter is going to describe the fact that God made the universe. All that we know of the size of the universe, the more we understand through science of its enormity and complexity, the more amazing it is that God who made all of this should ever be able to come and visit his people.

Our God contracted to expand, incomprehensibly made man. It is incomprehensible.

How could God take on our flesh, put on skin, become one of us? Isaiah has already talked about this. He has already said, “The virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”¹⁷ That is the only way God is going to come and visit us. That is amazing. That seems most improbable.

Do you know the promise to Abraham and the promise concerning the Messiah are like two bookends of this great line of promise in the Old Testament. When God comes to Sarai, Abraham’s wife, and he says, “You know, Sarai, in your old age, in your 90s you are going to have a baby, you are going to be pushing your baby carriage down to get your diapers from the local store.” And she laughed. She laughed. She said, “It is impossible.”

God said to her, “There is nothing impossible.”

Then you go to another girl. Her circumstances were different. She was a virgin. An angel comes to her. Same circumstances. An angel comes to her and says, “You are going to have a child and she has more faith than Sarah has actually. But she still asks, “How can this be?”

The angel explains, doesn’t give a lot of detail, but explains. Going to be a miracle in your womb and you are going to have a child.

¹⁵ Isaiah 40:3.

¹⁶ Isaiah 40:3-4.

¹⁷ Isaiah 7:14.

And then the angel says similar words to the words he says to Sarah. “Nothing is impossible with God.”¹⁸

You see, that is precisely what is being said here in these verses. Everything, all the mountains, all the mountains of impossibility leveled to a plain, all these rivulets that are in the way, everything straightened out. God is coming to visit his people.

Now that is an amazing message, isn't it, of the New Testament? God can do it? And God has come to visit his people. And what is the result of the visit, verse five?

“And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed.”¹⁹

They saw a glimpse of it, didn't they, when they were proclaiming the arrival of Jesus in Luke? When the angels appeared in the sky and the glory of God surrounded the shepherds? They saw a glimpse of it. But they saw even more of it enfleshed, in the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is what the apostles said of him.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”²⁰

The glory of God was revealed.

John's testimony, as we have seen, his glory and all this is going to happen, says Isaiah. All of it is going to happen. Why? Because the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. God is gracious. God is gracious and God is coming.

And then, thirdly, God is reliable because the question is: How can I believe this? This is really hard to believe, isn't it?

Well, verses six to eight proclaim that it is believable because of who has spoken. And there is this great contrast set up in verses six to eight as Isaiah the prophet and everyone else is taught to cry out this message.

There is this contrast between God's Word and humanity and human weakness and fragility. Do you notice that? The whole motion there.

“All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it.”²¹

¹⁸ Luke 1:37.

¹⁹ Isaiah 40:5.

²⁰ John 1:14.

²¹ Isaiah 40:6-7.

People are likened to something as inconsequential as grass.

We have back home in London a lovely English garden, lovingly cared and tended by our resident gardener. She is my wife. And it is one of these areas that I have delegated. Being a good delegator, apparently is a good management skill and I have worked that one out very well. And she spends a lot of time in the garden. She gets it all. It is a lovely English garden because we get lots of lovely English weather, i.e. rain, which is why we are here for the summer and not there. And but there are lots of flowers and bushes and all the rest of it and they are very, very lovely and people when they come to our home come to look at the garden. It is a huge garden. We can take about 200 people in the garden. You don't... so don't all come at once, but it is a lovely garden. But everybody... nobody yet has ever commented on the grass, much to my son Andrew's disgust because his job is to cut the grass and it takes a long time to cut the grass, so I am told.

I delegated that job as well. You understand that I am far too heavenly minded to get involved in these earthly things.

Anyway, there is nothing as inconsequential as the grass and when you get one of these rare thing sin Britain, a dry summer, the grass fades. It withers. And unless you are watering your grass here it is going to whither and fade.

Now that is the picture that Isaiah sets up here and he says, "What a great contrast." He says, "Here are the great powers of the world. Here are... here is Babylon, mighty Babylon, mighty Assyria, eventually mighty Rome, the mighty empires of the world, the great people of the world, the movers and shakers of the world. But at the end of the day, what are they? They are grass. Here today, gone tomorrow, but the Word of the Lord, this Word, this Word stands."

Careless seems the great avenger, history's pages, but record. One death grapple in the darkness twixt old systems and the Word. Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. That is the way it looks. But the Word of the Lord endures forever.

What Isaiah is saying, what the Word of God is saying is this. You can trust God to keep these promises. The New Testament says about all the promises of God they are yes and amen in Christ.

Well, one last thing. God is gracious. He will pardon. God is coming. We would say from our perspective he has come. He is reliable. You can trust his Word.

But here is the fourth thing. He is Savior. God is Savior.

Do you see how the Word now turns to us, to you, to me who are the hearers of it, the believers of this Word? The Word now comes to us.

“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion.”²²

He is speaking to the people of God, using that word “Zion” of the believing people of God, the church, speaking to this church. Get up on a high mountain. You don’t have any high mountains around here, but figuratively speaking get up to the top of a sky scraper. Get up there. Get somewhere visible. Herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, oh Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift it up. Fear not.

You see as God is speaking to these fearful, disheartened, ashamed people, “Fear not,” he says, “But don’t just sit there not fearing. There is something for you to do. There is a job to be done.”

What is to be done? Well, you are to proclaim to the world this good news. You are to get it out. You are to get the gospel, the good news and you are to get it out to the world. The world needs to hear this this morning, that God is gracious and that God is come and that is God is reliable, that he has kept his Word.

Do you see how he spells out this message? He says, “Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”²³

Behold is a very strong word. It is more than just look or see. It is pay attention. Lift up your eyes. Isn’t this amazing? It is something unprecedented. It is something you weren’t expecting, something you should pay attention to. Behold your God. Behold the Lord God comes. He is coming.

Do you notice he is coming in two forms. He says he is coming as a mighty warrior.

“Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”²⁴

Yes, God is mighty enough to come as a bull dozer breaking down all of his enemies, crushing them under his feet. And he will. He will. Isaiah is going to tell us. that is the ultimate end of the story. God will come as the judge. He comes as the mighty warrior.

He got a glimpse of it when Jesus came.

When Jesus first came do you remember as in this chapter of Isaiah he comes out of the desert, out of the wilderness. He comes towards Jerusalem from the wilderness as Isaiah 40 verse three and four suggest.

The glory of the Lord is revealed there. He comes into the city. What is the first thing he does? He cleanses the temple. What he is doing he is just laying down his claims that he has the right to judge and judgment begins in the house of God. And one day he will

²² Isaiah 40:9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Isaiah 40:10.

come at the end of history and he will be the judge of all. He will judge the world in righteousness because all judgment has been given to the Son.

But he comes not just as a mighty warrior. Do you notice how Isaiah ends this picture? He comes as the good shepherd.

“He will tend his flock like a shepherd.”²⁵

I want you to see that there is a coherence to this message. This little section here coherently begins with comfort and ends with comfort. It begins with tenderness and it ends with tenderness. It is a gospel message. It is a good news message to lost people, to sinful people. It ends by talking about the shepherd, because the Lord who is coming is not only going to devour his enemies. He is going to comfort his people.

Jesus when he came, you remember, called himself the Good Shepherd, said he had come to give his life for the sheep, said he was looking for the lost sheep, said he would lift up the sheep and enfold them so that they would never be lost again.

You see, this is the message of the gospel. On bad news days for the world the message of the gospel comes into your hospital ward, as it were, into your room and says to the patient, “Something miraculous has happened. Something wonderful has happened. The disease has been dealt with so radically. There are now no symptoms left. The prognosis that was spoken over you has now been revoked. You have a future and a hope, an eternal future and an eternal hope and all because of something that has been done for you.”

Now when the New Testament picks up this language not only does it pick it up in verses three to five and apply it to John the Baptist preaching and preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah, but the opening words are picked up in the New Testament very early on in the gospel of Luke.

You see, when this message came to the exiles in Babylon it comforted them then. And then during the 500 quiet years, the years when nothing very much changed, they went back to Jerusalem and that was good. They resettled there and that was fine. But they were still in exile, really, because there were still foreign powers fighting for them and over them, the Greeks and the Romans. And there was something in this promise that had not yet been fulfilled. God had not yet turned up. He had not visited yet. And there were people, believers, people who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, waiting for the comfort, same word, the comfort of Israel.

And one day some of those people who were waiting for God’s comfort to come, to turn up went to the temple to pray and a little family came in with their little baby. Remember? When that little baby arrived in the temple that day those people realized that God had come to comfort his people. And the great Christian message is that in Jesus Christ God has kept his Word. He kept his Word. He has fulfilled his promise, the

²⁵ Isaiah 40:11.

promise of salvation, the promise of comfort that he offers to all who believe it alone. That was their problem. They had always looked elsewhere for their security.

God says to you and to me this morning, “If you want to enjoy my salvation receive it by trusting in him alone for salvation.”

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you that you have given us great and precious promises in your Word and they are for individual people as well as for a corporate group like this. Therefore, people like me and like people like us who need to know that our iniquity has been pardoned, the warfare is ended and that there is blessing abundant for those who trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. We pray that you would bring this message home to all of our hearts, to those of us who have known it for years, that it would thrill us as much today as it ever has for the glory of your name. Amen.