

PREPARE
THE WAY
OF THE LORD

1st Week of Advent
DEVOTIONAL



ISAIAH 40:1-5

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² 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.

³ A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ 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.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

DAY 1

ISAIAH 40:1-2a

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

Do you ever find yourself discouraged in faith? Or down because of your sin? There was a time I can remember when I felt particularly crushed over my sin. My pastor at the time asked me, “How do you picture the expression on God’s face for you?”

I think I flinched: disappointment? frustration? irritation? My conscience tormented me. Yet deep down in my heart I knew the answer, and I was speechless. As my lips quivered and eyes welled up with tears, my pastor helped me to find the words, “He looks at you with a face of tender care, because He loves you. He loves you.”

In that moment the simple truth of God’s love broke down all walls of unbelief and cast out my shame. Because of the atoning blood that Jesus poured out for you and for me, the Father does not look upon us with his anger, but with gentleness. This Advent we hear this message of comfort that Isaiah speaks to God’s people. One that is found in the promised Messiah, Jesus. We invite you during this season to celebrate the heart of God and give ear to His tender voice.

- How do you picture the Father’s expression for you? Why do you think that is?
- Do you ever struggle with believing that you are forgiven and made clean? What is/was that experience like?

Pastor Dane Ortlund in his book *Gentle and Lowly* describes the heart of Christ like this: “It is impossible for the affectionate heart of Christ to be over celebrated, made too much of, exaggerated. It cannot be plumbed. But it is easily neglected, forgotten. We draw too little strength from it” (p29).

- Do you believe that Christ cares for you and comforts you in this moment? Do you cling to the Holy Spirit to help you rest in the love of God? In Jesus, God calls to you, “Comfort, comfort [insert your name].” Take a moment to rest in God’s words for you and draw your strength from him.

PRAYER

Father God, I confess that an honest look at my sin brings me to despair. Not only my sin, but the circumstances of life and the world surrounding are so dark at times. You sent Jesus to reveal your tender heart towards your people; to cry out for repentance and faith that leads us to streams of living water that will never run dry. Thank you Lord for being my only true comfort in life and in death. Thank you that even when I struggle to rest in your promises, your Spirit surrounds me with Your love. Help me to listen to your voice of comfort today. Amen.

DAY 2

ISAIAH 40:2b

that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

Here we note that the reason for the difficulties God's people are experiencing is their own iniquity or sin. The prophet even goes as far as to call it warfare with none other than their Creator.

- Do you see your rebellious heart and the sin it produces to be at warfare with God? How does this shape the way you see your experiences in this world?

Now take note of the fact that our iniquity needs pardon and it is only the Lord's hand that is capable of granting this pardon.

- Sometimes we can get caught thinking we can make up for our sin. Spend some time repenting of your self-salvation efforts and mentally place yourself at the mercy of God.
- Rejoice that God hears these prayers and moves his hand to grant us the pardon we need. In fact, God's mercy is so great we receive "double" for all our sins. Or in other words God's forgiveness is so great it deals with realities caused by our sin that are beyond our comprehension. Spend some time marvelling at God's grace and thanking him for his mercy.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus how hopeless and helpless a people we are without your mercy in our lives. Though you have made us good and created us for relationship with you, we are rebels, choosing instead to go to war with the very one who has made us. Forgive us for the pride that refuses to surrender to you as our King. Yet you have not abandoned us to ourselves! In your mercy you have extended your nail-scarred hand to bring an end to our warfare and pardon for our iniquity. Thank you Lord for this mercy that thoroughly cleanses us both from sins that we see and from those which you alone can see. Holy Spirit help us to live today joyfully, humbly as recipients of such a great salvation. Amen.

DAY 3

ISAIAH 40:3

A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God

Isaiah provides a doublet or repeated theme here with the image of the wilderness and desert describing the same thing using two different terms. It represents uninhabited and uncultivated land where only nomadic people dwell, but it is also represents the place of chaos and sin that is outside of the peace of the Garden/Promised land. The wilderness/desert is an important place in the history of redemption beginning with Israel's travel from Egypt to the Promised land of Canaan, and it becomes a place of God's judgment against the first generation of Israel because of their refusal to go into Canaan. It also becomes the place where Israel repeatedly fails the testing of God and proves themselves unfaithful. Again because of Israel's and Judah's sin they are continually under threat of being scattered and their cities becoming like the wilderness. Isaiah 27:10

¹⁰ For the fortified city is solitary,
a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness;

Despite their sin God is continually willing to meet them in the desert and bring about redemption. He doesn't abandon them in the wilderness but guided them through his presence in the tabernacle. Even the prophets continually remind the people that God is going to redeem them out of the wilderness of their sin and that is what we see here in Isaiah 40 as God clears away for Israel to be redeemed from their sin.

We see this fulfilled in the New Testament in a number of ways. First, John the Baptist is the prophet in the wilderness calling Israel to repentance and anointing the one who will bring about the redemption of Israel, Jesus. Second, Jesus then goes into the wilderness to fast for 40 days. There he proves himself to be faithful Israel as he overcomes the Devil's temptations. Third, Jesus again proves himself faithful by carrying our sins into the wilderness of death, but because he was faithful and without sin he emerges from the wilderness to bring all his people into the promised land.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we recognize our sinfulness and how we were lost in the wilderness. Thank you for taking our sin upon yourself through your son and bringing us into your kingdom. We know that you are faithful and that we are alone and desolate but have been adopted into your family.

DAY 4

ISAIAH 40:4

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.

In Babylonian hymns there is a call to make their god Nabu's "way good, renew his road. Make straight his path." According to Alec Motyer, in his commentary, Isaiah, this was a festival journey that pictured a journey made without difficulty and with certainty of arrival for the god.

- Do we live with the certain expectation of the coming of the Lord?
- How does this change the way that you approach your day today meditating on the certainty of arrival of the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Here the prophet uses the imagery of valleys, hills, uneven ground and rough places to be leveled and made a plain. As we look for the coming of the Lord it is fair to see this imagery having both personal and societal fulfillment. Personally God will lead us in ways of repentance in order that we might be prepared for his coming. Societally, God invites us to see the structures of this world as valleys to be lifted or mountains to be brought low.

- What are the rough places that you see in your life today that you want to bring before the Lord in repentance?
- Societally, what are some of the "mountains" you long to see brought low or "valleys" you yearn to see exalted? Earlier the prophet calls on the people to "make straight a desert highway for our God," as you bring the broken social structures before the Lord, ask how you might participate in the work that he is doing?

PRAYER

King of kings, Lord of lords, we bow before you today as we see the certainty of your coming. Thank you for this reminder. Too often we have despaired of our lives, we have despaired of the world around us, forgetting that it is your world and that you are coming as a victor to claim what is yours. Help us, O King, to do our part in “making straight the highway for our God.” May we live with humbled hearts, personally seeking renewal. May we be sensitive to the places in society that either need exaltation or leveling. May we live as a people prepared, in a world poised to receive our King. We pray these things in Jesus Name. Amen.

DAY 5

ISAIAH 40:5

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

As we walk through this passage we realize that the “glory of the Lord” is the tenderness and mercy that he shows to a rebellious people. We realize that the “glory of the Lord” is his ability to overturn the sin and sinful systems people have erected within his creation and establish a new kingdom characterized with righteousness and justice.

- Do you regularly connect God’s glory with his mercy? How does that change things for you? Spend some time praising him for his glorious mercy!

Another aspect of his glory is that all flesh shall see it together. It is not just for the Jews, not just for the Anglos or the Africans, but all flesh!

- How often do you marvel at the cosmic comprehensiveness of the salvation which our God is engaged in? How might this challenge an ethno-centric or self-centered view of the world?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus we thank you that your glory is wrapped up with your mercy. As you come to this world that has rebelled against you, you elevate the valleys and humble the mountains. You bring grace to all who will surrender in faith. This is your glory. Glory revealed to all flesh. Lord forgive us for being content with lesser glory. Expand our heart to match yours as we wait for the day that all flesh together shall see your glory. This we pray in the most precious name of Jesus. Amen