

Who is the one calling out?

Text: Isaiah 40:1-11 for December 10th, 2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

When Isaiah wrote these words he had been a prophet of God for almost 40 years. All that time he had been proclaiming a message of gloom and doom for Israel. The hearts of the people had turned away from God, and God was going to bring his wrath and judgment against Israel. There were occasional glimpses of hope, but for the most part Isaiah proclaimed a message of judgment. Now God comes to Isaiah and says, "Proclaim these words, 'Comfort, comfort my people [...].'" As Isaiah wrote these words, I wonder if he didn't scratch his head and maybe go back and re-read them a couple of times. Comfort, forgiveness of sins, people proclaiming that God is here? This is certainly not the message Isaiah was used to hearing and speaking. So who is the one who will be speaking this message? Is it Isaiah, or someone else? For us to understand what Isaiah is talking about we need to ask the question:

Theme: Who is the one calling out?

1. The one preparing people's hearts.
2. The one proclaiming God's arrival.
3. The one proclaiming God's comfort.

In Isaiah's prophecy, the first thing that someone is "calling out" is that people are to be preparing the way for the LORD. God uses these words of Isaiah to point to John the Baptist. In fact all four gospel writers use these words of Isaiah to describe John the Baptist and his message. So if John's message was Isaiah's message, which was to prepare a highway for the Lord, does that mean the people were supposed to be out building roads, filling in valleys and knocking down mountains? No, because the picture that Isaiah gives us here is not talking about filling in some small ditches or leveling off little hills. Isaiah is speaking of things that are completely impassable: deep gorges and large craggy mountain peaks. What Isaiah is speaking about are the craggy peaks of pride and self-righteousness.

God simply labels these things as "man's glory." The "glory" of the human race is everything that people treasure more than God. For each thing a person puts in the place of God, a deep trench is cut, or a mountain is raised up, so that person ends up cut off and separated from God. This is the impasse that needs to be cleared away for the coming LORD.

So how does God break through this impasse? He does it with the breath of his Word. God compares human glory to that of grass and flowers. God had Isaiah write, "**All [people] 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**" (vs. 6, 7). Isaiah also wrote, "**The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever**" (v. 8). God's word shows the glory of mankind for what it is: worthless, like a dried up flower. Human glory is extremely brief and not good for anything except the manure pile.

John the Baptist ran into the very impasse that Isaiah spoke about: The impasse of people relying on worldly glory (Luke 3:8). The people of John's day made themselves look important by saying that they were descendants of Abraham. They felt that pointing to Abraham as their ancestor was as good as trusting in God. They put the name of Abraham in a higher place than God's name.

John works to break through this impasse just as Isaiah prophesied that he would, using God's Law. John said to the people. "**You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath**" (Luke 3:7)? John was certainly not one to mince words, yet John did not come to simply call people names. John goes right to the heart of their problem: "**[...] do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham**" (Luke 3:8). John showed the Israelites that what they glorified the most, what they trusted to save themselves, was completely worthless

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in God's eyes. Their glory was like a dying tree that cannot produce good fruit. "[...] **and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire**" (Luke 3:7-9). John was certainly leveling some mountains in preparing for the coming of the LORD.

So, Isaiah wrote the prophecies and John the Baptist proclaimed them, but we should not think that God's Word stops there. His Word comes to us today to confront us about our sinful natures. Our sinful self is far more attracted to the glory of this world, then to God's glory. You don't believe me? Well, if God is truly first in our lives, as he should be, then why is it that we can remember every detail about our favorite actor or singer, yet we cannot remember many details about Jesus life. Why is it that we can quote facts and statistics about our favorite sports figures, or our favorite game, or our favorite hobby, yet we are unable, or unwilling to quote God's Word. Why are we so willing to spend huge amounts of time, money and energy on our toys, our homes, our hobbies, and our "stuff," yet we spend relatively little on actually proclaiming God's good news to others. The glory of the things that we hold up as so valuable, so important, that glory is nothing but dry, dead grass. All God has to do is blow on these things with his breath and those things will all be gone.

Our sinful nature loves what this world has to offer. It loves to suck us back into the filth and waste of what this world calls glory. God realizes that on our own this is all that is going to happen. That is why God had to come to us. He had to come to pull us out of this muck which our sinful nature seems to find so glorious. To do that God set aside his glory and chose to be born in a barn. And even though when he first arrived he could not even sit up on his own, yet even then he was still living a perfect life, something we have never been able to do. And eventually he would even go so far as to give up that perfect life for us. He did that so that we could be free from the sin and the garbage that our sinful nature loves to glory in.

One of the neat things about God coming to this world was that when he arrived God made sure that people knew about it. Who is the one calling out? The one proclaiming God's arrival.

Isaiah tells us that the one who is calling out was to lift up their voice with a shout. Not to shout out in fear, but instead to shout out good news! This person would get to tell the world, "**Here is your God**" (v. 9)! Your God is coming with power. Not the power to punish, but the power to reward people. God has come to compensate his people for what they are lacking. He does not compensate them for what they lack physically. He compensates them for what they lack spiritually.

What Isaiah foretold, John the Baptist did: He made it clear when God arrived, and who God was: **When [John] saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God"** (John 1:36)! John was saying, "There he is, don't miss him!" John also made it clear who Jesus is when he said "**I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God**" (John 1:34). John was bringing good news proclaiming "**Here is your God!**" Your God has come in power, and he has come with his reward.

Even for us today, all those who proclaim God's Word are saying to us (holding up the Bible), "**Here is your God!**" No, your God is not a book. God comes to us through his word. Every time you hear or read God's Word, God the Holy Spirit comes to you. He comes to you to make your faith in the Savior stronger. The Holy Spirit strengthens our trust in the true glory of God, that glory which has been reveal in his Son Jesus.

Yes, God's Word tells us of how and when he arrived here on this earth. Through his Word God makes known what we could never know or understand on our own. He makes it known that this one who is calling out is the one proclaiming God's comfort.

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I do wonder if Isaiah was surprised at these words that God had set before him. After all of the prophecies about God's wrath and punishment, he was now going to be speaking of God's comfort. Not just any comfort, Isaiah would be proclaiming the comfort of forgiveness.

As we look at the parallel between Isaiah's words and John the Baptist we may be tempted to say, "You know John was not exactly a comforting kind of guy. He was more a fire and brimstone kind of guy." It is true that John laid down the law. He pointed out sin where necessary. But John the Baptist also pointed out where people could find true comfort. John pointed and said, "**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29)!

Through Isaiah and John the Baptist, God was giving his people a marvelous message of comfort: The message of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. And this message was not just for the Jews. God did not stop proclaiming this message at Jerusalem or Judea. God brought his saving message to the entire world. God brought his saving message to us.

Jesus, true God and true man, came in power, bringing his reward with him. And that reward was the full and complete payment for every one of our sins. Your guilt is gone because your sins have been paid for by Christ. Jesus' payment to buy you back was not just adequate, it was double what was necessary. For all the times we put our trust in human, worldly glory – Jesus more than paid for all that. He more than paid for all of your sins. God most certainly has revealed to us his true glory: The glory of his forgiveness which we have by faith in Jesus. It is a forgiveness that brings us comfort. It is a forgiveness that gives us peace. It is a forgiveness that's worth sharing with the world.

Isaiah must have been truly amazed at the words God had given him to speak and to write, words he probably did not fully understand. Isaiah foretold it, John the Baptist proclaimed it, Jesus fulfilled it. Comfort, comfort which comes from the full and free forgiveness of our sins. And all of this is found in that Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The glory of the LORD was revealed in Christ, for Jesus came in power bringing his reward with him. And we have received from his hand double for all of our sins. We have received from our Lord's hand comfort. Amen.