

Words of Comfort
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“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.” Isaiah 40:1-2

At first glance the ideas of "comfort" and "receiving double for sin" don't really seem to mesh. We all know that payback is rough - wouldn't a double payback, and one from God, be even more brutal? Especially in times when things aren't going well, when things we love are cancelled or slipping away and we are isolated and alone. Comfort - this sounds downright terrifying!

Well, most of the Scripture actually seems terrifying if you don't think about Christ Jesus when you read it. This is a passage that is centered upon and relies upon Jesus.

When Scripture speaks of warfare there is almost always an idea of rebellion attached to it - that warfare arises because of people not honoring authority and commitments to those above them. This is emblematic not just of our earthly conflicts, but it is the image of what sin is. Sin is rebellion against God, it is waging war against God and His authority and all the orders that He has established.

When you are engaged in warfare, there's a constant stress that breaks you down and wears you down. A fear of what will happen next - a fear of what will happen to you. Part of being a sinful human being is that we have this fear that our sin is going to have cosmic consequences that are beyond our control. A fear that my sin X brought about disaster Y - that I caused this badness.

This is why we need comfort. This is why God sent Isaiah to point out the coming Messiah to people who saw their sin and their trouble and their frail mortality. Apart from Christ Jesus we can be driven to see nothing but sin and death and fear. However, the story of the Scriptures is not that we sin and God does nothing but smite. The story of the Scriptures is that God Himself promises to rescue and redeem us, that He Himself will take up the punishment for sin to rescue us from sin.

This is why there was a first Christmas. Christ Jesus came down from heaven to be born, to become man, and to go to the Cross. To take up punishment for sin Himself. To receive the punishment in full measure, to take the brunt of the warfare of sinful rebellion upon Himself, and then to cry out, "It is finished."

And it is so. Fully. Completely. Now there is no more condemnation left, not a drop, for those who are in Christ Jesus. God's not out to smite you. Christ Jesus has taken up and paid for your sins, and He has instead given you His righteousness, His holiness, His own everlasting life.

This week, as we come across all the strangeness and fear and worry that are circulating around, remember Christ Jesus. You are forgiven in Christ Jesus, and even though the world still rages, and sin and death still swirl around, you have received from God forgiveness and life enough to cover double your sins. And when Christ comes again, you will see this in full.