

The God of All Comfort
Isaiah 51:12-23

November 6, 2011

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^B John 14:6, Psalm 46:1

^C Lamentations 1:2, 9, 16

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^E John 1:3, Gen 1:2

A. Introduction

1. Comfort: that is the theme of our service and our message this morning
 - a. in a time of trouble; in the loss of a loved husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister, the Christian finds great comfort in the Lord
 - (A) in the promises of the word of God and in the truths of our faith
 - (B) in the knowledge that we do **'not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.'** (1 Thessalonians 4:13)
 - b. but unbelievers can scoff and sneer at this comfort
 - (A) 'your cross,' they say, 'is but a crutch; a crutch you carry because you are weak'
 - (B) for the religion of man, humanism, which worships man and his capabilities, has no use for this
 - (C) this is the religion of the poem 'Invictus'^{—{2}}. whose author's bravado is understandable on a human

level given his sufferings,
Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

- (D) Karl Marx scoffed that 'religion is the opiate of the people,' making them senseless to their situation and suffering
- (E) and the accusation is made, that Christians are willfully blind to such realities
- c. yet the Bible and Christian experience displays the true reality
 - (A) 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us such ideas come from those 'in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.'
 - (B) and the poem of the believer is Ralph Carmichael's hymn:^{3}.

We are more than conquerors
through Him that loved us so—
The Christ who dwells within us,
is the greatest pow'r we know!
He will fight beside us
though the enemy be great—
Who can stand against us?
He's the Captain of our fate.

2. Meaning of Comfort and Comforter – what is the meaning of this word in Scripture?

- a. in the OT, as in this passage, it is Menachem, the One who comforts you – your Comforter
 - (A) it primarily conveys the thought of consoling, showing oneself moved to pity of word and action on behalf of someone
- b. but in the NT, it is that word Paraclete which I substituted for Comforter when I read John 14:16
 - (A) it has the meaning of one who is called alongside – to be there to help, and includes the idea of consolation
 - (B) but it also includes much of what is in the English word in its original meaning:
 - (1) com – with or accompanying + fort – strong or mighty as in the word fortress

- (2) comforter is someone strong who accompanies you in your need
- (C) that is 'God', who 'is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.' (Psalm 46:1)

- 3. Outline: the passage before us today first tells of who God is so that His people may be assured of the truth
- 4. of what He then tells them He is going to do in the future when their punishment is complete; but we will approach these in the opposite order so we can see clearly that He is the God of all comfort.
 - a. the Comfort of the Passing of God's Wrath, vv 17-23
 - b. that Comfort Assured by Who God Is, vv 12-16

B. The Comfort of the Passing of God's Wrath Isaiah 51:17-23

- 1. It Will Pass from Suffering Israel (vv 17-20)
 - a. from a Punished People – 17 Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who have drunk from the LORD'S hand the cup of His anger; The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs.
 - (A) the people of Jerusalem, who are, in Isaiah's prophetic eye, already living in exile in the prison house of Babylon
 - (B) who have suffered from God's wrath – pictured as a cup like that of wine, a wine of punishment that has stupefied their senses
 - (C) are now called to rouse themselves from their stupor akin to that of drunkenness
 - (D) who are now reeling; staggering like a drunken man, are called to stand back upon their feet and listen to God's voice
 - b. from a Helpless People – 18 There is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne, Nor is there one to take her by the hand among all the sons she has reared.
 - (A) this is a people who on account of their rebellion have refused the kindly guidance of Yahweh their God
 - (B) and now, they have none among them who can lead them in truth – they are helpless; in need of true comfort
 - c. from an Inconsolable People – 19 These two things have befallen you; Who will mourn for you? The devastation and destruction, famine and sword; How shall I comfort you?

- (A) in refusing God, they have sought strength and comfort in all the wrong places
- (B) as a result they have suffered in two ways
 - (1) the devastation of famine as occurred at Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem
 - (2) the destruction by the sword as Jerusalem was torn down, its people slain, its people taken into exile
- (C) in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, grieves that Jerusalem – once Isaiah's prophecy of punishment had come to pass – had 'none to comfort her' (1:2) among all her idols, that 'She has no comforter.' (1:9) and in Lamentations 1:16 sighs, 'For these things I weep; My eyes run down with water; Because far from me is a comforter, One who restores my soul. My children are desolate Because the enemy has prevailed.'
- d. from a Fainting People – 20 Your sons have fainted, They lie helpless at the head of every street, Like an antelope in a net, Full of the wrath of the Lord, The rebuke of your God.
 - (A) and now the people are weak, wearied and humbled by their punishment
 - (B) but the punishment is about to be lifted

2. It Will Pass to the Enemies of God's People (vv 21-23)

- a. the Cup Removed from Their Hand – 21 Therefore, please hear this, you afflicted, Who are drunk, but not with wine: 22 Thus says your Lord, the Lord, even your God Who contends for His people, "Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of reeling, The chalice of My anger; You will never drink it again.
 - (A) those who are in captivity will be delivered to return to their homeland, this punishment complete after the 70 years exile as promised
- b. the Cup Put in the Hands of the Tormentors – 23 "I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, Who have said to you, 'Lie down that we may walk over you.' You have even made your back like the ground And like the street for those who walk over it."
 - (A) and Babylon, who had been God's sword, is now in turn put to the sword for all of her cruelty, and Judah goes home

C. That Comfort Assured by Who God Is Isaiah 51:12-16

- 1. Who is God? ... The Consolation – 12 "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid

of man who dies And of the son of man who is made like grass,"

- a. the promise of Messiah was a promise of consolation to Israel – ‘And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.’ (Luke 2:25-26)
 - b. so it is God who consoles His people; they have none of their sons who can do so; certainly none of their idols could do so
 - c. it is not simply mortal man, but God – so fear no longer what man can do
2. Who is God? ... The Creator – 13 “That you have forgotten the Lord your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth, That you fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, As he makes ready to destroy? But where is the fury of the oppressor? 14 The exile will soon be set free, and will not die in the dungeon, nor will his bread be lacking.”
- a. when John opens His gospel, to show that Jesus, the teacher from Nazareth is also the eternal God, he tells us ‘All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.’ (John 1:3), or the less technical translation ‘all things were made by him’ (AV)
 - b. it is because God is Creator, just as God the Son is Creator (and God the Holy Spirit, too, Genesis 1:2), that there is no situation in which He cannot come alongside and provide help, consolation, strength – the God of all comfort
3. Who is God? ... The Miraculous Redeemer – 15 “For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea and its waves roar (the Lord of hosts is His name).”
- a. once again, the subject echoes back to the redemption of God’s people out of the bondage of Egypt
 - b. once again I would draw your thoughts back to the cross, the redemption of God’s people out of the bondage of sin
4. Who is God? ... The Protector of His People – 16 “I have put My words in your mouth and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, ‘You are My people.’”

a. how I used to thrill as Lorraine Morrison sang that Harry Ironside's hymn, 'Overshadowed'^{4}.

I'm overshadowed by His mighty love,
Love eternal, changeless, pure,
Overshadowed by His mighty love,
Rest is mine, serene, secure;
He died to ransom me from sin,
He lives to keep me day by day.
I'm overshadowed by His mighty love,
Love that brightens all my way.

b. it is because of God the Son and His death for us; because of the Holy Spirit He sends to those who believe in Him; because of the Father's love for His children; that for us who name the name of Christ, He is the God of all comfort

D. Conclusion

1. Francois Picard is the President of SEMBEQ, the French-language Seminary of our Fellowship. Earlier this year, his wife, Hélène, went to be with the Lord, ending a bout with cancer. In a letter received a few days ago, he writes: 'My neighbour calls himself an atheist and had refused the New Testament Jérémie wanted to give his daughter a few years ago. Recently, he came over, saying, "I have to let you know how shaken I have been since my last conversation with Hélène. When she said her last goodbye to me, she took the time to ask about my home renovations. The sincerity of her interest in me and her detachment from herself really touched me. This has brought me to ask myself how I would live my last moments when the times come. As a non-believer I have no answer." For the first time he was willing to talk about our faith!'
2. you who know the Lord have the answer the world needs, tell them of this God you know: the God of all comfort.

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Except as noted otherwise, quotations are from the New American Standard version, used by permission. Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. Versions are identified as:

AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers

Some of my favourite commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870

EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan

Volume 6, Isaiah, by Geoffrey W. Grogan, Principal, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, Scotland;

EJY – The Book of Isaiah by Edward J. Young; © 1965; Wm. B. Eerdmans

K&D – Commentary on the Old Testament, by Keil & Delitzsch; Volume 7, Isaiah, by Franz Delitzsch

Kerux – The sermon and illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick to be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. William Ernest Henley (1849-1903)

3. ‘We Are More Than Conquerors’ by Ralph Carmichael, © 1956, 1956 by Lexicon Music

4. ‘Overshadowed’ by Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951), © 1935 by G. S. Schuler