

Good morning I am Josh Burnham and I'm the lead pastor here at Bethel. For all of our guests, those watching online, and all our covenant members, welcome! Why are days like today so important? Because your presence here is encouraging to others. As you sing, you encourage others to sing, and as you grow in righteousness you provoke others to love and good works. So what if you being here today is not about you? But is about the Lord and your neighbor?

We are continuing our sermon series in the Book of Isaiah "Yahweh saves." What we read today is such a **drastic** turn in the text that many scholars postulate that Isaiah was written by two different persons or schools. Isaiah 1-39 presumes a setting in Jerusalem, judgement is imminent and calamity is near. Isaiah 40-66 has the perspective that judgment is now passed and now is the time of comfort. **Some would immediately say: this cannot possibly be the same prophet.** But what if the Lord uniquely and beautifully is the only being in the universe that can sovereignly marry judgement + redemption. "Comfort, sweet comfort."

We live in a world in desperate need of comfort. Many like you and I watched through tearful eyes the press conference for little Kamille McKinney the young girl kidnapped, murdered, and found in a dumpster as if she were a piece of trash. **Rev. Alvelyn Sanders** said in an impassioned prayer from the pulpit at her service, "We don't know, oh Lord, how we got here.," "But we know something happened in our lives. There was a baby named Kamille who made us all stop and check ourselves." It's moments like these when we must stop, check ourselves, and cry out, "Comfort, sweet comfort!" **And in this moment, I did not want an antidotal sound bite.** I wanted comfort that is grounded in reality, in Jesus Christ. Today's message is entitled"

"Comfort Sweet Comfort" (Isaiah 40:1-9) pg # 635

A Comfort (40:1-2)

No sooner the message of disaster in 1-39 than the message of glorious comfort. It is as if when you turn the page that you have stepped out of the darkness of judgment into the light of salvation.

The word comfort is the Hebrew *naham* or *nahum*. In one sense it means to be grieved or repent. When used with certain verbal forms (*piel*) it means to comfort, console, and express sympathy. I believe this word is used because the Lord's **comfort is linked to the repentance** of his community.

The purpose of 39 chapters of judgement from the Lord's hand is to lead the people to a point where they can be consoled. Until you are grieved by your iniquity you will never reach a point where you find comfort. **Repentance is an indelible mark of the Lord's covenant.** "my people- your God."

It is **through** repentance you find comfort. 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Isaiah says it this way. The same hand that brought judgment is the same hand that took away her sin. This is the beautiful picture of **pardon**. Literally in Hebrew it means to *take or lead away*. No longer will His people be **led** into captivity by the hand of Babylon. No longer will His people **hold** false idols in their hands. Wow what comfort! His **hand** has removed their iniquity, shame, and guilt. Because of Jesus Christ you **don't have to fear the hand of the Father.** Comfort, Sweet comfort.

Speak Tenderly. God sees your need. He saw the need of Judah and commanded Isaiah to speak to tenderly-to her heart. *The heart was the seat of man's emotions.* The Lord is not simply **expressing** kindness but **persuading** you to respond to His **love** as He speaks directly into your heart. And this is not a one-time event

but a continually imperfect “keep speaking. Yahweh’s comfort, true eternal comfort, falls into our hearts **with pleasure and refreshment like a gentle rain on parched ground**. What a comfort to hear the words... tell her/him her time of judgment, “is over.” God’s people no longer live in captivity. It’s over! Wow what a comfort.

Pardon. How can this be so? Through the pardon of the Lord. This word was used specifically for the acceptance of Levitical offerings. This is the power of the cross and the sacrificial atoning work of the Messiah. God accepted his sacrifice on your behalf, and everyone who believes receives this glorious comforting pardon. One hymn rejoices this way:

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer (heart language) and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Because of this pardon you have eternal comfort.

A Cry (40:3-8)

Notice that pardon always precedes deliverance, because pardon is deliverance. Truly, deliverance without pardon of sin and righteous judgment is a **false hope**. I don’t want a religious sound bite when my soul longs for righteous substance.

And from the comfort of the Lord comes a unique cry in the wilderness. The voice is used in an exclamatory way as if to say listen!! Who is speaking? The voice remains **anonymous** because his identity pales in comparison to the glorious **message** he presents. Seven hundred years later John the Baptist would declare John 1:23 . “I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord just as Isaiah the prophet said.” And it was John the Baptist who said “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

The way will be made straight. Valleys raised, mountains lifted, uneven ground smooth, and rough places plain. This is the modern version of I-20/59 construction. Isaiah is picturing the rightful King coming into a city. As the King arrives, the path is prepared. The voice is crying this: “the Lord is coming to your aid! He will arrive without fail, travel without difficulty, and be undelayed by any hindrance.” The voice is speaking to our hearts that **nothing has happened in your life that would prevent** or hinder the Lord’s covenantal grace from reaching you! You know that valley you created? It’s not too deep. You know that rough patch? It will be smooth. Hear the voice: “**The Lord is coming for you!**”

And one day, declares the cry all humanity together will see the glory of the Lord. This is the same people whose eyes were once looking and could not perceive (Isa 6:9) Now, they can see. Is this your story? Maybe today you say, “**I just don’t see it.**” **Sin blinds us to the things of God.** But, the glory is the Lord’s presence. It’s how Jesus could boldly declare, “the one who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9). And one day every knee will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

The cry continues, humanity pales in comparison to the eternal glory of the Father. In fact, you are like grass that withers when the breath of the Lord blows across. Every May, a scorching wind called Hamsin blows over Palestine from the dry desert regions of Arabia and causes vegetation to wither and fade. In contrast to your falling and fading—the Word of the Lord is the sure and steady anchor. Listen, some of you are getting burned by the scorching wind because you are **living outside of the Lord’s loving Word** for your life. The Word of God remains when all else falls and changes. **Here the cry of the Lord! Live in the comfort of his unchanging Word.**

A Community (40:9)

Now let's get personal. The anonymous voice of 40:3-8 now grows in specificity and number, Zion and Jerusalem. Zion is the same community who has received just consequence for sin. Jerusalem is the same who received undeserved pardon from their iniquity. **This is the community of faith. Fully deserving eternal judgment and finding eternal mercy.** And for this community, a command is given.

Herald/brings of joy news. Twice the community of faith is called the bringers of good news. This is news the world needed to hear. [A herald in the ancient world was someone who received news from the king and went running to surrounding villages to share the message.](#)

Not news of destruction, exile, brokenness. We have enough of that. In Christ, you have a new mandate. You **are a bringer of joy news!** And this news is not **quiet** news. This beautiful gospel message should be raised with a loud voice. We do not proclaim the message of Jesus with fear (Do not be afraid). ***The church is not to pose as a seeker after truth among other ideologies, but to declare in clear, firm, and positive voice that the message of Jesus saves!***

And **who** should hear of this message (40:9)? **Everyone.** Go up on the high mountain and shout! Let the world know that there is no longer male, female, slave, free, Jew, gentile, illegal, white, black, rich, poor, or outcast in the kingdom of the Lord! We have no right to choose who we share the message of redemption with. [Fall Festival](#)

And what is the community's message: **Here is your God!** In these words is found the heart of the Gospel, ["the sum of our happiness which consists solely in the presence of God. –John Calvin.](#) Church. The world is dying to hear this message. The world is perishing because they have not heard this message.

Our Response

Lament by Anton Chekhov

It is a simple story about an old man, Iona, who drives a horse and buggy for hire through the city. The story goes that the old man's son died recently and he wants so desperately to tell someone. A wealthy man hires the horse and buggy for a ride across town. As the wealthy man steps into the carriage, the old man says, "My son, my son. Let me tell you about my son." But the busy man doesn't have time to listen.

Well, after the wealthy man leaves, another man steps into the carriage. He wants to be driven to the other side of the city. Again, the old man says, "My son. My son. Let me tell you about my son." And again, this second man also doesn't bother to listen.

At the end of the day, the old man returns to the stables, unhitches his horse, and as he begins to brush the horse down for the night, the old man begins to tell the story to his horse, my son my son."

In a world looking for comfort and hope, the Lord through Isaiah and His word is walking the streets shouting, "my son, my son, let me tell you about my son."

Listen to the cry in the wilderness. Will you by faith today receive His pardon? Will you by faith today embrace his comfort. Will you today let Jesus Christ speak to your heart? Comfort is sovereignly linked to repentance.

Have you found comfort in Jesus? Will you rest and rejoice in that eternal peace today?

What mountain do you need to climb and declare that Jesus saves?!

Notes

Isaiah is painting a universal picture of redemption in Isaiah 40

“when one turns from the 39th chapter to the 40th chapter it is as though he steps out of the darkness of judgment into the light of salvation (Young, 17).

Is. 40:1 “Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.

נָחַם *nāham* 108x

v. [root of: 4968, 5695, 5699, 5700, 5715, 5716, 5717, 5718, 5719, 5720, 9487, 9488, 9489]. **N** to relent, repent, change one’s mind; be grieved; **P** to comfort, console, express sympathy; **Pu** to be comforted, be consoled; **Ht** to console oneself; to change one’s mind; avenge oneself. → *change one’s mind; comfort; grieve; relent; repent, repentance.*

No sooner the message of disaster (39:5-7) than the message of comfort (40:1-2)! (Motyer, 298)

The Zion promises may be forfeited but they cannot perish (Motyer, 298).

The plural imperatives Comfort, comfort address the three “voices” of verses 3, 7, 9, but the scene is best understood as a heavenly court on the analogy of 1 Kgs 22:19 (Mother, 299).

Says- is imperfect tense with the sense ‘keeps saying’ and is almost peculiar to the Isaianic literature (Motyer, 299).

True comfort consists in setting forth the entire truth concerning the people's tragic condition and in causing them to see God as their only hope (Young, 19).

2 "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and announce to her
that her time of forced labor is over,
her iniquity has been pardoned,
and she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins."

Tenderly

Literally in Hebrew = speak to the heart

Is not just expressing comfort and kindness but is seeking to persuade, inviting to respond to love (Motyer, 299).

The comfort consists in the speaking of words that will fall upon the heart with pleasure, comfort, and refreshment, to encourage and cheer the heart like gentle rain falling upon the ground (Young, 20).

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

In scripture, the heart is the center of man's emotions.

Forced Labor

Means a period of duress but the word contains the idea of duress which serves a purpose (Motyer, 299).

Pardoned

The passive of this verb is used only of God's acceptance of the Levitical offerings (Motyer, 299).

Is. 40:3 A voice of one crying out:

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

A voice is used in an exclamatory way meaning, 'listen' someone is calling out (Motyer, 300).

The voice is of a human voice, a messenger of God declaring His commands (Young, 26).

The voice remains anonymous because his identity must fall behind the glorious message he proclaims (Young, 27).

John 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

Way

It combines the ancient picture of the Lord coming to his people's aid with the practice of constructing processional ways for visiting dignitaries or for use by the gods as they were carried in procession (Motyer, 300).

He will arrive without fail, travel without difficulty and be undelayed by hindrances (Motyer, 300).

4 Every valley will be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill will be leveled;
the uneven ground will become smooth
and the rough places, a plain.

5 And the glory of the LORD will appear,
and all humanity together will see it,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

The glory is the Lord's presence.

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **10** Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works. **11** Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Otherwise, believe because of the works themselves.

With the destruction of the Temple under Nebuchadnezzar the glory would depart from Jerusalem, and the theocracy would come to an end. No longer would Jerusalem be the holy city, for the people's sins would keep their God from them. Now, there is going to be a full reversal of the situation (Young, 30).

Is. 40:6 A voice was saying, "Cry out!"
Another said, "What should I cry out?"
"All humanity is grass,
and all its goodness is like the flower of the field.

Grass is an emblem of transiency (Motyer, 301).

Isaiah is speaking not merely of the frailty of human existence. His thought penetrates as well to the inner life of man (Young, 33).

7 The grass withers, the flowers fade
when the breath of the LORD blows on them;
indeed, the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flowers fade,
but the word of our God remains forever."

In contrast to this fading and falling—the facts of human fragility and fickleness and the dread of judgment of God of which it is one aspect—there is a sure and unchanging reality (Motyer, 301).

Isaiah uses two verbs in the perfect and thus gives expression to what is accepted as true because of general and widespread observation (Young, 34).

1Pet. 1:22 Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly, **23** because you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God. **1Pet. 1:24** For

**All flesh is like grass,
and all its glory like a flower of the grass.
The grass withers, and the flower falls,
25 but the word of the Lord endures forever.**

Breath

In May, before the rainy season, the Hamsin or Sirocco blows over Palestine, having come from the hot, dry desert regions of Arabia. It is a pernicious wind and blows often for several days without intercession, filling the atmosphere with fine dust and rendering it sultry and oppressive (Young, 34).

Is. 40:9 Zion, herald of good news,
go up on a high mountain.
Jerusalem, herald of good news,
raise your voice loudly.
Raise it, do not be afraid!
Say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”

The church is not to pose as a seeker after truth, unsure of her message, but to declare in clear, firm, and positive voice that her message is true (Young, 38).

Herald

A picture of someone receiving the news and running with it to the surrounding townships (Motyer, 301).

High mountain

Chosen so that all may hear

The speaking unto the heart is not to be done by some quiet, obscure method, but by means of vigorous proclamation (Young, 21).

Here is your God!

In these words is found the heart of the Gospel, “the sum of our happiness which consists solely in the presence of God.” —John Calvin

Illustrations

Love your fellowmen, and cry about them if you cannot bring them to Christ. If you cannot save them, you can weep over them. If you cannot give them a drop of cold water in hell, you can give them your heart's tears while they are still in this body. –Spurgeon

He grieves truly that weeps without a witness. – George Swinnock

I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless;
That only men incredulous of despair,
Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air
Beat upward to God's throne in loud access
Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness,
In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute heavens. Deep-hearted man, express
Grief for thy dead in silence like to death—
Most like a monumental statue set
In everlasting watch and moveless woe
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go. –Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Application
