

“Comfort, Yes, Comfort My People!”

Text: Isa 40:1-5

Suggested Hymns:

12, 154, 164, 286, 159

- 1) With The Wonderful Message That Your Warfare Is Ended
- 2) With The Wonderful Message That Your Debt Is Paid
- 3) With The Wonderful Message That Grace Now Reigns

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 40:1-5, ¹ ***“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. ² “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD’s hand Double for all her sins.”***

³ ***The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; ⁵ The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today Australians are engaged in several wars overseas. They are long and sometime appear to be never-ending. We think of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What precious comfort and joy it would bring to our hearts if a messenger would come to us to tell us that all the wars are over. Peace has finally again come to our war-torn world, and our sons and daughters need no more die on the battlefields. They will soon return home to the arms of their loved ones, live in peace, and enjoy again the comforts and love of home!

Our joy would know no bounds and that our prayers of thanksgiving and praise would rise like a mighty chorus to the throne of God on high.

But in this Advent season, I bring to you a message which is far more comforting and capable of imparting a far greater joy.

I am here to tell you that a warfare which began soon after the creation of the world and which has brought misery and death and destruction to countless millions of its inhabitants has come to an end. Peace has been declared. This is God's message this blessed Advent season, "*Comfort, yes, comfort My people!*" *Says your God.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Be Comforted With The Wonderful Message That Your Warfare Is Ended

YOUR WARFARE WITH GOD

There was a day in the history of mankind far more terrible than Pearl Harbor, when, in the beautiful Garden of Eden — the perfect Paradise, far more delightful than the Hawaiian Islands — the powerful enemy of God and man, suddenly struck a treacherous blow.

By lies and deception the devil launched a terrible attack on the ancestors of our race. With one fell blow he robbed them of their righteousness and their holiness, which was the divine image in which they had been created.

But it also deprived them of peace with God, and changed the beautiful relation in which they lived with their Creator. From that day on there was no peace, but a state of war between man and his Maker. Sin turned man against God; and God, who is holy, cursed man and drove him out of Paradise into a world where the very ground was cursed because of his disobedience and from then on brought forth thorns and thistles.

Toil and labour, sweat and weariness, pain and sorrow, then belonged to his lot, and his final destiny was death, the death of his body, and the eternal death of his soul, which is eternal separation from God.

All the misery and woe, all the hatred and bloodshed, all the disappointments and losses, which people have suffered are all the result of this warfare caused by man's sin, a warfare which man in his fallen state and sinful condition was powerless to bring to an end.

The sinful condition of the ancestors of our race is by nature the condition of all of their descendants, which includes you and me, for "*just as through one*

man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”¹ “For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²

For us this warfare of which our text speaks is all the more terrible since there is nothing which we sinful human beings can do to appease God’s wrath and avert the punishment pronounced upon us by infinite Justice.

The Bible is clear *“your iniquities have separated you from your God.”³* That is the terrible condition of mankind in this global warfare since Adam sinned.

CHRIST HAS BROUGHT PEACE

And now in this Advent season, think of it, I am privileged, to tell you, the sinner, to cry out to you, that your *“warfare is ended,”* that peace has been declared between you and your Maker.

A war can only be ended by the declaration of peace, and this is the essence of the Advent message, that God has declared peace, that peace has been made by the Prince of Peace, the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ.

From the very beginning of the conflict God did not want the destruction of the sinner. From the very beginning God had compassion on man and with the very declaration of the state of war, gave man the promise of a coming Mediator, *“the woman’s Seed,”* who would crush the head of Satan and redeem man from the misery which man had brought upon himself.

The Evil Foe would be crushed by this Mediator, the Seed of the woman. His evil power would be broken, and man would be made free again from sin, and become reconciled with God.

This promised Mediator was no one else than God’s only Son, who was born of the Virgin Mary. It is He of whom the Prophet Isaiah said, *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”⁴*

This Prince of Peace, who came in the fullness of time, established peace, for *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* The

declaration of peace established by God is the substance of the text before us, which clearly states that your *“warfare is ended,”* and God commissions His messengers to proclaim *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!”*

2. Be Comforted With

The Wonderful Message That Your Debt Is Paid

But how could God make peace? How could Christ, the Prince of Peace, reconcile you and God? Our text tells us. We read in this divine ‘peace declaration’ of our text not only that your warfare is ended, but that *“her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD’s hand Double for all her sins.”* In other words, *your iniquity is pardoned; For you have received from the LORD’s hand Double for your sins.* Peace has come because your debt to God has been paid.

The word *“double”* simply means that God’s blessings are abundant and beyond expectations. Your sins have deserved punishment, but God has offered you forgiveness and eternal life instead of punishment. The apostle Paul grasped the meaning of this when he wrote in Romans 5:20, *But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.*

CHRIST PAID OUR DEBT

You know that this is something which people so easily and carelessly pass by, that every sin incurs a debt to God. Every sin in thought, word, or deed is a debt which must be paid. It is a debt which at the same time creates a guilt which must be punished. Here the helplessness and hopelessness of man stands out. It shows your desperate need.

God could not simply pass sin by. Because of His inherent holiness, God could not simply cancel it. The debt has to be paid, and paid to the last cent. Already in debt, and unable to pay past debts, and with more debts piling up against you daily because of sin, what is there that you can do? Absolutely nothing.

All your efforts, even your best efforts, could only involve you in still more debt, for as Isaiah says, *“But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.”*⁵ *“There is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.”*⁶ Nor was it within the ability of any person, since

every person is a sinner, to help his fellow men in this situation. It required someone greater, someone who Himself is perfect, to step in your place and pay the debt for you.

That is what God arranged to do and did, and this is the message of Advent. God sent His Son into the world to take your place. His Son was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and made Man.

Jesus was put under the Law as your Substitute, for *“when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*⁷ Jesus kept the Law perfectly in your stead. *“He committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.”*⁸ *“He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.”*⁹ Jesus, by His holy, sinless, spotless life, as your Substitute, kept the Law, which sinful you could never keep, and thus satisfied the demands of eternal Justice for all people.

CHRIST BORE OUR PUNISHMENT

However, there still remained the guilt which deserved punishment, and that, too, the Son of God, made man, bore in your stead. *“The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*¹⁰ Think of what that means!

Isaiah says, *“Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”*¹¹

By His bitter suffering and death for your sins, by the shedding of His holy, precious blood upon the Cross as your Substitute, the Son of God atoned for your guilt. *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”*¹²

The Apostle Peter, therefore, reminds us that *“you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ... ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”*¹³ *“The blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanses us from all sin.”*¹⁴

Yes, as the hymnist writes,¹⁵

His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood avails for me.

By Jesus' holy life of obedience to God's Law and by His sacrificial death suffered for your sin, the Son of God satisfied the eternal justice of God and effected your redemption. Your debt to God was paid, paid in full.

Forgiveness for sin became an accomplished fact. And so the words of the Prophet were fulfilled, "*iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD's hand Double for all her sins.*" The warfare has ended. Pardon for your iniquity was achieved. However, there is yet a third item of comfort in the Prophet's Advent message.

3. Be Comforted With The Wonderful Message That Grace Now Reigns

We read in our text, "*The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together.*" The glory of the Lord to which the Prophet here refers is not the glory which belongs to Him by right of the creation and the preservation of the world, great as that glory is, for "*The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork,*"¹⁶ but it is the greater glory of His grace revealed in His mercy and compassion to sinful people, such as you and me.

This glory was revealed in the marvellous event which we are preparing to celebrate on the holy festival in which this present Advent season culminates, for "*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*"¹⁷

The glory of God's grace was revealed when the Son of God, made flesh, performed all manner of miracles in affirmation of His divinity and in the exercise of His compassion, for "*we beheld His glory,*" writes the disciple John, "*the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"¹⁸

The glory of God's grace has been revealed all through the centuries where the Gospel has been preached, and it is being revealed today in all the continents of the earth and in all the islands of the sea where the divine message of pardon and peace is proclaimed to sinful men.

How great the glory of God's grace in the repeated offers of forgiveness and peace and salvation which the Gospel, even today, extends to all who hear its tidings! How great the glory of God's grace in the full and complete pardon which it offers to the very chief of sinners! ***Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.***¹⁹

Think of the thousands and thousands of people to whom the assurance of God's grace in Christ has comforted through all the ages, how it has lifted them out of the valleys of despondency and despair, of fear and dread, and filled them with hope and confidence as they basked in the warm sunshine of the "*love divine, all love excelling*"!

To be sure, the reception of God's grace requires humble hearts. The high hills must be laid low and the rough places must be made plain. You must abandon the mountaintops of your self-righteousness and get down from the hills of pride in your own merit, if the grace of God is to find entrance in your soul.

It is for this reason that the Advent season sounds the call to repentance, the call to leave the crooked lanes of the world, to part with sin, to turn to God in humble patience, and to resolve by His grace to walk in the way of His commandments. It is by daily contrition and repentance that we heed the call of the Advent season, "***Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.***"²⁰

And if you are still travelling on the crooked ways and on the rough places of your own sin, following those crooked lanes that lead through the rough, unhallowed wilderness of the world, turn back from your own way. Turn and come to your Saviour, who has opened up the gates of heaven for you by His sacrifice on the tree, cling to His grace and mercy, and you, too, shall be received in the arms of God; you, too, shall find forgiveness, and peace with God shall be yours.

THE CHEERING COMFORT RECEIVED THROUGH FAITH

If only all people would hear and take to heart God's declaration of peace and believe the message of His comforting grace and treasure it in their hearts, that they, too, might taste of the joy and the comfort of this Advent season!

How their anxious souls would be quieted! How new comfort and strength would flow into their hearts! They would be filled with cheering hope and with

the assurance of the love, the guidance, and protection of their reconciled Father in heaven.

They would not have to fear any more, but could rejoice in the grace and mercy of God, and they would finally come not only to see, but also to enjoy the perfect peace of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 5:12

² Romans 3:22-23

³ Isaiah 59:2

⁴ Isaiah 9:6

⁵ Isaiah 64:6

⁶ Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁷ Galatians 4:4-5

⁸ 1 Peter 2:22

⁹ Hebrews 7:26

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:6

¹¹ Isaiah 53:4-5

¹² 1 John 2:2

¹³ 1 Peter 1:18-19

¹⁴ 1 John 1:7

¹⁵ Hymn 159

¹⁶ Psalm 19:1

¹⁷ 1 John 4:9

¹⁸ John 1:14

¹⁹ Romans 5:20

²⁰ Isaiah 40:3