

Text: Isaiah 40:1-5

Theme: I Need a Little Comfort

June 24, 2018

What do you need most in your life today? What do you view as an absolute necessity? What would you give almost anything to have right now? If we put all our answers in print and compared them, we would surely find a variety of responses. What one person perceives as necessary isn't always what someone else perceives in the same way. Regardless of our responses, we all face times, more times than we might acknowledge where we all need the same thing, where we all need a little comfort.

I. Because our world and our lives are broken, we all need God's comfort. A. But, we have a problem. 1. We think we aren't broken enough. Strange as it may be, we like to play the comparison game. As we do, we try to find someone who is worse off than we are and then we feel better about ourselves. We think, "Boy, they could sure use some help, some encouragement. Glad I'm not them!" And at the end of the day, we comfort ourselves with the comfort that someone else is worse off and, therefore, our lives aren't that bad after all. It sounds like a strange game, and it is, because it's a game of denial, a game where we deny that we need what we really need most.

2. We also think we can fix what is broken. How many of you think you can fix anything or take great pride in being a jack of all trades? In some areas, that's a good thing, but in other areas that notion gets us into a heap of trouble. As we look at our spiritual lives, we know we are broken; we know things aren't as they should be. And that's where people step onto two divergent paths. Some say, "I can fix it. I don't need any help," and others say, "Lord, I don't know what to do. I'm broken and I can't fix what is broken. I need You to do what I cannot do." As we realize the two paths, it's obvious that thinking we can fix ourselves is not the best path.

3. We also think God won't provide. You've heard it, "What's God going to do for me? What's He ever done for me? He hasn't been there when I needed Him in the past, so why would He do anything now?" Along with hearing something of that nature, we've also felt those same things. God promises to supply all our needs, but, from our viewpoint, there are times when we feel like God has let us down, that God has looked the other way, that God has ignored us when we needed Him most. We don't like to admit that that is or has been our problem, but we know, we know we've been there, felt that more times than we care to admit.

B. In our brokenness, what does God offer? 1. He offers to speak tenderly. At first glance, it's easy to think, "And how will that help me?" But when we move beyond the first glance, we realize the comfort. When a baby is crying, does a loving mother pick her up and yell in her face, "I love you. Don't cry. Everything will be all right?" Or does she speak those same words with great tenderness and compassion? God speaks tenderly to our hearts because our hearts need to hear His tender voice, His compassionate, kind, loving, forgiving, understanding voice. As Isaiah says, "Speak tenderly," he knows the voice of God, the voice of tenderness.

2. He offers to heal our brokenness. We recognize the words from the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O, my soul, for He heals all your diseases." Our first level of comfort comes as we remember that God knows what's broken. He knows what hurts better than you do. Knowing God knows is a comforting thing. But then

there's the second level of comfort. God not only knows, but He also heals; He also fixes what's broken. But before we start an argument in our minds about God healing, we remind ourselves that God promises to heal and He must keep His promise, but how He heals is His to decide. He heals in His way, not always our way.

3. He offers to forgive. "Speak tenderly and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned." The most comforting thing God does is to forgive, to wipe our slate clean. As God forgives us, He says, "I remember your sins no more. The moment I forgive is the moment I forget and the moment I forget is the moment where I never recall it again." Imagine the comfort of knowing God has forgiven and forgotten. As we cling to that comfort, He also says to us, "Now, forgive one another, and forgive yourself. Because I have forgiven you and brought you such comfort, increase that comfort by forgiving yourself and moving forward."

4. He offers us His message of salvation. In our Gospel, Zechariah announced with great joy, "He has raised up a horn of salvation" and in the concluding statement from Acts, Luke writes, "to us has been sent the message of salvation." This glorious message follows on the heels of forgiveness. Because we're forgiven, all the wonders of salvation as they affect us here and in eternity are ours. How comforting and encouraging! We are numbered among the saved and when our departure time arrives, we know where we are going. That comfort leads us to say, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come and give Your people the comfort of eternity with You."

5. He offers a plan for our future. As Paul spoke in our reading from Acts, he spoke about the past to demonstrate God's plan in the past and to set the stage for God's plan for their future and our future. As we reflect, God has been carrying out His plan for us in the past, and, most importantly, God has a plan for your future and my future. Maybe He doesn't give us all the details or send us a text each morning, but that doesn't mean He doesn't have a plan. It just means that His plan is so far beyond us that He chooses not to overwhelm us. Instead, He comforts us with the assurance that there is a plan and it's a great plan.

6. He also offers us the opportunity to serve with gladness. Zechariah used the words, "that we might serve Him without fear." What's the difference between serving and serving with gladness? One needs recognition; the other wants no one to know. One is done with the hope of praise; the other is done as a simple response. To express our appreciation for His comfort, God gives us the opportunity to serve, to serve with a heart that constantly says, "What can I do to honor my God, to express my appreciation, to show others the wonders of my great God?" As we serve with gladness, we recognize all the more clearly the amazing comfort our God offers.

7. There are things we need, things we think we need, and things we actually need on this side of heaven. As we consider all those things, we say to ourselves each new day, "Lord, I need a little comfort." Amen.