

"COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE"
Isaiah 40

Intro: We now pass to the section of Isaiah which deals pre-eminently with redemption. It is composed of twenty-seven chapters, three sections of nine chapters each:

- 1) Chs. 40-48.
- 2) Chs. 49-57.
- 3) Chs. 58-66.

The first two sections close in a similar way. Cf. 48:22 and 57:20, 21.

In many respects, chapter 40 is really an introduction to all twenty-seven chapters.

Isaiah 53 stands at the center of the 27 chapters.

Isaiah's charge is given in the first two verses of chapter 40. He is called to comfort the people of Judah. The urgency of the message is indicated by the repetition of the word, comfort-- "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people . . ." The Hebrew verb means to cause them to breathe again. The commission came from God Himself. The gist of Isaiah's message is given in verse 2. He is to speak to their hearts (which is the meaning of "comfortably")--good instruction for all who minister the Word.

Obviously, Isaiah is projecting the people by his message beyond his own day, to the new heaven and the new earth, but included in these chapters we have both the first and second comings of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have the ministry of John the Baptist predicted in v. 3 as he heralded the first coming of Christ. All four of the Gospel writers quoted Isa. 40:3; Luke quoted Isa. 40:3-5. But even these verses go beyond what John saw, and beyond what our Lord accomplished at His first coming. But there is the prospect of what is going to take place.

So, when we read in verse 2 that Isaiah was to "cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins," he was speaking prophetically. "Double" means an abundance, enough. The heart of God is extended to His people as One Who has punished His people far more than He wanted to. Now He is going to speak of His love, His grace, and the redemption that He has planned for His people. Note how this thought is brought out in verses 9-11.

These are grand promises, and were sufficient to let the children of Judah breathe again, but they are not the main emphasis. How do the people of God find real comfort, the comfort of God? Let us notice how God commanded Isaiah to comfort His people,

and then take comfort from the same truths.

Over everything else, Isaiah was to comfort the people of God with . . .

I. THE WORD OF GOD.

Note these three expressions:

- 1) V. 1 -- "saith your God."
- 2) V. 5b -- "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."
- 3) V. 8b -- "but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

God wanted Isaiah to comfort Judah, but they were to be comforted, not with Isaiah's words, but with the Word of God!

Psa. 107:20 says, "He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." Psa. 119:49, 50, Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me."

Do we need to be reminded that the Word of God is the Word of God, and not the word of men? When we need comfort, when we need encouragement, when we need peace, GO TO THE WORD OF GOD. One word from God is worth more than a thousand from anyone else!

Now everything else in the chapter issues from the Word, and so do not take these next three points as being anything distinct from the Word.

II. THE PROMISES OF GOD.

The only place these can be found are in the Word.

Verse 2 contains promises. Verse 4 has promises, followed by verse 5. And verses 10 and 11 are full of promises. They speak of future realities, but they have present comfort for the child of God.

But then think of how many promises there are throughout the Word of God. Remember what a promise is, and Who made these promises. Reflect, too, on the fact that God has never broken a promise. He has never found that a promise He made was greater than He could fulfill. Oh, what comfort is to be found in the promises of God found in the Word of God!

But there is another source of comfort. Before we will look in the right place for comfort, we often need to learn what the wrong places are. There was one in particular that gave trouble to the people of Judah. Notice that this passage speaks of:

III. THE INFIRMITY OF MAN.

Cf. Isa. 40:6-8. This is God's view of man revealed in His Word. It is not man's view of himself.

A message like I brought last Sunday morning on the depravity of man is a message that would make a lot of people angry. They do not want to hear those things about themselves. They feel that they are better than that. They may recognize that they have needs, but they do not want to be told that they are hopeless. Listen to what you often hear preachers saying today. It is the same kind of stuff that you get in the world--that you can make it, that if you will only realize the potential you have you will be able to rise above all of your past difficulties and faults. We are constantly being told about the greatness of man. But you never read such things in the Bible! There you see man as he really is--like a fading flower, or a vapor that is here one minute and gone the next--corrupt, with all that goes with that!

It is a great comfort to a true child of God to hear what the Bible says about man. If you understand how this applies to all of us, then you will not look to people for your comfort, but to the Lord.

And this brings me to my main point--the chief source of comfort in the Word:

IV. "BEHOLD YOUR GOD" (Isa. 40:9b).

And this is what the rest of the chapter is really concerned with--but it does not stop with chapter 40! If you want comfort, if you want to breathe again, spend much time in meditating upon and learning about "your God"!

But Isaiah gives us some help, help which was given to him by God.

Here we are concerned with vv. 12-31. About all that I can do is summarize briefly. You go back over these and get the meat out of them.

- A. "Behold your God" in comparison with creation (v. 12).
- B. "Behold your God" in His wisdom (vv. 13, 14).
- C. "Behold your God" as compared with the nations (vv. 15-17).
- D. "Behold your God" as compared with idols--their glory as compared with God's glory (vv. 18-24).

What idol can do what God does, as described here?

- E. "Behold your God" in the functioning of the universe (vv. 25, 26).

How many of us passed over those verses in Col. 1 without really drawing comfort from them? I speak of verses 15-17. That is what Isaiah was writing about here.

In view of all of this, Isaiah then asked a heart-searching question in verse 27, and another one in verse 28, concluding with great words of comfort.

What shall we call this?

- F. "Behold your God" in the light of His glorious attributes (vv. 27-31), concluding with one of the most wonderful promises in the Word.

What wonderful comfort is here!

This section actually concludes with a number of promises having to do with the way the Lord strengthens His people--one of the choicest of all passages in the Word of God.

When we say that we cannot face all that we have to face, we are right! But when we see that our strength, our wisdom, and all that we need comes from God and is not found in ourselves.

It is probably true that Paul learned that lesson more than any other during his first imprisonment, because he was saying before he was released, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Concl: You know, it is fairly easy to listen to this chapter explained, or even to read it at home. It only takes a few minutes to read these 31 verses. But it takes time to learn these truths. It takes time to draw comfort from them. It calls for waiting upon the Lord--prayer, meditation, and more prayer, and more meditation.

God forbid that we should trust in ourselves. God forbid that our trust should be in others. People may be the instruments that God uses to meet our needs, but remember that the blessing, the strength, the supply of our needs, always comes from God--and He wants us to know that, and to look only to Him. That is when we really know the comfort of God.

Is it any wonder that there was urgency with God when He spoke to Isaiah saying, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people . . ."