

God Comforts
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Isaiah 49:1-13

Before you know it we'll be singing about "tidings of comfort and joy." Those are two of the most encouraging words in the human language! We all desire joy and relief from suffering and the only true source of comfort and joy is God.

Isaiah 49:13 conveys the promise of God's comfort for His people: ¹³
Sing for joy, O heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering.

When things are at their darkest our hearts long for comfort and joy. The people of Judah (God's people) were in a dark place and in desperate need of comfort and deliverance. Because of their sin, God had allowed the people of Judah to be captured by King Nebuchadnezzar and exiled in Babylon for seventy years. At the end of that time God used King Cyrus of Persia to defeat the Babylonians and return the people of Judah to Jerusalem.

They would be delivered to their homeland but they needed a greater deliverance. They needed what every human being since the Garden of Eden has needed: forgiveness for their sin and reconciliation with God. King Cyrus accomplished Judah's physical deliverance, but God would raise up a "suffering servant" to bring salvation. The prophet Isaiah told of God's plan for this suffering, saving Servant in a series of four "Servant Songs" in chapters 42, 49, 50, and 52-53. This morning we're looking at the second "song" in chapter 49.

Big Idea: God is compassionate and comforts His people. His compassion and comfort are available because of the sacrifice of His Saving Servant, Jesus. They only come by trusting Him as Savior and Lord.

- Given the current state of affairs in our nation and world, wouldn't you like to just change the subject, change the channel, or change the focus?
- Instead of a rehash of bad news let's take a break for some good news.
- It's the good news God inspired Isaiah to proclaim to Judah in this section of his prophecy.
- The good news of Jesus and what He has done for all mankind.
- Verses 1-2 describe the Servant's mission and calling from God:

¹ Listen to me, all you in distant lands! Pay attention, you who are far away! The Lord called me before my birth; from within the womb he called me by name. ² He made my words of judgment as sharp as a sword. He has hidden me in the shadow of his hand. I am like a sharp arrow in his quiver.

- The Servant is speaking here as He describes God's plan to touch the nations around the world through Him; a calling that came before birth.
- No doubt the captive people of Judah were asking God for military might. The Servant is a warrior of a different kind with "words of judgment as sharp as a sword." His words would not only bring judgment, but the good news of God's plan to reconcile people to a relationship with Himself.

³ He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, and you will bring me glory."

- Is the servant's name, Israel or is this the nation of Israel being described? Clearly the servant is Jesus the Messiah, so why is He called Israel?
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary tells us: *"This cannot refer to the nation because the Servant is to draw that nation back to God. The Messiah is called Israel because He fulfills what Israel should have done. In His person and work He epitomizes the nation."*ⁱ

⁴ I replied, “But my work seems so useless! I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose. Yet I leave it all in the Lord’s hand; I will trust God for my reward.”

- That verse describes Jesus’ earthly ministry. The Apostle John tells us, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” (John 1:11 NKJV)
- It is also the “hearts cry” of preachers, pastors, and missionaries through the centuries. When the work seems useless, trust God for the reward.
- What’s the application for us? The verse isn’t just for vocational ministers because every follower of Christ is called to be a minister. When you are using your spiritual gifts at church, at home, or on the job, and it seems to be in vain, “leave it in the Lord’s hand” and trust Him for the reward.

⁵ And now the Lord speaks— the one who formed me in my mother’s womb to be his servant, who commissioned me to bring Israel back to him. The Lord has honored me, and my God has given me strength. ⁶ He says, “You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

- God’s plan of salvation through Christ comes into focus with those words.
- “...more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”
- The restoration Jesus offers is restoration of relationship with God for all.
- This passage is not only Messianic pointing to Jesus first coming; it’s also eschatological pointing to when He returns to reign as King of Kings.

⁷ The Lord, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel, says to the one who is despised and rejected by the nations, to the one who is the servant of rulers: “Kings will stand at attention when you pass by. Princes will also bow low because of the Lord, the faithful one, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

- We quoted John 1:11 about Jesus' first coming: *"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."* Now we look to Philippians 2:10–11 for a preview of His second coming: *"...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*
- A hope-filled picture for Christ-followers to embrace in this crazy world!

⁸ This is what the Lord says: "At just the right time, I will respond to you. On the day of salvation I will help you. I will protect you and give you to the people as my covenant with them. Through you I will reestablish the land of Israel and assign it to its own people again.

- The Servant, Jesus, was given by God to provide the "new covenant."
- My Bible reading Friday took me to Hebrews 8:10-12. Here's the promise:

Hebrews 8:10–12 (ESV)

¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

- Jesus offers the "new covenant" not only to Israel but also to all people.
- It's a new covenant that leads to freedom and provision for His followers.

⁹ I will say to the prisoners, 'Come out in freedom,' and to those in darkness, 'Come into the light.'

- These words of promise remind us of Jesus' first earthly sermon as He quoted Isaiah 61:1 ¹ *The Spirit of the Lord God is*

upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; (ESV)

- In Isaiah 42:6–7 God the Father says to His saving Servant, ⁶ *“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.*
- When we feel trapped by the discouragement of our own sin and shortcomings, we can look to Jesus as the liberator who will set us free.
- He not only bring freedom, He brings comfort, renewal, and protection.
- Back to verse nine, listen to the imagery of God’s promise of redemption:
...They will be my sheep, grazing in green pastures and on hills that were previously bare. ¹⁰ They will neither hunger nor thirst. The searing sun will not reach them anymore. For the Lord in his mercy will lead them; he will lead them beside cool waters. ¹¹ And I will make my mountains into level paths for them. The highways will be raised above the valleys. ¹² See, my people will return from far away, from lands to the north and west, and from as far south as Egypt.”
- We’re reminded of the “green pastures” and “still waters” of Psalm 23.
- All of this is available to all people from the “Lord in his mercy.”
- What a poetic promise for those who trust in the saving Servant!

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- We said, God is compassionate and comforts His people.
- These can be discouraging days for all people. Christ-followers have a special source of encouragement when we recall God’s

story of redemption. It shows us once again that He is in control and has a plan.

- His compassion and comfort are available because of the sacrifice of His Saving Servant, Jesus. True comfort and joy only come to those who have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. That is God's plan of salvation.
- Verse eight says, "At just the right time, I will respond to you. On the day of salvation I will help you."
- That reminds us of the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:21–6:2 (ESV) ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
- The takeaway for anyone who hasn't accepted this free gift of salvation is that today is the day to do that by trusting Christ as Savior and Lord.
- The takeaway for those who have accepted His free gift of salvation is to escape from the stress and bad news around us and bask in the promises of God's amazing plan of salvation for all people. Let these words apply a "salve" to your discouraged spirit. Then let's all do what verse 13 tell us:

¹³ Sing for joy, O heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering.

ⁱ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Isaiah](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1103). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.