



It Shall Not Return to Me Empty

3 Glorious Comforts from the
Wonderful Word of God

Isaiah 55:1-13

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Introduction

Where can you find comfort? When I think about comfort, I think about how my kids each have a blanket they love to carry. It keeps them warm. It makes them feel safe and protected from monsters. Or I think about a campfire in the cold. It keeps you warm. It makes you feel safe and protected from the dark. The thing about these comforts is that they don't last. The blanket will unravel. The campfire will eventually burn out.

We're all looking for comfort in our lives. It's hard for us to see that because we live so comfortably. But take away the power of your phone and your followers, take away your good grades, take away your money and your material possessions, take away your home or your health — you might find yourself uncomfortable. The truth is that if you don't lose these comforts in this life, you cannot keep them in the next. God tells us to go to him for comfort today.

Context

In our passage, God's people were in exile. This was during the Babylonian captivity, and they were begging for comfort. God doesn't give them a blanket or a campfire, but he warms them with his words.

Isaiah 55 is directly tied to Isaiah 53 and 54. In Isaiah 53, we see the Suffering Servant, and we see that his suffering is the work of redemption. His suffering is what saves God's people. In Isaiah 54, we see that "God's people" are not just ethnic Israel, but all the nations. God wants all the nations to come and know him. And that leads us here at Isaiah 55.

Sermon Preview

Isaiah 55 is the message that God gives to the nations. It is the literal word that God speaks to the nations. This is the Word that God gave his people to remind them of his compassion and kindness during their captivity. In our sermon today, we're going to see 3 Glorious Comforts from the Wonderful Word of God:

1. Invitation (1-5)
2. Restoration (6-11)
3. Expectation (12-13)

After our three points, I will present to you the Gospel. I will give you the big idea, and we will end with our conclusion. My goal is for you to go to God for your comfort, and that you will see his glory in his wonderful son, Jesus Christ. Let's get started.



1. Invitation

The first way the Word comforts is with an invitation. The Word invites you to come to God:

*“**Come**, everyone who thirsts, **come** to the waters; and he who has no money, **come**, buy and eat! **Come**, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. (Isaiah 55:1-2)*

The first and dominant word in this verse is *come*. You can’t miss it. It is a call to go, to walk towards, to get near to God. Notice who is called to come: everyone who thirsts. Jesus made the same invitation in John 7:37 when he said: “If anyone thirsts, let him *come* to me and drink.” He wasn’t talking about physical thirst, but spiritual thirst. When you thirst, you’re saying that you need. Some say “thirsty for attention” or “thirsty for love.” The Bible uses the word thirst to describe a spiritual longing for the Lord. It is a spiritual seeking for satisfaction. There is a sense of urgency in the invitation. Your soul is starving and thirsting in the desert. You are going to die, and God is offering you free food and water. We see in the text that only God can satisfy our souls. He is good, and he wants us to delight ourselves in him. God is where true life is found.

This message was meant for the Israelite exiles but the invitation extends to you who feel far away from God: Come to him and live. Our passage tells you to listen, and to incline your ear, to come to God and hear so that your thirsty, starving soul may live. Listening to God is how you live. And this is what God says: He has made an everlasting covenant by his steadfast and sure love for David the King. This covenant blessing continues and climaxes with Jesus, a witness to God and a leader and commander of God’s people. He calls and invites the nations to come to him and partake in the glory of God and his people. When you truly listen to God, you’re going to hear him talk about Jesus.

Come and Listen

So, will you come and listen? Coming to God means listening to him, and listening to him is how you live. You come, you listen, and you live. The text ties listening with living so much it’s as if to say “*if you will listen, then you will eat and live*” or “listen *in order* to eat and live.”

Don't get distracted from listening to the Lord! The Bible tells us a story about two sisters, Mary and Martha. They invited Jesus into their home. Mary sat with Jesus while Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. Imagine being a Christian, inviting Jesus into the heart of your home, and just leaving him there without listening to him at all. We distract ourselves with our phones. With our friends. Even when we put school over our spiritual lives, we distract ourselves from what really matters.

Make it a priority to come and listen to God. When you eliminate distractions, you'll be efficient with your studying and homework. You won't procrastinate. Steward your time well. You'll have time to read your Bible, you'll have time to pray. You can come to church and fellowship. God invites you to come to him in the midst of a hostile world (ESV Expository Commentary). In John 4:13-14, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Stop searching and come to God for your ultimate satisfaction. Don't get distracted. Listen to him.

The first glorious way the Word comforts is with an invitation. The Word invites you to come. Come and listen so that you may live.



2. Restoration

The second way the Word comforts is with restoration. The Word calls you to restore your relationship with God.

*Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; **let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9)*

“Returning” is the language of restoration. It means to turn back, to come home. Our invitation to come is a call to repent. This is a limited opportunity. God can be found and is near to us now. Don’t take him for granted. Some say that there is no way God can be good, forgive, and love when this world is filled with so much evil. God says his thoughts are not your thoughts, and his ways are not your ways. He promises compassion and abundant pardon. Others say that they’ll deal with God when they die. They say that they’ll have some questions, and God will have to give an answer to them. This is ignorant and foolish. Where were you when God created the world? Your lips are unclean. Repent and return with a humble heart. Psalm 103:11–14 says: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” When you come to God in faith, admitting that you are fragile, he will be your strength and your salvation.

This offer of salvation is sealed with a promise in verses 10-11: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” God’s ability to save stems from his unfailing, effective Word. You can count on God to keep his promise of a restored relationship if you return to him. This message was meant for the Israelite exiles but the call extends to you who feel far away and at odds with God: restore your relationship with God. Return to him and repent of your sins.

Return and Repent

So, will you return and repent? When we speak about returning, we're speaking about repentance. Comfort from God does not come without repentance. Repentance is more than saying sorry. Repentance results in real life change. It is holistic holiness. And I want to highlight that our repentance to God affects our relationship with others. If you say sorry to God, he expects you to say sorry to others. If God has forgiven you, he expects you to forgive others as well. Repentance to God and reconciliation with others go hand in hand.

The way of repentance goes against everything the world tells you, especially in Asian American culture. We don't like to talk about being wrong. We don't like to talk about weakness. We don't like to challenge and confront. We are passive, yet prideful. And that element of pride is sinful when it comes to repentance and reconciliation. In our pride, we prevent ourselves from asking forgiveness, forgiving others, and moving forward in peace.

It's funny that the word reconcile comes up frequently in my life. My wife reconciles our bank accounts. It's an audit of our financial statements. This means that she checks to make sure our spending is accurate and accounted for. It's like you're making peace in the process. I used to think that this was a waste of time. While there aren't glaring errors, small mishaps can add up over time. And we're able to save because we're monitoring our money. I recommend that you do the work of reconciliation in your relationships. Monitor your heart. Check to make sure your sin is accurate and accounted for. When you find it, seek forgiveness and be quick to forgive others. Make peace with people. Don't let your pride get in the way.

God is not like you and me. His thoughts are higher. His ways are greater. Jesus Christ, your creator and sustainer, your king and your savior, humbled himself on the cross. Christians, my brothers and sisters, you must also likewise put away your pride. Look at the example of our Lord, and live like him with a humble love for others. When you are able to repentant and reconcile, this assures that your relationship with God has also been restored. You confirm your calling when you live and love like Christ. You are an ambassador of Christ with your actions, and you proclaim that the way back to God is still open. You witness and live out the Gospel.

The second way the Word comforts is with restoration. The Word calls you to restore your relationship with God. Return to him and repent of your sins.



3. Expectation

The third way the Word comforts is with expectation. The Word exhorts you to live with a hopeful expectation from God.

*“For you shall go out in **joy** and be led forth in **peace**; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into **singing**, and all the trees of the field shall **clap** their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” (Isaiah 55:12-13)*

God’s Word paints a picture of promises fulfilled: joy, peace, singing, clapping. Thorns and brier patches are overtaken by strong green cypress trees and beautiful myrtle flowers. God’s people and all of creation are celebrating the Lord. God’s name will be established forever and his grace will never be forgotten. You don’t have to doubt God’s goodness. You can expect God to make things right again. Earlier in our passage, God said that his Word will succeed. God’s guaranteed success is because of his sovereignty. He has a purpose and the power to fulfill his plans. This is called God’s *providence*. John Piper defines God’s providence as his *purposeful sovereignty*. Again, he has a purpose and the power to make his plans succeed. Our hopeful expectation is kept by the fact that God is in control. Our hopeful expectation is powered by God’s providence. This message was meant for the Israelite exiles but the exhortation extends to you who feel worn out and weary in this world: Live for God with hopeful expectation.

Trust and Rest

So, will you stop doubting and live for God with hopeful expectation? The Bible describes this expectant hope as “waiting on the Lord.” With joy and peace, you trust and take rest in what he is going to do. Living for God with hopeful expectation means that you can lift your eyes from your own concerns to the coming kingdom, and you have strength to keep going in the present (ESV Expository Commentary). You don’t fear man or missing out in this world. You freely give of yourself and your funds in the name of Christ and his kingdom. You don’t crave human praise or approval. You have aims and ambitions for the glory of God, content and secure in his love.

I know that some of you just finished your first week of school. The initial excitement has worn off by now. I dare you to live for God this school year with hopeful expectation. Think about how your life would be different if you anchored your life on God’s absolute sovereignty. You will try your best but

not be slaves to your grades and college acceptances because God directs your paths. You can tear down the idol of success and find rest in God's sovereignty. You won't get trapped in comparing yourself with others but trust that God is in total control, he loves you, and knows what's best for you. You can lay down envy and jealousy and find joy in God's goodness.

I'm not saying to be fake. I'm not saying that school will be simple. You can count on difficulty, trials, and even persecution. But Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:8-10 that we can be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Even in your personal life, when you experience physical pain, relational strain, or emotional heartbreaks — Christians have hope because of Christ. 1 Peter 3:15 says that you are to honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect. You can hope and expect that God will love and take care of his children. And the peace of God that surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

The third way the Word comforts is with expectation. The Word exhorts you to live with a hopeful expectation from God. Trust and rest in his providence.



The Gospel

I've gone through our three points, but there's so much more you need to see. Listen closely and carefully as this is the most important part of our sermon today. I bring you both bad news and good news. The bad news is that God's words of comfort are not for everyone. Yes, they are offered to everyone — but they are not accepted by everyone. You must respond. If you reject this message of comfort, what waits for you is the bitter cold of being cast out from God's presence, and the fiery furnace of his judgment and wrath. But the good news is that if you admit that your sins have separated you from God, if you believe that Jesus, the Son of God saves with his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave, and if confess him as the King over your life — you will be saved, and God's comfort comes free of charge. You will be adopted into his family where faith and hope and love abound. The Gospel message is God's Word to you today: Jesus is the culmination and realization of God's comfort. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has conquered the grave. Satan, sin, and death are defeated. Our passage spoke of God's everlasting covenant to King David, and Revelation relates it to Jesus:

*And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, **the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered**, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." (Revelation 5:5)*

The scroll and the seven seals represent God's judgment of the wicked and justice for the wronged. Jesus is declared worthy to deliver us. Jesus is the King who has come to reign forever, offering rest and comfort to God's children. His conquering of sin, Satan, and death is our ultimate comfort. Jesus Christ is the comfort of God. He is glorious, and he is wonderful.

If you are already a Christian, your mission is to share Jesus Christ, the comfort of God:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, **so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction**, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*



Big Idea

We saw 3 glorious comforts from the wonderful Word of God. The first way the Word comforts is with an invitation. The Word invites you to come to God. So, will you come and listen so that you may live? The second way the Word comforts is with restoration. The Word calls you to restore your relationship with God. So, will you return to him and repent of your sins? The third way the Word comforts is with expectation. The Word exhorts you to live with a hopeful expectation from God. So, will you trust and rest in his providence?

Here is our big idea: The Word comforts God's people with an invitation to come, a call to a restored relationship, and an exhortation to live with hopeful expectation.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning for our conclusion. I asked you: Where can you find comfort? Blankets and campfires, power and possessions, none of this will last forever. All will fail you in the end. God gives us words of comfort that will never waste away. Just like Isaiah 40:8 says: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

In the Bible, The Word of God is another name for the Son of God, Jesus Christ. I titled our sermon "3 Glorious Comforts from the Wonderful Word of God." Another way to say this is "3 Glorious Comforts from the Wonderful Son of God." He invites you to come, he calls you to restore your relationship with God, and he exhorts you to live with hopeful expectation. God's Word has gone out into the world, and it will not return empty. Jesus will bring all who believe back to God. Your exile will end. You will spend eternity in the Promised Land with the Lord. If you are able to see this, you have seen his glory:

*And the **Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:14)*

He is marvelous and wonderful! Jesus is the blanket that will never unravel. Jesus is the campfire that will never burn out. As you are wrapped with his warm and wonderful words and as you bask in the beautiful blazing light of his glory, may Jesus Christ be your comfort.



God, You Are My Comfort

Like water in the desert
With streams that overflow —
God, you are my comfort!
You satisfy my soul.

Like fire for the winter
With light to pierce the dark —
God, you are my comfort!
You warm my weary heart.

Like shelter in the thunder
With shielding from the rain —
God, you are my comfort!
You cover sin and shame.

Like bread for all who hunger
With words to taste and see —
God, you are my comfort!
You fill with joy and peace.

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