



MATT SEARLES

COMFORT
&
JOY

Advent Devotions from Isaiah 40–55

10 Publishing
a division of **10**ofthose.com

CONTENTS

Introduction – ‘Comfort my people’	8
1. Here is your God! (Isa. 40:1–11)	10
2. With whom will you compare me? (Isa. 40:12–26)	12
3. On eagles’ wings (Isa. 40:27–31)	14
4. Do not fear for I am with you (Isa. 41)	16
5. A bruised reed he will not break (Isa. 42:1–17)	20
6. You are mine (Isa. 42:18 – 43:13)	24
7. Streams in the wasteland (Isa. 43:14 – 44:5)	28
8. Is there any God besides me? (Isa. 44:6–23)	30
9. I am the Lord, and there is no other (Isa. 44:24 – 45:13)	32
10. Everlasting salvation (Isa. 45:14–25)	36
11. I will carry you (Isa. 46)	40
12. He breaks the rod of the oppressor (Isa. 47)	42
13. Peace like a river (Isa. 48)	44
14. A light to the nations (Isa. 49:1–13)	46
15. My name is written on his hands (Isa. 49:14 – 50:3)	48
16. A word to sustain the weary (Isa. 50:4–11)	50

17. He will make her deserts like Eden (Isa. 51:1–8)	52
18. Everlasting joy will crown their heads (Isa. 51:9–23)	56
19. Good news of great joy! (Isa. 52:1–12)	58
20. God of the nail-wounds (Isa. 52:13 – 53:3)	60
21. Pierced for our transgressions (Isa. 53:4–9)	62
22. He will see the light of life and be satisfied (Isa. 53:10–12)	66
23. Unfailing love and everlasting kindness (Isa. 54)	68
24. Come to the waters (Isa. 55:1–5)	72
25. You will go out with joy (Isa. 55:6–13)	74



INTRODUCTION – ‘COMFORT MY PEOPLE’

*Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.*

(Isa. 40:1)

Under dark skies in Jerusalem, an old man called Simeon is waiting. He lives in a land of shadow, but he still hopes for light to dawn. He longs for Isaiah’s age-old prophecies to be fulfilled: promises of hope, of good news of salvation, of a suffering servant, and ultimately of God himself coming to dwell with his people. He longs for the ‘consolation’ of Israel (Luke 2:25), or as this same word is translated in Isaiah 40–55, the ‘comfort’ that God will bring. Then, one day, he holds a baby in his arms, and knows he may depart in peace. In Jesus, all these promises are being fulfilled.

The Christmas story is familiar to many of us, but perhaps it has become over-familiar. As we spend this Advent in the book of Isaiah, my prayer is that, like Simeon, we may have our eyes opened again to the beauty of our Saviour. I pray we might see afresh the astonishing blessings he brings, and our hearts would be warmed by the God who is so utterly *for* us.

Isaiah 40–55 is known as Isaiah’s ‘book of comfort’. After 39 chapters speaking of the people’s sin and the judgment of exile that they would face as a result, Isaiah 40–55 present promises of hope, of return from exile and of comfort from God – promises all fulfilled ultimately in Jesus.

Nowhere in the Old Testament paints a richer picture of Christ than Isaiah 40–55. These chapters are the primary Old Testament background for all the

hopes of the 'gospel'. The 'comfort' that God offers his people (40:1) is nothing less than his own presence with us, which we celebrate each Christmas. In short, to understand Jesus better and to delight more in the riches of his salvation, you could not find a better place to turn.

This Advent, join with Simeon in meditating on Isaiah's 'book of comfort', and experience with him the same comfort and joy as you behold our King in his beauty.



1

HERE IS YOUR GOD!
(ISA. 40:1 – 11)

Mark's gospel has no account of the birth of Jesus. There are no angels, no shepherds on the hillside, no wise men, no star. Instead, Mark opens with John the Baptist – 'a voice of one calling in the wilderness' – preparing the way for Jesus, just as Isaiah 40 prophesied. To understand the ministry of Jesus, Mark doesn't point us back to his birth in the stable; he points us back to the promises of comfort from Isaiah 40, chief among which was God coming to dwell with his people. We might say that Isaiah 40:1–11 is Mark's Christmas story.

Read Isaiah 40:1–11

In the wilderness prepare the way. When the Lord came, it would not be in a marble palace or in a centre of worldly power. It would be in an unlikely and unpromising place, the wilderness. But in this desert place, God's glory would be made known (v. 5). Indeed, the wilderness itself would be gloriously transformed to become a place of abundance. It has always been God's way to work in the unpromising and hopeless places. Perhaps our lives seem like desert places – places where God's glory could never be seen, nor his presence known. Think of the newborn Christ lying in an animal feeding trough. It has always been God's way to shine light where it is least expected.

Here is your God! When the New Testament writers use the word 'gospel' or 'good news', they have in mind this section of Isaiah which repeatedly uses this word. The great promise of comfort in Isaiah, the good news of hope, is

that God would come to rescue and then dwell with his people. God coming to dwell with his people is good news not just because of what he *gives*, but because of who he *is*, what he is like. This will be the primary subject of Isaiah 40–55: the character and majesty of God. When Mark opens his gospel with a quote from Isaiah 40, it is to signify that these promises of comfort are being fulfilled in Jesus. God – the mighty God of Isaiah 40 – was coming to his people.

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. Isaiah depicts a God whose power is without limit and who is uncontainable and unstoppable. But what does he do with this power? How does he use these mighty arms? Look at verse 11:

*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 that have young.*

When Jesus walked on this earth and stilled storms with a word, but then gently ministered to the sick, he was simply expressing what God has always been like: utterly powerful, but also gloriously tender and compassionate. This is the comfort we all need. This is the good news that we scarcely dare believe. Not only is there a God who wants relationship with us, but the *character* of this God is that of our tender and mighty Saviour, Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian believer, no matter how small and frail you may feel, know that you are held in these mighty and powerful arms, and no-one can snatch you away. No matter how weak and sinful you may be, God uses these arms not to hold you at a distance, but to bring you close and embrace you. You are now, and ever will be, held close to his heart.