**New Hope Sermon Comfort and Restoration**

**Introduction**

So many of the people I have spoken with around the world this week have had their lives disrupted by Covid-19 and its variants. As the disease continues to multiply, it leaves consistent sorrow in its wake., with global economic, emotional, physical and spiritual consequences.This pandemic has shaped the lasts three years in incredible ways.

I have been doing a study of second Isaiah (from chapter 40 to the end) for my meditation “Scattered Flock” (cite link to my website) and been struck by the applicability of these chapters to today. God’s Word continues to be relevant and penetrating over all the centuries! As Paul tells Timothy: “Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us” (The Message). 2 Tim.3:16-17. Knowing the Word is essential for truth-filled redemptive lives.

The year was 1897. In a village garbage dump at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, two British archaeologists
unearthed some scraps of paper—the discarded contents of a wastepaper basket. When the men read the first few words on the “trash,” they knew they had discovered something big—very big.

The Greek New Testament has a vocabulary of nearly 5,500 words, of which some 500 words were unique to the New Testament, not seen in any prior Greek literature. Some Bible scholars thought the unique words had been created by the Holy Spirit to suit the purpose of God’s revelation. But with the uncovering of the Oxyrhynchus scraps of paper, it became clear that the words of the New Testament simply reflect the common language of the street.

As we read, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16), doesn’t it shed new light on the Author of Scripture? God is holy, but He’s also deeply personal. He doesn’t speak to us in grandiloquence (extravagant language), but in a way that captures the meaning of an abbreviation that people sometimes text: “HTHT” (heart-to-heart talk).

The highly developed Bible study tools available to us today can cause us to run the risk of missing the simple, profound truths contained in God’s Word. We might walk away from a Bible study with insight into biblical truths that speak to our minds, but our hearts remain unchanged. Instead, let’s take the common-language teachings of God’s Word to heart.

In applying that goal, Paul says, “Do what I have done. I’ve lived through those kinds of pressures” (see vv.10-13). The second part of Paul’s instruction is, “Stick with what you learned and believed about the Scriptures” (see vv.14-17). This advice isn’t extravagant or conceptual; it’s personal and practical. Let it speak to your heart today. —Poh Fang Chia

With that admonition, let’s do a brief overview of how second Isaiah speaks to our hearts today.

**Three Themes**

In broad strokes, there are three themes interwoven from chapter 40 to the end of the book of Isaiah:

* Israel’s sin and suffering
* The promises of God for comfort and restoration
* The Servant of the Lord who will make God’s promises a reality

**Israel’s suffering**

In Isaiah’s day Israel (still under captivity in Babylon) lamented that God had forgotten them: God asks: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?” (40:27) They felt “bereaved and barren. . . exiled and rejected. . .all alone” (49:21),. . .living in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor who is bent on destruction (51:13). They say, “ Justice is far from us. We look for light, but all is darkness, for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes,…among the strong, we are like the dead. We growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but find none, for deliverance but it is far away” (59:9-11).

From God’s perspective their suffering was because they were not obedient to God: “Who is blind but my servant . . .You have seen many things but have paid no attention, your ears are open but you hear nothing.” (42:20) God’s judgement for sin is clear in the plight of his people.

Today all physical and emotional suffering is not the result of God’s judgment on our sin, but it can lead us to greater dependence on the Lord and the blessing of His promises. It also can lead us to seek the Spirit’s necessary role in our restoration.



**God’s Promises of Restoration**

And that’s the context in Isaiah. God promises comfort and restoration to His people because of His compassion for their suffering and because of His essential character of love and forgiveness. That’s why the opening words of chapter 40 are “Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God. 2“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone” (40:1-2). This theme is reiterated repeatedly: in the following chapters:

* “Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance—all who seek the Lord! Consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were mined. 2Yes, think about Abraham, your ancestor, and Sarah, who gave birth to your nation. Abraham was only one man when I called him. But when I blessed him, he became a great nation.” 3The Lord will comfort Israel[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+51%3A1-3&version=NLT#fen-NLT-18653a)] again and have pity on her ruins. Her desert will blossom like Eden, her barren wilderness like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found there. Songs of thanksgiving will fill the air.” NLT (51:1-3)
* 7“When the poor and needy search for water and there is none, and their tongues are parched from thirst,
then I, the Lord, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will never abandon them. 18I will open up rivers for them on the high plateaus. I will give them fountains of water in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water.
    Rivers fed by springs will flow across the parched ground. 19I will plant trees in the barren desert—cedar, acacia, myrtle, olive, cypress, fir, and pine. 20I am doing this so all who see this miracle will understand what it means— that it is the Lord who has done this, the Holy One of Israel who created it.” NLT 41:17-20
* ‘I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?
I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland. 20The wild animals in the fields will thank me, the jackals and owls, too, for giving them water in the desert. Yes, I will make rivers in the dry wasteland so my chosen people can be refreshed. 21I have made Israel for myself, and they will someday honor me before the whole world.” NLT 49:15-19

These realities of barrenness turned into an oasis are what is so needed among God’s people who are suffering today. We need to have our focus redirected from the suffering and uncertainty that stalks us day and night, and be brought back to a shining faith in the Light and salvation of the God who loves us and can fill the desert with pools of water, the God who sees when we are “storm-tossed” and afflicted” (54:11) and says “Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth. . . For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.. . . 5“I will not forget you. 16Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.”(49:13-16) “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”(43:1-3). Walking through the waters recalls God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt’s oppressors by creating a “path through the sea” (Exod.14:5-31, Ps.77:19-20). This same God can still do that today!

**The Messiah**

The third theme woven throughout second Isaiah is the announcement of the Servant of God, the Messiah, who will bring all God’s promises to fulfillment for all nations. The Servant Songs describing the character and work of this Messiah are in Isa. 42:1-9, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12). Isaiah 52 and 53 are clearly fulfilled in Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. As the African Bible Commentary expositor Edouard Kitoko Nsiku says,”The many similarities between this passage and the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ led his disciples to recognize this passage as a prophecy that was being fulfilled in their time(Mt.8:17, Luke 22:37,John 12:38.Acts 3:26, Rom.15:21, I Peter 2:22-25).” In fact, Isaiah 61 is what Jesus quoted about Himself in his inauguration of ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isa.61%3A1-3&version=ESV#fen-ESV-18845a)]
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isa.61%3A1-3&version=ESV#fen-ESV-18845b)] 2to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; 3to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint (or heavy) spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isa.61%3A1-3&version=ESV#fen-ESV-18847c)] (Isa. 61:1-3..

The Passion Translates this Messianic calling (from Jesus’ proclamation in Nazareth) as: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has anointed me to be hope[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+4%3A16-21&version=TPT#fen-TPT-6510c)] for the poor, healing for the brokenhearted, and new eyes[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+4%3A16-21&version=TPT#fen-TPT-6510d)] for the blind, and to preach to prisoners,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+4%3A16-21&version=TPT#fen-TPT-6510e)] ‘You are set free!’ I have come to share *the message of Jubilee,*[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+4%3A16-21&version=TPT#fen-TPT-6510f)] for the time of God’s great acceptance[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+4%3A16-21&version=TPT#fen-TPT-6510g)] has begun.”[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+4%3A16-21&version=TPT#fen-TPT-6510h)] This translation clearly makes Jesus Himself God’s hope, healing, sight, and deliverer for all people.

And, by the Spirit, His ministry is now entrusted to all His followers. In His name we are to claim with others that God can heal their brokenness; God can remove their spirit of heaviness and give them His coat of praise. To those who mourn, we bring them to Jesus for His comfort and the beauty He can give that comes out of ashes. We lead them to “the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”(2 Cor. 1: 3-4). In Jesus’ name we bring Jesus’s power and love and hope to a broken, suffering world.

**Conclusion**

We can claim all the Isaiah promises today, beloved, because Christ made them available for all people, not just the people of Israel. In Christ all who have called on the name of the Lord for salvation are now God’s chosen people. God sees all the struggles of our souls and hears all the cries of our hearts, as He did those Israelites centuries ago. He has not left us; He has not forgotten us. He alone is the only Savior, the Good Shepherd, the Healer, the Comforter, the Lord of heaven and earth, and all His purposes will stand. Neither Covid nor any future form of opposition, reverses, oppression, sickness or trouble will thwart God’s good purposes for his people or separate us from Him (Romans 8:37-39). As God said through Isaiah: ”What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do”(46:11).

Our comfort and hope is in God’s restoration and goodness. This is the good news of the gospel, foretold in second Isaiah and remaining true in the centuries since. God is till the God of all comfort. May His promises and acts through history bring peace and restoration to all who are weighed down with troubles today. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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