

Message: God's Word and a Mighty Savior

Sermon Series: Isaiah 40

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The first two verses of our passage illustrate the contrast between God and us. I think of family and friends who have preceded me in death. We daily read the accounts of others who are like the beautiful flower of today that is gone tomorrow. The contrast between human flesh and the word of God is stark. That was true of the Israelites and their captors, the Babylonians.

God does not want us to live in perpetual fear, anxiety or depression about our mortality. God has offered us a plan. The Bible reveals that plan in a sweeping narrative. We find guidance, comfort and peace from the Scriptures. We have a message to share with the world. We want to proclaim the good news that our Savior comes to us in a mighty way. God is transcendent. Yet, God is near. God is like a good shepherd with strength to defeat the enemy and tenderness to protect His flock. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is both God and human at the same time. God has come to us in Jesus in both strength and humility. Jesus is both "the Lion of Judah" and the "Lamb of God."

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said he was "a man of one book" (the Bible). It was his authority and guide. When the Scripture is not our guide, we are our own authority. The written word points us to our need for a savior.

APPLICATION: We learn best in community with others. Asbury offers many Bible studies. We help one another. Pastors Dick Read and James Lambert are eager to help. Our pastors can connect you to places for spiritual growth. Biblical study and community have always been vitally important to Methodist people.

This letter was written by a German soldier on the eastern front in Russia during WW2: *We are entirely alone, without help from outside. Hitler has left us in the lurch. If the airfield is still in our possession, this letter may still get out. So this is what the end looks like. Hannes and I will not surrender; yesterday, after our infantry had retaken a position, I saw 4 men who had been taken prisoner by the Russians. No, we shall not go into captivity. When Stalingrad has fallen, you'll hear and read it. And then you'll know that I shall not come back. The Fuhrer made a firm promise to bail us out of here; they read it to us, and we believed in it firmly. Even now I still believe it, because I have to believe in something. If it is not true, what else could I believe in? I would no longer need spring, summer, or anything that gives pleasure. So, leave me my faith, dear Greta; all my life, at least eight*

years of it, I believed in the Fuhrer and his word. It is terrible how they doubt here, and shameful to listen to what they say without being able to reply, because they have the facts on their side.

The last German plane out of Stalingrad in January 1943 carried this and other letters. But the German high command intercepted them, to assess troop morale. These letters were never delivered.

On the other side of the battle line was a regime of equal brutality and betrayal, with its vast network of concentration camps. The Leninist program was epitomized by a sign at a Russian concentration camp: With an Iron Fist, We Will Lead Humanity to Happiness.

Isaiah 39 predicted BAD NEWS: Babylon will capture Judah and take their leaders into exile. This happened in 586 BC. The Babylonian army brutally overwhelmed Jerusalem. They sacked and burned the great City of David, with its glorious and magnificent Temple, but they led the leading families off to captivity in Babylon hundreds of miles away. It was called "The Exile." This was not how it was supposed to end. God told Abraham He would make it a mighty nation, blessing the whole world. But things fell apart. The people of God failed and were exiled. Now God's people are bitter, defeated and disillusioned. They believe God failed them.

Isaiah 40:6-11

A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Isaiah 40 predicts GOOD NEWS. God acts. He gives us **COMFORT** (v. 1 "*Comfort, comfort my people*")

We can relate to some of their feelings. We are part of the withering grass/fading flower routine. We see how far we have fallen & how broken the world is. It explains why cynicism & despair overwhelms us. The longer we live, the more persistently disappointment piles up that it can make hope look stupid. Why do we need comfort? Because we are disappointed by an assortment of withering/fading: aging (health), bullying, career, depression, economy, family, government, politics, & in people we trust.

In Isaiah 39 King Hezekiah heard Isaiah's prophecy that the generations following him will be taken into exile in Babylon, but he only thought of himself. He was a totally self-absorbed King who led poorly.

Not only are many of us are disappointed in others and in situations, but we are also very disappointed in ourselves. Our own limitations frustrate and overwhelm us. We also tend to do what happened in Judah –shift the fault & responsibility and blame God.

3 ways God Comforts us:

1.) He Reveals His **GLORY**. God's glory was revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai and Ezekiel saw God's glory like a supercharged war chariot, but God's glory is best revealed in **Jesus**. That's what the shepherds in Bethlehem saw: *"the glory of the Lord shone 'round about them."* The disciples saw the glory of Jesus at His transfiguration. Ironically, Jesus' glory was revealed when Judas left to betray Him and Jesus' glory was most revealed at the cross. That shows God's strength – He humbled Himself all the way to death. He is the Lord of Glory (1 Cor 2:8 *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*) Jesus is the ultimate display of the glory of God.

2.) He gives us His **WORD**. After telling us how bad things are (we're grass that withers and flowers that fade), the little word, "but" in verse 8 tells us about God's word. God's word is contrasted with us – God's word will stand forever. God gives us a promise. Our hope doesn't depend on us but on God.

3.) He gives us a **SAVIOR**. Verse 10 says He will come like a mighty lion but verse 11 says will also come like a gentle shepherd. He is not either/or but He is both/and – the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the great shepherd of the sheep.

We are to Comfort Others:

God gives us a **Mission** – proclamation. We have a message: tell people good news. We don't need to live in fear. God is mighty and strong. God rules. God is not only great and good, but God is near and dear. We are full of praise, not despair. Let's not spread the disease – let's spread good news.

The world rings with praise. Lovers praising their mistresses, writers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game. Praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical persons, ditches, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars. Just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that's magnificent? I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment (C.S. Lewis – Reflections on the Psalms) For our faith to be fully alive and engaged, we need to talk about it – to express it.

Our King comes to us wherever we are, even in the wilderness, deserts, valleys & isolated places of life. He creates new landscapes for us. He smooths things out. He is both a mighty, conquering king and a tender and lowly shepherd. This is Jesus. You can trust Him more than you can trust anyone else, including yourself. He has given us His Comforter, the Holy Spirit to help us help others follow Jesus.

Rev 21:22-25 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.