

Sermon: Second Sunday of Advent, Tidings of Comfort and Hope!

December 6, 2020

Isaiah 40:1-11

ISAIAH 40 IS ONE OF THE LOVELIEST CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE. IN ONE MOMENT, IT SPEAKS SOFTLY AND TENDERLY. "COMFORT MY PEOPLE", IT SAYS. "SPEAK TENDERLY TO JERUSALEM" AND TELL HER THAT HER SUFFERING IS AT AN END. (V1-2) THE LORD IS COMING OUT OF THE WILDERNESS AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE REVEALED.

IN ANOTHER MOMENT, IT CASTS A MAJESTIC VISION OF THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF GOD, WHO CREATED ALL THINGS AND RULES OVER THE PRINCES OF THE EARTH AND THE STARS OF THE HEAVENS. THE PEOPLE ARE GRASS, IT SAYS, "BUT THE WORD OF OUR GOD ENDURES FOREVER." (V8) GOD HAS MEASURED THE WATERS OF THE EARTH IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND. HE HAS WEIGHED THE MOUNTAINS AS THOUGH THEY WERE DUST. SET BEFORE THE EVERLASTING GOD, THE CREATOR OF THE UNSPEAKABLE VASTNESS AND BEAUTY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE UNIVERSE, EVEN THE NATIONS THEMSELVES ARE "AS NOTHING" AND "LESS THAN NOTHING" (V 17)

THE QUESTION BECOMES, WHAT WILL MOTIVATE THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO ACTUALLY TRUST HIM AND BECOME THE SERVANTS THAT THEY ARE CALLED TO BE? HOW WILL IT BE POSSIBLE FOR SINFUL ISRAEL TO BECOME GOD'S SERVANTS AT ALL? AND FINALLY, WHAT IS TO BE DONE ABOUT THE SIN THAT HAS ALIENATED THEM FROM GOD?

THIS PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH DRAWS ON ONE OF THE DEEPEST HOPES OF THE HUMAN RACE. HE COMPARES THE WORLD TO A WILDERNESS – UNINHABITABLE, LIKE A DESERT. THERE’S DEATH, DISEASE, WAR, POVERTY, STRIFE AND BROKENNESS OF ALL SORTS. BUT WHEN THE KING COMES, THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE REVEALED, AND EVERYONE WILL SEE IT! THIS WORLD MAY BE DESOLATE, BUT THE KING IS COMING!

WHEN YOU READ THE FIRST 39 CHAPTERS OF ISAIAH, YOU’LL SEE THAT THERE’S ALMOST NOTHING THERE BUT JUDGEMENT. AND THE REASON FOR THAT IS BECAUSE IT WAS ISAIAH’S JOB TO SPEAK CLEARLY THE STANDARDS OF THE JUSTICE OF THE GREAT KING. HE TELLS ISRAEL, “YOU ARE GOING TO BE TAKEN AWAY INTO CAPTIVITY. YOU ARE GOING INTO EXILE.

BUT THEN IN CHAPTER 40, WHICH WE READ A PORTION OF TODAY, THERE’S THIS INCREDIBLE HOPE. COMFORT “MY PEOPLE”. SEE NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, GOD STILL CONSIDERS THEM “MY PEOPLE”.

AND ISAIAH PROCLAIMS THAT THEIR HARD SERVICE, THEIR WARFARE, THEIR STRUGGLE, THEIR CONFLICT, WILL BE COMPLETED. IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT THEY HAVE TO GO THROUGH IN EXILE IS NOT PERMANENT. THEY ARE NOT BEING ABANDONED – JUST SENT AWAY FOR AWHILE.

WHY? BECAUSE – “HER SIN HAS BEEN PAID FOR, THAT SHE HAS RECEIVED FROM THE LORD’S HANDS *DOUBLE* FOR ALL HER SINS.

AND IT'S NOT SAYING HER HARD SERVICE IS COMPLETED BECAUSE GOD HAS PAID HER DOUBLE, PUNISHED HER DOUBLE FOR HER SINS. THAT'S NOT WHAT IT SAYS. NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE DOES GOD GIVE YOU TWO PUNISHMENTS, DOUBLE THE PUNISHMENT YOU DESERVE.

NO, WHAT IT SAYS IS "SHE HAS RECEIVED FROM THE LORD'S HAND DOUBLE PAYMENT." IN OTHER WORDS, THE REASON WHY EXILE WILL ONLY BE TEMPORARY, IS THAT GOD HIMSELF HAS PROVIDED THE PAYMENT FOR THEIR SINS, AND THAT PAYMENT IS DOUBLE.

LOOK AT VERSES 9-11. WHEN THE KING SHOWS UP, WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY PICTURE. THE SOVEREIGN LORD COMES WITH POWER, AND HIS ARM RULES FOR HIM. AND THE WORD ARM IS VERY IMPORTANT, IT'S A HEBREW METAPHOR FOR YOUR POWER, BUT LOOK AT WHAT THE KING'S ARM IS *DOING*...

"HE TENDS HIS FLOCK LIKE A SHEPHERD: HE GATHERS THE LAMBS IN HIS ARMS, AND CARRIES THEM CLOSE TO HIS HEART; HE GENTLY LEADS THOSE WHO HAVE YOUNG." SEE, THE KING/WARRIOR IS A SHEPHERD. WHY ARE WE NOT AFRAID? VERSE 10 TELLS US – "SEE, HIS REWARD IS WITH HIM. NOT *OUR* REWARD, BUT *HIS* REWARD HE'S COMING WITH *HIS* RECOMPENSE.

AND WHAT EXACTLY *IS* THAT REWARD? WHAT WOULD GOD LOOK AT AND FEEL SO WEALTHY AND RICH THAT HE WOULD SAY "THIS IS MY TREASURE. THESE ARE MY JEWELS. THIS IS MY

WEALTH?" WHAT IS HE LOOKING AT? IT'S *US!* IT'S HIS FLOCK. IT'S THE LITTLE ONES. IT'S THE WEAKEST ONES. HOW CAN THIS BE?

WHEN YOU READ THE REST OF ISAIAH 40, IT BECOMES SO OBVIOUS. THE OCEAN IS NOTHING, THE MOUNTAINS ARE BUT DUST, THE GALAXIES ARE NOTHING COMPARED TO HOW HE SEES YOU. HIS DOUBLE PAYMENT, IS SO MUCH LOVE, SO MUCH HONOR THAT IT DOESN'T JUST WIPE OUT OUR SINS, BUT IT ALSO WELCOMES US INTO HIS LOVING ARMS. HE DOESN'T JUST SEE US AS PARDONED SINNERS, BUT AS HIS TREASURE, HIS WEALTH.

HOW CAN WE EVER RESPOND TO SUCH LOVE? ISAIAH 40 THE LAST VERSES PROVIDE THE ANSWER: THOSE WHO HOPE IN THE LORD WILL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH. ANOTHER TRANSLATION SAYS THAT THOSE WHO WAIT ON THE LORD...

HOW DO WE HONOR HIM AS LORD AND KING IN OUR LIVES? WE WAIT...

WAITING MEANS TO OBEY. SEE, EVERY MOUNTAIN BOWS DOWN, EVERY VALLEY MADE SMOOTH. NOTHING IS HELD BACK. AM I WILLING TO SAY, IN EVERY AREA OF MY LIFE, LORD, NOT MY WILL BUT THINE BE DONE. SEE, THE HARDEST THING TO GIVE, IS *IN*. EVERYTHING ELSE IS RELATIVELY EASY, BUT THE HARDEST THING TO GIVE IS *IN*. TO GIVE UP THE RIGHT TO DETERMINE HOW MY LIFE SHOULD BE LIVED – THAT'S A WHOLE OTHER BALL OF WASX.

WAITING ALSO MEANS TO RELAX – IT MEANS IN YOUR TIME LORD, NOT MINE. I ACCEPT YOUR PLAN, YOUR PURPOSE, IN YOUR TIME.

AND WE DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT COMES NEXT, BECAUSE WORRY IS ALWAYS A RESISTANCE OF THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST. WORRY, ANXIETY, FEAR ALWAYS MEAN "IF I WAS IN CHARGE, I WOULD DO A BETTER JOB, I WOULD KNOW JUST WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN, BUT AS SOON AS WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BEFORE THE LORD, WE CAN RELAX AND LET HIM DO THE ORDERING.

FINALLY, WAITING MEANS TO EXPECT. WAITING MEANS TO HOPE. WAITING MEANS IF IT REALLY IS TRUE THAT JESUS IS LORD, THEN I HAVE TO HAVE GREAT EXPECTATIONS IN WHAT HE CAN DO THROUGH THE LIKES OF ME. JUST IMAGINE WHAT OUR WORLD, OUR CHURCH, HIS KINGDOM HERE ON EARTH WOULD LOOK LIKE IF WE COULD JUST WAIT ON HIM.

LET US PRAY:

GIVE US, FATHER, THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS THAT THERE IS A KING, THAT HE IS COMING, AND WE DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID BECAUSE OF THE DOUBLE PAYMENT OF JESUS CHRIST FOR US. SHOW US HOW TO WAIT, IN OBEDIENCE, IN REST, IN EXPECTATION, UNTIL YOU COME AGAIN. IN JESUS WE PRAY. AMEN.