

**Isaiah 40:1-11 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

<sup>9</sup> You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

23-40-01-Boldly Expecting His Coming

Advent, hope, repentance, Second Coming

Isaiah 40:1-11

Advent season boldly announces our hope in Christ's coming.

**INTRODUCTION: (text read as the Scripture reading)**

–Advent Sunday #1: “*27 more shopping days till Xmas!*” Why is Xmas so *secular*? Maybe it’s not Christ’s real birthday. [The **early church** didn’t know, so they picked 12/25 to get converts to stop observing the *sun god’s birthday*. Even gift-giving was part of the celebration.] But *even if* the date is *pagan*, the *season of Advent* itself is fully Christian. **HOM.idea**. It’s a time chosen for heart-preparation and expectancy, in celebrating the hope brought by Christ’s 1st Advent and rejoicing in the hope of His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent. –Advent ends and begins the Christian year, but it energizes all the other seasons– **Mat 24:44**, ...be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. How do we get and stay ready, in the midst of a *secular-Xmas culture*? The answer can be found in this famous Advent text in Isaiah. Christ’s coming should, first, make us....

- I. Realize Our Captivity in Babylon!**– **v.1-2**, *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*
- A. Israel’s history was a destructive cycle of divine blessing > backsliding > suffering > repentance > restored divine blessing.
1. This predicted “comfort” came right after predicted judgment.
  2. God speaks tenderly to the hearts in Jerusalem, to break this cycle.
- B. Why do we in the church today also need this “comfort”?
1. Like Israel, modern culture is in a Babylonian captivity. [Harold Bloom in his book *The American Religion* (subtitled, *The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*), wrote: “*The real religion of America is Gnosticism and the god we worship is ourselves.*”) Was Harold Bloom right?
    - a. Religious Gnosticism in America mixes rugged individualism with a belief that “*knowledge [gnosis] is salvation.*” (That’s a bad mix, because it leads to *everybody doing their own thing!*)
    - b. But do “*we worship ourselves*”? A better question is: “*Do we really worship God?*” (Some think: “*God is only concerned with the spiritual. In the physical, I live as I see fit.*” Such thinking sent

Israel to Babylon; it sends the modern church into secularism.)

2. The church was established to *set people free*, but by *flirting with falsehood*, it has fallen prey to a *post-Christian* culture.

**TRANS:** Why can **Advent season**, by **boldly announcing hope in Christ's coming**, brings "*comfort*" in our modern Babylonian captivity to secularism. His *prophesied coming* reminds us to...

**II. Realize Our Need for Repentance— v.3-5.** *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* (A message about the past, present & future.)

- A. It recalled the past, "*in the wilderness*," when Israel failed to be led "*straight*" into the Promised Land—giving a warning and a hope.)
  1. 40 years of desert wandering warns of the results of unbelief.
  2. But, for us, the comfort and hope was that *God stayed with them!*
- B. It also addressed Israel's present Babylonian captivity:
  1. Getting home from Babylon meant crossing "the wilderness" again.
  2. The way back was repentance, and a Babylonian story illustrated it in v.4? (*Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.*) [The queen who built Babylon wanted to improve a mountainous road full of *crag*s and deep hollows. She memorialized herself by ordering all the crags leveled and the ravines filled up.] (*A "highway for our God" needs empty worship and shallow devotion to be raised up to a holy level, and the high and haughty obstacles of spiritual pride to be brought down.*)
  3. This prophecy also pointed to the Messiah's future Advent: it was John the Baptist who became this "*voice of one calling in the desert*," preaching repentance, in anticipation of Christ's coming.

**TRANS:** **Advent season boldly announces the hope found in Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> Coming and the hope expectantly awaited in His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.** His 1<sup>st</sup> Advent revealed God's glory to believers, but v.5 promises a revelation "all mankind together will see," a glory beyond this world, when we will...

**III. Realize Our Eternal Destiny— v.6-8.** *A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the*

*flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."*

- A. Briefly stated, these verses say that human life is briefly lived.
- B. By being tied to time, our "*glory*" withers like grass, but one thing does last: "*the word of our God stands forever*," and that faithful word ties our destiny to eternity and to the glory of the Eternal God.

**TRANS:** This *Advent prophecy assures us of an eternal destiny.* But it also bids us **boldly announce our hope in Christ's coming to a world that has forgotten how to hope.** *It tells us to...*

- IV. Realize the Boldness of the Advent Message— v.9-11.** *You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 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. (In these verses, both Advents of Christ are foretold and we are told to spread these "glad tidings"!)*
- A. We must **boldly announce the Incarnation** ("*Here is your God!*" is good news to all who long to meet a real, live God Who cared so much about us that He actually showed up and will do so again.)
  - B. We must **boldly announce** that "*the Sovereign Lord comes with power*" to free people from spiritual captivity as both Savior and King!
  - C. We must **boldly announce** that Jesus returns not only to bring "reward" for obedience but "recompense" for disobedience.
  - D. We must be **bold** in this culture of violence, abuse, tragedy and injustice, to proclaim that a God Who really cares is coming to tend "*his flock like a shepherd*," gathering His "*lambs in his arms...*"

### **CONCLUSION:**

—"*How many shopping days till Xmas?*" isn't the question. The Advent question is one of heart-preparation and expectancy: "*Jesus is coming back! Am I ready today for His Coming?*" Are we ready to break with Babylon and to point our friends and neighbors to the Child in Bethlehem's manger, **boldly announcing**: "*Here is your God!*"?"