

Isaiah Ch40v1-11

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[0 : 00] for complicated words. Isaiah 40, 1-11. Would somebody like to come and read that for us? Thank you, Louise.

Isaiah 40, 1-11. Thanks very much. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low.

The rough ground shall become level. The rugged place is a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed. And all people will see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

[1 : 21] A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry? All the people are like grass. And all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall. Because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

But the word of our God endures forever. You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout.

Lift it up. Do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God. See the sovereign Lord comes with power. And he rules with a mighty arm.

See his reward is with him. And his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms.

[2 : 22] And he carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young. Thanks so much, Louise.

Please keep your Bibles open there. As we turn a corner from Christmas time and think ahead, we're going to be looking at Isaiah 40.

It's perhaps a well-known chapter to some of you. And we're going to be looking at it over the next three Sundays as we think about the new year and what's ahead.

So I'm going to be speaking on verses 1 to 11. And then Sam next week is going to be speaking in the middle section. And then I'm going to finish off at the end, the week after that.

So that's where we're going. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word.

[3 : 32] Thank you that it speaks into our lives and into our circumstances. And thank you that we can trust that your word is true and that your word will do its work as you have promised.

So we pray that as we look at Isaiah 40 together over these next few weeks, you would speak its truth deep into our lives so that we may be prepared and ready for all that you may bring to us in our life in this coming year.

And it's for our good and for your glory that we pray this. Amen. Well, in a few days' time, it will be the start of a new year.

We're going to leave 2024 behind and we're going to march out into 2025. And of course, when it comes to a new year, if you're anything like me, we always set out with great hope that the new year is going to bring better days.

We're going to turn a corner and things are going to be different. We think that, yes, a year of less struggles, a year of better health, a year of new opportunities.

[5 : 09] Well, as we look at our text in Isaiah 40, God's people were looking into the future and their hopes, I'm sure, were for better days.

But it seems they're in for a rude awakening. Isaiah, God's prophet, is looking ahead to an event off in the future and he's telling the people that troubles lie ahead.

Look back in Isaiah 39 and verse 5. This is what he speaks to the nation through the king.

Isaiah 39 verse 5. Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah the king, Hear the word of the Lord Almighty. The time will surely come when everything in your palace and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day will be carried off to Babylon.

Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, who will be born to you will also be taken away and they will become eunuchs or servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.

[6 : 35] Babylon was the up-and-coming superpower of the time. And he's saying, they're going to come and they're going to destroy your city and they're going to take you from your homes and you're going to live in a foreign land.

Troubles lie ahead. And it's with these troubles in mind that God now speaks through Isaiah chapter 40 verse 1.

Comfort, comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. God will sustain you and help you.

He will strengthen you and he will keep you. He will be your comfort in all of your troubles. You see, as we step out into 2025, we're going to go through all kinds of trials and struggles.

For you it'll be different. For another it'll be something else. Yes, there will be good times, joyful times, but mingled in between the normal run of the day will be days of trouble.

[7 : 55] It's the world we live in. We cannot escape it. And yet God's message remains the same. I will comfort you.

How is this comfort going to come? Well, if I can get my notes sorted out, I'll tell you.

God promises to bring his comfort to his people through his word. God's word of comfort.

In verses 1 to 11, we hear four voices, each speaking a word of comfort. So look at verse 2. The word is, speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

Verse 3, another voice, a voice of one calling in the wilderness. And verse 6, a voice says, cry out. And then down at verse 9, you who bring good news.

[9 : 01] So there's four words, four voices of comfort that will help us see that as we face into troubles, whatever they may be, we will not do it alone because God will be your comfort.

He will be your steadfast helper. He will be your faithful father. Listen to his word. And I promise each and every one of you that you will know the comfort of God.

So let's listen to each of these voices and see the comfort that God has in store for us. The first one may catch us off our guard and surprise us.

The first is the comfort of sins forgiven. Look at verse 2. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for.

Isaiah is looking into the future and he knows that God's people will sin, that they will disobey God. But he wants them to know that when they sin, there's going to be forgiveness.

[10 : 26] Verse 2, end of verse 2. Her sin has been paid for. Now you and I need to know this.

Because as we enter into this new year, we'll make all kinds of promises of being better and doing better, that this is the time I'm going to turn over a leaf, I'm going to be a better husband, going to be a better father, I'm just going to be a better person.

I'm not going to mess up the way I normally do. But yes, we will fail and we will fall. We will sin in thought, word and deed.

And because of our selfish actions, we will get ourselves into all kinds of trouble. It's not that we set out to sin, but we will sin.

And when we do, we need to know that we have a God who will forgive you and that will comfort you.

[11 : 34] Now for some of us, we will find that we will sin in ways that we never thought possible. We will be horrified at our own actions.

Things that we pointed the finger at others of doing and condemned others and sat in our holier-than-thou look and go, I would never do that. And guess what?

We find ourselves doing those same things. And it can leave us in despair, overcome with a burden of guilt and shame and think, God could never forgive me.

How could I fall so low? But know this, look at the end of verse 2, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

I don't think that this means here that they've received a double punishment for all their wrongs. Rather, it speaks of double grace.

[12 : 38] In other words, God is saying, for all your sin, I have paid double. I have covered it twice.

You see, what has been promised then has become a reality even for us today. Just have a look at Isaiah 53 because this is what he speaks of a little later on.

Isaiah 53, verse 5. Here he is looking ahead and speaking of the Saviour to come, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53, verse 5. Hear this word of comfort. He was pierced from my transgressions.

He was crushed from my iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.

[13 : 49] Let's go back to chapter 40. You see, this is the word we need to hear. What peace as we step into 2020, 2025, that as we look out into the future, that whatever may happen, God has provided the means for the forgiveness of all of our sin.

hear God's word, the comfort of sins forgiven. But there's more comfort.

There's the comfort of coming glory. Look at verse 3. A voice of one calling. What does this voice say?

In the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. He's reminding the people that the Lord is coming.

And of course, that has been partially fulfilled. God has already come in the person of Jesus. That's what we celebrated on Wednesday just gone. Emmanuel God with us.

[15 : 05] But there's another coming that I think he's pointing to and that we can look forward to. The coming of God in all his glory. All people in all the nations in all the world will see his coming.

Look at verse 5. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people all the nations will see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

You see, when it speaks of the Lord coming in all his glory, it's speaking about his coming again to restore and to renew all things. He will come and bring about the new heavens and the new earth.

God God will come again, Isaiah speaks of this. Go to the very end of the book, Isaiah chapter 65. Isaiah 65.

65. And here we get a glimpse of the new creation, the glory that will be revealed.

[16 : 19] We'll pick it up in verse 17, Isaiah 65, verse 17. See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered. All those troubles, they will not come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create.

For I will create Jerusalem, that is God's people, to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

And the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. God's coming will be a display of his glory.

Every injustice will be put right. Every sickness will be healed. Every heartache will be over. Now, when we go through our hard and difficult days that are ahead, when suffering weighs us down, when trials cause us to doubt, we need the comforting word that the glory of God is coming.

[17 : 43] Life is not always going to be like this. Look at verse 4. every valley shall be raised up. Every mountain and hill made low.

The rough ground shall become level. The rugged places a plain. It's like the new motorway being built to ring a skiddy.

Every hindrance and obstacle is being removed to make a straight road. Where there's a dip, it's filled in. where there's an obstacle in the way, it's taken out.

Well, the first coming of God in Jesus Christ, if you like, with all that preparation work, all the obstacles and all the hindrances are removed as Jesus comes.

For sin is paid for through the cross. Death is defeated by the resurrection. A highway has now been cut through for the coming of God in all his glory.

[18 : 45] and when he comes, he will restore this disordered world and renew our broken lives. What joy as we step into 2025 that a day is coming when suffering and sorrows will be no more.

It'll all be over. Hear God's word. The comfort of coming glory. So the promise of sins forgiven, the promise of God coming in his glory, and then third, the comfort in enduring promises.

Look at verse 6. Here's the third voice. verse 6. A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry?

All people are like grass. All their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows in them.

Surely the people are grass. grass. The grass withers, the flowers fall, but the word of God endures forever.

[20 : 15] Do you see the contrast? our life is like a withering, dying flower, but the word of God endures forever.

You see, our lifetime is short. 2025 will bring us all closer to our demise. We don't live forever, but the promises of God's word remain.

You see, the one thing that we can count on in a world that is full of decay and trouble and death is God's word. His promises will not fade or fall.

God's word will never wither or die. God's promises will be our enduring comfort. The promises of sins forgiven.

The promises of God's coming. But there's more promises than that. Maybe there's one of these that you will link to. The promise of God's presence when our loved one is taken from us.

[21 : 26] The promise of God's grace when we are confronted with our own weakness. The promise of God's peace when we're overwhelmed with worry.

The promise of God's provision when we feel we can take no more. The promise of God's steadfast love and faithful commitment.

What comfort for his people. You see this is what we need as we receive news of a cancer diagnosis.

This is what we need when we discover our child is struggling in school. This is what we need as we care for an aging parent. This is what we need as our own physical bodies fade and fall.

That God's word endures. His promises remain. He will sustain you and he will keep you. Here is encouragement for us as we step into a new year.

[22 : 35] Hear God's word. The comfort in enduring promises. The fourth voice that brings comfort is the comfort we receive from gentle strength.

Verse nine. You who bring good news to Zion go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem lift up your voice and shout lift it up don't be afraid say to the towns of Judah tell the people of God here is your God but what is your God like?

What is the God that we trust in? Well God is both strong and gentle. Do you see in verse 10?

See the sovereign Lord comes with power. He rules with a mighty arm. And then look at verse 11.

He tends his flock like a shepherd and gathers the lambs in his arms. Now we don't usually put tenderness with power do we?

[24 : 05] Or gentleness with might. But yet God declares that I am both. He is strong and caring.

He is sovereign and loving. This is our comfort. You see God has no weakness or frailty. Let's read verse 10 again. See the sovereign Lord comes with power.

power. And he rules with a mighty arm. See his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. He never sleeps.

God never tires. He's never taken by surprise or he's not surprised at anything. He rules over all. He has authority over all. He is sovereign.

So no matter what happens in your life, no matter how big or great the trouble might be, no matter how hard or difficult or overwhelming the year may be, God is mighty and he is in control and he rules over everything.

[25 : 17] God is tender and gentle. Verse 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd.

He gathers the lambs in his arms. He carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young.

You see, God is filled with compassion. He's not going to break you or crush you. As Isaiah says in chapter 42, a bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

He is a shepherd who holds his lambs. People like you and I who are vulnerable and fearful in this world and he holds us close.

This is the God who will comfort us. Do you see what it says in verse 10? God rules with a mighty arm.

[26 : 30] And then in verse 11, God gathers his lambs in his arms. Arms of strength and arms of gentleness.

I'm always amazed at watching rugby players after the match. I think of Bundy Aki, that international rugby player.

You ever look at his arms? They're huge. He's got biceps the size of watermelons. And with all his power and with all his might he bashes and tackles the opposition.

But then after the match you see him walking around holding his young daughter in his arms. Tender, caring, gentle strength.

You see, when we're overwhelmed by the terrors of this world and the troubles that come, when we are struggling with our fears and our worries, we have a God who is both powerful and mighty, but tender and caring.

[27 : 52] What a blessing as we step out into 2025. Hear God's word, the comfort that comes from gentle strength.

You see, this year I trust will bring good times and joyful times. We will laugh together, but mingled through the months and the weeks will be days of trouble.

Some of us will go through hard times, some of us it won't be so bad, but yet whatever we go through, we are all going to need the comfort of our God.

He is for you and not against you. Do you see the second part of verse 10? see his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him.

The picture there is of a king who's conquered his enemy and as he returns in victory he shares the riches and the spoils with his people. He blesses them in abundance.

[29 : 12] Well our God is victorious in our troubles. He is never overcome and he will share of the rich resources that is his and he will pour out his comfort upon you every moment of every day.

How will we experience this comfort? Well have you got your little card? that puts together the theme of what we've looked at this morning.

Just pick it up there and have a look. You can take it home and pin it up somewhere or keep it somewhere and remind yourself throughout the year just that little phrase at the bottom the comfort of God will sustain the people of God as we listen to the word of God.

This new year be comforted that all your sins have been paid for. Be comforted by the fact that God is coming in glory.

Be comforted by His enduring promises and be comforted by His gentle strength. Comfort comfort my people says your God and my God Let's pray our Father God we do not pretend to know the future we dare not say what is going to happen or what's not going to happen other than the fact that we know that you have promised that as we walk this life there will be hardship but you have also promised that your comfort will be sufficient so Father help us to step out in faith to trust you that you will be our comfort in everything you will not forget us and you will not fail us help us to be those who listen to your word that we may experience your comfort daily

[32 : 12] Lord for those who are needing your comfort this day please pour that into their life be that gentle mighty shepherd hold them close and do not forget as you have promised in Jesus name we pray Amen so a helpful song to bring together our thoughts as we've looked at the beginning of Isaiah 40 when I fear my faith will fail Christ will hold me fast he is our comfort he is our strength let's stand together as we sing through the■

Thank you.