

Sermon Manuscript for “Get Comfort”



It's no secret we live in a time of great trouble.

Navigating this pandemic has affected every part of our lives.

Every new day seems to bring scary headlines and new uncomfortable restrictions.

It has forced many of us to seek comfort wherever we can.

Drugs, alcohol, food, social media, entertainment are all substances we are prone to use to find some comfort.

What things are you using, or even over-using, to find an escape, find comfort?

How is that working out for you?

Substance abuse during the pandemic has greatly increased for people seeking an escape.

Do those temporary things really work or do they just ultimately find you more anxious and troubled?

Our key passage today in Isaiah 40 shows us where God spoke through his messenger to bring comfort to the nation of Israel.

They were in a lot of trouble.

In fact, the nation of Israel had lost EVERYTHING.

Here's how it happened:

King Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon, a world power that was flexing its muscles throughout the region.

Israel was a vassal state - sending protection money so Babylon wouldn't destroy them.

Zedekiah, the young inexperienced king of Israel, had sworn allegiance to Babylon but then abruptly changed sides.

Instead, he backed a new ambitious Pharaoh in Egypt named Apries.

Babylon wasn't having any of that, so they promptly declared war on Israel.

Israel held out as long as they could, but they lost the war.

Jerusalem was looted and burned to the ground.

King Zedekiah's family were killed in front of him and he was blinded and sent away into slavery.

The high priests and tribal leaders were taken away and executed.

The brightest and best were taken back to Babylon to serve as slaves and vassals.

The only people left behind were the poor folks to tend the fields to send food back to Babylon as tribute.

What really topped it all off was that the prophets had foretold that this would happen.

God had warned Israel to change their ways and return to Him, but they had ignored the warnings.

So on top of losing everything, they felt like God was angry and had abandoned them.

So God is addressing Israel in the middle of their trouble and bringing them comfort.

Isaiah 40:1-2 Comfort, comfort my people says your God. 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.

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9-11 ... You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm... He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. 27-31 Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Even though Israel’s trouble was greatly due to them ignoring God and rebelling against his prophets and his will for them, God had not abandoned them.

He was still ready to comfort them and help them thrive even in the midst of exile.

They did not see the deliverance that they wanted in the way they wanted.

But in some ways they got something much better- God promised to comfort them and restore them with his very presence and power.

Earlier I mentioned that right now, a lot of us are trying to find comfort in substances or entertainment.

Here’s the problem with that: comfort can be found in many places but it doesn’t last.

Even worse, some places we go for comfort can harm us and enslave us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Some of us try to make deals with God to get comfort and a release; “If you fix this one thing I will believe. Settle this one wrong and I will trust you.”

The problem is, today has its troubles, but what about tomorrow?

We need something deeper, something more lasting.

I believe God offers us a comfort that is in spite of our trouble or our preferred outcome.

His comfort doesn’t run out or cost us a fortune or lead to destructive outcomes.

Sometimes when we need comfort, God does not remove us from the trouble but he comforts us in the midst of it.

And even better, the comfort that comes from God equips us to be a comfort to others.

We see this promise of powerful comfort in 2 Corinthians Chapter 1.

Paul writes; **3** *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. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ...*

8 *...We were under great pressure (as we ministered in Asia), far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But*

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this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. **10** He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us...

Like the children of Israel, Paul and his friends were facing destruction, and that was after they had done nothing wrong!

They were experiencing trouble and persecution for obediently preaching the Gospel.

Along with the prayers and support of the Corinthian believers, they received powerful comfort from Christ.

Paul testifies that the trouble they experienced taught them to rely more on God.

Then he makes this powerful, comfort promoting statement of faith:

Our trouble taught us to rely on God. God had delivered us before, and he will deliver us again.

God's comfort can heal us, encourage others around us, and give us great victory in the middle of a storm.

He's done it before and he will do it again.

What are you relying on for comfort?

Imagine what your life would look like if you stopped using distractions or substances for comfort and made it a habit to look to God!

What would happen if we worried less about the outcome and instead looked for comfort from the Lord?

How victorious would you feel if you were then able to comfort others?

God has promised that if we hope in him, he will renew our strength.

Paul reminds us that God is reliable.

He has brought us through so much, and he will do it again.

As you go into this week, when you face trouble or anxiety, seek powerful comfort from God's presence.

That's the best place to get comfort.

Isaiah 40, 2 Kings 24,25; Jeremiah 34,37; Ezekiel 17,24; 2 Corinthians 1