

Dec 16th 2012 The Three Voices Of Christmas: Isaiah 40.

It was approaching the end of the 8th Century before Christ's birth, and the Nation of Judah was in a situation of great danger and distress. Since her sister state of Israel had been conquered and completely annihilated by the powerful Assyrian empire, Judah had stood alone against the enemies of God's people. Babylon, in particular, was a huge threat to her continual existence, and God's one true Prophet Isaiah, had proclaimed relentlessly that one day Babylon would be God's agent of judgment against His people because of their sins against Him.

Then one day a new element was heard in Isaiah's prophesying. The judgment to come was still spoken about but Isaiah talked about a future deliverance for God's people. A time of great comfort when the Lord Himself would appear amongst His people to save them. We see the beginning of that prophecy in Isaiah 40:1-2

***Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
2 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.***

Unbeknown to those listeners then, over 700 years would pass before that comfort would come. Not just to Judah but through Judah to the whole world. And it would come in the form of a birth of one chosen to be the Saviour and Lord of all.

But the truly amazing aspect of this prophecy are the three voices that in different ways are strongly connected with this birth of the coming Christ. That's why I've called these three voices that Isaiah refers to, the Three Voices Of Christmas.

These voices proclaim words that connect with the Christmas story in the sense that the event we call Christmas would go on to produce the glorious fulfillment that the voices predicted.

Just recently Australia has been caught up in the joy associated with the pregnancy of Princess Kate. And we have heard many voices telling us already what this child will become in terms of power and position. And one of the loudest voices has been that of the English Parliament declaring their degree that whatever the gender of the child, that child will go on one day to become the Monarch in the land.

The voices in Isaiah 40 do exactly the same about the one who is to come, predicting what He will do, achieve and change in His coming.

So look with me now at Isaiah 40 and note the three voices. The first is in v3

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

The second is in v6

***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 third voice is in v9

***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!"***

The first voice is the one that we can easily put a name to, for it relates to John the Baptist. He said so himself in John 1:23

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

It is interesting how John describes himself as The Voice. Not as the prophet or the preacher or by any other description, but as the Voice. That was what he was on earth to be. The Voice declaring the most incredible message that this world has ever heard:- make straight the way for the Lord.

In those days a messenger was always sent ahead to that kingdom or city to which a king or emperor was coming so that they could make their kingdom, their city, themselves, ready or suitable for such an extraordinary visitor.

John was to be the voice that announced the coming of almighty God and He firmly believed that. And we can understand why he did when we look again at Isaiah 40:3

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

Yet John also, as the voice, was given a very special message to proclaim about God in their midst. That this God had not come in judgment but as a sacrifice for their sins. So in John 1:29 John declared Jesus to be:-

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The second Voice declares the reason for God's coming to this earth for it speaks about the reality of man's fragile situation.

***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."***

From childhood we usually think of ourselves as 'bullet proof' until that first moment when we discover how near death is to us all, all the time. It often comes through a close escape that we have from death, or the death of one

near to us in age and circumstances. And when death is on your doorstep the fragility of life hits us hard. Suddenly all the glory that can be gained in this life is shown to be very transient. Here today but gone tomorrow.

There is only one thing that is certain to stand forever and that is the Word of Almighty God. He has declared that judgment follows death for all, and after judgment condemnation, and has provided us with the story of creation that reveals why this is so. For that story shows how sin entered into God's perfect creation producing death and eternal separation from God in a place of darkness and terror.

During the last century there were some terrible cases of nuclear contamination where whole areas had to be abandoned. And when the authorities went to those places they did not go to make a judgment about them. They knew already that there could be no hope, but they went to condemn them. To close them down. To isolate those areas from all other areas.

And God's Word tells us that the final judgment will not be an assessment to see whether there is hope, but a condemnation. Only those found in Christ Jesus on that day won't even be considered for condemnation because of the Grace and Mercy they have received.

So this verse that points out the fragility of this life asserts the desperate need the world had for a Saviour when God chose to enter this world as a man.

The Third Voice then, becomes extra important for it is the voice of Good News: verse 9

***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!"

**¹⁰ *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.***

See, his reward is with him,

and his recompense accompanies him.

***11 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.***

This is the Good News that God's people are now to declare. To assert about the baby born so long ago in a stable:- Here is your God.

And what a God we have to speak about. From verse 12 to the end of the chapter we are given a picture of this God that blows our minds. He is the Sovereign Creator and there is no power in the whole universe that compares to Him.

Consider verses 21-24 as an example of what our God is like as presented by Petersen in The Message paraphrase:-

***Have you not been paying attention?
Have you not been listening?
Haven't you heard these stories all your life?
Don't you understand the foundation of all things?
God sits high above the round ball of earth.
The people look like mere ants.
He stretches out the skies like a canvas—
yes, like a tent canvas to live under.
He ignores what all the princes say and do.
The rulers of the earth count for nothing.
Princes and rulers don't amount to much.
Like seeds barely rooted, just sprouted,
They shrivel when God blows on them.
Like flecks of chaff, they're gone with the wind.***

This is our God who gives strength to the weary who hope in Him and power to the weak. For He is also the God who comes as the Good Shepherd, gently carrying His lambs close to His heart. This is the Good News about that baby who was laid in a manger because there was no room in the inn.

And we who have received Him as our Saviour are to be this third voice still. Shouting out the glorious news about an all powerful God→Philippians 2:6-8

***Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but
made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,***

***being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!***

And we are still to be that voice because according to Isaiah the story is not yet ended. The God who entered our world as a baby is preparing to come again. Isaiah 40:10 says

***See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.***

That prophecy is still to be fulfilled but one day it will happen. Christ Jesus will return in power and glory and every eye will see Him.

This is the Good News we are to announce, for it is only by trusting the soon to return Servant King will the benefit of Christmas be an eternal blessing.