

## SERMON - PASTOR GREG GRAHAM

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COMFORT Isaiah 40:21-31. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you comfortable? OR are you seeking comfort? About 700 years before the first Christmas Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was given a vision. And he was commanded by God to share this vision with God's people. Let us pray.

**JUDGEMENT** The vision begins with a terrible accusation from the LORD- the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists: 1:2: *Hear, O' heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, and donkey his owner's manger but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt...they have forsaken the LORD, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel, and turned their backs on Him."* What a terrible word! Do you remember your teenage years? For those of you who have had children, do you remember their teenage years? Not always- but often- the teenage years are years of rebellion, of rejection, of anger, of frustration and of tears. Sometimes, but not always, there is separation- often for years. And how much more serious it is when God is rejected!

**CLEANSING.** To his people of old God spoke (1:24,25) *I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities...Afterwards you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.* His people would not and could not cleanse themselves from their sin- it was part and parcel of their very nature and sin must be punished- it must be dealt with- it must be atoned for- it must be removed or else total corruption and anarchy will prevail. And this is what God promised to His people- He would cleanse them from all their sins. But how?

**THE PROMISE.** We hear these words every Christmas: **7:14:** *The LORD Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* **9:6:** *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...He will reign for ever and ever.* **11:** *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse...The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him...with righteousness he will judge the nations, with justice he will give decisions for the poor...They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.*

**BUT NO CHANGE.** All the warnings, all the judgements, all the promises, all the words of God were to no avail. Israel, as a nation, continued to reject God and so came the destruction and the Exile: 39:5: *The time will come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD.*

**COMFORT.** Are you comfortable or are you seeking comfort? 600 years ago the people of God had no land, no king, no future and it seemed that God had abandoned them. Have you ever felt this way? In Isaiah 40 we hear these wonderful words of hope: *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed and her sin has been paid for.* How was their sin paid for? Through the destruction of the Temple, the end of their armies and kings, no home and for two generations no hope. Their sin was paid for by their suffering and loss. But then God promised that He himself would come and restore His people 40:10: *Behold, the Sovereign LORD comes with power...Behold His reward is with Him. He tends His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart and gently leads those that have young.*

**RETURN, REPENT, TRUST, OBEY, BELIEVE.** We heard these words earlier, now hear them again as words spoken by God to us- today: *Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? (The LORD) sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught, and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?"*, says the LORD.

The world is changing. How often have you heard these words! Of course the world is changing- we see change all around us- that latest promise or is threat -is AI- artificial intelligence. Will it save us or will it destroy us? Are you comfortable or are you seeking comfort?

Yes, there is change but we do well to remember Ecclesiastes 1:9: *What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.*

**PAGANISM.** And one of things that is happening today is something that has been before- paganism: `a modern religious movement incorporating many traditional religious beliefs and practices especially nature worship'. Paganism believes in many gods, believes in doing anything that does not cause hurt, believes in mother earth, practices white magic, worships various spirits and so on. It takes form in so many ways and we need to be aware of it. I served in Hopevale for nine months. I met an Elder, a former evangelist who had become a recognised painter. I visited him one day and he showed me his latest painting. It was a scene of a local waterhole and it was fine. But then he showed me various spirits hovering around and over the waterhole. It was his belief that the men of the community needed to return to their traditional ways in order to overcome the various problems plaguing the community. He believed that spirit worship could abide with the worship of Jesus Christ. The problem we face in the church now days is that when we challenge such beliefs we are seen as being racist and intolerant of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

**OUR SINFUL HUMAN NATURE.** Paganism is on the rise, we will see more and more demonic activity in our communities- what once was seen as fun will now be seen for what is – the work of the devil. But never forget that the biggest challenge to us is what lies within our hearts.

**COMFORTABLE OR SEEKING COMFORT.** Honestly, if you are comfortable with your lives and that you have- you may not need Jesus. But if you are seeking comfort- real, profound and eternal comfort – then hear again from Isaiah as he speaks to you the word of God: 53: *Surely he took up our infirmities, and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.*