

# Isaiah 40:1-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please keep that page open in Isaiah that we read earlier. I'll turn to it now on page 599. We're going to look at the first 11 verses of that chapter. Let me pray for us before we do that.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time of year where we can reflect on the person of Jesus as we wait and hope for his coming. We pray you would help us to fix our eyes on him, the perfecter and the pioneer of our faith.

Amen. Amen. We are in a time of Advent. Whether it is through seeing the Christmas lights or the decorations or the adverts or through hearing Michael Buble tell you, we all know it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

We're in the yearly December run-up to Christmas, the time of Advent, as we wait for and hope for the arrival of Christ or we reflect on that period of history where people waited for and hoped for the first coming of Christ.

So we're in a yearly December time of Advent, but we're also in a larger time of Advent as we wait and hope for the second coming, the second Advent arrival of Christ.

[ 1 : 14 ] Both of these times involve waiting and hoping dwelling on who Jesus is. And whether it's December or any other time of year, it matters what we think of Jesus.

We're dwelling on him. We're waiting for him. We're hoping for him. So it matters who he is and what we think of him. How do we view Jesus Christ? At this time of year, as the cards are getting sent out, as we see school nativity plays and we sing carols, it's tempting and we do think of Jesus as the rosy-cheeked baby in a manger surrounded by his mother and father and shepherds and wise men.

In fact, for some people, this isn't just a December view of Jesus. There's a certain generation I hear of French people that always view Jesus like this. They call him le petit Jesus, meaning little Jesus.

I'm not making it up. I have a friend who's French who told me this. He tells me that as he was growing up in a completely non-Christian family, his grandparents would say things to him like, would petit Jesus do that?

Would he be behaving like this? Petit Jesus? Little Jesus. He is kind of a benchmark for behavior. He is innocent. He's a nice benchmark for French children and other children to look up to.

[ 2 : 38 ] But is that it? Is that all Jesus was? We believe, yes, Jesus told us himself. He came. He is gentle and lowly in heart.

He humbled himself in being born as a baby. But was his death only a demonstration of that love and humility? Or did it have a purpose beyond that?

Perhaps as you think of Jesus, you don't think of the term Advent. Maybe the term absent is better for you. You wonder, who is Jesus?

Was he really born? Where is he now? What's he doing now? As we look around and see wickedness in the world, maybe he does feel absent to you or like he doesn't care or can't do anything.

Well, as we look at Isaiah chapter 40 this evening, we will see that Jesus came not only humbling himself, but Jesus came to bring restoration for his people.

[ 3 : 40 ] Jesus came to reveal the glory of God. And he is not absent by any understanding. He is reigning right now. This is a rich passage.

We'll only be able to scratch the surface of it tonight, but I hope we'll see its fulfillment in Jesus, particularly in three things, in his comfort, his glory, and his reign. So our first heading tonight is this, the comfort of restoration.

The comfort of restoration. Let's look at verse one again. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. And verse two, speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

If anyone in history was in need of comfort, it was God's people at around 700 BC when the book of Isaiah was written. We're in chapter 40 today, but for a lot of the last 39 chapters, God has been warning Judah and Israel of the consequences of their sin.

And he has been telling them that exile will happen as a result of their sin. They have been unfaithful to God. They have been covenant breakers to him. And they were facing exile as a result. [ 4 : 53 ] Chapter 39 ends with God telling the king, Hezekiah, through Isaiah. He's telling the king that this exile will happen during your children's lifetime.

While they are on the throne, this exile will take place. So when Isaiah was written, and in the following years, when it was being read, God's people were either facing imminent exile or experiencing that exile.

They were in need of comfort, in need of restoration. And that is exactly what God is doing for them. In fact, he's commanding someone to speak comfort to his people.

Comfort them. Speak tenderly to them. This passage was famously set to music in Handel's Messiah using the King James Version. It captures this beautifully. It says, Comfort ye my people. He's telling someone, Go, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to them. It's a verb, a command, a commission. God is commanding someone to comfort his people. And the comfort is spelled out in the verses that come afterwards.

[ 6 : 01 ] The verses show us that this comfort is restoration. It is a comfort of restoration. The first line, even, just verse one, begins to show what that restoration is.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. My people, your God. These words echo the covenant that God has made with his people.

In Genesis 17, God says to Abraham, I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring throughout their generations. I will be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God reiterates it to Moses in Exodus 6. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God. When God says, comfort my people, says your God, he is showing them that that covenant relationship is being restored.

Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, despite their breaking of the covenant, God is faithful to them. They are his people. He is their God. The relationship between God and his people is restored.

[ 7 : 16 ] He promises them the comfort of restoration. We see more of what that restoration means in verse 2. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she is received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Her warfare, her exile is ended, it's over. Her iniquity is pardoned, it's forgiven. She is received double for her sins.

That last phrase is a curious one, isn't it? She's received double for her sins. It's not God saying he's paid the price on them twice over.

He's been heavy-handed with them. It's not saying that. It's not saying that Israel have paid the price for her sins, I think. I think we know this for a couple of reasons. If Israel had paid the price of her own sins, well, what are the wages of sin?

The wages of sin is death. If you, O Lord, kept track of sins, who could stand? Israel can't have finished paying the price and still be standing.

[ 8 : 25 ] It's impossible. So we know this for that reason. I think we also know this because we live millennia after this was written and these events took place. We know that while God's people were geographically restored back to Jerusalem, they were brought from exile from Babylon, they were still facing warfare when the Roman occupation took place.

So what is this pardon? What is the end of warfare? What is this double for her sins she's received? Well, if we look to the New Testament, I think we get a bit of a picture of what this means.

Some 500 years later, after the restoration, the physical, geographical restoration, a man named Simeon we meet in Luke chapter 2. He is waiting for the comfort of Israel, for the consolation of Israel.

It's the same word. He is waiting for this comfort and he's been told he will see it in his lifetime and he sees it come in the person of the Lord Jesus. Simeon is waiting for this consolation and he sees it.

He calls Jesus the Lord's Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus that we receive this comfort. It is in Jesus that we receive double from the Lord's hand. And what is the double?

[ 9 : 43 ] When we receive double from the Lord's hand, we receive pardon in Jesus and restoration through him. We said it in that confession.

He takes our rags and clothes us in his righteousness. This double, you could call it a double imputation. The imputation of our sin to Jesus and his righteousness to us.

And so when Simeon meets the infant Lord Jesus, he doesn't see him as le petit Jesus, but as God's chosen king.

He is the consolation of Israel. He is the means of comfort, of salvation, of restoration. We could alter our first point from the comfort of restoration to Jesus brings the comfort of restoration.

Christians here, hear these words of comfort. Christ has taken your sins and he has clothed you with his righteousness. You have received double from the Lord's hand. Now verses one and two act, they're a bit like the headline of a newspaper article for us.

[ 10 : 55 ] And then the following verses help unpack what this comfort of restoration is. In these verses we see three voices that are crying out in verses three and six and nine.

God commands them, he commissions them to comfort his people and these voices, these heralds, go and explain what the comfort of restoration is.

So the first voice cries out in verses three to five, declaring that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. That's our second heading tonight, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

Verses three to five, let's look down and read them again. A voice cries, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level. The rough places are plain and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

[ 12 : 03 ] Verses three and four there, I think they're a bit like a musical crescendo. It's getting louder and louder. They're building up to a big event in the wilderness. Prepare a way for the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway. Valleys will be lifted up, mountains shall be made low. The uneven ground and rough places shall become a plain. That's anticipation. It's like a drum roll.

We're building up to a big event. It's a bit like that scene in Jurassic Park where they've got the glasses of water on the car dashboard and they hear the footsteps thudding and they see the water rippling.

They know something's coming. Something big is about to happen. What is it? What is it that's about to happen? Valleys shall be lifted up, mountains shall be made low, rough places and uneven ground shall become level and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

That is the moment of anticipation they've been waiting for. That's the big event. The glory of the Lord being revealed. The desert highway is for the Lord, we saw in verse 3.

[ 13 : 08 ] The glory of the Lord is being revealed. It is returning back to the land. In Ezekiel 10 and 11, you could look it up later, you can read about the glory of the Lord departing from the temple.

It departs from God's people. It's a sign of God's judgment on the people. They were unfaithful.

They were covenant breakers and so he's no longer among them in the temple.

But here, here they're given the promise of the Lord returning on a highway. He will reveal his glory to them again. This restoration that we're reading about, this isn't just restoration of people to land.

It is restoration of God's presence among the people or of the people to God's presence. Every obstacle that stands in the way, mountain or valley, shall be removed.

The way is being prepared for the Lord to return to the land. We see in verse 11, as he returns to the land, he will be leading his people. He will be their God. They will be his people.

[ 14 : 14 ] He will be dwelling among them. And in restoring them to his presence, his glory shall be revealed. These verses are famously quoted in all four Gospels in the early pages of Mark 3, Luke 1, Matthew 3, John 1.

Each of them tell these words, but we hear them through the voice of John the Baptist. John the Baptist goes into the wilderness and he proclaims, prepare the way for the Lord.

And he reveals that the one who will lead his people down this desert highway, the one who will reveal the glory of the Lord is none other than the Lord Jesus.

This is the true ending of the Jewish exile. Not the return to Jerusalem, but the arrival on the scene of Jesus. He's announced by John the Baptist, Jesus, Emmanuel, God dwelling with us.

John says he came to testify about the one who is to come, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world to bring restoration to the people and to reveal the glory of the Lord.

[ 15 : 26 ] this is not petit Jesus. This is the climactic revelation of the glory of the Lord in the person of Jesus Christ.

He is the word that became flesh. He made his dwelling among us. John says we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

again, we could alter the heading, sorry if you're taking notes, from the glory of the Lord revealed to Jesus reveals the glory of the Lord.

Jesus reveals the glory of the Lord. As he leads his people, as he pardons them for their sin, he clothes them with his righteousness, he restores them. And this event, this isn't just for the Israelites.

Look again at verse 5, did you see that? Verse 5, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. All flesh shall see this glory.

[ 16 : 31 ] This is a huge theme in these chapters of Isaiah. In Isaiah 49 and 57 we get the same idea of this, this mountain becoming a road, these desert highways.

Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way, the Lord says. They shall come from afar, from the north and the west. God says, peace, peace, to the far and the near.

This highway for the Lord to walk down will not just be for him to lead the Israelites but people of all nations. Isaiah 49, it is too small a thing that God would only restore the tribes of Jacob.

It's too small a thing. Jesus will be a light for all nations that God's salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Jesus reveals the glory internationally.

All flesh shall see that glory. And it isn't an empty promise either. It would be all well and good to say that but it's not an empty promise. Verse 5 says, this is spoken by the mouth of the Lord.

[ 17 : 40 ] And as the second voice cries out in verses 6 to 8 we see that whatever comes from the mouth of the Lord will stand forever. We say this line after we hear the Bible read here because it summarizes what we know to be true.

Grass withers, flowers fade, mankind just the same. But the word of our God stands forever. We can see the certainty of Isaiah's words now because we live this side of the cross.

We've seen Jesus' glory revealed. We've seen the God's glory revealed in Jesus. Isaiah was written 700 years before Jesus' birth.

It shows us the certainty of God's words. Men are like grass. They and their glory fade. The kingdoms of the Babylonians and the Assyrians fell.

But God's word did not fall. God's word stood as not only did the Israelites return to Jerusalem but Jesus was born fulfilling prophecies written centuries and millennia before his birth.

[ 18 : 49 ] The word of our God stands forever. So we that read it, we can have full confidence that there will come a day when Jesus restores his people, when he leads them home, people of all nations.

He is not absent, not in the least. He has said he will lead his people revealing his glory and he will. His word accomplishes its purposes.

It will not return to him empty. So this revelation of the glory of the Lord is certain. Jesus brings comfort of restoration and he will lead his people home.

And he will do so ruling as shepherd and as king. That's our final heading tonight. I won't change this one. Jesus rules as shepherd and king.

Jesus rules as shepherd and king. He reveals the comfort of restoration or he brings the comfort of restoration and reveals the glory of the Lord. He rules as shepherd and king. Look at verses 9 and 11 with me.

[ 19 : 53 ] Go on up to a 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.

Behold, the Lord comes with might and his arm rules for him. Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. Here, the third voice, the third herald is told, go and cry out good news saying, behold your God.

He's told to go and cry out good news. Good news, the word is used in the Old Testament to say kind of the good news of a king's victory. Herald would come back from battle and proclaim the good news of the king's victory.

We get that in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we read the word good news in the opening lines of Mark's gospel. the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

[ 21 : 05 ] Simeon waited for this good news, this proclamation of victory. John the Baptist testified about this good news. Good news, it literally means gospel.

The good news is Jesus Christ himself. He is the one that brings restoration, we saw. He is the one who reveals the glory of the Lord. Jesus is the victorious one, the one whom the heralds say, he reigns, behold your God.

And verses 10 and 11 spell out exactly what sort of ruler he is. He rules as shepherd and king. Let's look first at how he reigns as king.

He reigns as king with might, with a strong arm, with might and a strong arm. It's the same sort of language as you see in the Old Testament about how God rescued his people from Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

The same Lord with a mighty hand and outstretched arm who rescued Israel from the Egyptians. This is the same Lord Jesus who comes with might, whose arm rules, who will bring restoration for his people.

[ 22 : 21 ] as we look back to the wonders God performed in Exodus. With that same mighty arm, Jesus is ruling and reigning right now. We see his might in his life as he calms the storm, as he casts out demons, as he heals the sick and raises the dead.

Nothing is outside of his authority. Nothing is beyond his might. Jesus reigns as king. And he brings his reward with him, his recompense before him.

We know that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. And Revelation 22 says it just like that, bringing his recompense with him to repay each one for what they have done.

And that is true. But I don't think that is what this verse is primarily talking about. When it says his reward, his recompense, it's not talking about him rewarding others at this point.

It's talking about the reward he receives, his reward. His reward is his people, his flock, those that he leads.

[ 23 : 36 ] And look how he leads them. In verse 11, he leads them as a shepherd. He reigns as a king and he leads as a shepherd. He will tend to them.

He will see to their every need. They shall not want. He will restore their souls. Just like David said, they will fear no evil. He is with them. God dwelling with them.

His rod and his staff comfort them. Verse 11 ends, he will gently lead those that are with young. He will gather the lambs in his arms.

Isn't that an astonishing thought? the same mighty arm which he rules with, which he rescued Israel with, which he parted the Red Sea with, he holds his lambs with, holding them close to his chest as those he loves dearly.

The arm which leads also are the arms which rule the universe. The strong one who rules, who levels mountains and raises valleys is also the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

[ 24 : 46 ] Say to the cities of Judah, behold your God, Jesus the shepherd king. Here we get the full colour picture of what it means to receive double from the Lord's hand.

He doesn't just pardon our sin, and that's no small thing, but he doesn't only pardon our sin and then leave us to our own devices. He pardons sin and he carries his flock home.

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness, Colossians says, and brought us into the kingdom of light, his kingdom. And so, in this time of advent, what do you make of Jesus?

Is he le petit Jesus, the child in the manger, innocent, lowly, but nothing more? Or is he the mighty one, who humbled himself beyond belief in being born as a baby, but yet is the one who brings restoration for God's people, God in the flesh among us, the consolation of Israel?

Is he absent? Isaiah would tell us he is not absent. He is reigning, and while in his sovereign wisdom he is permitting and limiting evil now, there will come a time when he comes with recompense, ending sin and death, bringing his reward, his flock with him.

[ 26 : 18 ] And at that point we will know once and for all that in all things he has indeed been ruling and reigning with a mighty arm. He has been working all things for the good of his people.

Cities of Judah, behold your God, Jesus Christ, he brings the comfort of restoration, he reveals the glory of the Lord, he rules as shepherd and as king.  
Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me