

Comfort for Our Crisis:

Who Is God?

Isaiah 40

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Text Introduction: With the exception of a few Sundays here and there for special emphases, we are going to be in the book of Isaiah from now until the end of the year. We are considering this book from the general theme of “Crisis,” because it is a prophetic message from a time of crisis in Isaiah’s day, focused on the nation of Israel and more precisely, Judah. To this point, we have examined the *Confrontation that Comes from Crisis*. That’s the tough part. But, that is only part of the story. Beginning today, we want to begin to see in Isaiah the *Comfort for Our Crisis*.

Isaiah was the messenger of God during a part of ancient Israel’s history that is filled with crisis. Isaiah would prophesy the coming judgment of God on Israel (really Judah). But, as is so common in God’s Word, this message of God’s judgment was always tempered with the message of God’s grace.

Our text today is at the point of a major transition in the compilation of Isaiah’s messages. For simple purposes, we can say that the passages of God’s judgment and warning are contained in chapters 1-39, and the passages of God’s grace or comfort are contained in chapters 40-66.

So, here we are at the beginning of that “Comfort Section” today, and we see the first words “Comfort, comfort.”

Text: “Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.

²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the whole earth.
He never becomes faint or weary;
there is no limit to his understanding.
²⁹ He gives strength to the faint
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Youths may become faint and weary,
and young men stumble and fall,
³¹ but those who trust in the LORD
will renew their strength;
they will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not become weary,
they will walk and not faint.

Introduction: We all have life defining moments, I think. Moments that are so vivid that you can visualize every detail as though it was yesterday. I have many moments that define my life as a pastor. I

want to tell you about two of those today. Both happened many years ago before coming to be your pastor. They both have to do with grieving families and my pastoral role to offer some means of comfort and my absolute failure to do so.

One night I was called to the home of a family. Their 19 year old son had died unexpectedly and tragically. Grief was unbearable in those early moments. I was greeted by extended family members and ushered to the room where the mother was. She looked up and said, "I'm so glad you are here. You will have the right thing to say to make all of this make sense." I didn't then, and I don't now.

On another occasion I was called to the hospital. A young couple had lost their child. The Mom was 9 months pregnant. The baby had died during delivery. To make matters even more unbearable, about 2 years earlier, under different medical circumstances, the same family had lost another child at birth. I entered that hospital room. I said that I wanted to pray with them and for them. The grieving father said in his emotion, but without hesitation, "You have been praying for us for 9 months, and look where it's gotten us." A Pastoral defining moment! And, I don't have any better response today than I had those 21 years ago.

So, Where do we find comfort for our crises of life?

I will tell you where we don't find our comfort. We don't find comfort in our ability to sort through the mysteries, hardships, and unexplainable things of life. We don't find our comfort in the human words of a pastor, especially this pastor. So, where do we find our comfort?

I am comforted in the faith that God is God!

For 39 chapters, we read of the judgment of God. But, then, "Comfort, comfort my people." And notice, the "my." Immediately we are pointed toward the relationship—the close personal relationship. And then what follows is a list of reasons as to why we find our comfort in God.

- The Compassion of God (1-2)

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

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."

Paul described Him as the God of all Comfort in 2 Corinthians 1. Further, Paul said,
He comforts us in all our affliction."

- The Consummate Plan in Christ (3-5)

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.

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.

What or who does this remind you of? This is the exact language that the Gospel writers used in pointing to John the Baptist who would point people to Jesus. The point here is that crisis points us to the consummate plan of God that finds its fulfillment in Christ. The brokenness of this world always finds its hope in Jesus. And, the world stays broken without Jesus.

- The Continuing Reign of God (6-10)

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.

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."

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!"

¹⁰ See, the Lord GOD comes with strength,
and his power establishes his rule.
His wages are with him,
and his reward accompanies him.

The Word of God and the ways of God remain forever.

- The Care of God (11)

¹¹ He protects his flock like a shepherd;
he gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them in the fold of his garment.
He gently leads those that are nursing.

- The Incomparability of God (12-29)

Through a series of rhetorical questions, reminiscent of the ending of Job, Isaiah pointed toward the incomparability of God.

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

¹³ Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,
or who gave him counsel?

¹⁴ Who did he consult?
Who gave him understanding
and taught him the paths of justice?
Who taught him knowledge
and showed him the way of understanding?

¹⁵ Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are considered as a speck of dust on the scales;
he lifts up the islands like fine dust.

¹⁶ Lebanon's cedars are not enough for fuel,
or its animals enough for a burnt offering.

¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him;
they are considered by him
as empty nothingness.

¹⁸ With whom will you compare God?
What likeness will you set up for comparison with him?

¹⁹ An idol?—something that a smelter casts
and a metalworker plates with gold
and makes silver chains for?

²⁰ A poor person contributes wood for a pedestal
that will not rot.
He looks for a skilled craftsman
to set up an idol that will not fall over.

²¹ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you
from the beginning?
Have you not considered
the foundations of the earth?

²² God is enthroned above the circle of the earth;
its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like thin cloth
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He reduces princes to nothing
and makes judges of the earth like a wasteland.

²⁴ They are barely planted, barely sown,
their stem hardly takes root in the ground
when he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind carries them away like stubble.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me,
or who is my equal?” asks the Holy One.

²⁶ Look up and see!

Who created these?

He brings out the stars by number;
he calls all of them by name.

Because of his great power and strength,
not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Jacob, why do you say,

and, Israel, why do you assert:

“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my claim is ignored by my God”?

²⁸ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the whole earth.

He never becomes faint or weary;
there is no limit to his understanding.

²⁹ He gives strength to the faint
and strengthens the powerless.

As I share this list with you, I think about an old story of a preacher beginning his sermon with the introduction that he had been led to speak on the subject of God is Love. “But,” he said, “I determined that was too broad of a subject, so I begin to think about my subject being just God Is. However, after deciding that subject was still too broad, I have settled on the just the word is.”

There’s more to say here, but we can be comforted that God is God. He is on His throne. He is in control. There is nothing too difficult for Him. He rules! He reigns! He is the beginning and the end! He was, and He is, and He is forever. He existed in eternity past. He came, clothed in humanity, as Jesus, and He is coming again to make all that is wrong right!

Here is where we find our comfort!

I am comforted by the fact that I am not God!

Return to verses 6-9. People are grass. Consider verses 23-24. We are grasshoppers. Our rulers are nothing.

I am strangely comforted by the fact that I am not God. Sometimes at the end of the day, I don’t want to make one more decision. There is something strangely rewarding about not being in charge.

Discovering that “I am not God”—that is that I don’t have to have all the answers, because my knowledge is limited, that I don’t have to solve every problem, because my strength is weak, that I don’t have to do everything, because I can’t do some things—is strangely freeing. That is, if we stop trying to have all the answers, stop trying to solve every problem, stop trying to fix every person, and instead let God be God.

There is a whole ministry tool called “I am Second.” Maybe you have seen some of their videos. The idea is to take famous people who are Christians and let them tell their story by video. All of them end the same way—“I am second.”

Let me illustrate how freeing this is. I remember reading a story about a gentleman who owned a business. He worried all the time. He worried when things were bad, but he even worried when things were good. He worried about everything pertaining to his business. One day, he was tired of all of the worrying and he voiced this prayer to God, “God, I’m turning this business over to You. It’s Yours! You can do with it whatever you want.” That night, he was awakened in the middle of the night to the news that his business was on fire. He made his way down to the business to watch it burn to the ground. One of his employees who knew how much the man worried walked over to console his boss. The owner of that business was able to say, “It’s not my problem. You see, just today, I gave that business to God. It’s His! If He wants to burn it down, it’s no concern of mine.”

What a change in perspective!

So What?

³⁰ Youths may become faint and weary,
and young men stumble and fall,
³¹ but those who trust in the LORD
will renew their strength;
they will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not become weary,
they will walk and not faint.

When I come to understand that God is God and I am not, then and only then, I am in the position to trust Him completely and thrive!