



Sermon Series: Looking Forward to Christmas
To be used with Session 1: Looking Forward with Hope
Sermon Title Possibilities: “A Welcomed Interruption!”
Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-5; 9-11

Connection with Unit Theme: The theme of this series is, “Looking Forward to Christmas.” Each of these lessons will guide us through this season of Advent while both teaching and reminding us of what this season is all about. As your congregation enters into this season, use these messages to create an atmosphere of hope, celebration, and gratitude. Moreover, utilize this as an opportunity for yourself and your congregation to avoid the temptation of relying on familiarity and perceived knowledge of this story instead of taking the time to be open to fresh revelations from God. This holiday comes every year, but God has new insights with every season. We simply need to be sensitive to receive them.

Introduction: Most, if not all of us despise being interrupted. Anything that interrupts our flow, disturbs our equilibrium, or gets us off base is bound to create stress and frustration that none of us desire to deal with. Life is filled with all kinds of interruptions, inconveniences, ambushes, and unexpected moments. However, every now and then, God allows interruptions to come that we are glad to receive. Certainly, all of us know what it’s like to have convenient, peaceful, and enjoyable times interrupted, but as we will discover in today’s text, God has a way of also interrupting our difficulties. And He not only interrupts them, but He sometimes comes with news that they are coming to an end. One should never get comfortable in the valley, because God can take us to the Mountain at any given moment.

1. Isaiah 40:1-2 - “Parole Day Is Coming!”

One thing that every incarcerated individual looks forward to is their parole date. There aren’t very many people who are in captivity that don’t desire to be free. Most individuals who presently aren’t free typically spend every moment of everyday longing for the day in which they are free. Even those who have been sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, dream of a miracle taking place that will lessen their sentence and afford them the opportunity to get out. The point is that everyone that’s behind bars usually wants to get out.

Our text in Isaiah 40 finds the Children of Israel who have been stuck in Babylonian Exile for 150 years. They’ve been there so long that many of them have given up on any hope of ever getting out. They had gotten used to being stuck in exile that they figured exile would be their final destination. However, God speaks through the Prophet Isaiah to inform that their parole day is coming! Many of them were descendants of their ancestors, so they personally didn’t know anything other than Babylon, but God had a new future and a new purpose for each of their lives. That’s why God, through Isaiah, begins the text with the words, “*Comfort, comfort my*

people, says your God.” In other words, don’t pronounce judgment or condemnation, but this time pronounce freedom, peace, and the fact that their sins have been pardoned. This gave the Israelites something amazing to look forward to and a sense of hope that that had never felt before.

2. Isaiah 40:3-5- “Isaiah’s Prophecy & Martin’s Dream!”

In his August 28, 1963 speech, at the historic March on Washington, the late and great Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted our text in Isaiah 40. Using verses 4 and 5 to provide not only some biblical context to his masterful speech, but to instill hope in his audience as they were enduring oppression, abuse, and injustice on a daily basis. Dr. King wanted us to know that even though things may be difficult at that moment, no place is too crooked for God to straighten up. In a likewise manner, God, through the Prophet Isaiah, speaks to the exiled Israelites and encourages them to not only prepare to leave their Babylonian captivity, but to look forward to the day that God makes the crooked places straight, smooths out the rough places, and makes His glory visible for all to behold. This was both a Prophecy of Isaiah, and a dream of Martin. Both prophets wanted to encourage their people not to only see their captivity, but to visualize and prepare for the reality of their forthcoming freedom. That’s a word to all of us today. Our current mess may be a lot, and it may have been going on for a while, but God still knows how to straighten out the crooked places, and He does it in a way that makes it clear that it was nobody but Him.

3. Isaiah 40:9-11 – “Breaking News!”

Anyone who has watched television has likely experienced have your program interrupted by a Flash News Bulletin. Anything from a new development in a matter of National/International security, to the death of a prominent politician, celebrity, or other public figure. Sometimes it’s to announce the progress of dangerous weather, or the signing of major legislation that impacts the masses. Whatever the case may be, every broadcast gets interrupted at some point with some breaking news! God uses Isaiah yet again to pronounce breaking news to the Israelites, as He speaks through the Prophet to encourage them and to remind them of who He is. Notice how Isaiah says in the latter part of verse 9, “...*raise your voice loudly. Raise it, do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’*” In other words, interrupt their regularly scheduled programming, and let them know that their God is still mighty, is still on the throne, has not forgotten about them, and will be delivering them very soon. This is good and breaking news!

Conclusion

Each year is a different journey for each person. For some of us, we’ve had a wonderful year and are eagerly anticipating next year in hopes of continued progress and success. On the other hand, there are those of us whose year was so tumultuous, painful, and full of difficulties that we are ready for it to be over and hoping that these holidays are a passage into a better new year. Whatever cards the year has dealt us, we all must pass through the hallways of holidays in order

to exit it. Every year has ups and downs, but any interruption from God pronouncing freedom, joy, and new beginnings should be welcomed by all of us. As previously stated, all of us encounter challenges, inconvenience, and frustrations. However, we must also remember that God's path for our lives doesn't solely consist of pain and suffering, but there's also joy, celebration, and happiness. While Heaven is the only place where we can experience that on a never-ending basis devoid of any interruptions, God intends for us to enjoy certain aspects of it right here on Earth. And His word provides us with the necessary guidance in order to do so.

Author Bio

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