

# “Comfort, Comfort My People”

“A New Thing” Series, June 27 & 28, 2026 | Isaiah 40:1-5 (1-31)

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## Why are we starting in the middle of Isaiah?

**To explain, let me start with my trip last week to Istanbul, Turkey, with a team from Valley.**

Valley is partners with an organization that has church planters in countries across the Arab-speaking world. We gathered roughly 100 of them in Istanbul for a conference for the first time in nearly nine years. Eleven of us from Valley and from Pathway Church went. We got to know them and serve them. We worshipped together and taught them. We were blessed to see their love for Jesus Christ and for His Church.

**Istanbul is where continents and civilizations meet.**

Part of Istanbul is in Europe; the rest is in Asia. In between is just a small body of water, the Bosphorus strait. Trade and culture have flowed through the city for thousands of years. Empires have fought over the city. It belonged to the Greeks. Then the Romans. It was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Then the Ottoman Empire. Now it is Turkey’s largest city and cultural heart.

**They all leave their mark on the grand Hagia Sophia.**

A Roman emperor built this building in the 530s AD. For most of a thousand years, it was the cathedral for the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. During the crusades, it was briefly conquered by Roman Catholics. Then in 1453 AD, the city was conquered by the Ottoman Turks, and Hagia Sophia became a mosque. East and West, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Christianity and Islam, the ancient and modern worlds all meet at Hagia Sophia.

**In the prophet Isaiah, history and the hand of God meet.**

God’s people had been divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Sometimes they were allies, and sometimes they were foes. Both were in the path of some of the great empires of the ancient world—the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. Through Isaiah, God was confronting both with their sin and calling them both to repentance. He announced judgment on Israel—the Assyrians would destroy them. He announced the later judgment of Judah—the Babylonians would conquer them and send them into exile. But Isaiah is a prophet of good news. He looked past judgment and exile to a Deliverer and a new future.

**In Isaiah 40, sin and renewal come together in a message of comfort.**

“Comfort, comfort my people ...”

That’s God’s message to Israel, and it is God’s message to us. Could you use a message of comfort today? You may be facing a job change. You may be under pressure at work to do something you don’t believe in. You could be experiencing strains in your marriage. You could be having a tough time following Jesus at school. You don’t need anyone to pat you on the head and say, “There, there. It’s

going to be all right.” You need a comfort that is much deeper than that. You need real comfort. And that’s the kind of comfort God offers us here in Isaiah 40. But we have to dig deeper to see how.

## God offers us pardon in place of penalty.

### **Isaiah confronted Judah with her sin.**

We will get into that sin much more deeply in the weeks to come. Simply put, the people of Judah abused one another—especially the weak. They worshipped God and idols at the same time. They trusted in themselves and in powerful friends but didn’t trust in God. Does any of that sound familiar? Isaiah warned that judgment was coming, but by chapter 40, that was all in the past.

### **Judah paid for her sin and had been pardoned.**

Judgment came in the form of the Babylonian Empire. They conquered Judah, destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem, and sent many of the survivors into exile for 70 years. Judah suffered for her sin, and now in **Isaiah 40:2**, God said that her sin had been paid for,

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.

### **People like Danny Trejo show that failure doesn’t have to be the end.**

Danny Trejo’s face is probably familiar to movie fans. He has played some rough characters in his acting career. His life started out like one of his tough-guy movie characters. He began using hard drugs as a teenager and was in and out of prison for years. In prison, he did recovery work, got sober, and decided to leave drugs and crime behind—a transformation he credits to God’s grace. After prison, he became a drug counselor, helping others fight their own addictions. He was visiting the set of a movie to support a young man in recovery when he was discovered and got a role as an extra. From there, he built a successful career as a character actor. All the while, he continued to help people with their recoveries. He paid for his crimes and turned his life around. But what if your sins aren’t like Danny Trejo’s? Are your sins really that big of a deal? And what if you haven’t been to prison to pay for your crimes? And how are you going to pay for them?<sup>1</sup>

### **Our sin, like Judah’s, deserves God’s judgment.**

If you’ve ever charged someone too much because they really needed what you had, then you’ve been like Judah—taking advantage of the weak. If your first thought when you chose your career was, “What is going to make me a lot of money” instead of “What does God want from me”, then you’ve been like Judah—trusting yourself and your powerful friends instead of God. If you’ve ever said to yourself, “I know what the Bible says, but this is what I’m going to do”, then you’ve been like Judah—putting idols in front of God. We tend to excuse our own sin, but it’s deadly serious. God announced judgment on Judah for these sins, and He isn’t going to let us get by with them either. Our sin deserves God’s judgment—torment in this lifetime and hell forever. That’s the bad news.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53327437>

### **But our sin has been paid for and pardoned by Jesus.**

When Jesus died on the cross, God the Father took our sin and placed it on Jesus. Then God poured out judgment on Jesus—the full weight of God’s wrath came crashing down on Him. So, when He died, our sin was paid for. Our debt is paid. Now we can be forgiven! That past can be gone if we will come to Jesus. Hear **Isaiah 40:2** again,

Speak tenderly to [put your name in here], and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that [Jesus] has received from the LORD’s hand double for all [my] sins.

If we accept the price that Jesus has paid for our sin, then our future can be entirely different. That was what God said to Judah through Isaiah, and it’s what He is still saying to you and me today.

### **God will do a new thing in us.**

#### **We, like Judah in exile, sometimes think that we are alone and on our own.**

On the good days, that means that our lives are ours to live as we choose. We choose how to spend our money and whom to love, and God is out of the picture. On most days, it can feel like we’re just working jobs and going to track meets, and our choices don’t matter. On the bad days, we think that it’s all up to us; we have to fix our problems on our own, and we suffer alone. We think that God doesn’t care. When we get cynical about it, we doubt that God is even there. That’s exactly what Judah said after the Babylonians conquered them, “Does God care?” After seventy years of exile, they were wondering, “Is God even there?”

#### **God was promising to do a new thing among His people after the exile.**

Let’s look again at **Isaiah 40:3-5**:

A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

God was saying to a group of people who thought that He had abandoned them that He was paving a highway to come to them. His glory, His presence, would come to them again and be with them. That’s a new thing! Some prophecies don’t just point to one thing, and this is one of those prophecies.

#### **God was promising to do a new thing through Jesus.**

Before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of God’s glory leaving the Temple in Jerusalem. God’s glory had been with Israel since He brought them out of Egypt. Ezekiel saw God’s glory leave the Temple, leave Jerusalem, and depart into heaven. But Isaiah is saying here that God’s glory will come again, and a messenger will announce His arrival. The New Testament says that this messenger is John the Baptist announcing Jesus’ coming. **John 1:23** says:

He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

Jesus is God’s glory coming to us in the flesh. **John 1:14** says,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus' first coming is also a new thing God was promising us. He is God's glory dwelling not just in a Temple in Jerusalem but inside of you and me when we follow Him. Isaiah was promising us that Jesus would come. But there is still more!

### **He was even promising that Jesus would return and do a new thing we can't even imagine.**

This prophecy hasn't been fulfilled fully yet. Look at **Isaiah 40:5** again,

"... and all flesh shall see it together ..."

"All flesh" refers to the whole world. The exile ended, but the whole world didn't see God's glory. Jesus came, but the whole world didn't see God's glory. Isaiah is telling us that Jesus is coming again. And when He comes again, He will usher in a kingdom that will fill the world. The world is going to change, the desert will get a makeover, and everyone—everyone—will see Jesus' glory. There is more to come. God is not done yet.

### **This new thing God is doing means that we are never alone nor on our own.**

Ever since the Garden of Eden, we've been hiding from God, ignoring Him, and rushing away from Him. Then when we need Him, we wonder where He is and why He hasn't shown up already. The prophets warn us that we can't hide from God; He knows our sin, and it matters. And they also encourage us; we've run away from Him, but He is coming to us. We are never alone, never on our own. In Jesus, God comes right into our lives now. And He will come right into this world again someday to set things straight. That's Good News!

## **God is stable and able, and we are not.**

### **When some people are worth more than a \$1 trillion, it hurts to be compared to a weed, but it's true.**

SpaceX stock recently went public, and Elon Musk was suddenly and briefly worth more than \$1 trillion. He's worth \$1 trillion, and we're like grass? Ouch! But God is just being realistic. Elon Musk is like grass, too! Apart from God, we're fallen, fading, and temporary. Like daffodils after they bloom. Or grass during a drought. At some point, we shrivel up and die. This is important because God is reminding us that we can't solve every problem ourselves. We can't solve our sin problem. We can't solve our dying problem.

### **Judah doubted God at every turn.**

First, they doubted that He was watching their sin. Then they doubted that He was standing with them during their time of need. In the future, Isaiah could see, they would doubt that He could do anything about their nation's disaster. Bottom line? They doubted that God was big enough and good enough to do anything about whatever came next. Does that sound like you at all? At least at times?

### **Instead, they consistently relied on themselves and their neighbors. What a mistake!**

Israel turned to Syria. Judah turned to the brutal Assyrian Empire. Then Egypt. All these allies eventually failed God's people. And Isaiah pointed out how pointless it was. He warned God's people not to trust in themselves or in their neighbors but to trust God! Isn't that powerful advice in a crisis and every day?

## **God is consistently bigger and more reliable than we can imagine.**

In **Isaiah 40:8** the prophet proclaims,

... the word of our God will stand forever.

God, His proclamations, and His promises never go away. In the verses that follow, Isaiah says that God is like a shepherd to His people (v. 11). The waters of the world are just a drop in his hand (v. 12). He hung the stars in the sky (vv. 25-26), His strength never runs out (vv. 28-30), and He can give us the strength we need. **Isaiah 40:31** says,

... but they who wait for 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.

God can do the things we can't. And He gives us His strength, which is far more than we have on our own.

## **He is inviting us to trust Him!**

When you're about to have your first baby, the contractions set in, and you wonder how you will ever make it through delivery, much less parent this child. When you get that diagnosis that is going to disrupt, change, or even end your life here and now. When you have a choice between being faithful and doing what you want to do. Will you trust yourself? Will you trust your friends? Or will you trust God? Everything else is like grass in the hot sun. Only God is eternal, reliable, and good. He wants us to trust Him.

## **Take a deep breath and let it all sink in.**

### **The word "comfort" is rooted in taking a deep breath and letting it all sink in.**

The root of the Hebrew word translated "comfort" here pictures a deep breath. The kind of breath you take when you realize that you've done something wrong and are determined to make it right. The kind of breath you take when you're hurting or running out of energy, but now you've got a new vision of what's possible, and you're ready to get started. You have the strength to do what must be done. That's what God told His people to do. Take a deep breath, take it all in, take Me in, find new strength, find the resolve to keep going, and find a new beginning with Me.

## **God is inviting you and me to take a deep breath ourselves.**

He's inviting us to do what He wanted Judah to do. He's calling us to look at our own sin—which is massive. But He doesn't just want us to get stuck in that sin; He wants us to repent and walk away from it. He wants us instead to turn to Jesus. Jesus is the One who appears over and over again in the pages of Isaiah the prophet. He is the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the suffering servant, and so much more. The Old Testament people of God saw Him in shadow, but we see Him clearly. He is the Son of God who took on human flesh, lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for our sin, rose again victorious over sin and death, and is coming again. Turn to Jesus, God calls us. Trust in Him. He will do a new thing in you now. He will do a new thing in the world someday. It's a lot. Take that deep breath and take it all in! That's what God is saying to us here in Isaiah chapter 40. It's like a summary of the whole book, and that's why I wanted us to start here.

**When we let all that sink in, God strengthens us to live faithfully—no matter what comes at us.**

He's giving students the strength to go onto their campuses and live out their faith, even when it is questioned by their teachers and scorned by their peers. He's giving married couples the strength to love and serve one another for a lifetime. He's giving us all the strength to live out our faith in public places, even when people call us crazy. He's giving us the strength to share that faith and invite people to join us. This is real strength!

**This isn't like a night light in your room when you're a child.**

A night light keeps the darkness from being complete. You can see the outlines of the things in the room when you're trying to fall asleep or when you wake up in the night. A night light helps convince you as a child that there aren't any monsters hiding under the bed. A night light can't do a thing to protect you. But when a good mom and dad are sleeping in the next room, you are really safe. Mom and Dad stand between you and danger, and they will protect you. God isn't offering us a night light. He is announcing that He's our Good Father, sleeping in the next room! We're not alone, and we're safe now and forever in His hands!

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

This isn't a pat on the head to say, "There, there." We don't want that kind of comfort. This is the deep breath that confronts our sinful past; it's real and consequential. But in Christ, we are pardoned. We are forgiven. This is the deep breath that says that everything will now be different. God is with us. He is doing something new in us right now through Jesus. And He will make all things right and new in the end. We're ready. With Him, we're strong and can face it. Take a deep breath. That's what God is offering us. That's real comfort.