

Discouragement. Despair. Disappointment. These are words I've heard and even felt as I think about this coming Christmas. Things I've loved, waited for, even hoped in – they're not to be as 2020 comes to a close.

It's been a long, hard year. It feels like today is March 280 – the month that just won't come to an end. Our experience of disappointment, aloneness, and sorrow isn't new. Everyone who has looked at the world and see how broken it is, we understand why disappointment pervades our experience. The more of life we have under our belts, the more potential for disappointment rises. And after a while, hope just looks stupid.

For some, disappointment pervades their lives. Careers didn't pan out the way we hoped. Relationships experienced pain. Bodies don't work the way we want. And if we're honest, some of us are just disappointed in ourselves.

When Isaiah had spoken his message to God's people, he had warned them in Isaiah 39 that there were harder days ahead. God's people were having a hard time understanding how, as God's chosen people, God's blessing wasn't coming to the world through them. Now in exile, full of disappointment and disillusionment, God's people wondered if God had failed them. Had he forgotten their ways? Did he even care?

When all human hopes let us down, we are ready to hear the words of the prophet Isaiah. Here is our only hope. And what does God do when we've reached the point of despair? God comes to comfort us. He comes to reveal his glory and empower us so that we can face anything.

Isaiah 40 are words that look ahead, words that say, "Your best days aren't behind – they're ahead! God's grace is for you, and because God is for you, you haven't seen anything yet! So how does God come and comfort us when we seem like there's no way forward, when the darkness seems heavy, when we feel forgotten?"

### **Hear the Comforting Voice of God's Promise (vv. 1-11)**

The first thing God does to comfort us is to re-orient our perspectives. When life is hard, we brood. But God comes to shift our focus by the magnificence of his comfort and remind us of his promise and our future. God's aim is to make you happy in him. Life might overwhelm you. You might be full of sorrow and disappointment, but when God's promise comes to you, you can be happy in God no matter the circumstances in life.

The way we become happy in God is that we hear the voice of promise. First, God speaks that word of promise. "Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. After all the hardship has done its work, after all human hopes have failed you, what does God do? He comes to comfort. Comfort MY people says YOUR God. This language – my people, your God – is the language of covenant keeping. And how does he speak? Tenderly. Gently. To a people who have been led off, away from Jerusalem, he still identifies with them in their sorrow and pain. God meets us in our failure.

And now Isaiah hears an anonymous voice crying out: The Lord is coming! So get ready? How should you get ready? Ready yourself by making the road straight, by lowering yourself from your pride, by acknowledging your valleys of despondency. In other words, repent! When God shows up, he comes to show his glory – how great he is! And just like Isaiah, who saw the Lord high and lifted up, you hear the voice that cries, “The Lord is coming!” And then, your small view of God will give way to his greatness and grandeur.

A third voice tells Isaiah to cry out (vv. 6-8). He tells Isaiah that we are unreliable, like grass that withers and fades. But God’s promise isn’t like humanity. God’s promise is constant, completely reliable, forever dependable.

So Isaiah calls us in vv. 9-11 to join in proclaiming the good news – our God may judge, but he comes and brings the presence of joy with his tender presence. At the beginning in v. 2 and now at the close of this section in v. 11 we are told what God is like: when you get to the depths of who God is, he is the God who is tender, who will carry you close to his heart, who gathers you in his arms.

If this is who God is, can’t you trust him? Can’t you find that he is reliable, dependable, able to fill your heart with the enjoyment of himself?

## **Lift Your Eyes to the Great Promise-Keeping God (vv. 12-26)**

So God has made a huge promise – to give you himself and make you happy in him. But have you seen how hard life is? Can God really deliver on this promise? Verses 12-26 Answer this objection. God’s promises are big, and you need to have your eyes lifted to see how great God is so you know that he will keep his promise!

How great is God? We’re told three things about God in this section. First, in vv. 12-14 and 25-26 God reminds us that he is the all wise and watchful Creator. How great and awesome is he? He can hold all the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand. And then look up into the sky. See all those stars? He measures them off with the span of his hand. So – do you think that you can tell God how to do things?

Sometimes, what we need to do when we are filled with despair and disappointment is take a long night walk, look up into the sky, and remember: every single star, God put into place. Every star has a name. In the vast, great universe that God has put together, don’t you think he’s got things under control?

Second, this great God is the sovereign and active ruler. Verses 15-17 and 21-24 show how great God is in relation to human history: nations are like a drop in the bucket. Superpowers come and go. Good rulers and bad rulers exist – but they’re not so great and mighty – they’re like grasshoppers! And with his breath he could blow them all away! So why do you fret and worry and lose hope about bad governments, about governmental overreach? Isn’t God great?

Third, at the center of it all, is the incomparable God. Verses 18-20 are the centerpiece of this section. Is God like an idol that is created and needs to be carried around? Why do you think that you have to control God?

So – do you wonder if God can keep his promise to you? The Creator God? The Sovereign God? The Incomparable God? Do you think that he can make you happy in him when everything feels disappointing? Is he worth your joy?

What Isaiah does is he tells us that the way forward for disappointed and despairing people is to have a new point of view. Lift your eyes! Look and see! Don't look at things from your perspective. Look from God's perspective! Behold, your God!

If there is anything that we ought to repent of, it is that we have a view of God that is too small. We've made him manageable, controllable. As one modern theologian has said, the reason why Christians today are so miserable is that their God rests too lightly on the world. In other words, they've lost sight of his greatness, his glory. And the word glory means "weighty." God has been diminished. We think we can live without him. And guess what? When we live like we don't need him, we will find that all of our human hopes fail us. But when we lift our eyes up and see GOD in all of his beauty and greatness, your heart will find the comfort that God can keep his promises!

### **Receive Renewed Strength from Hoping in God (vv. 27-31)**

But God's people complain: you've forgotten me! You don't even remember my name? We are prone to unbelief. We are prone to judge God and think that he has forgotten us. And when we look at God from our perspective, our energy will be sapped. We will lose any reason to hope.

Humans need hope. So Isaiah prods Israel. First, he does it by reminding them of their history. "Why do you say, O Jacob, and why do you speak, O Israel?" Isaiah takes them back to their founding, when their father Jacob was about to face his estranged brother and he was afraid. And the angel of the Lord came; Jacob was desperate to be blessed, so he wrestled for a blessing, and Jacob persevered. But before the wrestling match was over, Jacob had his hip put out of place, forever limping. Now, in the moment where he was vulnerable, he wouldn't be able to run. But he was also given a new name – Israel – for you have wrestled with God and prevailed (Gen. 32:28). And this is their heritage – wrestling with God and prevailing in blessing.

It's as though Isaiah is provoking the people by saying, "Com'on! Wrestle with your view of God! You might find that you are weakened, but God's power is made perfect in weakness!" And God comes, eager to help us and renew us!

So God reminds us of who he is. He is the everlasting God. We are locked into our moment. We can only see the present. So the urgency of now can squeeze out hope and make us desperate, exaggerating the present problem. But God is always out ahead of us.

# The Weary World Rejoices! Comfort My People

CBC Ilderton

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God is working out his own purpose in his own way in his own time. He doesn't need our nervous worry.

Second, he is the creator God. Wherever life may take us, God will already be there because he is the creator of the ends of the earth.

Third, God is always at work. We spend about 1/3 of our lives in bed, recuperating our strength after an exhausting day. But God never grows tired or weary. He is the source of never-ending love and joy and hope. He is forever able, always strong, and on constant watch.

Finally, God is all-wise. He knows exactly what we need both now and forever. His ways may be mysterious to us, but they are always good. We are the ones who grow tired and weak. We are the ones whose strength fails us. We are the ones who can't see beyond the present moment. We grow tired and weary.

So what will God do? God will give strength to those who depend upon his promise to do the impossible – the weak soar with eagles' wings and run without exhaustion. And how does he give this strength? He gives it as we wait – as we hope – in God.

What God is doing is he is taking weak, desperate people and saying, "Hear my promise! Lift your eyes! Get a different perspective of me! Because as you do so, your strength will be renewed so that you can have joy in the impossible because I will carry you close to my heart! I will gently lead you!"

God isn't tired of your weariness. God isn't disappointed with your weak faith. He isn't saying, "Oh no! I've got to carry them again!" No! It is his delight to give you his delight. When your faith feels weak, when you're exhausted and run down, come to him and find the smile of heaven radiating on you as his arms open wide!

When John the Baptist came, he came with the call of Isaiah 40:2-3 – out in the wilderness, his voice crying as one who was preparing the way of the Lord. People's view of God had grown so small. But now, God had contracted to a man and was walking on planet earth. What was needed was a new perspective – that God is so radically for us that he came to us and embraced our weakness so that we might have his strength.