



Sermon: Sunday, February 11, 2024

“Comfort, comfort my people”

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 40:28-31 ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted, ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Introduction: We need comfort for our souls

The text we are reading today is in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. The Book of Isaiah can be roughly divided into two parts: the first half, chapters 1 to 39, and the second half, chapters 40 to 66. In the first half, God's justice, judgment, and repentance due to Israel's sins are emphasized. In the second half, the main contents are salvation, hope, forgiveness, and restoration.

Chapter 40 of Isaiah begins with the message of salvation. It testifies to the greatness of God by comparing it to the finitude of all creation, including humans, and prophesies comfort to the faithful people who believe in and follow God.

To understand the book of Isaiah, background knowledge of the history of ancient Israel is necessary. 587 BC is an unforgettable year in Jewish history. This is because it was the year that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian Empire. Jerusalem's palace, temple, and homes were burned and destroyed. And many people died, were injured, became refugees and slaves. Additionally, many leading figures in society were taken to the Babylonian Empire. The people who were taken captive to Babylon had to live in the environment of the Babylonian Empire for over 50 years. And the children of captives born in such an environment grew up to become a central force in the Jewish diaspora community. However, they were not desperate to return to Jerusalem, nor were they desperate to have faith in serving only God. It was important for them to endure the Babylonian system without God.

To live under the Babylonian Empire, the captives had no choice but to acknowledge reality and find their best path under it. This was the situation the ancient Jews found themselves in during the latter part of the Babylonian captivity. In other words, they had resigned themselves to having no choice but to accept reality and adapt to life. In this situation, Prophet Isaiah delivered words of comfort to them.

Isaiah received a message from God to comfort God's people. **Isaiah 40:1 says: “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.”**

But how should one comfort them? Also, what do people find comfort in? There are many ways we can receive comfort in our lives. Some people are comforted by someone's warm words. Some people find comfort through laughing or crying. But these are temporary. We need true comfort for our souls, not temporary, but eternal. This comfort of the soul is given to us only through a relationship with God.

Prophet Isaiah was aware of this fact, so he preached about God to the people living in the dark times of the Babylonian captivity. The contents appear in Isaiah 40:12-31. The book of Isaiah expresses God in a literary way and delivers words of comfort to those who were in despair and resignation.



Through Isaiah's words of comfort, we must be able to realize how insignificant all the things that the Jews living under the Babylonian Empire at the time feared and envied. On the other hand they were compared to God, who was the source of the Israelites' religious identity.

Like the ancient Jews, what we fear and what we envy are similar. The power and might of the world are what we fear, and the wealth and fame of the world are what we envy. But they cannot bring true peace to our souls.

Body: Incomparable God

Chapter 10 of 1 Kings in the Old Testament mentions Solomon's wealth and wisdom. Solomon was wise, had the power to rule over Israel, the most powerful nation in the history of Israel, and possessed enormous wealth. Perhaps by today's standards, Solomon was a near-perfect man who possessed everything: wealth, fame, power, knowledge, and good looks. However, the end of Solomon's life as told by the Old Testament writer was that he was not a worthy king before God. Solomon may have been the best king in man's opinion, but in God's opinion, Solomon was not a king who followed God's will.

Jesus spoke in Matthew 6:29, comparing King Solomon. **“Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”** Can you agree with these words of Jesus?

To many people, the grass of the field may seem too trivial, and the glory of Solomon, with all his wealth, fame, and power, may seem too precious and great. So how can we understand Jesus' words? In fact, if we are to understand Jesus' words, we must have a completely new perspective on our lives.

So what is the true nature of Solomon's glory? Solomon's glory was based on people's envy. The reason people envy Solomon is because they envy his wealth, wisdom, and authority. Without this envy of people, Solomon's glory would be meaningless.

In contrast, wild grasses may seem trivial to people, but they are not at all conscious of other people's gaze. Next to all the other wild grasses, they remain faithful to their existence as wild grasses, regardless of whether someone says they are pretty or not. Therefore, Solomon's life, which focuses on boasting so that people envy him, can be said to be a house built on sand that easily collapses. Whereas the life of a wild grass does not care about such things and can be said to be a house built on solid rock.

Someone who listens to my sermon may think to themselves: **“Pastor! No matter how faithfully we live our life without worrying about other people's opinions, shouldn't we objectively be able to secure some level of happiness?”** That's a valid question. That's why people try to fit into the standards of a happy life that the world has created. Perhaps this is our drive toward the possession of wealth, honor, and power that Solomon's glory exemplifies. I am not speaking negatively about spending our lives striving to possess wealth, fame, and power. However, if we live our lives buried in this, we will not be able to experience the freedom that wild grass feels. I think most people's lives are stuck in an awkward position, repeating trial and error between the freedom of the wild grass and the glory of Solomon.

In fact, the souls of the ancient Jews who lived at the end of the Babylonian captivity, which is the historical background for today's sermon, also experienced the same conflict as we do. No matter how hard they tried, they could not escape their real fate as prisoners of the Babylonian empire. However, the Babylonian Empire, which was so powerful, was defeated by King Cyrus of Persia in 539 BC. But the Jews did not foresee this fact. And they were exhausted from nearly 50 years of captivity. Also, they were unable to continue their faith in God as their identity in life. For them, the only thing that mattered was how to endure the reality called Babylon and how to live there. Isaiah 40:27 expresses their thoughts and hearts. **“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?'”**



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! When do you think God doesn't care about you? It may be a time when life has fallen to the point where it is difficult for us to handle. It may be when our business goes bankrupt, we suffer heartbreak, or we become seriously ill. What is clear is that God allows us a way to overcome this situation. Please remember this.

It is by experiencing God vividly in our lives that we can enjoy joy, gratitude, freedom, and rest amidst the pain and challenges that life brings. Today, the prophet Isaiah presents a way for us to vividly experience God. Verse 31 of today's text says: **“But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”**

Conclusion: A life that waits on the Lord

In this verse, the word 'waiting' means believing, hoping, and waiting. Of course, living this kind of life is not easy. So, to live this kind of life, there is something we need to clearly understand. First, we must know exactly who we trust and wait for. As Isaiah 40:12 and below repeatedly states, the God we believe in cannot be compared to anything in this world. Second, we must wait for God's will and plan to be accomplished, not what we want or hope for. Third, the world we live in, and our lives cannot be perfected in any way through our own strength and effort. We Christians are people who believe in waiting for the moment of completion. And that completion is accomplished within us by God through the Holy Spirit.

If we believe, hope, and wait on the Lord with clear confidence in the three things above in our lives, we will experience the joy of fullness/fulfillment of life in our lives.

