

Isaiah 40:1-11 - EHV

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her. Her warfare really is over. Her guilt is fully paid for. Yes, she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³A voice is calling out: In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD. In the wasteland make a level highway for our God. ⁴Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The rugged ground will become level, and the rough places will become a plain. ⁵Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh together will see it. Yes, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

⁶A voice was saying, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry out?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. ⁷Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the LORD blows on them. Yes, the people are grass. ⁸Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.

⁹Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, you herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, you herald of good news. Lift it up! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰Look, God the LORD will come with strength, and his arm is ruling for him. Look, his reward is with him. The result of his work is in front of him.

¹¹Like a shepherd he will care for his flock. With his arm he will gather the lambs. He will lift them up on his lap. He will gently lead the nursing mothers.

Dear children of God who wait for the coming of our Savior,

It is that time of the year where people like to bake some cookies, isn't it? It seems that each person has their personal favorite cookies that they like to eat, and they have their favorite recipes that they like to follow. Personally, I still like the good old faithful Chocolate Chip cookie, but that is just my opinion. But what do you need to make a good cookie? You first of all need a good recipe and then you need to have good ingredients and the right ingredients. I would say that the recipe and the ingredients are two of the most important things for making a good cookie, but you also need to follow that recipe very closely and make sure that you get all the correct ingredients in the correct amounts and baked at the right temperature and for the right amount of time. If you leave out even one of these things or add something extra, your cookies may turn out poorly.

In our text for today, we see already in the Old Testament God's perfect plan or "recipe" to save sinners like us. Isaiah under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is telling us where to find this plan from God and what this plan is all about. And much like baking a cookie, you can't just find this plan of salvation anywhere and you certainly can't "wing it" by adding or subtracting any parts as you see fit. No, today Isaiah reminds us exactly what the plan is and how it works. If we change God's plan in anyway, we may miss out on the eternal joy and peace of heaven that God wants us to have and to enjoy. So as we gather today to celebrate the Advent or Coming of Jesus, let us once again marvel at:

THEME: God's Plan or "Recipe" For Salvation

- 1. The Plan Is only Found in God's Word**
- 2. God uses his's Law to lead us to repent**
- 3. God uses his Gospel to comfort our sinful hearts**

In our sinful world, we don't like to look at the big picture. I think that is because everything is temporary in this world. Things die and break and get old and generally wear out. In our text, God gives us some simple pictures to describe this temporary nature of things. He says: **“All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the LORD blows on them. Yes, the people are grass. Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.” (Is. 40:6-8).** Our earthly lives bloom and have the beauty or glory of the flowers, but our lives are temporary like the grass because they wither and fall because the breath of time blows on us. As much as modern medicine and cosmetic surgery and diet and exercise plans try to capture our human beauty and strength at their peak, and try to slow or stop the effects of time, the grass still withers, and the flower still falls. Age and time takes its toll.

People and generations will pass away and troubles and hardships will come and go, but many people still try to attach themselves to these earthly things like our financial security, our job security, or our health security, even though these will not last forever. All of these temporary earthly things are mere distractions from our real problem, which are sin and death. The devil would be pleased to have us worrying about these symptoms while the real problem of our sin remains untreated and unattended. So we worry about all sorts of things outside our control that Jesus told us not to worry about.

In contrast to the temporary days of our lives, God's Word stands forever. His Word remains unchanged and lasts forever. Why is this so important? As we think of God's plan of salvation, what a blessing to know what God promised in his Word to Adam and Eve and to Abraham and to David and to Isaiah is the same Word that he gives to us in 2020. God knows our human frailty since he made us from dust, and even more so since God himself took on human flesh in Jesus Christ, and lived and died and rose as a human being. He literally knows our lives inside out.

God's steadfast love found in his unchanging Word is eternal. The Bible never changes or needs to be update or improved. It gives us God's perfect plan for salvation as it was given to Adam and Eve, and it is our same plan of salvation today in 2020. God isn't shifting or changing like so much in life, but is eternally dependable. But the fact that the Word of our God endures forever isn't just a contrast to our frail and changing state — it's the very cure for our frailty!

As the world clamors to find the new and improved God and a new and improved way to salvation, we have the rock-solid Word of God that has never changed to stand on. As we are tempted by the devil to find new and different ways to interpret God and his plan of Salvation, we realize that God's Word never changes. Did you know that *“The Word of the Lord Endures Forever”* became a slogan of the 16th Century Lutheran Reformation, as they upheld Scripture alone? The Latin translation *“Verbum Dominum Manet Aeternum”*, abbreviated “VDMA” is still imprinted on some Lutheran books, letters, and other places. It would be good for us to remember that we have the one constant in this world of change – God's Word.

Knowing that God's Word is the only place to find God's plan, Isaiah now tells us how God gives this plan to sinful people like us. He first does this through his Law which leads us to repent. He uses a picture of a King and getting things ready for the arrival of a king. The king and his entourage don't want a bumpy, windy road. Only a flat, straight and smooth road is fit for a king. Fixing roads for kings in the wilderness is beautiful picture for us.

Isaiah's picture is talking about our hearts, and God wants us to get our hearts fixed up from all the bumps and valleys of sin in our hearts as we get ready for Jesus to come. God sent John the Baptist, the human fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, who was going to preach God's Law to prepare our hearts for the

arrival of the Great King, his own Son. God is seeking to destroy the evil in our hearts by the crushing power of the Law which shows us all our sins and then leads us to repent and place our trust in Jesus.

It is interesting that the Hebrew word Isaiah uses for comfort is also a word which can be translated “repent.” Their sins had been paid for and comfort was theirs, but this was not the result of what the people had done. This was the work of God. It was undeserved, unmerited favor.

Everyone is included in this call to repent. To those who are filled with too much pride he says, “Repent.” To those who on the outside seem to do everything right on the outside, but did them all for the wrong reasons on the inside, he says, “Repent.” For those whose hearts have become a winding, treacherous path because of doubt and a lukewarm reaction to God and his Word he says, “Repent.” To those whose lives have been an open book of shame and sin he says, “Repent.” To those who have looked down their spiritual noses at others who aren’t as “spiritual” as they are, God says “repent!” The call of repentance goes to each of us because before God there is no difference when it comes to the natural state of any human heart. Everyone is on the same level. Nobody is better or worse – We are all lost and condemned sinners in God’s eyes. God’s Law says that the whole world will be held accountable to God.

Through the preaching of repentance God makes hearts ready for what he really wants to tell them. What he really wants to do is to comfort his people with the saving Gospel message of Jesus. The Law can’t save, but the Gospel can and does. The Gospel message is that sin has been paid for. It has been completely covered by the blood of Jesus and not just partially paid for so that we have to help God to finish it off. We have full and eternal comfort and peace, which is not temporary and this world cannot destroy.

God’s comfort is based on his coming to mankind in all his grace. God’s saving glory would be hidden in someone who looked pretty ordinary. He would do it in Jesus, a child and yet a King. The apostle John puts it this way: **“The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth..” (John 1:14)**

Only the Gospel stands forever. It’s larger than our worries and problems that are here today and gone tomorrow. It’s the eternal word of comfort, peace, and hope. The good news of God’s Word is founded on Jesus’ coming into the world. He comes as the promised Good Shepherd we hear about in Isaiah today.

This is most important part of God’s “recipe” or plan of salvation. No wonder we are told to go tell it on the mountain and to shout out: Look at your God! Look at him. He’s powerful enough to do anything he wants, and yet he is our holy and majestic King who wants to be seen by us as our tender and protecting shepherd. **“Like a shepherd he will care for his flock. With his arm he will gather the lambs. He will lift them up on his lap. He will gently lead the nursing mothers.” (v. 11)** The Lord is the shepherd who is focused on you. Are you young and need constant attention, old and need special care, anxious and need peace, confused and need guidance, doubtful and need confidence, guilty and need pardon, hurting and need healing, injured and need treatment, weak and need strength? Are you ashamed and need assurance? Whatever you need Jesus has you covered. He is the Good Shepherd, Immanuel, God with us.

Jesus joined himself to us so that through his life and death he would conquer our sin and death. He gave us the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. He’s the cure for our temporary lives, marked by sin and doomed to eternal death. By faith we’re attached to the Word of the Lord that endures forever. We thank God for his perfect plan, found in his Word which tells us about God’s Law that leads us to repent and God’s saving Gospel that offers full and complete forgiveness, comfort and peace. That’s a perfect “recipe” or plan for our salvation. May we never forget this plan and may we thank God that he has given it to us to use each and every day. Amen.