

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED **Isaiah 40:1-2 & 25-31****IF IT SEEMS THAT GOD HAS FORGOTTEN YOU !**

Comfort, yes, comfort My people, says your God. Speak comfort to [the heart of] 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 [the] double for all her sins.

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To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal, says the Holy One?

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number? He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God"?

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint !

Q. "How is the New Year going so far?" A. "Well, I don't know. It just started." It's sort of like asking someone how's their day, five minutes after they get out of bed. Ok, then, what are your expectations for this year? Would you answer, "I hope it's better than last year. Last year was such a bummer. I think God forgot about me, forgot about us, last year." Do you realize, God doesn't operate on the basis of years? It's true, by God's design on this earth, we operate on a system of years, and months, and weeks, and days. Life in this physical world is bounded by time. But with God there is no "time." A thousand years are like a day to God, we read in II Peter 3:8. And the reverse is also true, a day is like a thousand years. God is timeless. He didn't hang up a new calendar three days ago, and say, OK let's start fresh here. There is one continual flow of our lives before God. You get a sense of that on the day you turn 25, or 40, or 60, or 80, and someone asks, "Well how does it feel to be 25 or 60?" "It feels just the same as yesterday." There is one continual flow of life before God. Just because you put up a new calendar, doesn't mean—Aah, a fresh start, let's see if this goes better.

Anyway, who's to say 2020 was a bad year? If you had given 2020 to someone living in the 1940's during the burden of World War II— if they could have suddenly experienced 2020—what would they have said? "Bad year"? Or go twenty-five years earlier, during World War I and the 1918 flu epidemic? with no electricity, no cars, no cell phones, no internet, no propane gas, no trucks, no tractors, no antibiotics, no automatic wash machines? Would they have called 2020, with all its shortcomings, a "bad year"? I wonder. For that matter, maybe the 10 years prior to 2020 were exceptionally good years in the grand scale of things. Maybe we were living the high life, far above average, and foolishly grew to expect that those years were merely average. Maybe 2020 really was an average year and now we're back to average, and there will be more like it, and some even below average. At any rate do you know for sure 2020 was a bad year? Well, maybe it was. What if this next year is worse?

What is the worst possible thing that could happen this year?? I like to ask the confirmation students that question during the course of catechism classes. Their answers are many and various. And I just keep answering, "No, that's not the worst." Finally they say, I could die! And I still say, No, that's not the worst--the worst possible thing that could happen is that you DIE AND GO TO HELL! To die in unbelief is the worst possible thing that could happen. The so-called "bad" things that your Father sends in this life and in last year and in this year, are all designed to draw you and the people around you, closer to Him and to His Son your Savior.

But does it seem that God has forgotten you? us? That last year was out of control, the worst you've had, and you wouldn't want another year like that? Listen to the words of Isaiah, words from your God.

To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal, says the Holy One? Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number? He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing.

Your God, the God, is not like any other “god” that people may revere and worship. He’s not an image of gold molten by man, or of hardest wood carved by man. He’s not the composite result of the thoughts of various philosophers or of one great thinker over the years. He’s not a god that man can control! He’s the Holy One, the “separate one,” far different from, far superior to, far more perfect than anything or anyone on this earth. Stop comparing God and the ways of God to earthly forces and earthly beings and to sinful man. He created everything, whether it’s the countless hosts of the stars in the sky, or the gallons of water in the sea, or the grains of sand on the seashore, or the beasts of the field, or the men, women and children of this earth. All are numbered, in fact all are named by Him. He is aware of and knows and cares for each one! Not one is missing from His care. In caring for us, He’s not just an administrator of a massive population, or like a cattleman with 2000 head of cattle, trying to do what’s best for each one. He made each one, and knows how to fix each one, and to run life for each one in their own best interest. He does not want you to die and go to hell this year or last year or next year.

And yet we think, it’s been a bad year, or it will be a bad year, or God has forgotten about us. *Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God”?* God doesn’t care about me—about me personally—He isn’t such a loving God, or I’m not important enough to Him. He’s likely fatigued and buried in work and I fall by the wayside. *Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.* God does not get weary and tired. His understanding and ability to see, to know, to care for all, is unsearchable. On our own, life gets bigger than we are. On our own, life runs out of control. If we were running things, indeed 2020 was not a good year. But God is running things! When He allows us to feel and see our weakness, when He allows us to be weak, then He makes us strong! That’s His goal!

Here is the best assurance of all: *Comfort, yes, comfort My people, says your God. Speak comfort to [the heart of] Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended.* Calm your hearts, dry your tears, have new hope and new courage regarding last year and this year and next year. God’s message to His people through Isaiah and for us is: Take heart, take a deep sigh of relief. Like a little child crying in despair, the Lord lifts you up, wipes your tears, and speaks to your heart, “It’s ok. There, there. I am here. I’m holding you safe.” Your warfare is ended, your iniquity is pardoned. That battle you’re fighting every day, that struggle to survive that you face each day, it’s already won! The reason you even face it—sad to say—is because of your own sinful heart, will, and actions. But the Lord has taken care of that too! Jerusalem’s *iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord’s hand [the] double for all her sins.* God says, Through My Son, your iniquity is pardoned. Your inequality is considered a no-issue. Like weighing items on a balance scale in the science classroom. You’re too light, you’re too heavy, you’re unequal to God’s demands. But take comfort, your iniquity is pardoned in Jesus. It’s no longer an issue, because Christ has stepped in for you at the cross. In Jesus you have--*she has received from the Lord’s hand [the] double for all her sins.* Your debt is paid in full. Double! Nothing left outstanding. Precious forgiveness—double-- for each day. Comfort!

This is the status for each year. This was the status for last year. There is no reason to mope, or to whine, or to feel sorry for yourself, or to look accusingly at God, or to resign it all to “fate” and no one can do anything about it. God in His Fatherly love and mercy, was managing the continual flow of your life the last 12 months, or 49 months, 139 ½ months, or years, weeks, days. All life. And He will do so in the future—this year too. God has not forgotten you. He carries you safely each day. When hardship comes as allowed by His all-wise and all-loving hand—indeed, hardships for sinners—lean on Him. That’s his plan for sinners. He has the victory in store for you. Even if death itself sneaks through the door, or blasts through the door, you have the victory! Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. At our best, we are weak and are nothing, but with the Lord we are strong and victorious. In Christ you even have victory over death and the grave! Death may come this year, even if this is the greatest year ever! But in Jesus, you just keep right on running and right on walking past death. You mount up, rise up, like a mighty eagle taking to flight, over Satan, death, and hell itself. *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint !*

How is the year going so far? In fact how was last year? Or next year? In our Lord and Savior—GREAT!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach