

Sermon: A Message of Comfort

Text: Isaiah 40-48

Introduction:

One of the things that we do in our weekly staff meetings here at the church is to take turns giving what we call our “Top Ten.” It’s a unique way for us to talk about our lives...to tell our story. The assignment is to look back over our lives and identify ten events or significant circumstances that have uniquely shaped us into the people that we are today. Think of them as turning points. They aren’t necessarily “highlights”. In fact, quite often the things that most uniquely shape us fall more into the category of “lowlights”.

This past week, one of our staff shared her top ten. She listed off ten events that, looking back, have made her who she is today. After she was finished sharing these ten events, there was something that really stood out about her list. Almost every one of her top ten was a major difficulty in her life. She described significant illnesses that threatened to take her life. She talked about the death of numerous people she’s had to walk through. She introduced one of her top ten by saying “these three years were the most difficult in my life.”

On the surface, when we are living through life’s very difficult times—the last thing we think is that what we’re going through is actually a GOOD thing. Quite often, there is nothing seemingly good about the trials that we’re experiencing. However, as we look back on these times, we see that it was during those times that God was doing his greatest work in our lives. It causes me to think about the poem entitled, “Footprints in the Sand.” The premise of this poem is that as we look back over the span of our entire lives, there are times when there is only one set of footprints in the sand. Which causes the person to ask: “God, why was it that when I was going through the most difficult times in my life—you abandoned me?” To which God replies, “Oh no, my child. The reason there is only one set of footprints is because it was then that I was carrying you.”

These thoughts provide for us an excellent introduction to our text in Isaiah. So far, we have covered Isaiah chapters 1-39. Isaiah has been speaking to the current situation in his life at the time (740-700BC). He has addressed two kings primarily: King Ahaz (731-715BC); and King Hezekiah (715-686BC). The historical backdrop in these 40 years has been the threat of the Assyrian Empire—that first destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel (722BC), and then threatened Jerusalem (701BC) before God miraculously delivered them (Isaiah 36-37).

The “viewpoint” of Isaiah changes dramatically when we move from chapter 39 to chapter 40. God miraculously gives Isaiah the capacity to fast-forward in time about 150 years, and actually “look back” on the way that God has taken care of Judah and Jerusalem through some very very difficult times. God is showing Judah that it will eventually be the nation of Babylon (not Assyria) who will conquer Jerusalem. God will, in fact, judge Judah for her sin and rebellion. However; the Lord will not abandon Judah. After His act of judgment, God will show His mercy. A remnant will return. The Lord isn’t finished with Judah. Sin will be atoned for, and those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint.

Examination:

- Read **Isaiah 40**

- What three things is God telling Isaiah to do in verses 1-2?
- What do you think of when you hear the word “comfort”? What is the basis of this comfort in verse 2? How had God comforted you in the past?
- How does the “hard service” described in verse 2 relate to the exile that Judah will experience at the hands of the Babylonians between 607-537BC?
- Verses 3-5 seems to be describing the return of the exiles back to Jerusalem from Babylon. But it also seems to be describing something else that happened in the New Testament. What?
- The BASIS for the hope that Isaiah is giving the Israelites is based on something very important in verse 8. Why is this a sound basis for hope—both for them and for us?
- What is the good news that is described in verses 9-11?
- What is a second BASIS for the hope that have that is described in verses 12-14?
- When you think about the way the various nations in our world are trying to rise up and exercise control (think China, and Russia, and Islamic nations), how do verses 15-17 speak to this?
- Take some time to answer the question that is posed in verse 18.
- Are there people in this world that truly don’t know who God is? (v. 21) Are there people in Chambersburg who don’t know this? Are there people that you know who don’t know who God is? Whose job is it to tell them?
- Take some time to answer the question that is posed in verse 25.
- Does verse 26 seem to indicate that every single star in the galaxy has a name given by God? What does this tell you about God?
- The question that is posed in verse 27 seems to be bringing the reader back to present tense. That question is: “Why do you complain that God doesn’t see me or really care about me?” Is this a question that people still ask? Is it true?
- How does everything we’ve read in chapter 40:1-26 answer the question of whether or not God sees me and cares about me?
- According to verse 28, the Lord is the everlasting God and the Creator of the ends of the earth. Do you believe that this is true? Why do people choose NOT believe that this is true? If you DO believe that it’s true—what kinds of decisions should you be making to SHOW that you truly believe this? What kinds of decisions do people make that show that they really DON’T believe that God is the everlasting God and the creator of all that exists (even if they say that they do believe it)?
- What does God promise to do for us in verses 29-31?
- Are these verses you’ve heard before? What do you think about these words?
- Do these verses (verses 29-31) give you comfort?

Application:

Take some time to list out your “Top Ten”. What ten things have happened in your life that have shaped who you are today? How many of those things are trials or difficulties?