

Guest Preacher - Mr Donald Macaulay

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Preacher: Mr. Donald Macaulay

[0 : 00] And reading again at the beginning. 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.

And particularly the words at the beginning, comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Chapter 40 marks the beginning of the final section of the prophecy of Isaiah.

We've seen, if you look back, chapters 1 to 35 are prophetic and perhaps judgmental and condemning the situation in Israel at the time.

But as chapters 36 to 39 are quite different, they're historic. And unlike most of Isaiah, which is written in poetry, they're written in prose instead.

[1 : 20] And we see here at the beginning of chapter 40 then a return to this style. The style of, the poetic style of Isaiah.

And the message that he has is quite a different message to the condemnation that has appeared in the earlier chapters.

Why was condemnation necessary? Well, I'm sure you're familiar with that. If you go back to the beginning and the times when Isaiah lived, until we come to the rule of Hezekiah, particularly the kingdom of Israel and Judah had fallen on evil times.

And Hezekiah attempts, as we see in the previous chapters, to reinstate the worship of the God of Israel.

Probably there was none of the kings of Judah as faithful in that as Hezekiah himself, although I don't want to go back into that in detail.

[2 : 33] But the situation historically had been that the ten tribes of the north at this time, which we refer to as the tribes of Israel compared to Judah and Benjamin in the south, that those tribes had been defeated and assimilated by Assyria.

We never hear of the ten tribes again. They are wiped from history at that particular point. Taken into captivity, moved to various cities throughout the Assyrian Empire, and they disappear.

And if you look at the chapters before, just before this, the historic chapters, you will see that Sennacherib had led the Assyrian hosts to the outskirts of Jerusalem.

And you remember Hezekiah's prayer before the Lord when he spread out the letter that God had guaranteed him through Isaiah that the Assyrians would not come into the city.

And in fact, you remember the angel of the city. And in fact, you remember the next morning that the angel of the Lord had slain almost all of Sennacherib's host outside the city, and so delivered the people and the city from the Assyrian threat.

[4 : 02] But unfortunately, from that, a little bit of pride comes into Hezekiah's heart. And you can see in chapter 39, and again, if you have time this evening, you can perhaps go back and see what happens to Hezekiah after this.

Envoys come in chapter 39 from Babylon. And Hezekiah, and Hezekiah and his pride shows them everything. And you see that in verse 4 of chapter 9.

Isaiah said, what have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, they have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.

And then you get this prophecy from Isaiah to Hezekiah. The days are coming when all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up till this day shall be carried to Babylon.

Nothing shall be left. And you notice that Hezekiah himself, in the final verse of chapter 39, says, says, the word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.

[5 : 24] For he thought there will be peace and security in my days. And that is very typical of the human spirit. I don't mind the trouble that's coming in the future as long as it doesn't happen to me.

And that was very much Hezekiah's thinking in that particular way. But God's thinking is different. And God's thinking, as we see in chapter 40 onwards, is now of comfort. Comfort and blessing to the people of God.

In spite of what is coming. In spite of the fact that He will take them into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. Nevertheless, He has a purpose in that.

And after the 70 years, He will bring them back. Now, I'm not going to go into that in detail. That's not all that relevant, in a sense, to what Isaiah then says.

[6 : 33] Or writes, as the Lord directs him. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. You notice where the emphasis is.

It's my people. Your God. And these are the things on which we need to focus. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Literally, in the Hebrew it is, speak from the heart to Jerusalem. That her warfare has ended, her iniquity is pardoned.

She has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Now, sometimes we wonder what that means.

She has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. We have no problem with warfare being ended and iniquity is pardoned. That seems clear enough to understand.

[7 : 36] But why would she receive double? Well, again, this is a reminder of the law that had been given to Moses. Of the covenant that God had made with his people.

If you go back into the book of Exodus and Leviticus, you will find quite often that when people transgressed, if that's the right word, the social laws of Israel, if the thief was caught, for example, he had to restore double.

And there are several other instances of that in the Mosaic law that are given. And thus, the command is to speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

Now, he's not speaking to the city. Jerusalem here is used to symbolize the Lord's people. God's people. Jerusalem.

It's the same way that we tend to use throughout Scripture. You'll find interchangeably Jerusalem and Zion. Zion also refers to the Lord's people.

[8 : 50] Why those two particular words were used is fairly obvious. Jerusalem is the city, of course, where the temple was. The city of David.

And therefore, it was, for the majority of people, a symbol of God's presence. And you can see later on in the history of particularly Judah, etc., after the captivity, when the temple is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, how they are completely shaken from their faith in that sense.

But God reminds his people that you don't necessarily have to worship in Jerusalem. If you look, and again, this is going into the historical background a little bit.

If you look at the situation in Babylon, you find that one of the things that happened during the Babylonian Empire was that any people taken into captivity.

And notice again, I think I've said this before, they're not slaves. They are captive. They are exiles. But they are free. And they have complete freedom to worship in Babylon.

[10 : 08] And you see that throughout the book of Daniel, Ezekiel, and various others. And it's during the time of captivity that the Jews begin to build synagogues in Babylon.

During the 70 years that they are there. Not necessarily in the city of Babylon, but in the various communities where they were settled. That captivity was a blessing in itself.

Because like everything else that God does, there was a purpose in it. And the purpose was to cleanse the Jews from their idolatry.

You go back right to the golden calf with Aaron in the wilderness. How prone. Go through the book of Judges, Joshua, etc. and so on.

And you see time and time again how Israel falls into idolatry. But the 70-year captivity, 70 years, a generation, cleansed them.

[11 : 21] The Jews never worshipped idols again. When they returned in the days of Esra and Nehemiah onwards. There was never idol worship again in Jerusalem.

And therefore you can see that God has a purpose in everything that he does. But we are instructed to comfort God's people.

And perhaps the first question that you would have is, well, why did they need comfort? Well, superficially, of course, the reason for the comfort is the disaster that's coming.

There's captivity in Babylon. But there's much more to it than that. God's people need comfort almost at all times.

What does that actually mean? Well, if you put it in the semblance of a child and a parent.

[12:37] And remember that very often God uses the marriage covenant to symbolize the relationship between himself and his people. Then think of how a parent comforts a child.

Little child, what does he do very often when he's frightened? He runs and hides behind his father's legs. And very often holds on to the two legs and peeps out from between them to see if the danger has gone away.

Or whatever he sees as danger. And whenever the child feels in danger, what does he do? He comes to his parents for comfort.

Because the parents represent security and protection. Unfortunately, of course, in human terms, there are some homes where that is not the case.

But nevertheless, when we take the analogy to God's relationship to his people, then God always provides comfort.

[13:45] How does he do that? Comfort. My people says you're God. So who is to do the comforting? Well, first and foremost, God himself will carry out this comfort.

Because the instruction follows. Speak from the heart. 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. It's very comforting to be told, isn't it? That your iniquity is pardoned.

That your sins are forgiven. That your warfare is ended. What is meant by warfare here? The struggles that we have.

Literally, in Jerusalem, the warfare was against those enemies round about. But for the people of God, your warfare is constant.

[14:52] And your warfare will continue while you are still in mercy's ground. There are so many times in the believer's life where he suffers.

And suffers in so many different ways. It may be issues of health. It may be financial issues. It may be relationship issues. But the greatest difficulty that the believer faces very often.

Is that he feels that the presence of God is not with him. Comfort, comfort my people. Says your God.

And this is Jehovah, Yahweh, the covenant God who is speaking. How can we comfort God's people? Well, that is very much the job of those who lead congregations.

The elders, the deacons to a lesser degree. But particularly of the pastor. But it's also the job of each individual believer.

[16:08] To comfort and strengthen other believers. How do we comfort each other in human terms? Well, you see that particularly in terms of a bereavement.

Usually what happens is that people will gather in the home of the bereaved. And spend time with them. Sometimes there's no need for great conversation.

It's enough simply to let them know that you're there. And to let them know that you care. Isn't it the same with God?

Shouldn't it be enough for us that each time, if God lets us know that he cares and that he's there, that that should be enough to comfort us?

Oh, it sounds so simple. But any Christian will tell you in the course of his life, especially the older, more mature Christians, if I can put it that way, will know that there are times when that comfort seems far and far away.

[17:29] There are times when you don't feel the presence of the Lord in the way that you want.

When you're a young believer, very often when you come to faith as a young person, people will tell you, oh, you're all right now.

No problems anymore. Don't believe it. Your problems have just started. Your warfare has just begun. And it will continue because you have an adversary that is seeking those like a roaring lion whom he may devour.

You have an adversary, the fallen angel, Satan, is attacking so often. And the thing where he attacks most is he comes to you and he plants little doubts in your mind.

Does God really love you? Are you sure? You don't deserve God's love, do you? Just look at you.

What are you anyway? You're just a sinner. And you sin daily and thoughtward and deed every single day. Who do you think you are that God loves you?

[18 : 57] How often have the Lord's people had those doubts? How often have you come in prayer requesting that the Lord would strengthen you in your faith?

But where do you go to look for this comfort? Do you go to God's word? That's the first place that you should go to.

How many people say the first thing you do is pray about it. Pray, pray. Well, that's a very important weapon as well that we pray constantly for whatever situation we are in.

But God's real comfort is to be found in his word. Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God.

And he continues in this chapter to say things that are of great comfort to the believer. Look at verse 5.

[20 : 00] The glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

And again in verse 8. The grass withers. The flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever.

And therefore we need to come to the word of God to find comfort. There was one minister that I read of who put it like this.

And he said, my job, he says, is to comfort the afflicted. And to afflict the comfortable. If you think about it, it's a fascinating way of putting it.

To comfort the afflicted. Those who are in trouble. Whatever that trouble may be. But those who think they have no trouble.

[21 : 12] No problems. To come and afflict the comfortable. I don't know if you're here this evening and you're comfortable. Perhaps you are.

I don't know. I don't know all of you personally. But there may be some listening, perhaps even online, who are comfortable. And who think that, oh well, that's just what happens in life, isn't it? Things happen. And then they raise, of course, that famous question, why do bad things happen to good people? Well, God has a purpose in everything that happens to the believer.

And the purpose usually is to draw you closer to him. And closer to his word. But he has more comfort than that for you.

He knows, and he's telling you, that your warfare is ended, your iniquity is pardoned. How? Because of what is to come.

[22 : 25] And you see that in verse 9 onwards. Go up to the 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. And then, the rest of the chapter deals particularly with the sovereignty of God.

But if we come back to verse 3, what do we see? A voice cries, in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. If we look forward to the New Testament, we see that is exactly the words that are used of John the Baptist.

As John the Baptist comes to prepare the way for Messiah to come. the one who had been promised. Messiah, the anointed one.

[23 : 30] The Greek word is Christ. The Hebrew is Messiah. They both mean the same thing. The Jesus who is to come as the Savior of his people.

And John is sent before him to prepare the way. And everyone who preaches the word of God is also preparing the way of the Lord.

Preparing a way for the people to come to know that Christ, the Messiah, not only is coming, but has come.

There are so many people who pay no attention to that. The first group that comes to mind, of course, as we've put it in context here, are the Jews themselves who refuse to accept that Messiah has come.

who in many, many cases look at the prophecy of Isaiah and omit chapter 53, omit the chapter that tells particularly of the suffering of the Savior.

[24 : 45] It's amazing, isn't it, that 600 years before these things happened, that Isaiah was to write so clearly about the cross, about the servant king who was to come.

But nevertheless, as we see it here, the glory of the Lord in verse 5 shall be revealed and all flesh shall shade together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isn't it a great comfort to you this evening that you are not waiting for Messiah to come? that he has come? And not only has he come, but he has fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies, that he has died as the servant king on the cross at Calvary.

And in doing so, that the blood that was shed there has been shed in atonement for your sin and for my sin.

Your iniquity is pardoned. Oh yes, you will still continue to sin in this life.

[26 : 03] It's inevitable. It's part of the human condition. It's part of what happened since Adam fell in the garden. It's in our DNA, as one other commentator put it.

It's there and we can't escape it. But nevertheless, the cross makes it clear that your iniquity is pardoned.

shouldn't that be a comfort to you this evening? Oh, it doesn't mean you can go off and sin freely.

That's not the idea behind it. Paul reminds us of that in the epistle to the Romans. But it does mean no matter how much you try to live a holy life and that's something that each one of us should try to do, we will fail.

There are moments of failure. In fact, there may even be moments of despair where we feel and have no assurance that we are indeed saved, that we are indeed converted.

[27 : 18] And the lack of assurance that many, many believers have at times is what Christ speaks when he says, O ye of little faith, of little faith.

What does he say in John 17? I have finished the work that you gave me to do. But before that he has said to the disciples, I am going and I will send you another comforter.

Another comforter. If he himself is the first who gives us comfort by what he has done, then you might say, well, why do we need another comforter?

And the disciples in one sense asked that question. And because, and Christ tells them, because I am going back to the Father. But I will send another comforter, even the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of peace, which we see, again, time has gone by, which we see poured out on the day of Pentecost.

And it's the presence of the Holy Spirit in each one of the Lord's people that gives you the most comfort.

[28 : 45] Or you can take great comfort that your sins are forgiven, that you will stand at the day of judgment before him, declared innocent and clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Christ. But here, in your temporal situation, as you fight through your spiritual warfare, who is there to comfort you at all times, to strengthen and to guide you with the Holy Spirit.

He dwells in you. How often at times does a verse come into your head? pops out of nowhere into your head.

And it's just the verse that you needed to strengthen you, to give you encouragement, to give you hope in whatever situation you were in. Who does that?

The Holy Spirit. There are other times when you're not aware of the presence of the Spirit in your life. but he's there all the time.

[29 : 58] You are not perhaps aware of the Lord Jesus Christ interceding at the right hand of the Father in heaven for you. But it's still happening.

And above all, think of the comfort that you are given, just as a child from their parent, to know that you are loved.

I have loved you with an everlasting love. What does Paul say in Romans 8? We are more than conquerors in him who loved us.

And he goes on, of course, to finish that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. And he lists, and you can look at it when you go home, he lists the various things there that people think might separate you.

But none of these things, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. And it is, of course, because of love that God says, comfort, comfort my people.

[31 : 11] If he didn't love you, then he wouldn't care about your comfort. Isn't that the case for the parent and the child as well? It's because the parent loves the child that he comforts and provides security.

And it's exactly the same as God the Father deals in relationship with each and every one of his people. In whatever circumstances you are in.

Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understandings. That's how Solomon puts it in the book of Proverbs. And there are so many precious Proverbs and so many precious promises throughout Scripture that teach us again and again to come to the Word of God.

Let the Spirit guide you in the Word of God. And in order for the Spirit to guide you in the Word, you must read the Word.

You must be in the Word. And if you are not getting the comfort that you would desire, then perhaps you're not seeking it enough in God's Word.

[32 : 39] So many of us so often in the situations that we are in, we feel sorry for ourselves. Why has this happened to me?

Etc. And so on. What did I do to deserve this? And the answer very often is nothing. It is God's way of testing you.

It is God's way of teaching you humility. humility. And see, in the same way as parents deal with children, sometimes a child, even a young people, need to be disciplined.

But Scripture tells us that discipline at any time is painful. And it's not necessarily very pleasant. But there is a purpose to it.

When a parent disciplines a child, he does it not out of anger, but out of love. That's the way it should be. It's out of love to teach the child.

[33 : 45] Perhaps a rather silly example that was given of that many years ago that I heard, and it always stuck with me. How do you teach a child, a young child, particularly a baby who's crawling around, just learned to crawl, crawling around the floor?

How do you teach a child that electric sockets are dangerous? Let him stick his fingers in it and see what happens. And if he survives, he won't do it again.

But of course, what the parent wants is that the child never goes through that trauma in the first place. But there are other experiences experiences that as we grow, we need to go through in order to learn from them.

And that's the way it is with the Christian life. You need to go through experiences that sometimes will be painful for you, because God has something to teach you.

And what he's teaching you more often than not, comfort is to come to his word and to depend upon him, not on yourself.

[35 : 06] Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Isn't that an amazing verse for us to think of? And this comfort is not just the responsibility of the minister of the congregation, it's the responsibility of each of us for each other.

of our Christian brothers and sisters, that we need to comfort them. And perhaps there are many practical ways in which we can do that, but we should be looking above the just practical and looking at the spiritual, that the Lord's people need strengthening and comforting at all times, especially from the word, especially in prayer, from the But also from each other.

And may we remember that as we go on each day. May the Lord bless to us these thoughts upon his word. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that we can meditate on these things, that you are the great comforter, that you have provided for us through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, comfort and security, and yet we're required to be disciplined and chastened, and to be taught humility, and taught to trust implicitly in the finished work of Calvary, that he who has begun a good work will continue it, and continue till the end.

We thank you for these promises. We pray for any here this evening and any listening online who as yet have not closed in with the comforter, who as yet do not know you personally, and we pray that you would bring to a saving knowledge of yourself.

Be with us now as we conclude our worship. Take us safely to our homes, and pardon sin through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let us conclude then by singing in Psalm 121 in the Psalter, page 416.

[37 : 18] I think we sang this this morning, if I remember correctly as well. I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come mine aid. We'll sing the whole psalm to God's praise.

Psalm 121. Psalm 121. My dear the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come aid.

My city come and from the Lord to heaven and earth and may.

Thy foot in our best find our will be!

and he keeps Behold me, the keeps Israel, he slumbers nor sleeps.

[38 : 44] the Lord he keeps the heart by shade on thy right hand the state.

The world by night thee shall not smile nor yet the song I give.

The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill, and forth thy going out and ill, God thee forever will.

Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever. Amen.