

Guest Preacher - Rev. R J Campbell

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Preacher: Rev. RJ Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Seeking the Lord's blessing and help, let us turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together, the prophecy of Isaiah and chapter 40.

And we'll read again from the beginning.

We'll read into two parts. Chapters 1 to 39, there is a warning of judgment on Israel, culminating in an event pointed to at the end of chapter 39, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its people to Babylon.

But scattered throughout these chapters, there is also a message of hope that after the exile, God's covenant promises would be fulfilled.

And the second part of the book from chapters 40 to 66, pick up that promise and develop it further. So that chapter 40 to the end of the book is principally giving comfort to the Lord's people.

[1 : 3 5] The second section of the book is dealing almost entirely with future things. While earlier chapters, although you might find prophecies concerning future things in them, they are mostly addressing the immediate situation of Judah.

In this section of the book, the Lord, through his prophet is speaking concerning three things that is dealt with from chapter 40 to the end of the book.

He is dealing with the book.

Now, these themes have been introduced in earlier chapters, but they are developed and expanded much more in this last section of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah. Judah was not yet in Babylon, but they would be. So the people of that generation needed comfort. Those who believed the word of the Lord and the warning of judgment on Judah because of their idolatry.

[3 : 0 3] But also a generation some hundred years later when the captivity took place. And those who lived through that captivity, they all needed the comfort of God.

So that this word was not given just relevant for the day of Isaiah and not only for the people of God in Babylon and when they would come out of that captivity.

Then they would be delivered from Babylon. But these words are given and they are relevant for me and for you today. This is something that we must understand.

That the prophecies given in the Old Testament, given not only for that time, but they were also given for us. They were relevant for them at that time, but they are also relevant for us today.

Regarding the Old Testament prophets, Peter explains, It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, but you.

[4 : 0 8] Similarly, Paul wrote, Paul wrote to the Corinthians and he said, Now these things happened to, that is to the Israelites, as an example, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come.

So that Paul found many profitable things from the Old Testament, that things that call for repentance, things that call for faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And you will remember that Jesus, when he met the two disciples going to Emmaus, we read that in Luke chapter 24, that beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So that the whole Bible, the New and the Old Testament, and all that is contained within the New and the Old and New Testament, it's all about God's redemptive plan.

So this section to which we are introduced this day with these words, Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins, is as relevant for me and you, as it was for the people in the days of Isaiah, and for those who entered into captivity many years after these words were written.

[5 : 58] There are times in the Christian life, whether short or prolonged, when a person can struggle in the life of faith.

In Psalm 43, which we shall sing later on, we read these words, Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me?

There are many instances brought before us in Scripture wherein God's covenant people are cast down. The people of the Babylon captivity were a people who were cast down.

Have you not sung that psalm that expresses to us the way in which they were cast down, the way in which they struggled, in the life of faith? By the waters of Babylon there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

For there our captors required of his songs and our tormentors smirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

[7 : 13] In such a situation, they were tempted and they drew wrong conclusions. As we find in verse 27 of the chapter we have just read, where we have these words, Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is sitting from the Lord and my right is disregarded by my God?

It is interesting to note that while the Lord's people were referred to previously as Jerusalem and Zion, now they are called Jacob and Israel in verse 27.

And this probably in order to describe to us the reality of the struggles in the life of faith.

In Genesis chapter 42, in the experience of Jacob, we read, And Jacob, their father, said to them, You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you will take Benjamin.

All this has come against me. There was a man who was struggling. Earlier in, the Lord had said to Jacob, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.

[8 : 35] So this Jacob and Israel has the overtone, has the thought of one who struggles, who struggles in the life of faith, and yet one who prevails.

The prophet here is asked to speak tenderly to Jerusalem in order to comfort them.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem can also be translated, speak to the heart of Jerusalem. Jerusalem here stands for the people of God, the covenant people.

Speak to their hearts. There are many instances in Scripture where you find the same Hebrew word. For instance, in Genesis chapter 50, when the brothers were afraid of what Joseph might do to them, seeing that their father had died.

There we have these words, Then he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. That word kindly is the same word that we have here, tenderly.

[9 : 43] And the same in Hosea chapter 2, when the Lord said to, regarding Israel, Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.

Speak tenderly means to speak to the heart. And the heart, they refer to an individual's inner faculties, the intellect, and the emotions, to speak to the heart.

The message is spoken so that the recipient can be lifted out of the gloom of despair, that the recipient can be impelled to look forward in hope, so that the recipient can be encouraged, even although the recipient may be struggling in the life of faith.

And what is the comforting message then that we are told that he is to bring to those who are struggling in faith, to those who need comfort, to those who may be almost on the brink of despair.

What is the comforting message? Well, we are told here three things. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, and she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

[11 : 25] Firstly then, that her warfare is ended. And the term presents to us the idea of the appointed time for the end of military service.

This may be a reference to the hardship that they had experienced in exile, which would come to an end. But it could also be a reference to the time that the Lord had allotted his people as they sought to remain true to their commitment to him in a hostile environment.

The time allotted had come to an end. they were going to be delivered. What spiritual lessons can we have from this for me and you today?

Well, within the context, we have a people who are being chastised or disciplined by the Lord for their idolatry.

They are in captivity because of their idolatry. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, for the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

[12 : 49] And here is Judas, the covenant people, and they are in captivity. They are in Babylon, but they are there because they are being disciplined by the Lord.

Again, in Hebrews, we have these words, my son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. You see, the discipline of the Lord's people must always be understood within a covenant relationship.

although the covenant people of God were in captivity in Babylon and suffering hardship because of their disobedience, because of their idolatry, yet the Lord's love for them had not lessened.

He was still in a covenant relationship with them. Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. You see, they are still his people.

[14 : 07] Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in ruins.

The city of Jerusalem is in ruins. Nevertheless, those are dressed and styled Jerusalem, which stands for its inhabitants who constituted the covenant community, who constituted the covenant people of God.

God's acts of discipline do not mean he is abandoning his covenant promise. Cry to her that her warfare or time of hardship is ended.

The time appointed or the time allotted has come to an end. time for us to suffer and abound, that there is an ongoing need for consolation and encouragement.

It reminds us that the Lord has appointed or an allotted time for us as we seek to remain true and faithful to our commitment to him or following him in a hostile environment.

[15 : 24] Peter writes in his verse later, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is also a reminder for us that our warfare is not forever. It has its allotted time.

When the Lord disciplines, it has its allotted time. The trials that we undergo in this world in a hostile environment has its allotted time.

It is not forever. But we need consolation and encouragement so that as we look into the future, the people are told that warfare is ended.

The allotted time of hardship has come to an end. The people are given the promise that there will be a transformation of the circumstances that will be of great proportions.

[16 : 48] And whatever our situation or circumstance is today, whether you have been disciplined by the Lord, or whether you are going through some hardship, perhaps in your home, in your family, in your neighbourhood, in the congregation, whatever it is, it has its allotted time.

But as we're going through, we need this encouragement, we need this consolation, to remind ourselves, through the promise of God, that it will have an end.

It is appointed, it is allotted time. Secondly, you have to be comforted that her iniquity is pardoned.

Some versions of the Bible have it as that her sin has been paid for. We are not told how or by whom the penalty has been paid, but later in the prophecy we are introduced to the suffering servant, of whom we are told, he will bear their iniquities, where we are told, for he bore the sin of many.

And the suffering servant, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. So here, Judah is given this consolation, this promise that her iniquity is pardoned.

[18 : 23] Paul writes to the Romans and he says something that is very interesting in the third chapter of his letter to the Romans. And there he speaks of Jesus as the one whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

But this is what I want to draw to your attention of what Paul says there. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

You see, Paul is referring to a very definite time. He's looking back at the Old Testament times and he's saying that God passed over sins under the Old Testament times and now God has set forth or put forward Christ to do something about what he had done then.

In Hebrews chapter 9 verse 15 we read therefore he that is Christ is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

There the writer to the Hebrews is saying the same thing as Paul wrote to the church at Rome. What is made clear to us is that the sacrifices and the offerings under the Old Testament was never capable of producing pardon or to forgive sin.

[20 : 07] You may ask then were the sacrifices and the offerings of the Old Testament of any value? Yes of course there were. They were of value as the writer to the Hebrews again proclaims to us.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons were the ashes of a heifer sanctified for the purification of the flesh.

That was their value. The purification of the flesh. But they could do no more than that. But by doing that they gave a ceremonial cleanness enabling the people to continue to worship God.

But there was no sacrifice. There was no offering under the Old Testament could deal with sin. All they could do was that they pointed forward to the sacrifice that was coming and that could really deal with sin.

They were foreshadowing the sacrifice that was to come. Now that does not mean that the saints of the Old Testament were not forgiven.

[21 : 26] They were not forgiven. They were not forgiven. That Abraham was not forgiven. Or Moses was not forgiven. Or Jacob was not forgiven. But they were not forgiven for those sacrifices that they were offered. They were given because when they offered the sacrifices they offered them in faith.

Faith made all the difference. They exercised faith and they looked to the one that those sacrifices foreshadowed. They looked to Christ.

They looked to the sacrifice that was to come that would deal with sin. They offered their sacrifices in faith or by faith.

They were saved by Christ the same way as I and you can be saved by Christ. They did not see it clearly but they believed what God had taught them and they made their sacrifice and offerings by faith looking to the ultimate sacrifice that could deal with sin that is Christ.

Jesus himself said that Abraham saw his day and he rejoiced in it. He saw the day of Christ by faith and he rejoiced in it.

[22 : 48] God could in his divine forbearance pass over former sins. What is it that justifies God in doing so and passing over the sins of the saints of the Old Testament?

Well Paul tells us that God has explained it. He's telling us and he's explaining it by what took place on the cross of Golgotha. For centuries from the fall of Adam to Golgotha he had held back but now he has publicly displayed or declared or explained his passing over those former sins by laying them on his son.

And doing so he vindicates his own character. What was happening at Golgotha it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ.

God hates sin and he will punish sin and he will pour out his wrath upon those guilty of sin and unless God can prove that he has done this he is no longer righteous.

What Paul is telling us is that he has done that very thing when on the cross of Golgotha he made him who you know sin to be sin for us. he laid upon him the iniquity of us all so that upon the suffering servant we are told that he will bear their iniquities.

[24 : 21] That's the iniquities of the Old Testament saints and the iniquities of the New Testament saints. The iniquity of his covenant people. He will bear the sin of many.

So the covenant people can be told as a matter of encouragement and consolation that her iniquity is pardoned.

Isn't that consolation and encouragement for me and you today? That whatever hardship we may be going through that it is an allotted time that it shall come to an end.

Is it not a consolation and encouragement for me and you today that our iniquity, that our sin is pardoned. And thirdly, that she has received from the Lord and double for all her sins.

Now there are difficulties around the word double as it is unclear what has been viewed as double. In chapter 61 the prophet writes instead of your shame there shall be a double portion or a double blessing.

[25 : 31] But the word double there is a different word in Hebrew. what seems to be meant here is that the full measure of justice has been inflicted or has been handed down suggesting that the period of suffering and exile has fulfilled its purpose.

This does not mean a punishment that exceeds what is desired but rather a full satisfaction for the sins that were committed. that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sin.

In other words divine justice has been fully satisfied allowing for comfort and deliverance or redemption of God's covenant people.

It is a reminder to us that God will not overlook sin but will address it in a manner that fully satisfies his own justice.

It fully satisfies his righteous standards. What we have here then is the thought of divine satisfaction.

[26 : 47] For the faithful the message of double for all sin ultimately conveys hope. It assures believers that God's justice has been satisfied and his promises of comfort and restoration will be fulfilled.

Is it that not consolation and comfort for me and you today? That our hardships will have an allotted time that they will come to an end. That our sins have been pardoned and that divine justice has been satisfied.

the phrase underscores the certainty and the thoroughness of God's justice. It affirms that God will not overlook sin but will address it in a manner that fully satisfies his justice, his righteous standards, so that God is faithful and just when he forgives sin.

He is faithful but he is also just when he forgives sin. Otherwise, it wouldn't be forgiveness if it wasn't in accordance with justice.

It wouldn't be forgiveness. Whatever it would be, it would not be forgiveness. But God is just when he is forgiving you. Why?

[28 : 13] Because his justice has been satisfied through the atony work of his son on the cross of Golgotha.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, speak to her heart and say to her and cry that her warfare has ended.

The allotted time of her hardship is coming to an end. There is an end. Tell her that her iniquity is pardoned, that her sins have been forgiven and tell her that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins, that divine justice has been satisfied.

What great consolation and encouragement that is for me and you today. Whatever our situation might be, whatever our circumstances might be, we have those consolations from our Lord, those words of encouragement from our God, those words of comfort, that our hardship is in an allotted time, that our sins have been forgiven, and that God's justice has been satisfied.

May the Lord bless our thoughts upon his word. let us pray. Eternal and ever blessed Lord, we give thanks for thy word, and we give thanks that for thy people, thy word is a living word, a word that brings consolation and encouragement to them.

[29 : 56] And we give thanks to thee this morning, O Lord, that whatever hardships or circumstances or situations or points of discipline that we might be going through, that it is an allotted time, that it shall come to an end.

We give thanks to thee, O Lord, that we can have forgiveness for our sins through the atoning work of thine own Son. And we give thanks to thee, O Lord, that thine own justice have been satisfied through the atoning work on the cross of Golgotha.

Oh, what consolation and encouragement that is for thy people today. And we pray, O Lord, that we may enter into the joy of those consolations.

We pray, Lord, that thou would go before us, that thou would remain with us, and forgive us for all our sins. In Jesus' name, Amen. We shall bring our service to conclusion by singing from Psalm 43 and at verse 3 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 43 in the Scottish Psalter and verse 3. O send thy light forth on thy truth. Let them be guides to me and bring me to thine holy hill, even where thy dwellings be.

[31 : 08] Then will I, through God's altar, go to God, my chiefest joy. Yea, God, my God, thy name to praise my heart, I will employ. We shall sing to the end of the Psalm.

That's Psalm 43 God, verse 3. O send thy light forth on thy truth. Let them be guides to me. O send thy light forth on thy truth.

Let them be guides to me, and bring me to thine holy hill, even where thy dwellings be.

Then will I to God's altar go, to God, my chiefest joy.

Yea, God, my God, thy name to praise my heart, my will employ.

[32 : 39] Why are you to my heart, down my soul, what should discourage thee, and why with thanks in thought are thou disquiet yet dead in me.

Still trust in God for him to praise, good cause I yet shall have, he o'er my God saves the hell, my God glad God is here.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.