

Where Do We Find Hope?

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“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 hand double Lord’s for all her sins. 3 A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” 6 A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. 9 Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah “Here is your God!” 10 See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep” (Isaiah 40:1-11).

1. Hope in the Book of Isaiah

Last Sunday, Ann preached on peace. The theme of the second Sunday of Advent is hope. Why do we talk about hope in Advent? It is because there are many people in the world who feel hopeless. The hope that we talk about isn’t a false hope but a true and lasting hope.

According to a report, the national rate for suicide in the US increased by 25.4% from 1999 to 2016. In 2017, the estimate was 1.4 million attempts and over 47,000 deaths, the tenth leading cause of death in the US. There are many reasons that someone might try to take their own life, but feeling a loss of hope can take away from the desire to live.

This morning, I would like to talk about hope found in Isaiah 40. The Book of Isaiah can be divided into two parts: 1) chapters 1-39 and 2) chapters 40-66. In the first half of the book of Isaiah (chapters 1-39), Isaiah points out the sins of the Israelites and God’s punishment to them. The second half of the book of Isaiah (40-66) makes a dramatic shift. Twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah are filled with God’s consolation and hope. Instead of warning people of the impending judgment, Isaiah talks

about God's comfort. Isaiah reminds the Israelites that they still have hope despite their pain and suffering.

2. Our Hope is in His Comfort

In Isaiah chapter 40 and the following, Isaiah reminds the people of Israel that God does not forget His people. ***“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2 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”*** (Isaiah 40:1-2).

At the time, the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon. They mourned quite often in Babylon. Many of the exiles raised questions; Does Israel have a future? Did God abandon His people? Would God give the people a second chance to go to Israel? As they wondered, God spoke to His people through Isaiah 40-55.

Here Isaiah proclaims God's forgiveness and the word of comfort to God's people. The word “comfort” appears 13 times in chapters 40-66. Like a comforting mother, God's comfort to the Israelites is shared by Isaiah. God's deliverance didn't happen right away, but the people were able to hope because they knew that God did not abandon them. They learned through Isaiah what God was going to do for them.

During our trip, I was reminded of God's hope by seeing the blessings our children have in their lives. We don't see how they are doing on a day to day basis. But during our time, we were able to see our children's workplace, school, and church. We also got the news that our son and daughter in law will have a son in May. They are excited for the baby and I was reminded of how excited we were when our children were born as well.

We can often wish that our lives be filled with only joy and happiness, but as we know, our lives can often have suffering and pain. This was the experience of the Israelites 2,600 years ago. But Isaiah tells the people and us that our suffering does not mean that God has abandoned us.

Isaiah reminds us that being comforted by God does not mean all of our problems go away. Rather, God gives us the strength and encouragement to hope as we deal with our challenges and that God cares about us and comforts us. In God's comfort, we find hope.

3. Our Hope is in His Preparation

Isaiah 40:3-5 says, ***“A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough***

places a plain. 5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah tells the people that the Lord is preparing to come to Babylon to deliver His people. The obstacles that the people faced would be removed and the people should prepare to see God's arrival. In the four gospels, John the Baptist uses these words to challenge the people to prepare for the coming Messiah.

Isaiah chapter 40 tells us God prepared the way to send the Messiah to deliver His people from exile. God says through Isaiah, "***Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert***" (43:19). God's message of deliverance may be hard to believe for people in exile, but Isaiah affirms that this will happen. God prepares the way for the Israelites and for us.

God says in Exodus 23:20, "***See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.***" God promises the Israelites that he would send an angel ahead of them to prepare the way. When Christine and I got started to plant a church in Virginia, I did not know what to do and was afraid of failure. But we learned that God already had prepared the way in many ways for us. God always prepares the way for each one of us. So we can have hope in His preparation.

4. Our Hope is in His Presence

Isaiah 40:5 says, "***Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.***" Isaiah says that the glorious one will appear and all of humanity will see him. This verse talks about the coming of the Messiah. God would come to be with His people. So the baby Jesus is called Immanuel which means "God with us".

Nothing happened for 70 years in Babylon before this message was proclaimed. It was very difficult for the Israelites to believe what Isaiah said would happen to them. In verses 6-8, a voice tells the people to contrast the difference between God and people. The difference is that people are temporary. People are like wild grass and flowers that come up in the springtime only to fade when the weather gets hot. By contrast, God never fails for His word endures forever. This fact would have greatly comforted and encouraged the people in exile who heard these words from Isaiah.

In verses 9-11, Isaiah says that there is the one who is passing on Isaiah's message taking good tidings to Jerusalem. The messenger is to tell loudly to the towns of Judah that God is coming (v. 9) to Jerusalem, restoring His people from exile. The message of Isaiah was not only for

those who were in exile, but also for those who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah in Jesus' time and for us who are waiting for the return of the Lord today.

5. Conclusion

As Christians, we believe that what Isaiah says in chapter 40 was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the one who came to be with us, to comfort us, and to save us from our sins and death. Isaiah 40:11 says, "**He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.**" Jesus is the good shepherd that even died to protect the sheep. So when we say that Jesus is our hope, we simply do not wish the shepherd to take care of us. If we have a wishful thinking about Jesus, we have a false hope about Jesus. But we do know as the good shepherd Jesus died for us and would do anything for us. So Jesus is our true hope.

Through our trip to San Francisco, I learned that our Lord as the good shepherd has been taking care of our children in many ways and blessed them. I trust in the Lord for the future of our children. I praise the Lord and give thanks to him.

Therefore,¹ Peter 3:15 says, "**Always be prepared for give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**" In the US, many people think that faith is a personal matter to be kept to oneself. However, Peter tells the early Christians and us to be ready always to give an answer when asked about our faith, our lifestyle, and our hope.

6. Application

Isaiah 40 tells us that our hope is in God's comfort, in His preparation, and in His presence. Do others see our hope in Christ? Are we ready to tell them about who Christ is and what Jesus has done in our lives?

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, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**"

Paul reminds the Corinthians that God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. Every trial we endure allows us to comfort others who experience the same or other difficult suffering. In our suffering, we find hope from the Lord and can share that hope with others. Thanks be to the Lord for sending Jesus to help us to find hope in any circumstances. Amen.