

The Double Mercy Which Endures

Pastor Matthew Ude

December 10, 2023

Second Sunday in Advent

INI – SDG

Isaiah 40:1-11

Verses 1-2

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. ² "Speak comfort to 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 Double for all her sins."

God speaks comfort or rather tenderness to his people. God knows how tired and sad and distressed and depressed we are. Therefore, he speaks tenderly to us. This is the "still quiet voice" which Elijah heard on the mountain. This is the voice by which God called to Adam in the Garden. God does not come in the wind, or the fire, or the earthquake. He speaks tenderly to us because he knows that we are a broken people. We are broken by our sin and the sin of those around us. But God has come to tell us our striving and our arguing and our fighting is over.

"Your warfare is ended." Striving is done for all those who admit their sin. Some don't want to admit their sin. As long as you refuse to admit your failings you will continue to strive and fight. When you are honest before God, then the striving is done the sin is forgiven.

The same is true amongst one another, if we admit our sin the striving between one another is over. If we continue to insist on our own rightness our striving will continue. As long as we keep on with that attitude than we will continue our striving. Even more so with God when we admit our sins the striving is over because God has forgiven them.

You "have received double" for all your sins. The text does not say earned double but received as a free gift. The double here is not double punishment but double gifts. For each sin God gives you a double portion of grace.

Verse 3

³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert¹ A highway for our God.

Prepare the way of the Lord.

We have five bedrooms in that house, but we only need two of them. So it's really easy for one or two to become a heap. Whenever company is coming and you have to clean up (prepare) you just pile everything in one room and shut the door.

We prepare for the Lord's coming in the opposite way. We dig everything out of the closet and lay it in the middle of the floor. We do not hide our sins from the Lord but acknowledge them and he forgives them, wipes them away.

The one who must prove they are right always loses. Even if people at first agree with them they still lose because everyone simply grows tired of the argument. Even if they are right they still lose because no one cares anymore. Those who insist on proving they are right always lose. That is true from an earthly perspective. So it was that Jesus "was led like a lamb to the slaughter and opened not his mouth." We know how he was silent before the High priest and Pontius Pilate and Herod. He did not argue but trusted his father.

How much more will you lose if your goal is to prove you are right against God's word? When Elijah was on the mountaintop the Lord spoke to him in the "still quiet voice." You cannot win against that voice by proving you are right.

Instead of hiding all the clutter, we take it out of the closet and lay it in the middle of the floor. Do not hide your sin. The king of Glory enters in. When he enters, he will make ready the way. He will clean the room. He will forgive your sins.

As the text says, you will receive double for all your iniquity. That is, you will receive forgiveness and blessing. Where before there was sin now there will be a double blessing. However much sin you had you will receive twice as much mercy. As the apostle John reminds us we have all received grace on top of grace.

The Lord prepares his own way by switching our sin for his grace.

Verses 4-8

⁴ Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; ⁵ The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ The voice said, "Cry out!" And he¹ said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh *is* grass, And all its loveliness *is* like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people *are* grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

The people think all their virtue is a great and beautiful thing, but the breath of the Lord blows on it and it fades. This is as if a child were to make their own Christmas dress. The stitching is bad. One sleeve is longer than the other. The material is mismatched and gaudy colors. But the child is so proud of what they have done. The mother has to remove the child's clothing and put on a nice Christmas dress and clean white socks that go with it.

So the nations dress themselves in their own righteousness which they are so proud of. They resent the wind of the Lord which blows on them and uncovers their nakedness, but the only solution is to receive the double grace from God.

The clothing of righteousness which we make for ourselves although it looks glorious to other people is only grass. Although all the nations say, "what a beautiful flower" and put it on display, nevertheless it will not last even a second before the breath of the Lord.

But the word of the Lord stands forever, therefore we must clothe ourselves in God's word. This is the same as the double mercy mentioned above. This is God's word of promise not God's word of law. This is his name Jahveh, Jehovah, the one whose promises do not change. This is the clothing we wear and in which we stand forever.

Our righteousness is nothing and fades before the Lord. The word of promise from our God clothes us forever in Christ's righteousness.

Verse 9

⁹ O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

Here you see the purpose of the Nation of Israel. They were meant to be the proclaimers. Through them the name of the Lord was meant to be proclaimed throughout the earth. They were not the people of God because they were meant to be saved and no one else. They were the people of God because they were meant to proclaim his name, that double mercy. Through them all the world ought to see here is the end of strife.

Through the people of Israel, God's mercy and grace is on display to all the nations. How many times in the wilderness did they turn away from God, blaspheme him and seek to worship other gods. Yet despite their sin they remained his people and received double grace.

How many times in the book of Judges did they forsake the Lord until they were afflicted by the Jebusites, the Midianites, the Philistines, and many others. Then they called to the Lord, and they received double grace.

They demanded a king. They provoked the Lord until he sent the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Yet even in Babylon the Lord preserved his people and brought them back.

You who think your righteousness is good enough. You who think you are a good person, consider and see how the word of God endures. God's promise of forgiveness endured through all the sins of Israel. Can your own righteousness endure like that? Be clothed instead in God's word which gives double for all your sins.

You who are afraid. You who are ashamed of your sin. You who think you have to hide what you have done lest you be cast out. You "Behold your God." See what God has done for Israel. See how his word of promise lasts through all their sin. The same double mercy can cover all your sin.

Israel is a model in a clothing store, showing off the finery and durability of God's word, God's promises.

Now it is no longer just Israel that is the herald of the double mercy of God. Each and every one of us as His people proclaim the goodness of our God. Having received the double mercy we as the apostle Peter said, "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

The people of Israel failed in the proclamation of the double mercy of God because they kept trying to proclaim their own works. Many churches also follow this foolishness. They proclaim what they consider to be relevant, practical, and wise. The wisdom of man is here today and gone tomorrow. We rather with the apostle Paul "proclaim Christ crucified," which is the double mercy of God which lasts forever.

Verse 10-11

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand*, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward *is* with Him, And His work before Him. ¹¹ He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry *them* in His bosom, *And* gently lead those who are with young.

The strong arm of the Lord, which is a name for Jesus, will come and "gather the lambs in His arm." "His reward is with him." That is a Hebrew saying which means he will not fail to do this thing. He is Jehovah. His word stands forever. He will certainly accomplish this promise.

Jesus tells us in the gospels "you must become like little children." We can attempt to stand as shepherds and leaders and guides and claim to be grown up and strong, but then we will not stand against the breath of the Lord.

We can humble ourselves and learn to sing with the children "I am Jesus little lamb." This is a song which is clearly for the children and is beloved by the children. As adults we sometimes have to learn to love and cherish it once again, and not to disdain to be called "his little lambs."

In this way Zachariah had to be humbled. When he met the angel Gabriel he thought himself a wise old man. He questioned Gabriel. He suggested to the angel that such a thing was not possible. God shut his tongue until he learned to become again a little lamb. When his tongue was loosed once again, he talked about the "the tender mercy of our God." Luke 1:78. That is the double mercy by which Jesus is our shepherd tenderly leading us his little lambs.

This is the great comfort which Zion the people of God are supposed to proclaim from the top of the mountain. That the Christ is our shepherd, and we are his little lambs and his tender mercy, his double mercy, his endless mercy is with us forever. Amen