

Comfort and Complacency

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[0 : 00] Humans love comfort. We don't like to be uncomfortable. That's a normal human trait.! But I think Capetonians, or South Africans, but especially Capetonians, love to be comfortable.

We just like to be lacquer. We've got the sun, we've got the mountain, we've got the sea, and we like nothing better than a chop and a dob. The rugby! But to watch it on a nice couch, and the beers are there, the chips are there, everything is there, and we just want to have a lacquer, relaxing time.

But how comfortable do you find living in South Africa at the moment? Many find it very uncomfortable.

For the reasons that we all hear and read about in the news, and many of us experience, things that make life not easy, that bring discomfort.

The crime rates, the lack of jobs, the high prices. You know, in many ways we were promised a life of comfort back in the 1990s, after the terrible discomfort of apartheid.

[1 : 22] And I know it's more than just discomfort. But we're talking about comfort and discomfort. And so we ask ourselves, well what happened? We were hoping for a comfortable life, where things were going lacquer, and now we're struggling.

There's a lot of discomfort in our lives. How did we get there? Well one of the reasons is because of complacency. Complacency.

Complacency. We were, as the change over in South Africa happened, a lot of the comfort of the old South Africa was still around for many people, and everyone else was going to get that comfort as well.

And then, there was all these promises that were going to happen, and they've kind of slowly dissolved away. And it's because of complacency.

One of the reasons. Oh well, there's comfort, we'll just take it easy. We'll take it so easy, that we're not going to work at making sure we stay comfortable. And so this issue of comfort versus complacency, of being at ease, but then of taking it too easy, actually goes to the heart of why we need the Gospel.

[2 : 47] And why our passage from Isaiah talks about the need for comfort. Israel had for far too long been complacent with sin, and because of that had suffered massive, or were going to suffer massive discomfort.

But God, in His mercy, wanted to comfort her again with the good news that her time of discomfort, of alienation and exile, was coming to an end.

And just like Israel, we too need the comfort of God in our lives. But in order to fully experience God's comfort, we need to learn not to be complacent with sin in our lives.

And so we're going to look at the fact that the Gospel in Isaiah 40 gives comfort from sin, but only for those who are prepared to be discomforted by sin.

And so we're going to look at comfort from sin, and then discomfort of sin in our lives. So the comfort from sin, first of all, because those are the first words that strike us in Isaiah 40.

[3 : 56] And Isaiah 40 is the great turning point in the story of God's dealing with His people. Up to this point in Isaiah, all they heard was judgment.

Yes, there's the promises, and we'll explore those promises over Christmas, of a king who would change their fortunes. But it is here in Isaiah 40 that the promise of redemption and hope comes alive, and it's carried through the rest of the book.

And it starts with the tenderest of words, comfort. And so Isaiah 40 verse 1 and 2, comfort, comfort my people says your God.

Not comfort, those people says their God. Comfort, my people says your God. And that's important, because up to that point, up to this point in Isaiah, God has decided, you know what?

You're not my people anymore, and I'm not your God. We're not together anymore because of your sin. But God, He almost can't help Himself. It's because of His love that He wants to be with His people.

[5 : 02] And so He says, okay, my people, I'm still your God. Comfort is on the way. And then speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her that a service has been completed.

Isaiah 40 to 66 has the highest concentration of this word comfort in the whole of the Old Testament. And so God wants His people to know that He offers true comfort from the things that are causing them discomfort.

And the main cause for their discomfort is their sin of running after everything else but the God of the Bible for their comfort.

Which is why God's forgiveness of His people's sin is central to them receiving comfort. Have a look at verse 2. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

Up until that point, God is speaking harshly. When you read the judgment passages in Isaiah, it's nightmare stuff.

[6 : 11] It'll keep you awake at night. And as scary as the words were, to live through what God brought into their lives is a totally different kettle of fish.

When you actually feel the whips and the chains and the cold steel snuffing out the life of you or your family members. And here God says, I used to speak like that.

But I love my people. I can't keep speaking like that. I've got to do something. And so He speaks tenderly to them now. Verse 2. 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. Forgiveness of sins.

Peace after war. And later on in the same passage down to verse 11 where God is holding them in His arms tenderly.

[7 : 17] He tends His flock like a shepherd. Verse 11. He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart. He gently leads those that have young. Talking about His people as He brings them back from exile.

Forgiveness of sins is needed for us to be comforted by God. This is a foretaste, a promise in the Old Testament of what God was going to do for His people.

Of how He was going to comfort them. Sorting out their sins. Making a payment for them. So that they don't have to continue paying for the sins themselves. They spent 70 years in exile in Babylon.

Wondering, waiting. When is God going to come to our rescue? Does He still want to rescue us? Can He rescue us? Will He rescue us? The Bible's answer to the Gospel is yes to all of those questions.

God wants to rescue His people. He can rescue His people. And He does rescue His people. We know from the New Testament how God does that.

[8 : 28] In fact, it's prefigured in the book of Isaiah. In chapter 53. It's a famous chapter. We're not going to go to it now. But just to make the point that the good news, the Gospel, is that this forgiveness of sins, this comfort that people can receive is available to all people now.

Because of what Jesus did in making the payment that our sins deserve, that cause us discomfort. It's His payment that brings us comfort with God.

I'm just going to read from Romans 5, verse 6 and verse 7. Paul making the point says this, You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

And God demonstrates His own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is the best news you can possibly have if you're worried about your sins.

[9 : 38] If you're discomforted by your sins. The Gospel gives us this unspeakable joy and comfort that God doesn't count our sins against us, but counts us righteous in Christ.

But you only get that. If you realize you're in discomfort because of sin in your life.

And that means looking for ultimate comfort, not in God, not in His provision, but in your own abilities to get what you want out of life, to be as comfortable as you possibly can.

Or maybe looking for comfort in the things of this world. And this was a major part of Israel's problem in the Old Testament. They were constantly running to other nations and to their gods to receive the support and the help that they wanted, rather than turning to God when they got into trouble.

And every time that support they're looking for in the world would turn on them and cause them harm. There's a verse in Isaiah 36, where God talks to His people and He says, You know, you guys are going through a hard time.

[10 : 56] It's because of your sin. You don't return to me. I can help you. But instead you look around to the things around you and every time you trust in them, they hurt you more. He says this, Look now.

Talking to His people. Isaiah 36, verse 6. Look now. You're trusting in Egypt. Oh, Egypt was the bread basket of the world. When you've got a famine, you just run down to Egypt to get some wheat.

But you don't work out. Now, but why is there a famine in the land? But God tells you why there's a famine in the land. It's because of your sin. So instead of dealing with their sin, they try and make a plan B and run off to Egypt again.

Then God says, Look now. You're trusting in Egypt. And then He calls it that splintered reed of a staff that will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it.

And so Israel is leaning on Egypt to support them. But it's a broken reed. And it's got a sharp pointy end.

[11 : 55] And when you put too much pressure on it, right through your hand. And the help that you're looking for is causing you pain. Such is Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to all who trust in him.

Don't all of us still do that today? Not with Egypt. We look for systems of support and comfort, what the Bible really calls salvation, other than the gospel.

When we look for systems of support and comfort other than the gospel, it's always going to cause more harm than it solves. More harm than help. More problems than it solves.

If you lean too heavily on having the perfect relationship, the love of your life, and many of you, thank God, have married the love of your life, but if you push too hard and expect too much from them, those are one of the things that causes big relationship problems.

Maybe stress is a big problem in your life. Hmm. What is an easy way, a quick and easy way to handle stress? Oh, a couple of shots of alcohol, a couple of beers, a couple of tots.

[13 : 20] Very easy, and it helps for a little bit. And then it starts taking over. And then you respond too quickly and too easily with your emotions. And then you're fighting with your family.

Money. Ooh. We all need money, and if I don't have money, what have I got? And you run after it, trusting that it's going to deliver the things that you want that actually only God says He can deliver, that are for your good, not for your harm.

And then it grabs you and pulls you, and then you start sacrificing relationships to chase after money to get the thing that you want. Anything other than Jesus simply cannot do what you want it to do.

And it certainly cannot give you comfort from your sins, because that's the reason why we chase after these things. Deep down, in fact, not even that deep down. We have a problem, we've got a sin problem, and that means we've got a guilt problem, whether we feel it or not.

But running after these things proves that we feel it, whether we acknowledge it or not. The Bible says only God is able to give us comfort from our sins in a way that builds us up and doesn't break us down, that helps us and doesn't harm us.

[14 : 52] And so that God, in fact, Himself is our comfort. This is why God's comfort is the only true comfort we can have, not only because of Jesus, because God Himself becomes our comforter, literally in the person of the Holy Spirit.

You see, that same word that we've got here in Isaiah chapter 4, comfort, in the Greek is *parakletos*. And many Christians will know that that is the name of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, or more like His title, really.

Jesus says in John chapter 14, If you love Me, keep My commands. There's, If you love Me, keep My commands.

And I will ask the Father. Jesus asks the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.

Now that little word advocate is that Greek word *paraklete*. I'm going to unpack that in a second, but just to read, continue reading verse 17. Who is He?

[16 : 19] He is the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.

And so, the closest comfort you can possibly get from another being is from God the Father, through the ministry of Jesus, sending the Holy Spirit to literally be with you and give you the comfort of God.

Now, that word where it says *paraklete*, you know, it's an interesting word, and it gets translated in various ways. The NIV has counselor. I'm going to send you a counselor.

Other translations, the ESV has helper. I'm going to send you a helper. The King James Version has comforter. And some other versions have advocate.

A counselor. A helper. A comforter. An advocate. That's what the word *paraklete* means.

[17 : 22] It means to come beside and to give advice. To be someone who stands right next to the person that you're helping. That's what an advocate does when you're stuck in a very bad situation.

Hopefully, you don't ever have to be there. But some of us do. You've got to go to court. And the last thing you want to do is stand in court by yourself. You need someone who knows the system. But he's got to be there.

And so that's what a paraklete comes next to you to give you comfort. To help you. All of these words, counselor, helper, comforter, advocate, point to the same truth.

The Spirit gives us the help we need to find comfort in God alone. And not in forms of comfort that don't actually work. He makes us comfortable with God's provision for sin.

And the other thing he does is he makes us uncomfortable with remaining sin in our life. So how comfortable are you with God at the moment in your life?

[18 : 30] How comfortable is God with you? Maybe if you're not feeling discomfort, if you're feeling some discomfort in your life because of chasing after things rather than God, it could be that one of the problems is complacency with sin.

Taking it too easy with sin in your life. Just like the Israelites did. And so there's this truth that the more comfortable you are with sin in your life, the less comfort you're going to receive from God.

But the opposite is true. The less comfortable you are with sin, the more comfort you will receive from God. And so we're going to spend a bit of time looking at discomfort with sin.

So we receive comfort from God in the gospel. He pays for our sins. But he doesn't want us to be complacent with sin in our life. We've got to be discomforted by sin.

In the gospel, God gives us comfort from sin. But at the same time, it creates within us a deep discomfort with sin in our lives. So that just because God has given us comfortable news that our sins are paid for, we mustn't become complacent with sin in our lives.

[19 : 47] Complacency is a self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual deficiencies or dangers. Complacency is self-satisfaction.

It's my own value judgment on myself. Yeah, I think I'm okay. But it's especially accompanied by unawareness of actual deficiencies or dangers.

In one of the previous jobs I had, once a year, we had to score ourselves as a worker. And typically, how do you think you're doing?

Ah, out of 10, oh, pshh, 9, 8, 9, 9 and a half. You know, you can't say 10. You think you're doing 10. And then your immediate supervisor scores you.

Down to 7 and 6s. And then your boss scores you and his 3s and 4s. You get... We're complacent.

[20 : 52] We are self-satisfied. We grade ourselves and we think, no, we're doing okay. We don't see our own deficiencies, let alone the dangers out there. Sin is like that. It creeps up on you.

It creeps up on you. Complacency with sin was the one big problem with Israel in the Old Testament. That's why when God comes to save them, He wants them to be fully prepared.

They need a wholehearted change from the inside out. And so like the mountains and the valleys, they are fit to receive God back into their lives. So back to Isaiah 40 again.

Or if you're still there. Verse 3, there's the voice.

So have comfort. But now there's this uncomfortable thing going on. You're going to have to do a bit of digging and filling and raising mountains and leveling plains.

[21 : 53] A voice of one calling, In the wilderness, in an uncomfortable place, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight in the desert 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. Play for a second.

how the gospel works. Matthew chapter 3.

In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness. There's the connection of Isaiah 40 and saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near, is at hand.

Repent because the kingdom of heaven is near. That's the summary of Jesus' message as well. This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, talking about John the Baptist, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

[23 : 18] And so to prepare for having God in their lives as a comforter, John says people need to repent. Jesus says the same thing. Now that word repent, what's interesting is that the word repent and the word prepare actually have a lot in common.

In our minds they don't. But to repent is to change one's mind about who Jesus is and why you need him. It's a change of direction in your thinking.

And the word prepare comes from the word to face, towards. So that you're ready for whatever is coming in that direction. So repentance means a total change of direction of your life.

And to prepare, you've got to do the same thing. You've got to look. If God is coming from this way, we need to look in that direction so that we're ready for him. It's calling for a whole change in the direction of a person's life.

From seeking comfort in sin to seeking comfort from sin in God alone. Now, that word repent has a bad rap in the modern world because we get a picture of people with signs, you know, that classic picture of an old guy in a beard, scraggly clothes, and a big sign, repent, the end is nigh.

[24 : 32] And we tend to think of repentance as stop sinning. Now, there's an element of that, but the word itself encompasses much more than just stop the things you're doing.

It's a change of your whole direction towards, I'm not going to look for comfort and for the stuff that I need here. I'm going to look for the, for true comfort, for forgiveness from my sins, and only God can do that.

So repentance is turning and changing. Preparing is turning and changing and thinking about God and waiting for God and trusting in God and not looking around down here at the things that we can grab and get.

It's got a bad rap because we've got a picture of people with signs saying, repent, the end is nigh. But it's actually a good word because it helps us get ready in the right way to receive Jesus.

Not just into our lives as Christians now, but actually to get ready for his ultimate return. And it's in getting ready for his ultimate return where the New Testament, I think, helps us fight this complacency with sin the most because we're getting ready for a wedding, which is exciting.

[25 : 53] It's always nice to get ready for a wedding. And so, I'm going to read from Revelation 19. It says this, Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.

Why? Why rejoice? Why exult? For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride, meaning us, the church, his people, has made herself ready.

It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure. And the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Now, ladies, you're going to have to help us out here. But I think it's fair to say that if there's any day for which you're going to do your best to look your best, it's going to be your wedding day.

definitely, that's the case for most guys. Just we take different amounts of time to prepare. Now, why does a woman get ready for her wedding day?

[27 : 06] For her bridegroom? She's the bride, yes. He's the bridegroom. Yeah. Why does she do that? Is she scared of the person she's going to marry?

Is she doing it out of duty because she has to? No. She's preparing herself because she loves him.

And she wants to look her best for him and she knows he's going to like it. And that's exactly how the Bible wants you to think of getting ready to enjoy Jesus.

You become uncomfortable with sin because you know it's going to make you look yucky when Jesus comes back and you don't want to look yucky. You want to look beautiful.

If you're a lady, for a guy, you want to look handsome. You want to look clean and neat with clothes that are dressed well. And Revelation 19 says that those clothes that we've got that are bright and pure speaks of holiness, speaks of purity, speaks of goodness and it tells you that those clothes are the righteous deeds of the saints.

[28 : 21] It's the getting rid of the stuff that makes us ugly in Jesus' sight and makes us look good in his sight. And so we don't stay complacent with sin, not because we want to earn Jesus' love, it's already been earned, but because he loves us and because we love him and we know it will make him happy and it will make us enjoy that reunion all the more.

But this takes effort. Preparation takes effort. You don't get to look spiffy by accident. And so let me ask you, what preparation are you doing in your life to meet Jesus?

Looking like the bride that he deserves? Or are you just not bothered to look at the sin in your life because, ah, Jesus loves me anyway?

What are you doing in your life? What preparation are you doing? What bits of your life need changing? Is it your thinking? Is it the words that come out of your mouth?

Is it the things you look at? Is it your, is it complacency? Is it your hands that, that, that, that want to hurt? Or hands that can't be bothered?

[29 : 52] Do you need are there areas of your life that just need a little bit of touching up? Or are there areas of life that need, whoa, we need a total makeover? Send them to the professionals.

By the way, when you do need a total makeover, the professionals are sitting around you. You go to your fellow Christian and say, hey, I need a bit of help.

Do you need bits, are there bits of your life where you need help with changing from others? So those are, so the New Testament is helping us to not be complacent with sin in our life by pointing us to something really good to look forward to.

You don't have to chase a girl, a bride, to look pretty on her wedding day. She wants to look pretty on her wedding day. And so the gospel gives us this beautiful picture of us and Jesus enjoying a future life together so that you want to get rid of the stuff that's causing problems in your life.

But having said that, there is a warning for those who don't belong, who don't yet belong to Jesus as his bride. The truth is you are going to meet him one day.

[31 : 14] And he will either be your loving king or he will be the king that judges you for not taking sin seriously. I'm just going to read from Revelation 19 in that same chapter.

The bridegroom that is coming back to be with his bride. And I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called faithful and true.

With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the word of God. The armies of heaven were following him riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen white and clean and coming out of his mouth as a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God almighty on his robe and on his thigh.

[32 : 39] He has this name written king of kings and lord of lords. You want to meet that man as your partner who loves you not as your king who's going to end your life because you couldn't be bothered to get rid of sin in your life because why bother?

Would you agree with me that you don't want that person pitching up and you looking soiled and ugly and not fit for his presence? If you're complacent with sin and you pitch up to the great marriage banquet of heaven with all your sins still attached to you, you need to know that you're not going to be there for very long.

Jesus is not going to allow anything to stay in his kingdom that is going to spoil its beauty. And so you need to do work with that king, with that prince.

There's only one way to make him your bridegroom who's going to help you and comfort you and love you. That's to admit your sins. Admit you need his help.

Admit you've been messing around with your life. Here's the amazing grace. That guy that will end your life, he just says, look, just say sorry and we can be friends.

[34 : 09] You just say sorry and we can be friends. He's keen for that. He wants to give you comfort. That's what God always wants to do. And you just have to do it.

But you need the Holy Spirit even for that. You can't get yourself off your own high horse. Only the Spirit can do that. So that's the flip side of this beautiful marriage feast.

There's a king there that's going to end lives unless we take our sin actually to him and ask him to help with it. But let me end off by saying that there's this beautiful reminder in the same book in Revelation of what we can look forward to if we take these truths to heart that God gives us comfort not other things.

Don't be complacent with sin because you don't want to pitch up all spoilt and yucky. If we take these words to heart and get serious with our sin and we receive from Jesus the comfort that he promises then these words are for you.

Revelation 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

[35 : 42] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

he has the comfort he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

How do we know this is true? He who is seated on the throne says behold I'm making all things new and he also said write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.

do you believe that? Then let's live like it. Let me pray. Lord Jesus when we're reminded of who you are this mighty king coming back to rule this earth we are so humble Lord and so aware of our unworthiness before you and at the same time Lord we hear your word that you promise reconciliation that you promise forgiveness that you came to die for our sins and we are so thankful Lord help us to not be complacent with sin but to turn to you for all the comfort we need in this life Amen do you