

Christmas Eve. Almost Christmas day. If you haven't finished your Christmas shopping by now, tough apples! Hopefully we have checked our list to see who has been naughty or nice and have gotten what we think will be appropriate for those on our list. I think I'm done with my list. I'll probably remember something on Christmas day!

And so soon, on Christmas day, or sometime after we will give our gifts for those who are on our list. Now, I don't know about you, but one of the best things about Christmas for me, other than celebrating the birth of our Savior, is seeing those who I love open their gifts – giving them something that I know that they were not expecting.

We know that they are usually were looking for something, but we sometimes don't know what they are looking for, and we try our best to get them something special ... something unexpected.

As we consider our Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah 40, we know that the people of Israel were looking for something – and they had been looking for a while – they were looking to the Lord God for deliverance. Turn with me to Isaiah 40:1-11 (READ).

At this period of history the people of Israel had been in captivity in Babylon, which we know as present day Iraq. The first 39 chapters of the book of Isaiah speak of God's judgement on the nation of Israel because of their disobedience to Him. They had turned their back on Him, they had worshiped other gods and they had entered in alliances with unbelieving nations rather than trusting in Him, so the Lord allowed them to be defeated and taken into captivity.

Throughout this message of judgement, there were some messages of hope – for example there is promise of a Savior in Isaiah 7:14: *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”*

But for the most part we read that Israel is getting what they deserve, God's judgement for their unbelief.

However, in chapters 40–66, through the prophet Isaiah we read of three things – the promises of the restoration of Israel as a nation, which would come in about 150 years, and more importantly, the comings of the Messiah, the Savior, who we know as the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I say comings, because we see in this passage, as those who look back at the first coming our Savior, we see both comings – his first coming as a suffering servant and his coming again in glory and judgement.

So what we see initially in that the prophecies of Isaiah is something that was for the people at time ... although the fulfillment would be 150 years in their future in the deliverance by Cyrus. The first words of the chapter are meant as encouragement to the people who were in captivity. Then there was the fulfillment of the birth of the Savior about 600 years later that we celebrate tomorrow, and then the final fulfillment which is still yet to come.

Let's look at our passage and see what God promised His people. Isaiah 40:1,2 (READ).

Notice clearly the word in verse 1: *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God.*” God is saying that

comfort is coming to His people ... that there situation will be changing. The words are repeated to let the people know that comfort is indeed coming.

God often repeats Himself for emphasis. For example in Isaiah 51:9: *“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, In the generations of old. Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart, And wounded the serpent?”* And in Isaiah 52:1 we read: *“Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean Shall no longer come to you.”*

We see also in verse 1, that while the people had rebelled and were under God’s judgement they were still His people. *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God.*” Again, we see the possessive and very personal nature of those who belong to God — *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God.”*

As we move on to verse 2, we see more words of comfort and the promise that God’s judgement will be coming to an end. *“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins.”* Remember, that Israel and Judah had sinned – and God had judged them. He was now ready to forgive them.

As we go on we pick it up in verse 3, with words that should sound familiar – 40:3-6 (READ). 3 *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD;”* These words are the same words that were used to describe John the Baptist that we looked at the 3rd Sunday in Advent as he proclaimed the coming of the Christ. But they could also refer to the many prophets who came before to proclaim God’s Word to the people.

Look at how God describes His prophets – they are those crying in the wilderness and the desert, indicating that the people were in anguish and pain. It describes both those who were listening to the prophet Isaiah and those who were listening to John the Baptist – they were waiting for someone of something to deliver them.

When God’s time is right, all will be prepared ... all will be made ready. Again, notice the words that are used ... *prepare ... make straight*. God will remove all obstacles to His deliverance and to His coming in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that 150 years from Isaiah’s writing, God would use a pagan ruler, Cyrus to deliver His people. And 600 years after Isaiah’s writing, God would use Caesar to issue a decree so that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Again, God removes all obstacles, and this is what we see in 40:4: *“Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth;”*

And what will happen – 40:5: *“The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”* We should be reminded of John 1:14: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* This is how the glory of the LORD was revealed, through the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that he would bring. Can it get any better than that?

Verses 40:6-8 gives us the assurance that what God has said will come to pass. (READ). It is based on the fact that God’s word stands forever. God’s Word is God’s Word. He will do what He says He will do. What He says will come to pass, will come to pass because He can be trusted. What God said 2000+ years ago is still

applicable today, because God has not changed.

This is the thought continued in [40:9](#): *“O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”*

Jerusalem was also known as Zion. And the good tidings ... the gospel will be proclaimed from Jerusalem. As we know, Jerusalem is where the gospel was fulfilled ... where the Savior who came, died for the sins of those who believe in him. But what we see here is the promise of comfort ... that they need not be afraid because “your” God would soon be there.

And then in [40:10,11](#), we see, what I believe to a reference to the deliverance of His people and both comings of our Lord and Savior – ([READ](#)). God will come with a *strong arm* to deliver His people – as He did when He delivered His people from Babylon, and as will happen again when He comes again in glory and judgement.

We see in the concluding verse (11) of our passage the expression of what God will do for His people, as He takes care of them as a shepherd. We should be reminded of [Psalm 23:1-4](#): *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”*

Times are tough all around us – personally, economically, socially. The financial markets are in turmoil. The automakers are in trouble. We have all had to cut down on what we are spending. Many people are out of work. Many companies are in trouble and there are those that tell us that things will get worse before they get better. And as we read the headlines we know that there is oppression of people all over the world, including Christians.

But we also know that God is still in complete control – and I repeat, complete control. We love and serve a Sovereign God. The same God that proclaimed comfort to His people 150 years before their deliverance and 600 years before the time of Christ, is the same God that we have in our lives today. God has not changed and neither is the comfort that He gives His people. As the celebration of the birth approaches, let us remember what the coming is all about – the birth of the Savior ... the Messiah ... the Christ who brings good tidings of great joy for those who have trusted in him as Savior and Lord.