

Sermon Series: *Christmas*

Expectant Waiting for a Glorious Revelation

Isaiah 40

I have two goals in the sermon this morning. First, I want to bring you comfort and second, I want to help you prepare for Christmas. It might be easy to see the need to prepare for Christmas, but you might ask, “Why do we need to be comforted?”

Why Do We Need to Be Comforted?

This time of the year tends to deliver a mixed bag of emotions—for some people Christmastime is a wonderfully warm and delightful season filled with joy and generosity, while for others it simply reveals the iron-like tendrils of greed that grip the human heart which is whipped into a frenzy by unparalleled annual commercialism and consumerism.

For some people this is the one time of the year that brings the warmth and pleasantness of extended time with family. For others who have no family, cannot be near family, or who are estranged from family, Christmastime can be one of the loneliest times of the whole year.

The current economic situation can add to an emotional sense of instability. The world economic situation makes it hard to have a hopeful outlook for the future when you consider that multiple nations stand on the brink of bankruptcy. It is almost breathtaking to ponder the fact that nations, not small businesses or large corporations, but entire countries are a breath away from financial insolvency. And in the interconnected global-financial community in which we live, it is nearly impossible for the failure of one nation to have NO effect upon our economy.

So it's hard to be generous during these days and yet we know there is great satisfaction in being generous. Jesus spoke the truth when He said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). However, consider the emotions experienced when you arrive at this time of the year and you find within you the desire to be generous but the financial inability to fulfill that desire. What emotions do you experience when you arrive at the end of the year and you still have not found a job?

This is also the time of the year in which we may tend to be a bit more reflective than usual on the course of our lives. What emotions are experienced when we take a look at our lives, at who we truly are, and discover that we do not see the kind of personal growth that we wanted to see? How do you feel when you fail to see the kind of spiritual, emotional, personal, relational, or mental growth that you expected to see? Unmet expectations may be the single greatest contributor to the increase in the rate of depression that occurs at this time of the year.

For these reasons, and many more that could be listed, I believe we stand in need of receiving some comfort this morning.

Preparing For Christmas

We also find ourselves standing one week before Christmas. Next Sunday is Christmas Day! How can we prepare ourselves to truly enjoy these next seven days leading up to Christmas Day? How can we prepare our hearts to experience all that Christmas represents even if there are no presents under the tree?

How can we experience the joy of the true meaning of Christmas even if we have no job (or don't enjoy the one we do have), no family (or don't enjoy the family we do have), no friends (or don't enjoy the ones we do have), or no spiritual growth (or at least we haven't experienced the maturity we had expected to see by now)? How do we do those things? How do we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christmas?

The words of Isaiah 40 can help us. This chapter is intended to both **comfort** and **prepare**.

Comfort

Look at the words that open this chapter.

Isaiah 40:1-2 (ESV)

1 *Comfort, comfort my people, says the your God.*

2 *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...*

God desires His people to experience **comfort**. The word is repeated twice to communicate emphasis. The word is "twice repeated to give double assurance."¹ God emphatically desires comfort to come to His people. God wants **tender** words spoken to His people. This chapter carries a message of comfort and tenderness to the people of God.

You will recall that this word was spoken to Israel during the time of their exile in Babylon which occurred just over 700 years before the time of Christ. Israel had been sent into exile because of their own sin and yet, even during this hard and difficult time (which came about because of their own rebellion and sin) God still desired to give His children comfort.²

Comfort Comes Through Words

So how was this comfort to come to God's people and what was the content of that comfort? The comfort was to come through **words**. God wanted His people to be spoken to. He wanted them to hear certain words. Words were to bring them comfort.

God told Isaiah to comfort His people by **speaking tenderly** to them. God wanted His people to know something and Isaiah was speak tenderly to them the words of God. What was Isaiah to say? There are several things.

Comfort In the Permanence of God's Word

First, God wanted His people to be comforted by the permanence of His word. God's word will stand forever. **His word is eternal**.

¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Is 40:1.

² The word is repeated 13 times in chapters 40-66. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), Is 40:1-2.

Isaiah 40:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ 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.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the Lord blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

God said,
"Speak!" And
Isaiah said,
"Speak what?"

True comfort is only found in things that stand forever. There is no true comfort to be had in things that do not last. Lasting comfort cannot be found in temporal human flesh. **All flesh is like grass.**³ Our flesh will not last. We will all die whether we want to or not. This life will come to an end at some point whether early or late.

Christopher Hitchens died Friday at age 62. He was an ardent atheist and apparently, maintained opposition to and disbelief in God to the end.

We cannot put our trust in our flesh. There is no comfort to be had in the constancy of human flesh for it, like a flower, will wither and fade. The beauty of human flesh is like a flower that is here today and gone tomorrow. There is no lasting comfort in that. To seek a quality in a thing which that thing does not possess, is a fool's errand.

However, true and lasting comfort can be found in that which does last and will never fade. The **word of God will stand forever**. The power of His word will never fade and the presence of His word will never be removed. This is great comfort for God's people, for though we may be removed from our lands or our homes or our jobs or our families or our friends, God's word will never be removed.

The Bible is filled with lots of promises. How do we know they will come true? If we are God's children through faith in Jesus, then we can have great confidence that all the promises of God will come true for us. Jesus secured for us every word of promise that God ever gave.

2 Cor 1:20-22 (ESV)

²⁰ "For all the promises of God find their 'Yes' in him [Jesus]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory. ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

One of those wonderful promises Jesus made was just before He ascended into heaven. He said, "Go make disciples of all nations... and I will be with you to the very end" (Mt 28:20).

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but the words of God (i.e. "my words," said Jesus) will never pass away" (Mt 24:34).

God's word is eternal. These are incredibly comforting words.

³ See 1 Peter 1:24-25; Job 14:2; Ps 102:11; 103:15; Jam 1:10.

Comfort In the Greatness of God's Power

Second, God wants us to be comforted by being made aware of the greatness of His power. His greatness is good news and is to be shouted loudly from the mountain tops.

Isaiah 40:9 (ESV)

*9 Go on 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!"*

What are we to behold about our God? What is it that God wants us to see?

Isaiah 40:10 (ESV)

*10 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 is powerful & mighty. He rules with a strong arm. And for those who rejoice in Him, those who delight in Him, He comes with a reward.

*11 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*

This verse is wonderfully comforting. God will tend (care for, watch over, defend & protect) His people like a shepherd; gather in His arms, carry in bosom, near, him, being gently led, not harshly.

His greatness is immeasurable because He is greater than we can imagine and more expansive than we could dream of.

Isaiah 40:12 (ESV)

*12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?*

If were to think of God as we think of a man, He could contain all the waters of all the oceans of earth in the hollow of His hand. And He could measure the distance of the heavens in a span.



A span is the distance from the end of the thumb to the end of an extended middle finger. So the distance across this vast universe in which we live would be like the distance from His thumb to His middle finger. Consider for a moment that the universe contains hundreds of galaxies. The Milky Way,⁴ the

⁴ The image above is available from the European Southern Observatory at <http://www.eso.org/public/images/milkyway/>.

galaxy in which we live, is about 100,000 light years across. A light year is the distance light travels in a Julian year.⁵ Light travels at 186,000 miles per second. Traveling at that speed for a year would take you about 6 trillion miles. The Milky Way is a 100,000 light years across (or 600,000 trillion miles). And the Milky Way is one galaxy among many in a vast universe, a universe that figuratively fit in the palm of God's hand.

And yet this mighty God is to His children, like a gentle shepherd who carries His sheep. He is immensely vast, but imminently personal. In light of His greatness, can we not take comfort that He quite capable of dealing with all our problems, and even the problems of the world?

His greatness is incomparable. God is absolutely unique. He is unparalleled in His power and glory. There is no one or no other god like Him. He is incomparable.

Isaiah 40:25 (ESV)

*25 To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*

God has no comparison. There is no thing or person with which He can be compared. He stands in a category all by Himself.

What's the opposite of hot? Cold.

What's the opposite of up? Down.

What's the opposite of good? Evil.

What's the opposite of God? Satan??? No. God has no opposite. He is the only uncreated One. All other matter in the universe owes its existence to Him.



Isaiah 40:26 (ESV)

*26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name,
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.*

Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look at the stars. Who created these stars? Just as we did not create ourselves, neither did the stars create themselves. We were both created by God. He created the wonderful, beautiful, mysterious, powerful stars and He created each human being. We are not the result of the a cosmic accident and neither are the stars. We are both the specific handy work of a intentional God who personally created all that exists.

There are at least 200 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy alone. The Andromeda galaxy is reported to have one trillion stars.⁶ And God knows every star by name (I can barely remember the names of my three children!) Because of His strong power they remain in existence! **And yet this mighty shepherd-God also has counted the hairs on your head** (Mt 10:30).

⁵ Not a Gregorian year. A Julian year is 365.25 days.

⁶ Source <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn9282-andromeda-galaxy-hosts-a-trillion-stars.html> accessed 17 December 2011.

So do not be tempted to think that such a great, mighty, and incomparable God is unaware that you are lonely, or out of money, or out of a job, or struggling with sin, or struggling in some relationship, or struggling in your marriage, or unable to imagine that such a God would ever accept you. Because He is so great, He knows every detail of your life. Do not think that even the smallest details of your life could ever be hidden from His loving shepherding eyes!

Isaiah 40:27 (ESV)

27 *Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?*

Do you ever feel this way? Do you ever feel like God does not see your life? For certainly if He did would He not fix this mess? Do you ever feel like your rights are disregarded by Him? Do you ever feel like He does not care about you? Do you ever feel that you are too small for God to even concern Himself with you? Are you ever tempted to think, “He’s so busy running the universe and all, why would He care about my small troubles? Why would such a big God ever care for such a small worm as myself? He has much more important things to tend to than my petty problems.” These kind of thoughts are not based upon the truth of Scripture.

Isaiah 40:28 (ESV)

28 *Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.*

The Everlasting God cannot be wearied by the numerous request of all His children? The Everlasting God is not harried by the multiple requests of His children? His knowledge is unsearchable. His understanding is unlimited.

Do not think, “Because He is so great and mighty, He does not have time for me.” It is because he **is** so great and mighty that He **does** have time for you! Do not think, “His mind is so great and mighty that my small issues do not deserve His attention.” It is because His mind **is** so great and mighty that it is impossible that **any** small issue could ever escape His attention! Do not belittle His greatness with such false humility.

God is so great and mighty that it is impossible for Him to be unaware of your problems. So don’t think you’re doing God a favor by not bothering to bring up your troubles to Him. He already knows your troubles. Don’t you know? Have you not heard? His understanding is unsearchable! There is nothing that He does not know! So go to Him. Go to the loving Shepherd-King who gently tends His little lambs. Ask Him and He will carry you!

Isaiah 40:29-30 (ESV)

29 *He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;*

Are you weak and in need of power? Is your strength spent? Are you weary? Is your soul so tired of fighting and striving? Then trust in Him completely! Cast your soul upon Him and rest in Him! Cry out to Him and tell Him all of your problems.

Prayer is not a means by which God is educated on issues and problems about which He did not previously know! Prayer an exercise of the soul by which we through faith transfer burdens from off our backs and into His hands. And in return for entrusting our burdens into His hand, He fills our souls with life and strength to keep on walking and keep on waiting for Him.

Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)

*31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.*

Waiting is one of the most difficult things to do. OK. We have heard this morning that God is great and mighty in power. That is deeply comforting. It is wonderfully comforting to know that God has the power to eliminate all my problems. The trouble is that He never seems to do so at the time I think He should.

And so there is much of the Christian life that is spent waiting for God to do what we know He could do in the blink of an eye! Why OH Lord must we wait so long for you to act? I do not know the answer to that question. But while we wait we should prepare.

Preparation

Isaiah 40:3 (ESV)

*3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*

These are the words John the Baptist applied to himself in explaining his calling and ministry. John was sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of God. In order for God to be welcomed when He comes, the hearts of people must be prepared to receive Him. Preparation is necessary for His reception to be joyful.

You might ask, "The reception of what?" For what should they be preparing to receive?

Isaiah 40:5 (ESV)

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

The **glory of the LORD** was to be revealed. And it would be a revelation that **all flesh** would see. This revelation would be for the whole planet. This glory would be seen, not by Israel alone, but by the whole world. All tribes, and nations, and peoples are included in this wonderful revelation of glory.

God had long ago promised Israel a Savior. And Israel had been waiting and waiting and waiting. I wonder how many of the people of Israel said to the Lord, "How long must we wait for you to send the Savior? How long must we wait for you to rescue us by sending the Redeemer? How long oh

Lord, how long? Luke tells us of one such Israelite who came 700 years after Isaiah wrote those words. His name was Simeon.

Luke 2:25-30 (ESV)

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. **27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation

31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.

Simeon had been waiting his whole life to see the glorious revelation of God's great salvation. And the Lord granted the fulfillment of that expectant waiting when Simeon held baby Jesus in his arms. Seeing Jesus was seeing the glorious salvation that God had prepared for all peoples.

After seeing Jesus, Simeon said, "Now your servant can depart in peace." Simeon could depart in peace simply at seeing Jesus and yet Jesus had done nothing. He had healed no one who was sick, had not yet opened the eyes of anyone who was blind, had not opened the ears of anyone who was deaf, He had cast out no demons, and had raised no one from the dead! Jesus had not yet done anything and yet Simeon could depart in peace. There was yet much to be fulfilled yet Simeon was content with what he could see even though there was yet much more to be seen. Simeon had seen a glorious revelation, but there was yet much more glory to be revealed.

There are many things for which we continue to wait. There are many requests that God apparently does not answer the way we would like Him to. However, there is one request that God will always answer, "Let me see your glorious salvation. Let me see the glory of Jesus. Let me understand rightly who Jesus is. Father, God let my eyes behold your salvation. Let your servant depart in peace."

Seeing Jesus rightly is the most glorious revelation God will ever work in your life. The Bible repeatedly pronounces blessings upon those who wait upon the Lord. The most wonderful blessing comes to those who are content in seeing Jesus as Savior and Lord while not seeing the fulfillment of many other expectations. The glory of Jesus is the Hope of Israel and Jesus is our salvation.

May the comfort of the Lord Jesus Christ be yours this Christmas and may the glory of the Lord fill your hearts.