

Outline of Exposition: Isaiah 40:1-11

“When, as here and in the coming of Jesus, God blazes a trail from sin and oppression to redemption, people find comfort!”

Introduction

We begin a new series for Advent that features texts from Isaiah that speak of the Lord’s coming to us, with readings from Luke that lead up to the birth of Jesus. Today we look at Isaiah 40:1-11, a deservedly famous passage!

I. THEMATIC BACKGROUND FOR AID IN UNDERSTANDING

The Bible contains numerous examples of two themes, one always following from the other: 1. *Judgment for sin that leads to exile*, and 2. *Payment for sin that leads to home-coming*.¹ Can you think of examples? [Pause for input.] These come in waves, leading to a climax when Jesus returns, at which time both will happen simultaneously, depending on our relationship with Christ.

Well, the book of Isaiah is one; notice that Isaiah (who prophesied from about 740-700 B.C., but who predicted events as late as 535 B.C.) had two mandates:

1. *To preach God’s judgment for sin and exile*. So from chapters 6-39 Isaiah had been fulfilling that mandate, yet with predictions of a future second mandate.
2. *To preach God’s payment for sin and homecoming*. The point is that chapter 40 announces the beginning of this mandate. Crucial tension: Whereas Isaiah *in his lifetime* had predicted this (chapter 12 and 35), now his visions in chapter 40 following presume a real presence in the future. How can this be leads to a tension in the text between the mortality of people² [see footnote] and the Word of the Lord which continues to speak and prophecy beyond Isaiah’s lifetime. A subtheme of our text thus relates to the mortality of humans in relation to the endurance of God’s Word, His plans, purposes, etc.

2. EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH 40 (SEE PAGE 5 SECTION I)

First main point: Payment for sin that leads to homecoming a) demonstrates God’s glory, might, and compassion, and b) is good news that brings comfort!!

Subpoint: Prophets and people come and go, but

Second main point: The Word of the Lord stands forever

3. APPLICATIONS

-we have good news to share

-many doubts we have reflect the fact that we aren’t Isaiah, we can’t see beyond our lifetime and see (at least all) of God’s promises fulfilled

-Jesus’ advent coming represents the next phase. Despite John the Baptist’s prediction, God in Jesus brought homecoming and hope. Later when Jesus comes again, there will be both judgment for sin for some and comfort in homecoming. Which will it be for you?

CONCLUSION

¹ There are cases where the sin and redemption factor are less clear, as in the journey of Israel to Egypt being a judgment for sin. But the themes Exile and Return remain consistent throughout.

² “All flesh is like withering grass, fading flowers”) including prophets (is Isaiah dead? Has a later Isaiah figure replaced him? We are not told but Isaiah’s name doesn’t occur after chapter 40, but “he” is referred to, as in Isaiah 40:6.