

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***“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”*** (Isaiah 40:1-2).

This is a text that God Himself desires you to hear. In fact, He demands that you hear His words: ***“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.”***

When Isaiah first uttered those words from God, God’s people were in desperate need of comfort. They were in need of hope. They were in need of peace.

You see, in 587 BC, Babylon unleashed an attack against Jerusalem. This attack included the destruction of the Temple. When Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar defeated Judah, it looked to the Jews that the Babylonian gods had triumphed over the God of Israel. It appeared as though Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel, was no match for these foreign gods.

For many of the Jews, they thought the situation could be even worse. Could it be that Yahweh did not defend His people, because they had spurned Him too many times. Maybe Yahweh chose not to defend His people because they had by and large rejected Him? Worst of all, what if Yahweh did not even exist? What if their trust in Yahweh had all been in vain?

Whichever way the Jews were thinking, they saw the same future. They saw a future without any hope. They saw a future without any comfort. The only thing reasonable was to face the facts. Jerusalem was destroyed and they were now exiles. It was time to forget about Yahweh and just move on without Him.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the Prophet Jeremiah lamented, ***“She – Jerusalem – weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; ... she has none to comfort her”*** (Lamentations 1:2). ***“She has no comforter”*** (Lamentations 1:9). ***“For a comforter is far from me”*** (Lamentations 1:16). ***“Zion stretches out her hands, but there is none to comfort her”*** (Lamentations 1:17). ***“There is no one to comfort me”*** (Lamentations 1:21).

Israel was alone. Israel was in utter darkness.

Then, just as all hope was lost, Yahweh, their God, speaks: **“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”** (Isaiah 40:1). Yahweh was not done with His people! To the pain, He commands His heavenly messengers to **“comfort, comfort My people.”** It was time for Israel to step out of darkness and into Yahweh’s marvelous light! (1 Peter 2:9).

Israel’s hurt was deep, but Yahweh’s comfort was deeper. The people were **“dead in trespasses and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1). So, Yahweh, the Lord their God, **“being rich in mercy, because of His great love”** (Ephesians 2:4), takes the initiative and speaks the Gospel. This comforting Gospel comes before Israel responds in repentance and faith. This comforting Gospel comes before Israel makes any effort to repent and return to God. This comforting Gospel comes only when Yahweh turns back to Israel. This comforting Gospel comes when God promises His coming!

Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts, is coming! And why is that good news? Why is that comforting? God appeared to have left His people before. What could stop Him from abandoning His people again?

But something is different. Yahweh is announcing that He is coming back not to faithful people, but to a weak, unfaithful, failing, and failed people. They are, as Isaiah proclaims: **“a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly”** (Isaiah 1:4). Yahweh is coming back to a people who have forsaken Him. He is coming back to a people who have despised Him.

Due to their rebellion against God, Israel was struck by the Assyrians. Did they learn their lesson? Nope. They continued to rebel against God. Their **“whole head [was] sick, and [their] whole heart faint”** (Isaiah 1:5).

So, due to their evils against God, warfare would engulf them. And God Himself pronounced their doom. So, why is this good news?

It is good news because God is coming to a weak and sinful people, such as them. He is coming to a weak and sinful people, such as us – you and me. He will never abandon us. This is the greatest comfort. God is coming because of His amazing love and mercy. He is coming because we are His people.

And we have seen who this God is in His coming: in His manger, in His preaching, in His miracles and healing, in His sin-atoning cross, in His mighty resurrection, and in His reign at the Right Hand of God the Father.

In Isaiah 40, God demands that His coming be heralded as comfort upon comfort. He is doubling your comfort. He is calling sinners, like you and me as *“My people.”* To poor and miserable sinners, He is describing Himself as *“Your God.”*

Yahweh speaks of *“making straight in the desert a highway for our God”* (Isaiah 40:3). He says, *“every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain”* (Isaiah 40:4).

So, there will be no mountain high enough and no valley low enough to keep Him from coming to you. Yahweh is coming to bring double comfort. He is coming to bring an end to warfare. He is coming to bring an end to suffering. He is coming to provide atonement for your sin. He is coming to reveal His glory to theirs and your own eyes. You will see it.

When Isaiah first spoke of God’s double comfort, he was pointing to the end of their exile and to their return from Babylon. But in the fullness of time, these words of Isaiah speak of the coming of Yahweh in human flesh as Emmanuel – *God with us*. In *“the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”* (Galatians 4:4-5).

In the fullness of time, we received double our comfort in Jesus Christ, who paid for our sins through His suffering and death. The *“glory of the Lord”* (Isaiah 40:5) was revealed in the Advent of Jesus. By His atoning suffering and death, Jesus brought you back to Him. He paid the price for yours and my sin. Your iniquity is pardoned. And now, through Christ, you have received from God’s hand double your comfort. At the cross, Jesus was pierced for your transgressions. He was crushed for your iniquities. You have peace with God. Through Christ’s death alone, you are healed.

Remember, God chose the Hebrew people as His chosen people. Abraham didn't choose Yahweh. Yahweh chose Him. He didn't choose Abraham by his merit. He chose him out of His love, so that through him and his descendants, the Hebrew people, others would see God's love in them.

Likewise, God chose you. He chose you not by your merit. He chose you who are too weak and too helpless to save yourself. Jesus said to the His disciples: ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you"*** (John 15:16). No one chooses God, God chooses you. And this is double comfort knowing that God's love is for you. And to show how certain God's love is, He shows His love when He chose you as His own in the waters of Holy Baptism. And if you ever doubt His love for you, remember your baptism by saying, "I am God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price. So, there is nothing worth comparing to this lifelong comfort sure!" (*God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It*, LSB 594)

God doubles this comfort again, as He forgives us through confession and absolution. God doubles this comfort even more as He gives us forgiveness and strength through Christ's Body and Blood under the bread and wine.

So, be comforted! Through Christ alone, your sins are forgiven, and since they are wiped away, there is nothing that could separate you from Him and His love for you in Jesus Christ. ***"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever"*** (Isaiah 40:8). He is with you forever to give you comfort upon comfort.

Since we have been doubled our comfort through Christ's coming, God calls us to speak of this comfort of God's forgiveness to those around you. God's comfort is for everyone, so speak of His comfort saying, ***"God has come in Jesus Christ!"*** Christ alone has fulfilled your comfort in His first coming. The consummation of His comfort will come at His final coming. And He continues to double your comfort now in His Means of Grace – *His Word and Sacrament* – as we look to the future. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**