

Dated: 14th December 08

Isaiah Chapter 40: 1-7

1. ***“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 her sins.***
3. ***The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.***
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 he said what shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, Because, the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass.***
7. ***The grass withers, the flowers fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”***

As Christmas approaches, many a concert hall, Churches, homes and even shopping malls ring out with the world famous “Handel’s Messiah”. Tradition has it that Georg Friederich Handel, composed the music, in just 24 days. It was in the summer of 1741, at a time when he was in debt and depressed. The lyrics that accompany the music were indeed, taken from the blessed assurances of God’s promise to His people, fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is the Messiah!

Yet, of the millions of times that people have sung and listened to this amazing composition in deep appreciation of the music, they have failed to understand its true meaning. As a result, the wealth of the salvific promises given by God, is missed. It’s amazing that God blessed Handel, who at a low point in his life, perpetuated God’s promises by way of a magnificently written oratorio.

At the time that God called Isaiah to prophesy to the Israelites, Isaiah was laden with his own sin, but he boldly requested that God use him. Yahweh cleansed and purged Isaiah of his sins (Isaiah 6:7) and he became the most profound and evangelistic Prophet of all times. God will, and is able to use anyone who is willing. **Are you willing?**

Yahweh commissioned Isaiah to proclaim comfort for His people. Chapter 40 of the Book of Isaiah speaks to the nation of Israel, who had once been prosperous and materialistic. The promise given by Yahweh, was that they would receive not only forgiveness but ‘double’ grace and consolation, rather than His wrath, for all her sins (Isaiah 40:2).

In this particular chapter, the distress caused by the invasion of the Assyrians and the forthcoming Babylonian Captivity was spoken of in terms of the past. God is promising His people deliverance and comfort that looks past these events to far greater things - the coming of the Messiah! Poignant are the personal pronouns “My people” and “your God”.

This clearly demonstrates the covenant bonding between God and the nation of Israel at the time. However, whilst we, the Gentile Christians and those who will come to faith, have not replaced the

nation of Israel, we too because of our faith in Jesus Christ are the people of God (Galatians 3:26). The covenant blessings of Abraham are ours, through Jesus Christ who has redeemed us.

The promise of verse 5, that the glory of God would be revealed was brought to fruition in Jesus Christ. Yahweh speaking through the Prophet, promised that a virgin would bear a child whose Name would be Immanuel – meaning “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). This prophecy was fulfilled when the Virgin Mary by means of the Holy Spirit conceived a child.

Mary and Joseph were commanded to name the baby Jesus (“Yahweh is salvation”). The angel of God explained that He would be the Saviour who would set His people free from the enslavement of sin (Matthew 1:21). The Word was made flesh (John 1:14) on that precious unforgettable Christ Day! God came and lived amongst His people – God with us- Jesus - Saviour! effecting reconciliation and salvation.

Such an amazing and glorious promise as only Yahweh can give, failed to convince the many to change from their sinful ways. So it is still to this day, that many seek to not only disbelief, but to destroy the glory of God as revealed in Jesus.

The Prophet had cried out, “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades...” (Isaiah 40: 6). Poignant is the fact that we are like the grass and flowers. Humanity is powerless against God’s Word that will stand forever! This Christmas gift is available, for those who want to truly receive. In receiving, we do have the assurance of eternal life in Christ.

God called, and is calling the many from afar – we were so far away when we were seeped in sin! Being a Christian does not mean the end of trials, temptations or opposition. On the contrary, at times we seem to face more trials, tribulations and opposition, than the average worldly person.

But Jesus Christ assures us that in Him, we will find peace, because He has overcome the world! (John 16:33). The Apostle Paul tells us that with tribulation comes perseverance, it is character building and with it comes the kind of hope that does not disappoint, “because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).

Only by our total dependence on God, can we be exalted out of our misery or ‘valley’. Where pride and self-centredness stands as our ‘mountains and hills,’ these must be brought down low. Incorrect thinking and perspectives on how life is to be lived may be seen as the ‘crooked paths’ against what God has planned for us – we need to embark on ‘straight’ living. Aggression, prejudices and hate are ‘rough ground’ and needs to be made smooth. Only when these issues in our lives are addressed will we be able to discern God’s revealed glory.

In the year 2008, we are blessed, in that we are able to look at salvation history and to better understand, the God-given prophecy that Isaiah first uttered. The voice of one crying in the wilderness may be applied to John the Baptist. He preached repentance as a means of preparation. Jesus - Saviour- Immanuel did come, but many did not and still will not receive Him.

Jesus is True Light; that dispels our darkened thoughts and minds (John1:9-11). The best Christmas gift that anyone can receive is that of the Messiah ruling and reigning in one’s live. As James put it:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

We read and hear so often about the unmet expectations of a ‘Happy Christmas’. It need not be, if we stay focussed on what Christmas truly means. In terms of gifts, it is all about the God’s love and the precious gift of eternal life! It is about receiving the divine gift of peace and joy that springs from within, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a time of reflecting and giving thanks to Jesus Christ for being born into the lowest of low, in Bethlehem, just so He could be the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and effect reconciliation between God and humanity.

Christmas is all about God’s love and forgiveness- let us repent of our sins; draw near to God and receive this perfect gift of love and forgiveness. There was no room for Jesus at the inn – **will you give Him room in your heart?**

Let us pray:

LORD, we thank you for your precious Christmas gift. Please renew in our hearts the kind of love and compassion you wish us to have. Please lead and strengthen us to meet the needs of the sorrowful, the broken-hearted, the rejected and lonely, the sick and the poor. Please be in our midst as we come together with our families and friends. We pray that this Christmas, as they gather for celebrations, many will realise that it is really all about You. We pray for abundance of blessings and for peace and unity in the world. O LORD in your mercy, and in the Name of Jesus, please hear our prayer. Amen!