

Four Aspects of God for the Second Sunday in Advent

1. A God who brings comfort – Comfort my people – v1-2
2. A God who is coming – Prepare the way of the Lord - v 3-5
3. A God who brings clarity – People will last for a short time - v 6-8
4. A God who brings courage – Powerful and yet a shepherd - v9-11

Hymns

Readings – Isaiah 40:1-11 – Mark 1:1-8

1 We all need comfort and particularly at this time in our world history – we need a message of comfort today. Wouldn't it be great to hear God say to us, *Comfort, comfort my people.*

That is how our advent message begins today. God speaks to the prophet Isaiah and he speaks a message of comfort.

God's people were 70 years in exile, they had been deported by the Babylonians and their future was bleak. They had suffered under this cruel dictatorship. The Babylonians' goal was to break up Israel, to crush them, to take away their finest and best, and make them into Babylonians. The chosen people of God were to lose their identity and to lose their culture and lose their faith and lose their God.

That is the backdrop to these words. Their world had fallen apart and God seemed distant.

But into this situation God speaks through the prophet Isaiah.

Comfort, comfort my people, speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days have gone and that her sins are pardoned.

From Isaiah Chapter 40 to the end of the book, we have God pointing Isaiah to how this will happen – to how this comfort will come and it's a prophecy into the future, beyond Isaiah's day, a prophecy that looks to the coming of a servant of God and this servant will suffer and take the sins of the nation on his own shoulders.

This is what the book of Isaiah is all about – the announcing of the advent of God, coming to this world to redeem it.

This is the advent message of the bible. 700 years before Christ was born, and the prophet is telling his people that, in the future, God is bringing a Saviour to the world.

It's a great message and, trust me, this book is the hinge of our Christian faith.

On one side we have God's chosen people, the Jews in captivity, and on the other side we have the redemption of the world; and in between is the prophecy that God is coming to save the world.

God is in control and the sins of the people have been paid for and this suffering servant will take the sins of the world, past, present and future on his own shoulders. This suffering servant who is described in detail in Chapter 58 will be like a lamb before the shearers, He will suffer and die and the nation will be forgiven.

Do you see Christ in this?

Do you see Isaiah pointing to the advent of Christ?

As we prepare for Christmas and we prepare our hearts, let us see even beyond the baby in the manger, let us see God's big plan for this world, this universe, that His Son, the suffering servant will redeem the world and bring it back to him.

That is why God says, *comfort, comfort my people.....*The prophet can bring comfort to his people, for God has spoken and God has provided a means of salvation.

So, we also can receive comfort from Him today. These words are for you also. If you trust in God's plan of salvation through Christ, that the suffering servant on the cross has taken your sin on His shoulders, then you can embrace these words and let them flood into your heart.

Comfort, comfort my people...your sins are pardoned.

2 God's message to Isaiah is a message of urgency. *Listen!* He says...He calls to them.

Remember the words of Jesus....*"Those who have ears, let them hear"* and this message is for all God's people, but you need to hear it in your heart, not just hear it with your ears, but hear it and believe it in your heart.

Something amazing is about to happen. Something beyond your wildest dreams. I, God, am going to trail blaze a way to Jerusalem. I am going to do something so wonderful that all people will see it.

The people in Isaiah's today would be freed from exile and God was making a road for them.

But there is another dimension to this prophecy and it is that God is coming to us as a baby, Isaiah 9: *a virgin will give birth to a baby who will be the light of the world.*

Be ready for this! He tells them!

Another dimension is this: be ready, for at the end of time He will come as a mighty King. He is shouting *prepare the way for the King. Make straight a highway, fill in the valleys, straighten the curves, smooth out the rough places.*

Why? Because I am coming. I am on the way and nothing is going to stop me.

We will sing the hymn today...

Our eyes have seen the glory of our Saviour, Christ the Lord.

The older version has the words:

"Our eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave;

He is wisdom to the mighty;

He is succour to the brave;

so, the world shall be His footstool and the soul of time His slave;

our God is marching on.

Glory, glory Halleluiah

Glory, glory Halleluiah... "

I love this hymn and the confidence that it inspires!

700 years after Isaiah received this prophecy, and another prophet, called John the Baptist, proclaims those words, for he understood that the long-

awaited suffering servant from Isaiah is coming and John proclaims Isaiah's words,

"Prepare the way for the Lord's coming... Clear the road for him".

Isn't it amazing that John understood this revelation from Isaiah to be happening in Jesus?

Isaiah and John's message is both urgent for their own generations, and a message for us also this morning.

Prepare for the Lord is coming. Prepare your hearts, take out the stumbling blocks, remove our sinful ways, make our hearts and minds ready to receive the Lord and be ready for He is coming at any moment.

Do I believe that the Lord is coming back again!

Absolutely, and this time, it will be like nothing else.

This time is the final time when Heaven and earth will become one.

He is coming and the grains of sand are running low.

Let us never forget that a core message throughout Scripture is the return of the Lord.

Will we be ready for it, and are we ready today, if he should call us into glory? Are we ready to face him? Have we made room in our hearts for him? Have we cleared the way and made a highway for him? This is his call to us all...*be ready for I am coming!*

It's a message also of clarity. Isaiah hears a voice saying to him, *Shout* and he says *what will I shout?*

3 *What do you want me to shout* and the message that he is given is,

Tell people that their days are numbered, that their lives are short, that they are like grass, which sprouts up quickly and disappears as quickly, here for a season and then gone? Remind them of their mortality. God tells him to proclaim that when God breathes upon the grass, it is gone, and so as human beings they must remember how weak they are and that their time is limited.

It is also a message of encouragement for God's people who were held in captivity in Babylon, that God is ultimately in control, and that those who are holding them as prisoners are only like the grass of the field, and that at the right time God will come back and reverse everything, and these oppressors will be blown away.

Comfort the people with these words. It is a comforting word to us in this time of challenge that Our god is still in control and that he can blow away this virus, that he will blow away this virus and that he will make a way for us to come though this.

We want to be comforted and there is a real place for comfort in Isaiah's words, as we saw at the beginning, but that place of comfort comes when we realise in our hearts that our lives are weak and short and that one day we will not be here, and that we will be in God's presence. But the comfort is that, if we know God and his suffering servant Jesus Christ, and we trust him for forgiveness and grace, then we have nothing to fear, and we can take great comfort, and we can go forward rejoicing and trusting in the Lord and singing *Glory, glory Halleluiah*...In the words of Paul, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Like Isaiah we can go onto the rooftops and proclaim this wonderful message of good news. We can shout it loud with confidence and we can tell everybody that the Lord is coming.

Our final point today is Courage.

4 What kind of God is coming? What should we expect? What is he like?

Well, He is coming in power..He will rule with a powerful arm. He is the Creator God. He is the source of the Universe. No one can challenge him. He is God and all will bow their knee to him. He is all powerful and that is our God. He is not some wimp or some small idol or some false God. No, he is the God of all creation, and this is what we look forward to, and rejoice in. But there is another aspect, and this is wonderful because this God has rewards: V10, "*See He brings rewards with Him.*" He is coming to reward the faithful. He is coming to reward those who have remained with him throughout their lives.

At his judgement throne he will recompense all who have worked for him, all who have served him. He will be no man's debtor. He is coming and those who are His, He will say to them, *enter into my Father's banquet.*

It is prepared for you.

What a great message for us this advent.

God is coming and He is coming to bless you.

So, although He is all powerful, and with his breath he can destroy you, take heart, my friends, for if you are His, He is going to bless you with rewards!

More than that, he has the heart of a shepherd: V11, *He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.*

What a picture of God this Advent. He is coming and we must prepare for his coming.

But take comfort, although he is all powerful and we are so weak, do not be discouraged because he comes like a shepherd.

It is Christ, that Isaiah is speaking about. It is the Good Shepherd. This is our God. Isn't it wonderful that we have a God who cares, a God who is personal? A God who loves us and wants to bring us comfort. But the way to this comfort, and the way to know his love, is to prepare our hearts and to humble them, so that we can receive his love and grace through Jesus.

This Advent may you know the Lord coming into your life more each day. May you prepare the way for him, remove the obstacles and let his coming into your life be something that happens daily. Yes, there is a day when he will enter his world, and renew his universe, that will happen, and we look forward to that day, but there is something that we can do in the short term, and that is let him come into our lives and be our God and give Him our worship.

Amen.