

Each day I read and listen to the news headlines. The news to be thankful for. Overshadowed by tragic reminder of sin, brokenness, the cost in human lives. When talking with others I like to listen to their personal stories. Stories often involving pain and loss. The impact of sin. Sympathy, concern, words of human comfort seem shallow, inadequate. They are. For we need a lasting comfort of depth, substance. The comfort humans unable to give. The comfort people desperately seek wherever they think they can find it. But never do. Then I hear words from the prophet Isaiah, '*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...*' **40:1-2a** The comfort of God. Brothers and sisters, I need the comfort of God. Do you? Are you weighed down by anxiety, grief, weariness, uncertain of your capacity to cope? What does it mean to speak of the comfort of God? **Isaiah 40** reveals the comfort of God. Isaiah's ministry as God's prophet was to the people of Judah, the southern Kingdom. Called by God to speak his word in apparent good times. The long, prosperous, expansionist reign of King Uzziah ended. The promises God made to King David blossoming. But dark clouds on the horizon. Prosperity breeding complacency toward God, inequality in society. The ominous military threat of the advancing Assyrian empire. Much of Isaiah's long ministry spanned this period. The reign of increasingly idolatrous Kings. Turning hearts away from the LORD. Destruction of the northern kingdom, Israel. Jerusalem under siege from the Assyrian army. At the end of **ch39**, Isaiah prophesies future exile in Babylon. In the latter years of a long life Isaiah's words take on a new focus. God's word of warning and judgement now God's word of comfort. Beginning in today's passage. God's comfort proclaimed compassionately to the people of Judah. On the foundation of five truths. **First**, the people of Judah are God's people. Addressed as 'my people' in the opening verse. The beneficiaries of God's perfect love. A comfort in itself. As a Christian you belong to the God who pours his perfect love into your lives. **Second**, they are forgiven people. '*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*' **v2** God has already paid the price for their sin. Bountifully, overwhelmingly, completely. Pardoned people. In **53:5**, Isaiah reveals how this is possible. Speaking of the servant of God, '*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*' We are also forgiven people. The one pierced

for our transgressions is Jesus Christ. No greater comfort than peace with God. Being reconciled with God. Pardon from sin frees us from the discomfort of the burden and guilt of sin. Pardon from sin gifts us with life in eternity without pain, grief, death. A gift that sustains, comforts through present trials.

Third, God brings his people home. In **v3-5**, preparing the way for the Lord, making the path straight and level ultimately about homecoming. The Lord rescues his people from slavery in Egypt. Brings them through the desert to their home, the Promised Land. The Lord brings his people back home to Jerusalem out of exile. The Lord Jesus redeems his people, secures and prepares their eternal home. Guards and keeps his people on their journey home. *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.'* **1 Peter 1:3-5** What a comfort. **Fourth**, God's word of promise: eternal and reliable. Human life brief, human comfort fleeting. God's word of comfort never fails. *'The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.'* **v8** Our home often adorned with flowers. Our floors often strewn with fallen petals. Each time I sweep up fallen petals I'm reminded of human brevity and frailty. Human words of comfort count for nothing in the dustbin of life. Sisters and brothers, the enduring word of God counts for everything. Source of hope, true comfort, promise, lasting peace and joy There is no true peace outside the comfort of God's enduring word. To trust God's word is to trust in the one it reveals, the Lord Jesus Christ. Where does your comfort come from? Whose comfort are you offering others? **Fifth**, the Lord returns to Zion. Place of dwelling with his people. Symbol of the heavenly city. He comes with power to overthrow his enemies, to reward his people. With the tenderness of a shepherd. *'See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.'* **v10-11** What a reassuring picture of God's comfort. To those in exile in Babylon. To every child of the living God. Pointing to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Who saves his people by laying down his life. Protects his people from those who try to snatch them away. Giving eternal protection and security in the gift of eternal life. Brothers and sisters, this comfort is yours.

A fruit of Christian faith. Comfort based on God's enduring promises. Testified in the lives of countless saints, past and present. We're not immune from pain and tragedy. So, seek the comfort of God. Rest in the promises of his word. In particular times of distress and sorrow remember, the God of comfort carries you close to his heart. Rejoice in the comfort of God. That abides when all else fails. When the darkness overwhelms, the pain unbearable, no one else understands. Reach out to your sisters and brothers who can walk with you, imperfectly support you, speak the promises of God into your life. Sisters and brothers, don't keep the comfort of God to yourself. As Isaiah says in **v9**, *You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"* As a disciple of Christ, give up sharing empty, shallow human platitudes. Equip yourself with Bible passages of comfort and hope. Lovingly, prayerfully, tenderly offer them. Recognising the pain in the lives of others to them is as deep as the Clarence River. Acknowledging in your own mind, when someone is in pain your experience of pain seems to them as shallow as Woolgoolga Creek. Don't offer your experience but the enduring word of God. God equips us to do this as he becomes to us the Father of all compassion and comfort. It is in knowing first-hand the God of comfort that you grow as a comfort to others. Paul's words to the Corinthians worth imprinting on your soul. *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.'* **2**

Corinthians 1:3-5