

The Comfort of the Creator

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 May 2022

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me back to Isaiah chapter 40? Again, that's page 561 in the Pew Bible. We're starting a new sermon series today that will take us through the rest of the summer. Now, if you've been at Trinity for a while, you typically know that on Sundays we pick a book of the Bible or a section of a book, and then we preach through it in order.

And we do this kind of preaching, expository preaching, because we believe that the Bible is God's Word. And when we listen deeply to Scripture, God speaks to accomplish all of His purposes in us and through us for His glory. Now, this summer we'll be looking at a section of Isaiah that starts in chapter 40 and ends in chapter 55. Historically, Isaiah wrote these chapters in the 8th century B.C., when the people of Judah had just seen their northern neighbors conquered by the Assyrians, and when they themselves had just received the warning that captivity was coming for them too. We see this at the end of Isaiah chapter 39 in verse 6. One day, not Assyria, but the kingdom of Babylon would come and carry them off into exile. The nation was conquered in that way. There typically was no coming back. That was the end.

So what message does God give to Isaiah to speak into the future for His conquered people? After judgment comes, after exile comes, when the people are defeated and humiliated, when they're weary under sin and suffering, what does God have to say?

Well, chapter 40 begins that message, and it begins by speaking to a people whose hearts are weary.

We'll find at the end of the chapter that the people have grown exhausted. They're despondent. They're tired. They're worn out. They're weary of their own sin, and they're weary of the suffering of the world. What will God say to His weary people?

[2:05] Perhaps you're feeling a bit weary this morning. Weary perhaps because of trials, or weary perhaps because of ongoing struggles with sin. Perhaps you've come with a desire for renewal, for fresh strength, for fresh wind in your spiritual sails. And maybe you sense this desire not just personally, but corporately. You know, every church will go through seasons when we need to be refreshed, when our weary souls need to be strengthened, when it feels like our arms are drooping and our strength is waning. Well, if that's what you're feeling this morning, then Isaiah 40 is for you. It's for us.

Now, chapter 40 has three parts, and we'll look at all three in order. But the main message of Isaiah 40 that pulls it all together is found right in verse 1 that we read earlier in the service.

To the weary in heart, God speaks good news, and it's a good news of what? It's a good news of comfort. And comfort here means more than just kind of soothing. Comfort in the Bible means strengthening.

It means building up. It means renewing. This is the kind of comfort that comes when the general returns from battle returns from battle and announces that the war has been won. This is the kind of comfort that comes when the parent returns from searching and announces that the lost child has come home. This is biblical comfort. It's strength. It's renewal for the weary soul. And like I said, this message of comfort comes in three parts. In verses 1 through 11, what we hear is a promise of comfort. And then in verses 12 through 26, we'll see the proof of that comfort. And then in verses 27 through 31, we'll take a look at the imparting, the imparting of that comfort. So let me pray, and then we'll take a look at these three things together. Pray with me as we come to God's Word.

Father, as we turn to your Word now, we ask humbly and expectantly, we ask that you would speak to us the word that we need to hear. God, on this send-off Sunday when many in our community are celebrating commencements of various kinds, we pray that you would revive us today by the Spirit of your Son, our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen. So first then, in verses 1 through 11, we hear the promise of comfort. We read these verses earlier in the service, so I won't read them all again, but look down with me at verses 1 through 11. Verses 1 and 2 announce this message of comfort. God here is recommissioning Isaiah to speak a fresh word to the people, and it's a twofold word. First, that their warfare, that their hardship, that their captivity is coming to an end, which would have been utterly unheard of in the ancient world. We're going to be brought back from exile? But second, and even more wonderfully, it's a message that their iniquity is pardoned. Because the question before the people of Israel wasn't just, will God deliver us from our political and material exile? It wasn't just, is God going to reestablish us back in our land much deeper? The question was whether God would atone for their sins. Would he cure the much deeper disease that separated them from their God in the first place?

[5 : 39] And verses 1 through 11 say, yes, God's comfort will come. Not just liberation, but also wonder of wonders, pardon for sin. From the Lord's hand, Isaiah says, that is out of God's own initiative, they would receive double, that is exactly what they need, and even more than enough to cover their sins and bring them home.

And then after this opening declaration of comfort, there are three voices that ring out in the rest of this section. Three promises of comfort to weary and despondent hearts, to hearts that are downtrodden in sin and suffering. These three voices come. And the first voice, if you look at verses 3 through 5, this first voice promises that the glory of God, that is the Lord's presence, is coming to your rescue.

And nothing will stand in God's way. Valleys will be lifted up, mountains made low, uneven ground will be made level, rough places will be made smooth as a plain. In other words, God will clear every obstacle and he will come. And all flesh, people from every nation will see it, not just observe it, but experience it. And then a second voice comes in verses 6 through 8. And this voice reminds us that we're fickle and we're frail. Even our best efforts, our greatest glory is like grass. It fades.

And if God's Spirit were to come, if the mighty wind of his presence were to move among us in our frailty, in our fickleness, what would be the result?

Surely we would turn back to dust. Ah, but here's the promise of the second voice. We are fickle, but God is faithful.

[7 : 41] God's word stands forever. He's faithful to all of his promises, even though we are not. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever, the second voice says.

And then the third voice comes in verses 9 through 11, and it comes with good news. A gospel of glad tidings, a word not just for Jerusalem, but for all the cities near and far. And what is this good news?

Good news that when the Lord comes in might, when he comes to fulfill his promises, his mighty ruling arm that we see in verse 10 will become his merciful carrying arm of verse 11.

Here is good news that the mighty God, the strong one, is also our shepherd. He will come in mercy.

He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. So friends, let this speak to your weary soul.

[8:54] Do you doubt if God is willing to come and comfort you today, to strengthen you? Do you doubt if God is willing to come and renew our church and breathe fresh life into us?

Listen to these voices from Isaiah. You know, our weary hearts will often say the circumstances are too hard or too challenging. The valley is too deep. The path is too rough. But listen, God says he's willing to move heaven and earth to come to us.

Our weary hearts will say, but our faithfulness is too frail. We don't deserve God's comfort. We're like flowers, beautiful one day, but barren the next. But listen, God is willing to be true, to be faithful, even when you are not.

His word will stand even if every word of yours falls to the ground. Our weary hearts say, but God must not care for us. We're like sheep who've gone astray.

But listen, God is willing to take his mighty arms and gather you up like a shepherd carrying a lamb. There can be no doubt that God is willing to comfort his weary people.

[10:07] That's the promise of verses 1 through 11. But this, of course, raises another question, doesn't it? Our weary hearts may hear that God is willing to comfort us, to come, to forgive, to restore, but then a second doubt starts to creep in.

Perhaps God is willing, but is he able? He may have the desire to comfort, but does he in fact have the power to do so?

We hear this promise of comfort, but what proof do we have that it will come true? What makes this more than just empty words? Well, this brings us to the second part of Isaiah 40.

In verses 1 through 11, we hear the promise of comfort, but then in verses 12 through 26, we hear the proof of this comfort. What is it that makes these promises of comfort more than just empty words?

Well, because these promises are not the idle chatter of a mere creature or the mute oracles of a false God. These are the promises of the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth.

[11:12] God steps forth and says here, I am the proof of my promises. Listen to these verses as I read them, Isaiah 40, 12 through 26.

God says, 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?

Who has measured the spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him counsel? Whom did he consult and whom made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice and taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding?

And of course, you get the implied answer there, right? No one. Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as the dust on the scales.

Behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations, there is nothing before him. They are accounted by him, or we might say they are accounted before him in comparison to him as less than nothing, an emptiness.

[12:20] To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness compare with him? An idol? A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.

He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot. He seeks out a craftsman, a skillful craftsman, to set up an idol that will not move. Do you not know?

Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.

He who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spread them like a tent to dwell in, who brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

To whom then will you compare me that I should be like him, says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these, 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.

[13:47] You know, perhaps one of the greatest dangers in the church today is that our view of God is much, much too small.

We say that we believe in God, we say that he created all things, but we don't really believe it. The majesty of God, the immensity of God, the incomparable holiness of God is lost on us.

We look to the idols of our age, success and personal freedom, or cultural approval, and they all look so desirable and so important.

They're so big in our eyes and in our hearts, and yet Isaiah says in verses 19 through 20, it's all just wood and metal. It can't speak, it can't move, and it surely can't save.

Let God be big, and those things be small. Consider the oceans, Isaiah says. Vast and powerful.

[14:55] Go stand on the shore of the ocean and feel how small you are before the waves and the deeps. But now consider all those oceans, all those deeps, wave upon wave.

Creatures we can't imagine, of size and power that seem unfathomable. God measures those waters in the hollow of his hand. Like you or I would scoop up a drop of water from the sink, so are all the oceans to God, the creator.

And now think of the nations, all the power and glory and culture. We could spend a whole lifetime traveling, discovering, and learning, and still not scratch the surface of all the diversity and wonder of human cultures and nations, couldn't we?

But compared to God, it's like dust on the scales. Isaiah isn't saying that God doesn't care for humanity.

God indeed does care. Isaiah's point, rather, is one of comparison. The nations are like dust compared to God. They don't even move the scales.

[16:09] They're weightless, fleeting, gone in a moment. But God, he is all substance, wisdom, permanence, power, beauty.

Is this the God you believe in, friend? Utterly beyond compare? Utterly holy? The maker of heaven and earth? Or do we worship a mere idol?

There's only one God and the Lord is his name. And if that is the God you say you believe in, then go out.

Go out on a dark, clear night, Isaiah says in verse 26. Go out on a dark, clear night and lift up your eyes. Look at the vast array of stars, millions upon millions and millions more that you will never see and never know.

Consider, Isaiah says, that your God has arranged them all. We could never count them, let alone catalog them, but God has called them all by name.

[17:21] Every star and every galaxy into the vast stretches of the universe, God has named them all. And in his might and in his power, not one is missing.

If your heart is weary, Isaiah says, if you doubt his ability, his power to save, go look at the stars. And then as you stand in awe, overwhelmed by their number and beauty, consider the God who made them all and who named them all has made you.

What are we to think in the face of God's transcendence and majesty? Are we to think that he is too great to care? No, Isaiah says.

Rather, we must understand that God is too great to fail. Not one is missing. And if that is true of the stars, friends, how much more true of you.

How much more true of his people he's called by name and chosen from before the foundation of the earth. You are not just the product. Friends, you and I, you and I are not just the product of dust and stars and time.

[18:58] You bear the very image of God. What good news! And though your sin has brought great ruin and great judgment, it has not thwarted God's willingness nor God's ability to save.

comfort. The one who promises comfort is himself the proof that those promises are sure.

And so, from promise to proof, Isaiah now brings it all home. In verses 27 through 31, we have the impartation of this comfort.

Look with me at verse 27. Let me read verses 27 through 31. 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.

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.

[20:10] His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youth shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted.

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. You can hear in verse 27, can't you, this cry of the weary heart.

This cry that says, God must not see me. God doesn't see me and God doesn't answer me. He must be unwilling or unable to truly comfort, to truly save. Perhaps we're beyond saving, beyond.

But no, God says, have you not known? Have you not heard? God is the eternal creator, all wise and unwearying.

The wonder of wonders, this eternal, all wise, all powerful creator gives. It is in his nature not just to be strong, but to give strength.

[21:25] Look again at verse 29. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might, he increases strength. God gives.

But how? How does it come to us? How does God give this strength to the weary? Well, from the perspective of the New Testament, we see this more clearly than Isaiah or the exiled people of Judah could ever have seen.

You know, when Matthew and Mark and Luke take up their pens to write the story of Jesus, where do they begin? Well, Matthew starts with a genealogy, you know, and Luke starts with an old priest in the temple, but for all three of them, when the story really gets going and John the Baptist appears on the scene as the herald of the great coming king, whose words do they quote?

What Old Testament promise is being fulfilled, do they say? It's this one, Isaiah 40. A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.

It's Isaiah's message of comfort that rings out when the Messiah comes. The redemptive ages turn, and the kingdom of God is finally at hand. And the New Testament writers say it's coming.

- [22 : 41] The Lord is here, comforting his people. When the sovereign creator takes on flesh and moves heaven and earth to comfort his people, the real return from exile can begin.

The real pardon for sins can be given. When the good shepherd takes us up into his arms and lays down his life for the sheep. When the double payment for sin is made, and when the stars go black as the Son of God hangs on a cross.

Imagine, friends, the holy one, the sinless one, becomes sin so that sinners can be reckoned sinless.

The creator becomes weak so the weak can become strong. God gives, which is to say he imparts this comfort, this strength by grace.

If God's word is the promise and God's majesty the proof, then it is by God's free grace that it comes to us. And if it comes to us by grace, then we receive it, not by being strong, but by acknowledging our weakness.

- [24 : 04] Look again at verse 29. God gives power. Who? Not to the strong, but to the faint. What about the strong? What about those who are in their prime?

Well, look again at verse 30. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted. Now, if you're like me and you're starting to get over the hill, you think, I wouldn't mind for a little bit of that young man's strength, you know?

Give me some more of that. And yet, Isaiah says, even the strength of the strongest will fail. Even the best earthly strength will not sustain you.

So how do we get this different kind of strength? Verse 31, They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

It's not in the working, but in the waiting, that renewal comes. Now, what does it mean to wait on the Lord? Well, that word wait here means to trust the Lord with patient expectation.

- [25 : 15] In other words, it means to put your hope in Him. You know, too often we put our hope in our own ability, our own strength, our own strategies, but real strength comes when we stop hoping in ourselves and transfer our hope to the Lord.

And too often we put our hope in new circumstances, a new relationship, a new job, maybe a new political leader, but none of these things will truly comfort or truly strengthen.

Real strength comes, real renewal comes, when we wait, when we hope, in the Lord. This is fundamentally what it means to become a Christian, to transfer our hope, to transfer your hope, hope for the forgiveness of sins, hope for eternal life, hope for purpose, hope for meaning, to transfer our hope to Jesus Christ alone.

And that's ultimately what it means to live as a Christian too, to hope in him alone. Is it weakness to hope in the Lord, to wait on him rather than in our own strength?

No, this is where true strength is found. Isaiah promises to all who will admit their weakness and wait on the Lord.

- [26 : 42] He says they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Friends, here is comfort indeed.

To know your sins are forgiven in Christ. To know of your adoption in God's family and heir of the coming kingdom. To know that it's secure. To know that everything in life will be for your ultimate good and God's ultimate glory.

Here is strength and comfort like nothing else. strength. And it's a fresh strength, Isaiah says. Your strength will be renewed, refreshed. And he says it's going to be a different kind of strength.

Isaiah says you're going to mount up with wings like eagles. It will be nothing like you've experienced before. But it will also be a divine strength. Isaiah says you won't be weary and you will not faint.

Which is what Isaiah said of God's own strength in verse 28. But notice something else in verse 31. Notice how Isaiah's metaphors here, they go from flying to running to walking.

[27 : 57] The movement of these metaphors is what? It's slowing down, isn't it? As we continue to live the Christian life, as we grow older, we may find ourselves slowing down from an earthly perspective.

we used to fly, we used to run, now we just walk. But notice though we may slow down, God's provision of strength is as strong as ever.

Even if you don't soar like an eagle anymore, you'll still run and not be weary. Even if you don't run like you used to, you will still walk and not be faint. And even when walking is no longer possible, and you lie down for perhaps the last time, and the Lord calls you home, even then his strength will be sufficient for you.

His power will be made perfect in your weakness. And even in death, friends, his comfort will be sufficient to uphold you through those waters and to usher you into the presence of your Savior forever.

The grass withers, the flowers fall, but the word of our God will stand forever. in the 16th century, in the heart of the Reformation, the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism began their great tool of instruction with this question.

[29 : 24] They said, what is your only comfort in life and in death? We don't start catechisms that way anymore. You know, if you put your kids in children's ministry, we're not going to say, what is your only comfort in life and in death?

We probably should, though, right? What is your only comfort in life and in death? And here was the answer they gave, that I'm not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation because I belong to him. Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Here is comfort indeed, friends. Not just a promise, not just proof, but a real imparting it to us through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[30 : 36] Lord, let's pray together. Father, as we pause now in these quiet moments, our prayer to you is simple and it's profound.

Lord, would you come and would you comfort us and give us strength? Lord, help us to mount up with wings like eagles.

Help us to run and not be weary. Help us to walk and not faint. Work in us by your Holy Spirit this preserving and empowering grace that we might live all of our days for you and the strength that you provide and that you would get much glory in us and through us, God.

May we say that in our weakness then we are strong because of you, Jesus. We pray in your name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.