

- ***READ Isaiah 39:6-8*** These closing words of the first half of Isaiah's prophecy to God's people focus on the future captivity that will be endured by the descendants of Hezekiah. During his lifetime there would be peace, but after he has past on everything in his palace would be taken away to Babylon. The people of God would enter into a period of exile from their land and be forced to live under the rule of the Babylonians. Hezekiah isn't all that concerned since he would be long gone, but what about those who were coming after him who would actually experience this punishment of exile? How were they supposed to react to this tragic news of impending crisis?
- There is a stark change of tone that takes place between **chapters 39 & 40 of Isaiah**. Some want to use this change of tone as an evidence to prove that this second half of the book isn't legitimate. The goal is simply to create doubt in the validity of Scripture since this portion of the book being true would strongly show God's divine power of foresight. Instead, I attribute the change of tone to the fact that there is a change of perspective that has taken place.
- Whereas the first half of Isaiah is focused on warnings against rebellion and trusting in men for salvation from impending doom...the second half of Isaiah is focused on giving comfort to the people who are suffering for the sins of their forefathers in captivity. God foresees the continued rebellion of His people which will lead to punishment, and now He is shifting His attention to giving them comfort through knowing that their God has not forgotten them in their time of crisis.
- This message of God blessing His people with comfort during crisis is an enduring message that reaches us even today. Though we might not be captivity in this life, we are still like the people of God who would be in Babylon in the fact that we are surrounded by negative influences and situations that seek to cause our faiths to be diminished. This text of **Isaiah 40** reminds us that God does indeed seek to comfort His people when they are in times of crisis and we will seek to answer the question as to how He does such a thing. Let's look at these verses in their context and draw some applications to our own lives as Christians nearly 3,000 years later.

How does God comfort His people during their times of crisis? (Isaiah 40:1-17)

I. He comforts us through His forgiveness of our sin. (1,2)

- A. Sin, rebellion, pride, and a refusal to trust in God were the transgressions that eventually led God's people to be carried off into captivity, and this is true where we are talking about the tribes of Israel in the north or the tribes of Judah in the south. God had sent prophets to warn them of the punishments that would come upon them if they didn't change their ways, but these stubborn people refused to humble themselves before the Lord in repentance and a change of their ways. What's worse is that many of those who were actually guilty of transgressing God had died before they were even carried off into captivity. Therefore, there were no doubt a number of Jews who were only suffering the consequences of the sins of their forefathers.
- B. This would especially be true of those who belonged to the northern tribes of Israel. They had originally been conquered by the Assyrians in 722BC and enough time had passed that by the time Judah fell to the Babylonians around 600BC that those who were originally being punished for their sins were long gone. Now there remained those of Israel and those of Judah who were not guilty of the sins of their fathers, and here is the comfort that God seeks to give them in **Isaiah 40:1,2**, *"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her time of forced labor is over, her iniquity has been pardoned, and she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."*
- C. God saying this to those who would find themselves in captivity some 150 years in the future wouldn't have change their circumstances at that very moment, but it would hopefully give them comfort in knowing that if nothing else...at least they were not guilty of sins that were in need of being punished.

They were not in the same position as their fathers who brought this exile upon their own descendants through their ungodly behavior. They were crying out to God in humility for deliverance and this put them in a position to be freed from this exile based upon the assigned punishment before fulfilled. This leads us to the understanding that there is great value in recognizing that, even in a difficult situation, we can be comforted with the knowledge that we are able to stand before God forgiven of sins and righteous. These people were still in captivity, but at least they were not under the condemnation of sin. In knowing this, great comfort can be had even in the midst of crisis.

- D. This is something that we would do well to remember when we find ourselves embattled in real crisis within our lives. That crisis can come in many different forms from health issues, financial difficulties, family drama, cultural wars, and much more. The evil one would love for us to think during these times of crisis that all hope is lost and there is nothing positive to dwell upon. However, if we recognize that our sins have been forgiven and we stand justified in the sight of God, then what else truly matters? This doesn't mean that we shouldn't care about our health, families, finances, or what is going on in our world. But what it does mean is that we are able to lay down at the end of the day and be comforted by the fact that even if everything literally came crashing down and our lives ended in that moment...that we would actually be blessed by entering into eternal bliss with Jesus. This is Paul's encouragement to withstand the trials of this life knowing that those who have been forgiven will never be taken out of the loving hands and care of God. **(Romans 8:31-39)** What great comfort we gain when everything might seem like it is falling apart by simply knowing that our sins are forgiven and we rest in God's care!

II. He comforts us through His providential care. (3-5)

- A. Isaiah then goes on to write about the time when a voice would come crying out in the wilderness concerning the glory of the Lord appearing among men once again. The original readers of Isaiah would not have known who exactly this was referring to, but we know based upon our study of the New Testament Gospel accounts that this would be fulfilled through John the baptist as he sought to fulfill his calling of God by preparing the people of his day to receive Jesus as the promised Messiah of God.
- B. Again, we are able to see this as being the ultimate of what Isaiah is writing, but that original audience would have simply recognized this as being God providing the way for His people to return to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of His temple. They would have recognized these verses as being God's assurance to them that He would make sure that the proper things happened in order for this to actually take place. The fact that Isaiah concludes the thought with, *"for the mouth of the Lord has spoken"* **(40:5)** indicates that God is going to make sure that He does what is necessary for His plans to come to pass. He will providentially care for His people and His plan.
- C. During difficult times, those who trust in the Lord must allow their hearts to be comforted by knowing that God is working behind the scenes to make sure that His will is going to be accomplished in us, and this will must be recognized as our ability to remain faithful. Consider again what Paul says in **Romans 8**. *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."* **(Romans 8:28)** Can anyone explain to me exactly what that means God is going to do individually in each of our lives through His providential care? I don't believe we can pinpoint such things, but we can gain comfort by simply knowing that God is going to do things behind the scenes that will give us every opportunity to remain faithful and bring glory to His name. The Jews weren't sure what exactly this voice in the wilderness would look like or how he would prepare the way of the Lord, but they trusted that He would simply do what was necessary to accomplish His purposes in this way. We, too, must recognize God's desire for us to remain faithful and realize that even in times of crisis, God is going to care for us in ways beyond our comprehension and understanding.

III. He comforts us through His faithfulness to keep His promises. (6-11)

- A. Those reading these writings of Isaiah would surely be swelling with hope at the thought of the Lord restoring them as His people in their own land, but there might be some who are still questioning whether or not such things would actually come to pass. Isaiah's words in this section give assurance to those who are in the middle of crisis to be comforted by putting their confidence that anything that the Lord says will happen...will actually happen!
- B. One reason they might have been hesitant to put all of their confidence in God was because they had surely put their confidence in other people who had let them down, even their leaders! But Isaiah counteracts that lack of confidence by stressing that God is different than men in the fact that men are weak and temporary. ***"All humanity is grass, and all its goodness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, and the flowers fade when the breath of the Lord blows on them."*** (40:6,7) Men are like grass in the fact that it is easily destroyed, and they are like the flower in that they are only here temporarily. In fact, God might even bring their demise to pass!
- C. But with God and His word there is no weakness or temporary nature. No, God is all powerful to sustain Himself and His Word and there is nothing that is going to cause Him to fail to keep the promises that He has made. This is why Isaiah tells for Zion and Jerusalem to shout out the good news of God arriving on the scene to deliver His people. (40:9,10) If He says that he is going to protect and gently lead His people then that is exactly what He is going to do. (40:11)
- D. Those who originally received this message from Isaiah could look back in their history up to that point and see this as being true about God. Every promise He had made to Israel or the patriarchs had surely come to pass. Not a one of His promises had failed, and they had no reason to believe that God would begin to fail now. For us where we are, we can look to the entirety of Scripture and be even more impressed with God's continued faithfulness to fulfill every single promise that He has made to men. We can even look at what is said in this chapter concerning Israel's eventual deliverance from exile through Cyrus, John the baptist fulfilling the words of this chapter in preparing the way of the Lord, and Jesus fulfilling the promises of the Lord being our shepherd and be filled with overwhelming confidence that His promises of delivering us from crisis and sustaining us until the end will surely come to pass. Regardless of the crisis that we might be facing at the hands of the tempter, we can take comfort in remembering, ***"But the Lord is faithful; He will strengthen and guard you from the evil one."*** (II Thessalonians 3:3) What comfort in knowing that God's promises to us are guaranteed to come true!

IV. He comforts us through our knowledge of His unlimited power. (12-17)

- A. Finally, Isaiah offers up a few rhetorical questions in 40:12-14 for the purpose of emphasizing the overwhelming power of God to accomplish exactly what it is that He is promising that He will do for His people. Of course, the answers to the questions are no one, and then he goes on to describe the magnitude of who God is and what he is capable of doing. (40:15-17)
- B. The rest of the chapter proposes questions of who compares to God, answers that simply do not measure up, and then further evidences for God's power. ***"With whom will you compare God?... An idol...?...God is enthroned above the circle of the earth...he stretches out the heavens like thin cloth...He reduces princes to nothing."*** (40:18-22) The bottom line being stressed by Isaiah is that the people of Israel can take heart in knowing that the God who has made these promises to them is the God who created the world and does as He pleases. There is nothing that is outside of His control or power, and He will accomplish His will through this endless power.
- C. It might be easy for us to become discouraged by the completely lack of power that we often seem to have as we go through different types of crises in this life, but we can take comfort in knowing that the God we serve is incomparable when it comes to the power that He possesses.

D. We might not see anyway in which we can persevere through the crisis we are currently facing, but we must remember the words of Isaiah that the same God who sees entire nations as nothing before Him is the same God who has promised us incredible and magnificent promises. Paul recognized and admit such a thing in **II Timothy 4:16,17**, *"At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth."* Paul might have seen and we might see what God has done as being unbelievable, but from God's perspective it is nothing because of His unlimited power. Again, we might see the crisis as insurmountable, but God sees it as nothing, and He will comfort us through His power shining through in our lives as we overcome the crises that we face.

I'm sure there are people here this evening who currently find yourselves going through some sort of crisis, big or small, in your lives. If that is you, then I do hope that you have been encouraged this evening to know that the God you trust and serve is more than capable and willing to give you comfort through whatever your crisis might be just as He comforted Israel through the crisis of exile that so many of them were facing. If you will humble yourself before His might power and faithful promises, I am confident that He will, in His providence, care for you in whatever needs you might have to see it through. And if at the end of the day, the Lord sees the current crisis as being something that you need to endure, then the best thing we have going for ourselves as faithful people is the forgiveness of sins that gives us the hope of eternal glory with God. As we go throughout this week and weather the crises of this life, may the words of Isaiah bring us comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding. *"Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint."* (Isaiah 40:30,31)