HOPE when I need comfort December 2, 2018

*Isaiah 40:1-8 Series: Christmas Hope*

“Christmas is saying yes to a hope based on God's initiative, which has nothing to do with what I think or feel. Christmas is believing that the salvation of the world is God's work and not mine.” – Henry Nouwen

Intro: Anton Chekhov’s, “Lament” about a man who lost his son.

1. Hope in the God who seeks your comfort. (vv. 1-2)
2. God seeks to comfort those who have no comforter.

v. 1 *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

Lamentations 1:9 *her fall is terrible; she has no comforter*

1. God speaks tenderly, persuading those who have given up hope.

v. 2 *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem*

Hosea 2:14 *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.*

1. God provides a double pardon for our sins.

v. 2 *her iniquity is pardoned*

v. 2 *received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins*

Isaiah 61:7 *Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

* What difference does a comforter make when you face a trial?
* What are some ways that God offers comfort in this passage?
* How is ‘becoming the righteousness of God’ different than just being forgiven? When do you most need to remember that?
1. Prepare for the God who secures your comfort. (vv. 3-5)
2. Christmas celebrates God’s arrival into our world’s wilderness.

v. 3 *In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD*

1. Christmas is to be welcomed by dealing with our heart.

v. 3 *prepare the way of the LORD*

v. 3 *make straight in the desert a highway for our God*

v. 4 *Every valley shall be lifted up …*

v. 4 *every mountain and hill be made low*

v. 4 *the uneven ground shall become level*

v. 4 *the rough places a plain*

Matthew 3:1-2 *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

John 1:23 *He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”*

1. Christmas is a rehearsal for Jesus’ next arrival.

v. 5 *And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*Matthew 25:31-32 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

* How does repentance prepare for God’s arrival?
* How is Christmas a wonderful fulfillment of v. 5?
* How is Christmas an inadequate fulfillment of v. 5?
1. Trust in the God who promises your comfort. (vv. 6-8)
2. People’s empty promises make Christmas hard to believe.

v. 6 *All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.*

v. 7 *The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.*

1. People’s threats make Christmas hard to receive.

Isaiah 51:12 *I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass …*

1. God’s Christmas promise is secure and eternal.

v. 8 *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

* What are some ways that the Israelites’ experience of people (e.g. their past rulers, their current oppressors, their own selves) made it hard for them to believe God’s promises?
* How is v. 8 an answer to the people’s doubts about God’s promises?
* Where do you most need prayer in applying this message?

Study ahead: Next week, we’ll study Isaiah 40:9-11.

Notes