God Comforts Like a Mother

5/13/2018
Y. Joe Kim

Isaiah 40:1-2

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. [2] Speak tenderly to
Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is
paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

1. My Colleague Passed

We had the memorial service for Russ Peck last Thursday. Our sanctuary was packed by the people. We were comforted by the many friends of Russ. Yesterday, there was another memorial service in Portland, Oregon. A friend of mine who planted a church there two years ago passed away of hemorrhagic septicemia last Sunday. He was 59 years old and had wife and two daughters.

The man was my roommate at a conference in New Jersey that I attended last April. He did so many things for his community like helping the homeless and helping those who need immigration help. One of his daughters came back from Africa after she served for two years as a Peace Corp's volunteer. She was going to share her many wonderful stories in Africa with her father, but he left his family before she was able to. In times like this, it is easy for a family to feel a sense of loss. Maybe even feel like God has forsaken them. Who can give them comfort in these moments in life?

2. Comfort My People

Isaiah 40:1 says, "***Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God***." Why does the prophet Isaiah say this? After King Solomon's reign, Israel was divided into two regions: Israel to the North and Judah to the South. The prophet Isaiah lived in the southern kingdom and watched as the northern kingdom fall to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Isaiah Chapter 1 through 39 talks about this event. From Chapter 40, the prophet Isaiah shifts focus 150 years into the future, when he predicts the falling of the southern kingdom of Judah to the Babylonians. This happened in 586 BC. In Chapter 40, the prophet Isaiah talks about the return of the exiles to their homes as if all these events had already happened.

The fall of both kingdoms was a blow to the Israelites. God allowed each of these events to happen so that God's people can learn the results of their disobedience. Many of the people were killed and the rest were taken to Babylon. The Jerusalem temple and cities were destroyed. The Israelites would not be able to return home from Babylon for about 70 years. In Isaiah 40:1, the prophet Isaiah proclaims God's forgiveness and comfort in advance.

And during the Babylon captivity the Israelites have felt that they had been abandoned by God. They have been waiting for their deliverance. Here the prophet Isaiah tells us that God is comforting His people.

3. God as a Comforting Mother

When you think of God, what image comes to your mind? Quite often we call God the father. The reason we use the word "the father" is to describe the most intimate relationship between the Creator and human beings. I don't know about you, but it is not easy for me to think of God as the father. My biological father was not the best father. When I was a child, I was afraid of him because he would punish me if I ever did something wrong. When I graduated from high school, one of the reasons I was happy was because I would finally leave home and not have to deal with the daily interactions with my dad.

My mother was quite different from my father. My mom was very affectionate and thoughtful. When we moved to the US, making phone calls was very expensive. When I called my mother in Korea she tried to hang up as soon as possible because she did not want me to spend money to talk with her. She was always caring and prayed for our family. She remembered all her grandchildren's birthdays. This is the type of love that the Bible tries to convey to us in seeing God as our parents.

I still remember attending my first chapel in seminary. A student at the time called God the Father and Mother in her opening prayer. I was so shocked. I would love to think of God like my mother but have never called God the mother. I still do not feel comfortable calling God the mother. But the love that God conveys to us encompasses the love that we experience from both our fathers and mothers.

Isaiah 49:15 says, "***Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you***." God tells the Israelites that it is not often that a mother forgets her child. And even if she were to do so, God never could. God loves us like a nursing mother loves her baby. God loves us more than father, more than mother, and more than anybody. I've heard someone suggest to imagine the person who loves us the most in life-male or female, friend or family and multiply it by a million. That is how God loves us.

Isaiah 66:13 also says, "***As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem***." The prophet Isaiah says that God's love is a "comforting love." God ensures Israel that they will be comforted not in Babylon, but in Jerusalem, the mother-city for the Israelites. For the Israelites, the city of Jerusalem would have reminded them of God's presence among them. Here, God assures His people that they are

not forgotten and promises their return to their hometown. As God promised that they would return to Jerusalem they returned in 539 BC. The people of Israel were happy when they heard they would be back home soon.

Their joy is found in Psalm 126:1-3. "***When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' 3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced***." This is a song of joy for restoration to Jerusalem. The wonder and joy of the reality were so marvelous that they hardly believed it. It seemed more like the dream with which they had so long been yearning.

4. The Return of the Three Detainees

Last Thursday, three Korean-American detainees were released from North Korea. They arrived at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The detainees are a Baptist missionary, a college professor and a worker in college. One of them was convicted of charges of espionage and sentenced to 10 years hard labor. He was in prison for about three years. I am sure that they have been waiting for the day of release. They were welcomed by the president and the vice president's families when they returned to the US. The detainees saw their return as nothing but a dream.

5. The Holy Spirit Comforter

Last week while I meditated on today's scripture, a thought came to my mind. The thought is about the role of the Holy Spirit. John 14:16 & 17 say, "***And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever.***" Counselor in Greek, the original language, is "paracletos." It means helper, comforter, mediator, and advocate. The Holy Spirit always stands by us, helping, comforting and advocating.

Romans 8:26 also says, "***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.***" Paul says that as Christians we are not left to be alone to cope with problems. Even when we don't know the right words to pray, the Holy Spirit helps us to pray and is there with us.

6. Conclusion

Everyone needs a word of comfort, help and encouragement. God comforts us through the love of our mothers and by the Holy Spirit. Our mothers show us and teach us how much God loves us and takes care of us.

Matthew 23:37 says, "***How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!***"

Jesus wants to protect us if we will just come to him. Many times, we hurt and don't know where to turn. We don't turn to Christ often enough because we do not believe he can give us what we need. But who knows our needs better than our Lord? Those who turn to Jesus will find that he helps and comforts us. Our mothers cannot always be there for us, but our Lord and the Holy Spirit is always with us and for us.

7. Application

There is a Jewish saying, "God could not be everywhere, so He made mothers." Thomas A. Edison's teacher sent him home with a note which said, "Your child is dumb. We can't do anything for him." His mother wrote back, "You do not understand my boy. I will teach him myself." She did, and we know the results.

Another Jewish proverb says, "A mother understands what a child does not say." When I got my first job after high school I became seriously ill. I could not understand why I was sick. One day my mother rode a train for hours and visited me. She brought me my favorite food rice cakes. She stayed with me for a few hours and went back home. After she left, I realized that all my pain disappeared. I experienced the power that mothers have to care for their children.

Mothers understand, are concerned, and are always interested in their children. But my mother and many of your mothers are not near us but with our Lord. How can we overcome many troubles in our life without them? 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God***."

When we feel overwhelmed, we need to let God take care of us. We also need to remember that the Holy Spirit is with us always and comforts us. I am sure that our mothers and our Lord want us to comfort those who are in trouble. As we celebrate Mother's Day today, we praise God for giving us our mothers and give thanks to the Lord that the Holy Spirit comforts us always. Amen.