

Isaiah 40:1-11 - 4 voices of comfort

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 December 2024

Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0 : 00] Isaiah 40 verses 1 to 11 and Gloria is going to come and read it for us. So Gloria, over to you. Good morning church.

Isaiah 40, 1 to 11. 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 her sins.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 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. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry? All the people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

[1 : 21] 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 endures forever.

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news 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 has come to power.

And he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd.

He gathers the lamb in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have a young. Praise the Lord.

[2 : 24] Amen. Thank you, Gloria. Let's pray together as we come to look at God's word. Let's pray. Father, we want to pray and just ask for your help now as we come and look at your word.

I'm really conscious that I have nothing to offer, but you have everything, Lord. Please speak to us. Words of comfort and joy and peace.

We need you, Lord. We long to hear you. We ask for your help and the work of your spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen. I think we have to say, don't we, that despite all our best efforts in life, in one way or another, most of our lives are, to some extent, uncomfortable, aren't they?

For some of us, we've perhaps only experienced the discomfort of this world in quite small ways. Maybe just a broken dream or a disappointing exam result or something like that. But the truth is, if you live long enough, that's all you really have to do is live long enough and your life will be disrupted by the discomfort of our broken world.

Marriage breakdown. Family chaos. Family chaos. The death of parents, siblings, spouses, children. Sexual and physical abuse.

[3 : 53] Unemployment. Unshakable depression or anxiety. Schizophrenia, even. Guilt for past sins. Loneliness. Chronic pain from physical illness.

Persecution. War. Hunger. It seems, doesn't it, that at Christmastime, those sorts of things come much more clearly into our focus, don't we?

It is the discomfort of this life which comes to the fore at Christmastime. It's the absence of comfort that you feel profoundly. I was speaking to a friend on the phone this week, a dear friend, who was just telling me about what's going on in his family life and the trouble that his adult children are in, in various different ways.

And it just seems like right now, as you come up to Christmas, it is particularly acute. As you know that the people who you're going to be sitting around that Christmas table with are not comfortable

people, but uncomfortable people.

It's hard to pretend, isn't it? And as you come to Isaiah 40, and we're going to spend the next three weeks in Isaiah 40 in the build-up to Christmas. As we come to Isaiah 40, what you find is that Isaiah knows exactly what that discomfort is like.

[5 : 07] His world and our world are not that different, despite the fact there's, you know, over 2,000 years in between them. In the verses that precede our chapter, if you look up at chapter 39, Isaiah had just been telling King Hezekiah that Judah itself was going to be carried off into exile in Babylon.

And the king, the treasures of his kingdom, and the people would be dragged off to this foreign city and nothing would be left. You know, he's saying to them, listen, in your future, King Hezekiah, lie invasion, genocide, robbery, human trafficking, hunger, poverty, destitution.

All of those things are coming your way, says Isaiah. Discomfort. And then, in chapter 40, verse 1, God says, comfort, comfort my people.

And what you've then got in these first 11 verses of chapter 40 are essentially four comforting voices. It's four comforting voices that speak words of comfort to the people.

So let's just work our way through those four voices, not verses, four voices, and see what they have to say to us today as well. So the first voice is this. The first voice is tender words about forgiveness.

[6 : 27] Tender words about forgiveness. That's in verses 1 and 2. There's been the perennial problem in the book of Isaiah, and we're landing right in the middle of it, so let me just kind of cut some corners and tell you what's been going on.

The perennial problem in the book of Isaiah is that the discomfort, the brokenness that the people of God are facing is, to a large extent, the result of their sinfulness, their wickedness.

The chaos and the discomfort in their world was nothing more than what they deserved. Now, that's not to say, and this is important, it's not to say that each individual Israelite got proportionally the discomfort that they exactly deserved because of what they had personally done wrong.

That's not what it's saying. But that in general terms, the discomfort of the nation of Israel was a result of their rebellion against and their rejection of God. The pain of exile, the conquest of their nation, the destruction of the temple that's to come, the humbling.

All of that is, if you like, and it says it is a work of God, but it is a strange work of God in the book of Isaiah. This is an unusual work of God in bringing judgment on his people.

[7 : 41] The unbending goodness of a holy God meets the sinful rebellion of his people and comes discomfort. In other words, the harsh reality is that there can be no true comfort unless there is divine forgiveness.

That's the thing that's been set up in the book of Isaiah. You can't have comfort unless you have forgiveness. And that's really ultimately why lots of the things that we turn to for comfort ultimately don't really deliver.

You know, you find, don't you, that the comfort of a new place to live or a new job or a new TV or even a brilliant holiday, none of those really bring the kind of comfort that we desire because, well, they're over all too soon.

I don't know whether you're on Instagram. It's probably a really terrible thing to be on, so I'm not recommending that you go on it. It's kind of like a poison, isn't it, Instagram? Anyway, but one of the people who I follow on Instagram is this guy who is driving a truck from Widdess all the way to Australia, right?

So he's driving, and he's always putting up reels of what he's doing, and so you get to follow him on what he's doing, right? He has, he's just driven through China with his dog and his fiancée and her dog, right?

[9 : 00] It's amazing what they're doing. But the thing that they keep talking about is what? What's coming next? You see, there's a strangeness to it, right? That despite being on essentially a holiday longer than anybody I know has ever been on holiday before, right?

Despite that, the only thing that they can really think of is that there is a day coming, and it's not very far away when it comes to an end. And then we're going to be uncomfortable again until we can find something else to do. And Isaiah will tell you that the reason that you never achieve comfort in a holiday, a TV, a new place to live, a sofa, a hot chocolate, a piece of cake, whatever it is, is because there is no true comfort without divine forgiveness.

Because the discomfort of our world is there because of God's judgment. We're facing punishments from an unrelentingly holy God. And so the first voice in our passage says this, verse 2, speak tenderly that her hard service has been completed.

This forgiveness. Literally there, the word is warfare. Not so much the warfare with the surrounding nations, but with the God to whom she belongs. The hard service because of your sin is over, Israel.

God's people, it's over. How so? Well, look at the end of verse 2. She's received double for all her sins. You might read that and go, well, that seems a bit harsh, doesn't it? Why double? Why not just once over?

[10:26] It doesn't mean double as in twice for her sins. It means the exact kind of double off, you know, like a stunt double or doubling over a piece of paper. So she has received exact punishment for her sins.

The exact double for her sins. So her sins have been paid for. Now, of course, for Isaiah's listeners and first readers, this news points to the time of the end of their exile.

He says, listen, there will be a time when you will be brought back from Babylon. The conquest will be over. You'll be able to return to the promised land. But still, the truth is, in the Old Testament, this comfort of forgiveness never really gets delivered.

There is a sense in which God's people, from this point onwards, really, are always in exile. They never get back into God's place properly until the arrival of the Lord Jesus.

God the Son, arriving in human flesh, to do what? Provide forgiveness. Through his death on the cross.

[11:32] The one who came, as we were singing, as the second Adam. The one whose righteous death stands in for Adam's selfish life. For our selfish life. So that those who trust in Christ, you can say, can't you?

Your hard service is being completed, not by you, but by another. Why? How so? Because Jesus is your exact double. Your exact double.

Fully man. Perfect in every way. Standing in for our sin. Now, I know that for most of you, probably, this morning, what I'm telling you is old news.

You've heard this many times before. Oh, wow, I came to church, they talked about forgiveness.

Well, I expected that. But I want to make sure that you hear this voice really clearly this morning.

Because, listen, comfort flows into our life in the proportion to which we will listen to these words of forgiveness and grace and mercy.

Not just one time when we become a Christian, but all the time, over and over and over again. Let me try and put it as simply as I can. In the midst of our discomfort, surrounded as we are by the brokenness and discomfort of our world from our own sin, from the sin of others, there is somebody who can bring you and me complete forgiveness.

[12:49] There is one who can wipe away all of our guilt, not through exacting a price from us, but through bearing the punishment himself, the exact double of our sin, Jesus Christ.

And knowing that, hearing that, means that true comfort can be ours through him. Because this news means that God can look on us with love and mercy.

God, in his unrelenting holiness, cannot but show us grace, mercy, kindness, love, because we've received the exact double for our sins.

It doesn't matter whether you think you're smashing the Christian life or whether you feel like you're bumbling along or clinging on by your fingertips. Because Christ has paid for our sins as the exact double, so there's nothing to fear.

I've been in pastoral ministry for quite a long time, and there are many things that I still have to learn, and I'm a slow learner in lots of ways, and I depend on you to teach me many things.

[13:52] But this is one thing I have learned, is that Christians live lots of their life with a low-level guilt. That's how many Christians, me included often, we are robbed of assurance and joy in our Christian lives, because we listen to this voice that says to us, You're not really good enough, are you?

You're not really good enough to call yourself a Christian, are you? Are you really good enough to be with the Lord's people on a Sunday morning? You don't work hard enough. You don't know enough.

Look at all those things that other people know. I'm sure they've read their Bible all the way through, probably more than once. You know secretly that you've never read Leviticus, don't you? Well, if that's you this morning, let me tell you as clearly as I can.

Hear this news. Whatever you've done, there is mercy to match in Jesus Christ. However deep you've fallen, however far you've wandered, however little you understand, however much you doubt, Christ's death is sufficient for every sin.

Warfare is ended. Hard service is over. Comfort is yours. Iniquity is pardoned. You know this, don't you? Because you've experienced it just on a human level that forgiveness is really brilliant.

[15:08] I don't know whether you've had a fallout with a friend or something or a family member. And you've come to them and said, listen, I'm really sorry.

I'm really sorry for what I said. And they look at you and say, I forgive you. And then there's like fresh air comes into the rooms in there and it's brilliant.

All of a sudden it's like, oh, wow, that's great. Tension is gone. And that's it here, right? But on a cosmic level from God himself, Jesus is the forgiving husband, the generous friend, the one who moves towards you in love and kindness as you confess your sins.

And he says to you, comfort, comfort. There's an exact double for your sin. And if you're not a Christian this morning and you've never heard that before, can I say to you, if you've never experienced this kind of comfort of forgiveness, then the best you've ever experienced of comfort in this world is mere distraction from the discomfort, but not a solution.

There is only one double for your sin and it's Jesus Christ. Years and years ago, I was helping a group of students do door-to-door work in their campus.

[16:25] So we're going knocking on doors of student residences and inviting them to come to some events that the Christian Union at their university were running. I knocked on this one door. This young man answers the door.

And I said, you know, oh, we're here from the Christian Union. We're just inviting people to come to some events. I just wondered whether you might be interested in coming. He said, oh, no, I don't want anything to do with Christianity. I said, oh, you know, do you know something about Christianity?

You've been to church. Would you have called yourself a Christian? He said, oh, yes, all of those. I've rejected all of it. And it turns out that someone in his family had died of cancer.

And so he said, listen, I've seen suffering. And so I just don't think I can believe in the God of the Bible anymore. And I said to him, so how has that been?

You know, since you rejected God because of the suffering in the world, have you found comfort and peace, joy, maybe somewhere else? And he paused for a moment.

[17:25] And I think probably in a sort of divine moment of honesty, he said, I haven't. I haven't. And that's because comfort is only found in the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the suffering of our world.

It's the only place that we can find it. Comfort, comfort, says the first voice. Second voice, shout about a certain plan. Look down at verse three. Let me read it to you again.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 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 are plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed. And all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Now, if you'd been reading through the book of Isaiah and had come to this point, you would read that and think these are quite similar to chapter 35.

Because in chapter 35, we are told that there is a day coming when the exiles will return to the promised land. There's going to be a highway. But actually, as you read the verses more closely, you realize that actually the comfort here is not that the people themselves are returning to Jerusalem.

[18:41] The traveler in these verses is not the people. The traveler is God. God is coming to his people. Mark's gospel takes up these words and says that John the Baptist is the voice crying out.

He is the one making level the way for Jesus' arrival. Which means these verses are brilliant ones to be looking at, aren't they, at Christmas time? As we remember the birth of Jesus Christ and the eternal divine son taking on weak human flesh.

John the Baptist coming before to make level, to make the way. The verses hint, though, don't they, even beyond the first arrival of the Lord Jesus. Because they talk of a time when all people will see the arrival of the Lord.

A day when the Lord will be revealed to the nations. Now, all of that is really important. It would be worth spending some time thinking about the detail of all that and how it all fits together.

But the main focus of these verses is not so much the detail of the plan. The main focus of these verses, I think, is the certainty of the plan. So it's not so much the details of it, but the solidness of it.

[19 : 46] The reliability of it. Scan through the verses again. Let me show you that. The highway is made straight in verse 3. The valleys are raised up. The mountains are made low. The uneven ground is leveled out.

The rugged places are made a plain. In other words, the point is, there's nothing going to stand in the way of this happening. There are no obstacles that are going to prevent the arrival of the Lord. All obstacles will be removed. And why is this the case? Why is the plan so solid and so certain? Well, verse 5, because the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

That's why. This is then the second voice of comfort. There is a certain plan, an unstoppable arrival of God with his people. And you know because God has said it.

God has said it. Let me try and give you a physics lesson. I'm not brilliant at physics, but let's have a go. Let me ask you a question. What is faster?

[20 : 47] The speed of light or the speed of sound? Oh, my goodness. We are really in the remedial physics class. Light.

Yeah, is that what you're going to say, Mark? Light. So when you watch fireworks, yeah, you see the firework and then you hear the firework.

When the thunder and lightning comes, yeah, you see the lightning and then you hear the thunder. Why is that? That's because the light is traveling to you faster than the sound. Yeah, so you see the light first and then you hear the sound.

Oh, look, there you go. You've put them up. I was going to ask whether anyone knew. Light travels at 670 million miles an hour. And sound travels at 767 miles per hour.

So there's quite a big difference between them. But here's the thing, right? When it comes to theology, when it comes to the Bible, the opposite is true. In the Bible, yeah, sound travels faster than light.

[21 : 46] That's what Mark was thinking of, right? That's right, isn't it? You see? In the Bible, sound travels faster than light. In other words, you hear God's plan before you see God's plan, right?

Because God speaks of his plan and then you see it accomplished. In other words, if you want to know what's happening, you need to listen. And then you will see later as it comes to pass.

And so just like when you watch fireworks, when you see a firework, how do you know that you're going to hear a firework? Well, you know because those two things essentially are happening together, aren't they?

It's just a delay because of where you are proportional to it, yeah? So you know that when you see the flash of lightning, you will hear the thunder, yeah? Because the thunder is going to come because the lightning was there.

And so those things are inextricably linked. You can't divide them. You can't have a flash of lightning and no thunder because they come together. And because you've seen one, you will hear the other. Exactly the same in Christian theology, but the other way around.

[22 : 50] You know that you will see the accomplishment of God's plan. You will see it. Why? Because you've heard it. And God speaking his plan is the same as him doing his plan.

God never says something and it doesn't happen, right? I say that all the time. When the children were smaller and you said, right, we're going out, put your shoes on, what would happen?

Absolutely nothing, right? It's the same, isn't it, in every family, right? Put your coat on, nothing happens, yeah? But God, when God says, I'm coming in the person of the sun, I'm arriving to save, you hear it.

How do you know it's going to happen? Because everything God says will happen. Those things go together, even if there is a delay between the two. So back in Isaiah 40, we're being told that faith is about believing God's word before you see it accomplished.

And it says there's comfort in that. Comfort, comfort. Listen to the plan. There is an unstoppable plan and nothing can get in the way. The plan was that Christ would come.

[24 : 05] The plan is that Christ will come again. God has said it. And there won't be any mountains that are so high that they can stop him. There won't be any rough ground that will slow him down. Christ will come again.

There won't be any rough ground that will come again. Comfort, comfort. You've heard the plan. It's unstoppable. You will see it. You will see it. There is a day, brothers and sisters, when we will see the Lord Jesus.

Third voice of comfort. Words that last when we die. Verses six to seven. Verses six and seven are literally in every Christian funeral liturgy, aren't they?

I've read them aloud at lots and lots of funerals. But what is the comfort here? It's not the comfort that we die, is it? All people are like grass and all their faithfulness 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 the Lord endures forever. Where's the comfort in those verses?

[25 : 04] The comfort is not in the fact that we die. That's written, isn't it, all the way through those verses. We die. We are just like grass. We are just like fading flowers. God kind of breathes on them. Just a gentle blow and they're gone.

There's no comfort in that on its own. I think this is one of the big lies, isn't it, about that whole assisted dying bill. That there's an idea that death itself might bring comfort.

But actually death and its presence in our world is a horror, isn't it? It's a horror of God's judgment against our sin. Death is very, very unnatural. It's not what we were made for.

It's come as a consequence of our sin. And it comes as God breathes judgment on us. So there's no comfort in that. And actually we know that, don't we?

When we face the death of a friend or a relative, we know even if they were suffering, and in some senses the immediate death brings a release of that suffering, there is a sense in which you know that there's no comfort in that, don't you?

[26 : 02] It's one of the most uncomfortable realities of our world. And actually that's true, isn't it, for us. It doesn't matter how old we are. There is a moment when we will die unless Jesus comes before.

It doesn't matter whether that day is 10, 20, 30 years from now. It will come. And we know that the time between now and then will go as a flash. We're just grasped. We come up quickly and we go down quickly too. It doesn't matter whether you're fit and healthy.

And that means, doesn't it, there's no comfort in any of those things that you can do before death, right? Because there's no comfort in being particularly strong or being married or being a parent because all of those things just pass away.

You will only find temporary relief in those things, not lasting comfort. But Isaiah says there is something in our fading world that lasts forever, and it is what? The word of the Lord.

But, cries out Isaiah, he shouts, doesn't he? The word of our God will stand forever. In other words, listen, you want something, don't you, that you can hold onto in life and death.

[27 : 05] Something that will take you through this life and into eternity. And it's no one in this room. It's God himself. The word of God. The God whose words come first and actions certainly follow.

That is solid and lasting. Listen, I think more than maybe any other time of year, this sort of, the fadingness of the grass of this world is really apparent to us, isn't it, at Christmas?

I know that for people in this room and for my own family, there will be an empty chair at the Christmas table this year that was full last year. There was someone there, and they're not with us now.

A loved one who's missing. And I know in our family we will miss the absence. Where's the comfort in the midst of those tears? Where can you cling to in a world where people pass away?

Well, you can hear a word that lasts forever. A living word who came on the paths made straight by John the Baptist. A living word who died on a cross and rose victorious three days later.

[28 : 06] A word that says, I'm returning one day. And that is where to find comfort, because that word will not let you down in life or death. I don't know whether you've thought about this.

If this is true, then how does comfort come to me as a Christian? How do I receive comfort as a Christian? Really simple, isn't it? Listening. That's how you receive comfort.

Listening. God speaks. Jesus is the living word. And we find comfort, solace, hope and joy in listening. Not just so much to me on a Sunday as I preach. But actually as we listen to the voice of God.

As he uses me. As he uses you. As you open a Bible. As he speaks to you by his spirit. As you open God's word. Day by day. Week by week. Through the tears of loss.

It is something that extends through death and into eternity. Listen, if you are particularly distressed and troubled and grieving. Can I encourage you? Read the Bible. Listen to God's word.

[29 : 07] Here you have something that will last forever. Fourth and final word of comfort from these verses. Good news. God is with you. This is what we were looking at with the children, isn't it? Verses 9 to 11.

In lots of ways, I think you're sort of scaling the heights in Isaiah 40. You've come through these great heights of God's forgiveness for you. About his unstoppable plan of an unshakable, never dying word.

But in many ways, I think the best is still for last, isn't it? Here. You see, forgiveness is good, isn't it? But on its own, it's not actually that brilliant. If forgiveness just leaves you with a blank slate before God and nowhere to go.

It's not actually that much help. An unshakable plan is great in our shaky world. But it very much depends on what that plan is, doesn't it? And here then is this final voice that we need to hear that is the end goal of that plan.

The end to which forgiveness is given to us. Listen to what Isaiah says. What does he say? See, verse 10. See, the sovereign Lord comes with power. He rules with a mighty arm.

[30 : 11] See, his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lamb in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young.

This is the ultimate comfort, isn't it? It's not just that your sins can be forgiven, though that is brilliant. It's not just that God's plan can be trusted, though that is fantastic. It is that the forgiveness that you experience from God, the plan of God in Jesus Christ, is to bring you to him.

For him to gather you up. God's son comes as a shepherd. It's a picture, isn't it, of closeness and care. Of God coming near to live with us.

And as we close, it's worth just chewing on this for a while, isn't it? You see, this is a totally unique thing for a Christian in the face of the discomfort of this world. You know, I said about knocking on the door of that student, he said, I'm not going to believe in God because there's so much suffering in our world.

Listen, the suffering in our world is not a contradiction of the God of the Bible. You know that. It's not come to God and you'll never have any more suffering. That's not it, is it? Actually, the message of the Bible is that you can know God in the midst of the suffering.

[31 : 26] Our culture believes, doesn't it, that the discomfort in our world is essentially just sort of purposeless fate. If you've got no God, that's what you've got to believe. It's just like bad luck if bad stuff happens.

And so comfort in that view of the world is by doing as much as you can as far as possible to ignore all problems and trouble. Or go to extreme lengths to try and avoid it.

Why do you think the gyms will be full in January? Right? Because people are trying to avoid the bad luck, aren't they? You know, those in our world think that discomfort in the world is sort of like a karma kind of thing.

Bad things happen to bad people. So comfort for them is trying really hard to be good as far as you're possible, to ever deserve suffering. Some Christians live like that, don't they?

But Isaiah says something very different. The discomfort in our world, says Isaiah, is much more complex than any of those simple formulas suggest. And so their offers of comfort are ultimately too shallow.

[32 : 28] Discomfort comes in our world because we're in a world that is messed up by our sin and the judgment of God. And true comfort is only found in knowing the presence of God with us, of knowing God and experiencing the God who made us and to whom we belong.

The God who in the person of the Son took on human flesh and died in our place before rising again and ascended into heaven. That God, in the person of the Spirit, comes and dwells with us as comforter.

Gathering us to God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. Holding us, leading us like a shepherd does his sheep. Tim Keller, who passed away a few years ago, wrote a book called *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*.

In his book, he tells the story of a woman called Emily. Emily was happily married. She had four children. She was living in what she described as her dream home with a job that she loved. Everyone in her family was happy and healthy. And then out of the blue, her husband announced that he was leaving her. She was shocked. She sobbed. She begged him not to leave.

[33 : 38] She told him that they could work it out. But instead, what he decided to do at that moment is he woke the children up and he told them that he was leaving and he left and he moved out.

When Emily wrote her story, it's about six months after her husband has left. She's trying to come to terms with what happened. Her husband is being difficult and is being difficult, especially with the children.

The children themselves are depressed and angry and confused that the 14-year-old is finding it particularly difficult. The dream house that they were living in had to be sold. Emily has lost her job. They're not sure where they're going to move or what they're going to be able to afford. And then she writes this. She says this. I've never had a big tragedy in my life.

I've never really had to depend on God. I mean, sure, I prayed and I saw God work, but not like this. I never had the need to rely on God to truly just fall and rest on him.

[34 : 39] When I needed God's comfort, the image in my head was me clinging to Jesus and him hugging me. My image now is completely changed. My image now is just me, collapsed, and him carrying me.

And it's awesome, she said. That's Isaiah 40 verse 11, isn't it? The comfort of the gospel. It's not that you're clinging on to Jesus and he's kind of dragging you along.

The comfort of the gospel is that you are completely collapsed into his arms and by his spirit he is carrying you home. Forgiven. Absolutely. Yes, fully and finally.

A complete double for your sins. Mercy to match everything that you've done. An unstoppable plan of God. Absolutely unstoppable. You have heard it, you will see it.

Trusting in an eternal word that lives longer than our short lives. Absolutely. Something to cling on to in the temporary world that we live in. Walking through life alone, not at all.

[35 : 42] Rather carried along in the arms of a saviour who loves us. Comfort, comfort, comfort my people. Says the Lord. Let's just have a few moments of quiet.

You can pray in your own heart and reflect on what we've seen. And then we will sing together. Amen. Thank you.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for these great words of comfort. We thank you for the comfort of forgiveness, of an unstoppable plan, of an eternal word.

And thank you, most of all, for the comfort of knowing that we're in your arms, carried close to your heart, being brought home to be with you.

And Lord, in this Christmas time, as we reflect on the arrival of your son, the Lord Jesus, in human flesh, help us, we pray, as we listen to that message, to grow in certainty that we will see its fulfillment in Christ's return.

[37 : 14] Grow us, we pray. Bring us this comfort and joy. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.