

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “The Comfort Zone” from the “Worth the Wait” Advent sermon series

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- This section of Isaiah begins the second section of the book. Whereas chapters 1-39 focused on darkness and judgement, chapters 40-66 give promises of restoration through the release of Israel from captivity, and the coming of the Messiah. Take comfort: God will come and care for God’s people!
- Verse 2 says, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone, and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over for all her sins.”
- Verses 3-5 call on God’s people to a spiritual renewal in preparation for the Messiah’s advent. Verse 3 begins with “a voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare a way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.’” The comfort being discussed in this section of Isaiah will come by way of God’s arrival, in which God’s people should prepare for by making a “highway”. Verse 3 is quoted in each of the New Testament Gospels (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; and John 1:23). As a matter of fact, John the Baptist called himself “the voice” in John 1:23, calling for the preparations (i.e., repentance) to “Make straight the way for the Lord” for Christ’s ministry of salvation.
- Verses 6-8 speaks of how we all wither away like grass and flowers, but God’s Word is eternal. “Shout that people are like grass. Their beauty fades as quickly as the flowers in a field. The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the Lord. And so it is with people. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of our God stands forever.” God’s prophetic promises will never fail!
- Verses 9-10 read, “You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news 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!” See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm.
- See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- “The task of a prophet is not to smooth things over but make things right.” - Eugene Petersen. It is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable!
- The first section of Isaiah (chapters 1-39) sees the prophet *afflicting the comfortable* by warning Judah of their spiritual complacency and moral erosion.
- In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar’s troops from Babylon attacked Jerusalem and deported the people there and destroyed all their temples and structures. It was Babylonian policy to obliterate the entire culture of the defeated.
- Exile: a way of dwelling in a space with a constant awareness that “I am not at home.” In today’s text, the displaced Jews were haunted by two existential questions: (1) is God going to help us; and (2) Does God even care?
- In Isaiah 40, we now see a hope for those in exile! (40:1-2) God is making a way for the displaced Jewish people where there was not a way!
- Help for the Jews finally came in 537 BC! Cyrus of Persia (Cyrus the Great) was the reigning political leader and made it a policy to help restore those that were conquered and had their cultures erased.
- Regardless of our circumstance, we can always “go home again.” It is not just about geography, but theology...a person.
- The Lord is our refuge and dwelling place. Even in the wilderness, and as refugees, God is always our home. God with us, and God *within* us. It is not brick and mortar but soul and spirit.
- It is possible to be at home...even in exile. Even the wilderness can be *home*!
- The Lord is our comfort zone and our security. He is home!
- Remember the story of the Charlie Brown Christmas: Linus takes center stage and recites the Christmas story in Luke 2. When Linus says, “Fear Not”, he let’s go of his “security” blanket. The message is: the comfort that we are looking for isn’t found in a blanket, or a bottle, or a pill, or a bank account or a production. It is in the Gospel!
- The security we are looking for is in a God who makes His presence known in a manger.
- God is our shelter, our dwelling place, our salvation. He wants us to make His *home* in you and in me. That is worth the wait!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- To whom was Isaiah's prophecy of comfort directed? Why? How can we apply this to our times?
- How did Isaiah use the surrounding land to illustrate the change that Isaiah envisioned when God would intervene on behalf of His people? (See v. 4)
- In times of distress or uncertainty, what brings you comfort?
- What does it mean to be "exiled"?
- How is the idea of *home* not a geographical or physical location?
- Explain how God is our home and our shelter.

