

Her Sin Has Been Paid For

- ¹ **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.**
- ² **Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.**
- ³ **A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**
- ⁴ **Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.**
- ⁵ **And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."**

These verses display the two greatest miracles, not only in the Bible, but for each of us, personally, in the whole history of the universe. There are really only two kinds of miracles: Physical or bodily miracles which happen in the visible world: An ax head floats, a person is healed, water is changed to wine, that sort of thing, all of which are small potatoes, candy to children, and not all that important for us Christians, all except one. And then there are the really important miracles, which are all spiritual miracles. That's how you and I came to faith through baptism and the preaching of the gospel, and that's how you and I show our faith with a life and turns a little more toward Christ, a little more each day. A little more, a little more. And so on.

So the greatest two miracles are here before us. **The greatest** is that the Son of God took on human flesh to be incarnate as a human being like us, for our sakes. And God commands the prophet to comfort us: "Prepare the way for the Lord." He is coming. The glory of the Lord will be revealed. **And the second miracle** is that you and I have been brought to faith, raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Spiritual death is being condemned to hell forever, and that's how we were conceived and born into the world. But through a miracle, a miracle that touched, zapped, embraced, changed each one of us here and listening, a miracle that means we were brought to life through faith in Christ. And like any miracle of the dead being brought to life in the Bible by Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, Peter or Paul, we were spiritual corpses who had no say in the matter. We were brought to life even though we were dead, and praise God for both of those miracles: The coming of Jesus, and the resurrection of each of us from death to a life of faith.

"Comfort my people" is God's command to Isaiah and to all God's pastors. We have work to do with the people of God, and that work is to comfort them. Where the law has done its work, people will be terrified of their sins and afraid of everlasting unending damnation in hell, for that's just what we deserve for our sins.

But the message today isn't directly about how sinful we are. Oh, we know about our sins. We know that we have failed God with what we say with our impatient words and our potty mouths. We know that we have failed God with what we do and with what we should have done but didn't. We know that we have failed God with our thoughts, the secret pathways of our inner imaginations that even the Devil doesn't know about, but God knows. God grieves over our sins.

But that's where his message today comes tumbling down out of heaven like a boulder hurtling down a mountain to begin an avalanche of joy and love and good news. **The hard work of God's people**, the toil under the threat of punishment that hung over the heads of Israel from Moses to Malachi, is finished, filled up to the brim, and done with. The faucet of God's rage was opened wide, and now it is closed shut, not even dripping a single drop of God's anger anymore. Why not?

Because all of mankind's **sin is paid for**. There are lots of Hebrew words for sin, but today there won't be any Hebrew lesson. Just understand that even the very worst kind of sins are paid for, atoned for, covered over by God's foot kicking sand over our guilt. Even our intentional sins, our open rebellion against God, is paid for by the blood of the sacrificed Messiah, Jesus Christ.

God puts this in amazing terms. He says that **we have been paid back "double" for our sins**. This is the word you would use when you double a piece of fabric folding it over on itself. This is not a message of punishment—not even that Christ endured our punishment and double our punishment on the cross. Not that I would disagree with that. Jesus endured hell on behalf of all mankind. But that's not the message of grace that Isaiah delivers in this prophecy. If he only wanted to tell God's people that they would get what they had coming to them in the Babylonian exile, or even in the fiery pits and calderas of hell, it would hardly be a prophecy at all, but more of a regular sermon like the one Isaiah preaches in his final chapter.

No, this is the opposite of punishment. This what the Lord told the prophet to say when he doubled the first words of the chapter: Comfort! Comfort!

No sooner does the Lord tell us about this victory that we hear the voice calling, **"In the wilderness prepare!"** In the Gospel, the voice is in the wilderness. Here in Isaiah, the way of the Lord is in the wilderness. Which is right? Both are right. The voice of John was heard in the wilderness, not in a synagogue, not in the temple, but out in the river where John was preaching and baptizing. And the way of the Lord is not confined to churches and cathedrals, or even to our structured, ordered, visible lives. No, it's in the disorderly wilderness of our hearts and our sinful desires.

Whatever in my life is **too puffed up** and arrogant, so seemingly saintly that people hold me in awe even though I know the muddy, underfoot truth of my sins-- that's what needs to be made low, mowed down, pounded with repentance into a flat place. This is the work of the Law, convicting the sinner of his sin.

And whatever in my life is **a valley, a pit**, a hole of despair and grief over my sinfulness, well, that's what needs to be raised up. This is where I need to be lifted up from my grief over my sinfulness and shown my Savior, so that I can wipe my nose and dry my tears and be shown that Jesus' words of comfort and forgiveness apply to me, too. And the valleys and potholes of our fear and grief are filled in, made level, by the love of Christ. This is the work of the Gospel, convincing the sinner of his Savior.

And there are **the two parts of repentance**: True fear and shame over my sin, and true faith in my Savior who has forgiven me. So that I turn from sin and turn to Christ.

But our Lord isn't done giving us his promise, of folding his gospel over double to keep us safe and secure in his love. He promises: **"The glory of the Lord will be revealed."** The Glory of the Lord usually describes the appearance of God or a direct message from God amid a cloud and a bright light or even a blazing fire. It struck awe in people: a devouring fire to all unbelief, and God's saving glory to all who believe.

To the unbeliever, the Glory of the Lord is law. It shows just how unapproachable God is when sinful man finally comes face to face with the Holy God. To the believer, the Glory of the Lord is gospel. It shows God's special message of grace to mankind through Jesus Christ. Remember that the Glory of the Lord surrounded Jesus at his transfiguration, surrounded the angels when they announced his birth, and had appeared to the Israelites at times when, for example, God started to bring them manna in the wilderness, which was their daily bread.

Here, the coming of the Glory of the Lord points to a lot more than the return of God's people to Jerusalem after their exile. It points ahead to the coming of Jesus into world to rescue all mankind from sin, to give his own flesh as our daily bread.

When God created all of this, our universe and our world, he did it out of nothing. It was he alone that existed in eternity before the creation, and he chose to make room in that perfection which was he, alone, and he made everything with nothing but the power of his holy Word. He Spoke, and everything came to be. He made this world so that you and I would come to faith in him and become his children, and live with him forever in heaven.

Our sins put us in terrible danger, the danger of being cut off from God for all eternity in hell, the prison of eternity. Our sins separate us from God, they put us on the fiery side of the Glory of the Lord, and condemn us. So God jumped into the danger himself. We know the story. But that the Son of God would do what he didn't have to do, just to rescue me. Just to rescue you. That is love. And that this rescue is accomplished, fulfilled, and nothing more needs ever to be done-- how can we be certain that it's all complete? Because the very same mouth that made everything out of nothing is the very same mouth that declares that you and I are saved, we are alive even though we were dead: **For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."** Amen.

Gracious Father, we have assembled in your presence to hear your holy word. Now we turn our hearts to you in prayer. Bless those who have prayed for us when we have been in need, and grant our prayers now for the sake of Jesus our Lord, who intercedes with you on our behalf at all times.

Our people are suffering from separation, frustration, anxiety, worry, and a global pandemic that is now said to be the leading cause of death in our nation. Remember your people. Comfort your people, and teach us to love one another as you have loved us.

Bless **Paul Roiger** and **Aaron Thedens** who are hospitalized at Abbott, and also **Pastor Marty Lopahs** who is hospitalized in Rochester. Give them peace and recovery. Bless the doctors and nurses who care for them.

Bless **Connie Weilage** who is recovering at home from knee surgery, and **Paul Fromm**, also undergoing knee surgery, together with **Matt Dummer**, who will have shoulder surgery. These procedures are necessary and delicate, and we ask you to bless both the process and the recovery of each of your children.

Comfort **the family of Bob Berg** whose funeral took place (~~today~~/**yesterday**). Give them confidence and joy in the certainty of the resurrection. Pour out your grace on the Cauwe and Mertz family at the death of their relative, **Theodore Emo**. Grant them comfort in Jesus our only Savior.

Once again, Lord, bless those people who care for the sick in this emergency, **especially nurses** who willingly do the things that must be done with dedication and grace. Give them a special measure of your love, and send your holy angels to protect them from all dangers, seen, unseen, microscopic and diabolic.

Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.