

Title: Behold, your God!
Text: Isaiah 40.1-11
Theme: He comes!
Series: Isaiah #32
Prop Stmt Be comforted; God (the Sovereign Shepherd) is coming!

Read Text:

At the end of the Bible we read these words in Revelation 21.1-6. As encouraging as these words are, they actually stand in an enormous contrast from what John had just previously seen and wrote about in Revelation 20.11-15. That is very similar to what we have come to in our study of Isaiah. For 39 chapters we have studied through the warnings that God has given to the nation of Judah. Over and over he warned them of his coming judgment, unless they repented. Even when they did repent, it did not last. Even when they finally had a king who believed God, he was still not truly faithful. It seemed as if their doom was sealed. Babylon was going to arise and she would conquer. One hundred years later, it happened.

What was a Jew to think, ankles shackled, hands tied, shuffling under the curses of a guard on the way to a life of slavery in Babylon? Was God, really God? Or perhaps the Babylonians gods were the ones to follow. What should we think now? What would become of us? Would we ever get back? What about all of those promises about the Messiah?

What about you? Did you not believe God, and pray for help? Did you not ask God for something, thinking, that here is God's chance to prove that he really is, and that he really loves me. I mean, after all, if God is really God, then this one little request would be so easy for him to do. To all of us who are tempted to think that God is like a distant CEO who hides in the top floor of the building accessible only by an exclusive elevator and remains hidden behind walls of wood and secretaries like pit bulls, is this text.

Isaiah 40 is one of the mountain peaks of the Bible, along with Psalm 23, John 17, Romans 8 and Ephesians 1. This text, rightfully understood takes your breath away and then gives it back so you can shout. When we really read this and I don't mean read this in the sense that our eyes see every word on the page, I mean read this with understanding, read this with our hearts wide open, read this with vulnerability and with faith, allowing the Spirit of God to blow up our puny and pathetic, our gray and gritty view of God and replace it with this rich, luscious, glorious, awesome and tender (yes, tender) God, then we will know what the opening words cry. We will know comfort. No wonder Handel's Messiah opens with this text.

The text breaks down into 4 strophes. The 4 points therefore are four parts of one sentence that capture the message.

1. **Trouble won't last; God will.** (1-2)

a. **This is a command to be announced.** (1)

“Comfort” (repeated) is a command that God is giving to someone, presumably those who preach to God’s people. This follows 39 chapters that emphasize God’s righteous judgments. It is so easy to lose sight of the glorious reality that God is merciful and his comfort is triumphant when we are reminded of our sins. God’s holiness, perfection and uncompromising righteousness are imposing towers of judgment that stand over us and look down upon us when we read a record of our faults. But, judgment will not be God’s final word, or final act – Comfort will! The repetition of “comfort” speaks of an emotional intensity on the part of God.

After these past few days, I think that I have a better grasp on this reality of the character of God. In the span of four and half months, we have a high school graduation, a college graduation, a senior recital, our last child going away to college and our first child getting married. Here are some recent snapshots of what life has been like. I was watching Arianna finish a 2-mile track event in which she set a personal record and took second place. I was yelling loudly, as I usually do and savoring the moment when my phone rang. It was Rebecca. She was studying for finals (which means that she has not slept for 4 days, has way to much coffee and energy drinks in her system, and at that moment, had not received a return phone call for a job interview that she was desperate to line up. Graduation, and what she was actually going to do next week was hanging in the balance and it all came crashing down on her. So, I am simultaneously rejoicing and weeping, congratulating and encouraging. Shortly after that we attended an honors event for Arianna before driving 11 hours to watch Rebecca go through her nurses pinning ceremony and college graduation, only to turn around and drive back because Arianna was featured in her symphony band concert on Wednesday night. But, in the middle of that, our son and his fiancé drove to the graduation, and on the way back to KY, had his car break down at 1.30 in the morning. In the middle of this we find out that Rebecca did get a return call and did get the job interview. I told Cathi that I feel like a DJ, who has 3 CD players. They are marked Bobby, Rebecca and Arianna. Each one is playing music and the music is commanding me to respond. Sometimes the music is loud and raucous and you want to celebrate and dance, and other times it is heavy and somber and you want to weep, and other times they are ominous and foreboding and you want to fear, and then sometimes they all play together. But as a dad, I feel my kids, in me. They take me with them up the mountains and into the valleys. They are my kids. And I know that what I feel is only about 10% of what Cathi feels. Now, where does that come from? Who made us with the capacity to be moved like that? Who gave us that connection to enter into the very soul of trouble and triumph with another? That is God! What we do incompletely, he does completely. What we do imperfectly, he does perfectly! We can only imagine how deep the Father’s love for us is. Cathi and I only have three kids. Three kids wipe me out. I am exhausted from this. Can you imagine the depth of God’s heart to be able to perfectly feel your loneliness, your rejection, your joys,

your delights and your sorrows? We can only imagine the extent of his capacity to feel us. For 39 chapters we have been reading about God's warnings to his people because they have rejected his promises. They have rejected him for another lover. They have turned from him in order to pursue other gods. And God responds in righteous judgment. God responds in loving, righteous, wrath. His response is necessary. His response is right. The sin of Judah is grievous. It brings grief to the sinners and God feels that too. It is serious. It is rebellious. So, his response of judgment is good. His response of judgment is driven by his desire to see people enjoy him by trusting in him because he knows that there is no satisfaction, no eternal delight apart from him. His response of judgment is consistent. But it is not mechanical. It is awesome and full of awe and it is personal. It is not what God delights in. God delights in mercy! Therefore, his word of judgment is not the final word. So now, he announces comfort. He commands comfort to be announced. He commands it twice because he can no longer withhold the mercy in his heart from bursting the dam to come upon his people.

When you combine the repetition of the word comfort with the verb tense of "says your God" (Hebrew – imperfect) which has the idea of God saying it and he keeps on saying it, you have this: God is aching for his people to know that in him there is a comfort beyond all compare. He is saying to the messengers (not yet identified), "Comfort my people by announcing that comfort is coming from me. And keep on announcing it because I am going to keep on saying it!" Though they rejected me and have forgotten me, I have not forgotten my plan. Though they have forfeited my promises, I have not forgotten my promises. When I establish a plan, I follow through on it.

b. This announcement must be received by faith. (2)

But notice how this message is to be announced. "Speak tenderly." The picture is that of a person who is so traumatized and overcome by the enormous consequences of life that this one is paralyzed by fear and simply unable to do a thing. This one is truly lost and undone. The messenger comes and gently, gently speaks to the heart and cries to her. Speak tenderly is the language of love. Here is Judah, having rejected her true love, God, now, living with the devastating consequences of ruining her life and being left alone, broken, vulnerable, empty, and hopeless. Regret and repentance, despondency and despair have driven this one to loathing himself/herself. To this one comes a messenger and says, "His anger with your sin does not stop his love for your soul." His anger is over now.

Notice the three "that's". 1) Her (Jerusalem) warfare is over now. 2) Her iniquity is pardoned. 3) She has received double for all her sins.

But, this announcement does not bring hope because Judah has changed her ways, and will never stumble again, but because God announces a forgiveness that is unmerited and grace that is free. Therefore, this is a truth that must be accepted by faith.

2. **So, get ready for God.** (3-5)

This incredible announcement has to be credible if it is going to really be good news. Good news that is simply hype is not really good news. Have you ever had someone say to you, "Oh, you just gotta have faith."? Ok, faith in what? Faith in the wrong thing is just as bad, perhaps a bit worse than having no faith at all. A person who believes in a false cure is being set up for a greater fall than a person who does not believe in a cure. Faith is only legitimate if the object of the faith is credible. Beloved, I plead with you to engage your mind. Genuine Christianity demands thinking. God is rational. His truths are understandable. Yes, there is a level of mystery, but even that mystery is not irrational. So, the question that these next two verses are answering is this: On what basis can God promise comfort? These people (Judah), are a mess. They, at the time of writing were heading off a cliff. This very book, and text would be read when they were sitting in Babylon, when the warnings of God's judgments would be fulfilled and they had been uprooted from their land. How can God say that he is going to comfort them? Is Judah going to finally be the people that God called them to be? Are they finally going to get it? Is it up to them to bring about their own salvation and rescue themselves from the mess that they have made? NO!!! Yes, they made the mess, but no, they can't fix the mess.

This is critical that you understand this about your life. We create the problems but we cannot affect our own solutions. We need to be rescued. We need a Savior. We cannot go to God. We cannot climb a ladder to God. We cannot make ourselves good enough, respectable enough, pretty enough, smart enough, successful enough, healthy enough, for God. We need God to come to us. We need God to come to our bondage and free us, to come to our lost-ness and find us, to come to our brokenness and fix us, to come to our emptiness and fill us, to come to our loneliness and be with us, to come to our sinfulness and forgive and justify us. We need God to come to us! We are so dead, that we can't walk to him. And that is exactly what Isaiah is saying is going to happen. God is going to come, so, get ready for God! Your comfort does not come from your ability to fix your mess. God is coming and he is going to fix the mess. In fact, here is why the comfort of God is an announcement that is so trustworthy that it rightfully demands your trust: There is nothing that is going to stand in the way of the coming of God. Deserts cannot stop him. Mountains do not impede him, and no valley can slow him down. He is coming to rescue us. Now, keep in mind that this chapter is the opening chapter of this section that deals with the fact that even though Judah's well-earned judgment had come upon them, God's promises were so true, that he was still not going to abandon his own. He was going to deliver them. This is why he had to be trusted. Later on in this section, we read how that deliverance is going to be accomplished.

Not only is God going to come, but he is going to come in the form of a rather unimpressive servant. This servant does not seem like much, really. This servant isn't going to come from a powerful family, like you would expect. He isn't going to look all that attractive, like the people would like. He isn't going to command an

army, like the people think they need. In fact, he is going to suffer. He is going to appear to be weak. And then, get this, he is going to die! What kind of a deliverer is that?! This is what chapters 52 and 53 are about. This text is setting us up for that. Of course 52-53 are preparing us for the advent of Christ, where we learn what kind of a deliverer this is. This is a deliverer who rescues us first from ourselves. He comes to deal with our sins, by taking our sins upon himself. He comes to deal with our brokenness and emptiness and longing for acceptance and peace, by taking upon himself all of that and in exchange he gives us himself. He is our righteousness. He is our wholeness. He is our peace. He, God, in the person of Christ is our hope.

This second stanza speaks of the 1st and 2nd comings of Christ. He came as a suffering servant (as a lamb) in order to set us free and will return as the conquering King in order to reign over us. And all flesh will see it together. God has said it. God has declared it. God has planned it, ordained it, decreed it and has written it down. It is as good as being done. Therefore, this comfort that is yours for the believing is yours through Christ. Christ secured this for you. Christ made this available to you.

3. **He alone can be trusted.** (6-8)

This is a tough, yet very relevant text when two rather young men succumbed to cancer. The greatest among us, are like grass that is vulnerable to the wind. In the Mideast, there is a wind from the east called Hasim. It can take a lush green field (and crop) and make it desolate in less than 48 hours. The grass withers. The flower fades. But the Word of our God stands forever.

How would this speak to the people of Judah? They had recently survived a credible threat of annihilation by the Assyrian empire. They would not survive the Babylonian destruction in the coming years. In the face of these world superpowers, little Judah appeared to be nothing more than an overnight stop in between the real centers of world attention. In the years to come when the Jews would be taken into captivity (many of whom went to Babylon), it would be easy to look at the power, the impressive size, strength, wealth and fabulous cities of the Babylonians and conclude that this is where the real power lies. Yet God says, "it is like grass." "It is like a flower in the field." It won't last. Don't put your hope in that which will not last.

Most of us do not face an enemy in the form of empires, armies and governments. But some of you face a manager at work who, it seems is determined to make life so miserable for you that you will quit. At this moment, that person is so intimidating and domineering that he/she occupies, it seems, your every thought. Some of you feel that you are at the mercy of a group of kids at school. Their threats, taunts, rumors make your day miserable. You feel trapped by their whims. In those moments it is so easy to forget who these people really are. They are grass. They are flowers of the field. They will be gone, like in a moment. Do not fear them. Neither put your trust in yourself. We are all like grass.

So, here is the maxim. Here is the truth. It seems paradoxical, but it really is true. If we declare that we are permanent, then we are really nothing. Like chaff, like grass, like a lowly field flower, He blows upon us and we are gone; dried up, withered, uprooted – gone. However, if we acknowledge that God is, that is God permanent, and we bow before him, he breathes his permanence in us. It is God who gives life – forever to us. And this life is so certain, and so beautiful and forever, that it is worth running up onto the top of the highest mountain and shouting it to all who can hear.

4. **And he will make all things new.** (9-11)

In the next several chapters we will hear these words many times. “fear not.” Do not fear because God has come. Behold, your God! Look, it’s God! But, this is not God as we have made him to be. This is God as He is. Isaiah said, “He comes!” It was a cry of anticipation. We say, “He has come and is returning.” It is a cry of accomplishment and anticipation.

These last two verses just about wipe me out. (10-11) Verse 10 speaks of the arms of the Lord. He is mighty. He is mighty to save. He is mighty to rule. He is mighty to be victorious. He is mighty to accomplish his plan. He is mighty to guarantee and deliver his reward for those who trust him. But, this is not the might of a coarse brute, whose brain is like the mush of a protein shake. No, this is the One whose omnipotence is used for the care and the protection of his lambs. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms. He spots the lonely, the hurting, the needy, the vulnerable, and the broken. These are the ones that he goes to and picks up. These are the ones that he carries because he cares and the fact that he cares puts his might into the action of caring. He not only carries them, he carries them in his bosom. And those who are trying to care for young ones? Those who themselves are vulnerable and trying to protect the ones under their care who are vulnerable? He gently leads those. He knows you. He sees you. He meets you. He comes to you.

So, when Isaiah says, “Behold your God!” He is saying – that is your God. He is not like any other god. This is who the true God is. He is the ultimate shepherd and the ultimate lamb.

The question is – do you trust him?