

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

The Glory of the Lord Revealed to Comfort His People

Isaiah 40:1-14

I. “Comfort My People” (vs. 1-2)

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

A. God Commands Isaiah to Comfort His People

1. A prophet's task: carry the meal unchanged to the table
2. “Speak tenderly” = “speak to the heart”
 - a. Like a suitor speaking gently to the heart of a woman words of gentle love
 - b. Like a father speaking tenderly to a young child some words of encouragement
 - c. Here it is POIGNANT... this is the Holy God speaking tender words to a formerly rebellious and sinful nation

B. What Is the Comfort? Three Things (vs. 2)

1. Jerusalem's hard service has been completed
2. Her sin has been paid for
3. She has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sin

C. Context of the Comfort: Jerusalem's Sin

***Isaiah 1:2 Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken:
"I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled
against me."***

How? Idolatry (Isaiah 2); Social injustice – the rich exploiting the poor (Isaiah 5); drunkenness; adultery; luxury; lying; theft; violence

D. They Deserved Eternal Condemnation... God Gave Them Exile Instead

1. Isaiah is speaking sometime around the year _____
2. The exile to Babylon would not take place for another century and a quarter!!
3. But Isaiah is now LOOKING BEYOND an exile that hasn't even happened yet! And he sees plainly the time when God will forgive the Jews and restore them to the Promised Land so they can rebuild Jerusalem and resume their lives
4. In all of this, we see God's amazing grace to sinners!

Psalm 103:10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

E. Application: God is Speaking a GREATER word of comfort to us today... in Jesus Christ!!!

1. We are sinners just like they were
2. We are threatened by a far greater exile... Hell
3. God has come in Christ to redeem us and to provide "double for all our sins"... ample atonement in the blood of Christ

II. Prepare the Way of the Lord (vs. 3-5)

***Isaiah 40:3-5 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.
⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵
And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."***

A. Understanding “the Desert”: Literally and Figuratively

1. The desert represents the nation of Israel SINFUL and UNDER JUDGMENT by God... the desert land is a sterile place with nothing living... a picture of Israel dead toward God
2. The Judgment of God: Turning “a land flowing with milk and honey” into a desert
3. The restoration by God: turning a wilderness back into a rich, fertile land

B. This Passage Fulfilled: John the Baptist Prepares the Way for Jesus

1. All four Gospels cite Isaiah 40 as referring to John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1-3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

2. John was the final Old Covenant prophet....
3. He was born six months before Jesus Christ, and was sent to Israel to prepare for Christ’s imminent coming
4. He came “in the spirit of Elijah”... He wore a camel-skin garment and a leather belt like Elijah
5. He lived in the desert... a literal fulfillment of the judgment of God on the Promised Land... a desert land under judgment (like Elijah, who called for a drought and famine to come on Israel for their sins)
6. He preached powerfully in the desert... and baptized repentant people for their sins

C. “Every Valley Raised” and “Every Mountain and Hill Levelled”

1. What does this statement mean?

2. John was not a civil engineer... he didn't literally level mountains or raise valleys... the Romans were the greatest road builders of the ancient world... ¼ of a million miles of roads in Europe and Asia Minor, many of which can still be seen from outer space... many major roads in Europe follow ancient Roman roads... John had no interest in that! He wasn't building a literal road
3. These words are SPIRITUAL... metaphors for the work of John's preaching on people's hearts
4. So... a "mountain" represents a human heart that is arrogant... proud... lofty... for the Lord to come to that person, he must be LEVELLED
5. John sought to LEVEL proud, arrogant people with his preaching and his water baptism... the danger was if they refused to be leveled by the preaching, God would level them by eternal judgment
6. So... this is how John preached to the arrogant Pharisees and Sadducees:

Matthew 3:7-12 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

7. That is the LEVELLING of "every mountain and hill"... necessary if any of them were to believe in Jesus and be saved... they had to allow their proud hearts to be levelled by John's preaching
8. Conversely, John "raised up every valley"... these are broken-hearted sinners who feel there is no hope for them ever to be saved... his water baptism gave them hope that, through repentance and faith, they might enter the Kingdom of Heaven
9. The water baptism symbolized cleansing from sin... but that's all it did

10. John also prepared the way for Jesus' TRUE BAPTISM:

Matthew 3:11-12 I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

11. So... valleys get raised up and cleansed and baptized with the Spirit; mountains who refuse to repent get levelled by unquenchable fire

D. The Glory of the Lord Revealed... in Jesus Christ

1. John also came to PROCLAIM CHRIST plainly to Israel
2. The glory of the Lord was revealed at Jesus' baptism: His true identity as the Savior of the World and the Son of God

Matthew 3:16-17 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

John 1:32-34 Then John gave this testimony: ... I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

And especially this statement:

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

E. How All Mankind Together Will See Christ's Glory

Isaiah 40:5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

1. What does "glory" or "glorify" mean? It is the RADIANT DISPLAY of the nature of God... what He is like... what His attributes are... His power, His love, His patience, His righteousness, His compassion, His knowledge, etc.,

2. Jesus Christ is the perfect display of the nature of God

John 14:9 Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

3. Christ's first glory is to reveal the true nature of God in the incarnation

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

4. Christ's greatest glory is to reveal the salvation of God in His death and resurrection

John 13:31 Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.

5. Christ's final glory will be at the Second Coming

6. All mankind together can see the glory of Christ NOW by hearing the gospel with faith... so the gospel is spreading to the ends of the earth... through PREACHING

Isaiah 40:9 You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Behold, your God!"

We "See" by "hearing" ... with faith! That's how we "see" the glory of God in Christ! Preachers proclaim the word of the Lord, and believers hear it and close their eyes and SEE THE GLORY OF CHRIST by faith alone

This is happening all over the world... "all flesh" ... "all mankind" is experiencing this... it is a UNIVERSAL display by the word of the Lord... not for just one nation, but for people in every nation

7. People from all over the world are beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ when they hear and believe the gospel

8. If they don't believe the proclamation of Christ's glory—if they have NO EYES OF FAITH to see this invisible glory of Christ

now in the gospel—then all mankind together will see His glory at the second coming in Judgment!!!

Matthew 24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

All mankind will see it!!!!

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

The unbelievers in the world will see Christ's glory then with their eyes... but it will be TOO LATE THEN! We must see His glory now by faith in the proclaimed Word of God

Application: Do you "see" the glory of God in Christ now... by faith? Can you close your eyes and see the goodness of God in Christ? The power of God? The mercy of God? Focus especially on the cross... do you see the glory of God shining in the cross? God's wrath is there. God's righteousness is there. God's grace and mercy are there. All the perfections of God are on full display in the cross of Jesus Christ. Do you see it? Do you love it?

Isaiah 40:5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

III. Human Glory Fades; God's Word Stands (vs. 6-8)

Isaiah 40:6-8 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

A. God ("a voice") Speaks Again to Isaiah... Telling Him What to Say

1. Isaiah didn't know what to cry out... the prophet does not generate his own prophetic messages... **"What shall I cry??"**

B. All Human Beings Are Grass... All Their Glory is Like Wildflowers

1. Extremely humbling message for the human race... but completely true
2. We are MORTAL... we will die, every one of us, if the Lord doesn't return in our lifetime
3. All of us are hurtling toward that death... we are aging; our cells are replicating themselves imperfectly; some people are developing wrinkles and poor eyesight and grey hair and aches and pains...
4. There is a huge cosmetic surgery industry designed to fool us into thinking we are not all GRASS... botox, hair transplants, plastic surgery, etc.

John Wesley, Journal Entry, December 23, 1755, two days before Christmas:

"I was in the robe-chamber, adjoining to the House of Lords, when the King put on his robes. His brow was much furrowed with age, and quite clouded with care. And is this all the world can give even to a King? All the grandeur it can afford? A blanket of ermine around his shoulders, so heavy and cumbersome he can scarce move under it! A huge heap of borrowed hair, with a few plates of gold and glittering stones upon his head! Alas, what a bauble is human greatness! And even this will not endure."

This particular king was King George II, and he was at the height of his power;

But here was this fifty-five year old monarch looking frail, worn, ugly... within five years he would be dead, his aorta would rupture while he sat on the toilet

What an ugly and inglorious way for a King to die

Wesley put it right: "And is this all the world can give even to a King?"

5. So also all our glorious ACHIEVEMENTS

- a. We age and can't do any more the things we could do when we were younger
- b. I recently read an optimistic article saying that Michael Jordan can still dunk at age 51! Friend... it is just a matter of time. And time always wins.
- c. Our awards and accolades and skills... all of them are like the grass of the field... people forget; no one cares about the Academy Award won for Best Supporting Actor in 1955. Who knows? Who cares?

In Pasargadae, Iran is the forlorn, windswept tomb of Cyrus the Great who built the Persian Empire. According to Plutarch, the ancient historian, it was originally inscribed with these words:

"O man, whoever you are and wherever you come from, for I know you will come, I am Cyrus who won the Persians their empire. Do not therefore begrudge me this bit of earth that covers my bones."

But now, you can't even read those words!

***"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷
The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows..."***

- 6. Extend this idea to all the earthly glory that people pursue in our time
 - a. The "glory" of massive buildings will fade... the shocking fall of the World Trade Center's twin towers in a matter of a few moments shows that even the most impressive buildings can be removed instantly... with only a pile of rubble left
 - b. The "glory" of fame is rapidly fading: how many famous people of the 19th century have slipped into obscurity... very few people have heard of them?
 - i) Perhaps a famous Shakespearean actor whose performances electrified New York and whose name slipped into obscurity as he aged into his nineties... and is now forgotten entirely

- ii) Perhaps an invention that was all the rage for a while (like the FAX or the telegraph) that eventually is superseded by superior technologies and fades into obscurity... the glory of the fame withers and passes
 - c. The “glory” of power is also rapidly fading... like the story of President Jimmy Carter fervently negotiating the release of the American hostages from their Iranian captors on the day of his successor, Ronald Reagan’s inaugural to the Oval Office... the hostages weren’t finally released until after Reagan had been sworn in... when a top aide of Carter’s, who had been following the details of the release, called the same individual for information, he was told that that information was classified and he was now no longer cleared to receive it! Just like that... in one minute, the power was gone
 - d. ALL HUMAN GLORY is fading! Athletic glory fades... Earl Campbell, an NFL running back who was an astonishing physical specimen weighing 230 pounds and running 40 yards in 4.5 seconds, able to run over linebackers and leap over cornerbacks, now needs a walker just to make his way down the hall
 - e. Intellectual glory fades: Dr. Charles Kao, a trailblazer in fiber optics who won to 2009 Nobel Prize for his research, has Alzheimer’s and cannot carry on a normal conversation
7. Even ordinary people’s capabilities fade... normal people age and can do less and less... their arms get weak with age, their once sharp minds grow dull... their memories fade; and as they age, fewer and fewer people know them... funerals for people in their 90s are frequently poorly attended, because they have outlived their relatives and perhaps even their children...
8. Very few people will be remembered by their great grandchildren

Psalm 103:15-16 As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

C. Why Does Man’s Glory Fade? Because God Wills It!

1. Notice that the glory of man fades and withers BECAUSE THE BREATH OF THE LORD BLOWS ON IT
2. It is not an accident!
3. If the Lord wills to exalt a man and make him remembered for thousands of years, he will be remembered

2 Samuel 7:9 Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth.

4. If the Lord wills to exalt a woman and make even her simplest deeds remembered for two thousand years, she will be remembered

A woman with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume poured it on Jesus... Jesus said this:

Matthew 26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

5. But if God wills for your achievements to fade and be forgotten, they will be...
6. God's breath blows on us all and we all wither
7. This is what makes the promise of eternal life in Christ so incredibly precious

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

D. God's Word Never Fades

Isaiah 40:7-8 Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

1. The Scripture is as green and vibrant and powerful and active today as it was when your great great grandparents first read it

2. The Scripture will still be living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword when your great great grandchildren read it to their kids if Jesus hasn't returned yet
3. God's Word was first "engraved in stone" on Moses' tablets... the beginning of the written word... that engraving is emblematic of the permanent nature of the Scripture
4. Christ openly taught this eternal nature of the Word of God:

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Matthew 5:18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

5. Peter quoted this passage in Isaiah 40 and related it to the gospel of Jesus Christ... this gospel is the CENTERPIECE of the Scripture... and it also stands forever
6. Peter said that this gospel gives us an inheritance that will not wither and die

1 Peter 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you

7. The centerpiece of this gospel is what it does for us... and TO us; in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are freed from the death penalty for our sins... and we will never die

John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish

Christ will raise us from the dead in GLORY!

1 Corinthians 15:43 [the body] is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The glory that is ours in Christ we will have forever!!

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

E. So Also Christ's Glory Never Fades

1. The centerpiece of all Scripture is Christ Jesus Himself... Jesus IS the Word, and the Word IS Jesus... so Jesus can never perish, Jesus can never fade; His glory is the same today as it was yesterday, and it will be the same tomorrow as it is today
2. The Word testifies to the astonishing glory of Christ

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being

3. That glory will never fade away...

Revelation 21:23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

IV. Behold the Greatness of God: Gentleness and Majesty (vs. 9-14)

Isaiah 40:9-14 You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings 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!" ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ 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. ¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

A. Messengers are Sent to Proclaim Good News

Isaiah 40:9 You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid

1. This astonishing good news has to be spread throughout Zion... and eventually throughout the world
2. Messengers are told to bring the GOOD NEWS of this forgiveness of sins... the good news that the Lord is coming to save His people from their sins... the good news that, despite the fact that we are MORTAL and that all our glory will fade away, God is coming by His word to raise us up to eternal glory
3. These messengers are told to go up on a high mountain to proclaim this message of good news
4. They are told to lift up their voices with a SHOUT... they are not to be bashful, not to be shy, not to be quiet, not to be afraid

B. The Message: BEHOLD, YOUR GOD

Isaiah 40:9 say to the towns of Judah, "Behold your God!"

1. The good news is GOD HIMSELF!! He is the glorious good news of the gospel... as we already saw in vs. 5:

Isaiah 40:5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

2. The word "behold" (which NIV leaves out) is powerful... like God unveiled, dramatically
3. You haven't seen Him before like this, haven't comprehended His majestic nature... the full glory of God most powerfully revealed in His salvation of His people from their sins

C. Isaiah 40: One of the greatest chapters in the Bible for the unveiling of the majesty and glory of God

1. Vs. 10: The amazing power of God

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him

The mighty power of God is on display in the salvation of His people... their enemies will flee before Him in terror... He has come to rout the enemies of His people and save them entirely

2. Vs. 10: the reward the Lord comes to bring

Vs. 10 behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

Almighty God also comes to reward His faithful servants... to give the ultimate reward of His favor and love

3. Vs. 11: the astonishing tenderness of the Lord for His weak, frail people

Isaiah 40:11 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.

D. The Amazing Combination of the Awesome Power of God with His Tender Love for Us is Mind Boggling

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

E. So Also the Awesome Wisdom of God in Crafting Such a Salvation Plan

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

More next week!

V. Application

A. Come to Christ!

1. The amazing power of this passage to comfort brokenhearted sinners is incalculable!

2. Do you see yourself this way? Do you see the vastness of your sin, exposed by the perfect law of God?
3. Do you understand that God has been at WAR with you as a sinner? Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe has considered you AN ENEMY?
4. Do you feel the weight of that warfare? Does it bring you to terror to realize that God could strike you down at any moment... but that instead, in the sweetness of the gospel message, He is proclaiming PEACE to you? Forgiveness of sins? That in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, there is available for you DOUBLE for all your sins? More than enough atoning power!!
5. Do you realize that all human beings are GRASS and all their glory is as the grass of the field... green and vibrant and tall today, tomorrow withered and ready to be thrown in a furnace and burned? Do you see the utter futility of all forms of human glory? All the glory of money, of power, of achievement—of scientific inventions, or business success, or athletic achievement, or fame, or health, or material wealth... all that glory is GRASS... withering before our very eyes
6. Are you some mountain rising up in your pride and confidence, saying you don't need Christ? The word of God has the power to level you, to flatten you, to humble you!
7. Are you on the other hand a low valley, so low and depressed and empty and crushed by the weight of your sins, the weight of your failure, the weight of your mortality that you think "God could NEVER love someone like me! God could NEVER forgive someone like me!" The gentleness of Christ has the power to raise you up and give you hope
8. This is the gentleness of Christ:

Isaiah 40:11 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.

9. So... COME TO CHRIST!! Let His blood be the full measure of atonement for all your sins... know that your warfare has ended... or rather, that God's warfare with you has ended
10. If you are a Christian and came to Christ years ago, let the truth of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH bring you infinite comfort...
"Comfort my people" says your God

B. Christians: ALSO Be Humbled by this Message

1. Meditate much on this statement:

Isaiah 40:6-8 "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

2. Stop running after the things of this world... the glory of this present age, which is fading away constantly before our eyes
3. Esteem the WORD OF GOD above all things... the word endures forever, and will never change
4. Feed daily on the word of God... let it give you a taste of eternity... drink in the Bible

C. Behold, Your God

1. Seek to "see" the glory of God in the Word of God every day
2. By faith, plumb the depths of Scripture to find how infinitely majestic God is...Feed on God as your treasure and your portion!
3. Feel the range of the greatness of God... His infinite power and His infinite gentleness to his tender lambs

D. The Second Coming of Christ: He Will Come in Power and Will Reward His Servants

E. Next Week: Get Ready for an Extended and Careful Meditation on the Greatness of God's Power and Wisdom!!!