

This Sunday, in part three of our 700BC series, Candice Reardon shared a message from Isaiah 40.

The book of Isaiah is made up of two sections; chapters 1-39 is God speaking through the prophet Isaiah to His people in Judah, essentially warning them about making alliances with foreign nations for their security and protection. Chapter 40 begins: “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.” This marks a new tone for the rest of the Book of Isaiah. In this Chapter, God wants to console and comfort His people and renew their hope in Him. He’s thought through this – what do I need to say to my people that will leave them stable and strong, that will prevent them from falling back into the sins of the past AND help them to endure their time in exile holding to me as their loving God.

He’s not a God of wishy-washy comforts and generic sympathies. His purpose here is to speak comfort and truth that will strengthen and fortify His people again so that they do not wander back into their sins of the past that got them into this mess.

In this chapter, we see three things a comforting Father wants to remind His people of:

1. HE’S PREPARED A WAY FOR THEIR SALVATION (Isaiah 40:35)

We see this prophesied in Isaiah and then fulfilled 700 years later in the life of John the Baptist who came as a forerunner to prepare the way for people’s hearts to receive Jesus as their King. In fact, John the Baptist, when he’s being asked by the religious leaders of the day, refers back to this prophecy and in John 1v 23 says: “*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness “make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.”*”

God is such a loving, compassionate Father who is desperate for all people to come into a relationship with Him. He goes to the greatest lengths to secure our friendship - even sending John as a messenger before Jesus arrives on this earth, to start to soften people’s hearts, convict them of their sin, and to help them realise their need for a Saviour... and He tells us about this messenger who is to prepare the way for the King’s arrival 700 years before He arrives!

Look at the language used in this scripture. Does this sound like a God who wants to make it difficult to find Him? Does it sound like a God who wants to conceal Himself and let people work to find Him? What we see here is a God that’s that doesn’t want anyone to miss out on His salvation plan for this planet... make a path and keep it clear for the Saviour’s arrival - remove every obstacle, every rock and stone and mountain that would obstruct the King coming to encounter His people. And tell them about it 700 years before even the forerunner to the Saviour arrives!

2. HE’S LARGE AND IN CHARGE (Isaiah 40:21-26)

God is right-sizing Himself in the minds of His people again. At first glance, what He’s saying may come across

harsh – He calls us grasshoppers! The emphasis here isn’t on how small and insignificant man is but rather how enormous and almighty and wise and knowledgeable God is...and then by comparison to God’s size, man is small, and our life is fleeting.

His people had lost sight of who He is and how mighty and powerful He is. Their fretfulness and anxiety every time they got wind of a foreign army wanting to come and make war with them, and this bad reflex they had of running to another nation for protection is evidence that they had lost sight of the size of The One who stretches out the heaven and holds the waters in the hollow of His hand. He reminds them – “you’re afraid of Babylon and Assyria, well I am the one who brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing, and by blowing on them their life is ended.

I can imagine this truth is tremendously comforting to His people. God isn’t going on about His size, and strength and wisdom for his benefit but theirs!

It’s often difficult to describe whether a something is big or small if we don’t have something to compare it to. We determine the size of something by comparing it to the size something else. Size is relative. And this is what we do when we evaluate the problems we face... we evaluate just how big and scary the problem is by what we compare it to.

If we compare our problems or circumstances to our ability to solve them, there are going to be many times when the problem seems big and terrifying and insurmountable. (And if we compare the problem to ourselves and determine that we have all we need to overcome it and deal with it, we might tread into the territory of being prideful and self-reliant). But if we always compare the problem and the circumstance to a right-sized perspective of God, the problem or issue will be small by comparison and should not terrify us. We’re not saying dismiss the problem or pretend it’s not there. It still exists, but its size is kept in perspective because we’re comparing it to The One who holds the waters in the hollow of His hand and the dust of the earth in a basket.

In this portion of scripture, God is saying to His people: “those nations who want to come to make war with you, don’t compare them to yourself and the state of your military and your ability to fight them, compare them to Me and My might and My power and My desire to protect you!”

If you are afraid of something/a problem/ a circumstance occurring, you may have lost sight of the hugeness of God/you might need to ask Holy Spirit to renew your view of the One who stretches out the heavens like a tent.

3. HE HAS WHAT THEY NEED TO ENDURE (Isaiah 40:27-31)

The NLT translates verse 27 as “*o Jacob, how can you say the Lord doesn’t see your troubles? O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights?*” It seems at this time, God’s people believed that He didn’t see their pain and their suffering.... They felt like God was ignoring their rights to be protected, their rights to wellbeing, to live in a land that’s their own not in captivity.

This was their lament and their complaint 2700 years ago, but it still translates through to us today. In the midst of tremendous pain and suffering we have even asked the question, “where is God?”. “Does He not see what I’m going through/what my family is going through? How could He allow this – what about my rights to be protected from harm, to live comfortably, to be happy” the problems and circumstances we face today make us feel the same way the exiles did 2700 years ago.

In the midst of intense suffering, after huge disappointments like the nation of Judah had just been through, people can start to believe strange things about God. In fact, His people had started to believe a lie about Him - that He had abandoned them, that He was not looking after them, that He was not still passionately in love and devoted to them as His people and treasured possession!! So what does the God of all comfort do? As a loving Father, He can’t leave His people believing this lie about Him... So He speaks truth to them to dispel this lie – I am the everlasting God, the Creator, I will not grow tired or weary, and my understanding is unfathomable, (this is who I am) and I give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak!!!

He says “all my eternal power and strength I can give to you” – It’s yours...it’s a PROMISE OF PROVISION He extends to them. Why does He say this? Because when we live with this false view that God doesn’t see our problems and suffering and doesn’t care for our concerns/when He isn’t going to help us in our affliction we end up trying to sort things out with our own strength and power, running around using our human resources to make a plan (like Judah running to foreign nations to protect themselves from the threat of war). If we feel left alone by God, we are likely to become weary and tired as we desperately try to solve the problem, endure the hardship in our own strength (because we believe God has abandoned us). That’s why God gives them this promise – the provision of power and strength to help them endure the exile.

Now every problem we face, the provision that God has for us to overcome the problem is always greater. Whether its an emotional problem, a physical problem, monetary, family, marriage, health, material – God’s provision is always greater than the problem! Remember though we have a storehouse of provision available to us through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, but BUT there’s always a key to accessing God’s provision for the problem.

Here in Isaiah God says “I give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak...and then He explains to them the KEY to access this provision of strength. He says “those who WAIT on the Lord shall renew their strength...” He’s showing them a better way of doing things, a better way to live (patient waiting on Him) and that is going to allow Him the opportunity to enter into their situation/predicament and BE GOD AND SHOW HIMSELF TO BE MIGHTY AND THEIR PROTECTOR.

God is saying here “wait for me to come and help you, before you run again to foreign nations for your protection, wait for me to come fight for you...” Just wait, don’t worry, don’t fret, don’t run and scurry about trying to solve the problem – give me the space to BE YOUR GOD.”

How many miracles we’ve missed out on and how many battles we haven’t allowed God to fight for us, all because we haven’t waited for Him and given Him the space to be God in our lives. Whatever adversity you may find yourself in, be reminded that God has made a way for your salvation; He’s cleared a path for you to come and access eternal life, life and life to the full in Jesus Christ. He’s also large and in charge and when we right size Him in our minds, our problems are always smaller by comparison, then nothing seems impossible, no obstacle is insurmountable. Finally, the provision He has for you is always bigger than the problem. To access His storehouse of provision you need a key of faith – it’s often demonstrated by the action of ‘waiting on Him’. This allows Him space to ACTUALLY BE GOD IN OUR LIVES.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from Sunday’s message?
2. In times of distress or uncertainty, what brings you comfort?
3. What are some false/inadequate comforts you have given to other people? How can you replace these ‘imitations’ with Biblical comfort?
4. Isaiah 40:12-26 uses some powerful imagery to show the contrasts between God and other things. Read these verses and as a group, make a list of what God is like and what God is not like.
5. What does it look like for you to “wait for the Lord” (Isaiah 40:31)? In what circumstances is it difficult for you to wait for the Lord? Why?

PRAYER POINT

There may be individuals in your group facing difficult situations in which they need to experience the comfort of the Lord. Spend some time praying for them.