

**GOD IS GREATER THAN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES**  
**HARRINGAY UNITED CHURCH-BAPTIST**  
**SUNDAY MARCH 1, 2009.**

Isaiah 40 1-11

Isaiah prophesied around 700BC during the Babylonian exile (the present day Iraq). You remember that Jeremiah told them that the exile will be long and they should plant vineyard, build houses and inhabit them, marry for their sons and give their daughters in marriage.

When these exiles look back, they can only see misery, pain, disobedience, sins and punishment. Why? Because they have been taken captive, lost their freedom and uprooted from their land. Instead of being slaves to God they are slaves to their enemies. They must have been very dejected and sorrowful hence they needed encouragement and it comes in four voices, each with a special message for these needy people.

(1) **The voice of pardon (1-2).** Israel had sinned against the God with their idolatry, injustice, immorality, and insensitivity to His prophets (Jer. 7). But they were still His people, and He loved them. Though He would chasten them because of He is just, He would not forsake them because He is faithful. Therefore he sent His prophet to them to comfort them in their affliction and bondage. To speak words of comfort to the hurting people of God.

"Speak tenderly" means "speak to the heart," words to be grasped by the heart not the one that enters the right but leave on the left ear.

"Warfare" means severe trials and hardship "Double" does not suggest that God's punished the more than they deserve, for He is merciful even in His punishments (Ezra 9:13). God chastened them in an equivalent measure to what they had done (Jer. 16:18).

Any human life is warfare and that of a Christian is much more because he has drawn a battle line with the Evil one the day he/she gave his/her life to Jesus. Therefore there will be battles and wars in our lives but for the Christian he is a winner because his commander and high priest has conquered for him/her.

In some parts of the words today, people are been dislocated from their homes becoming refugees in foreign lands, but in our parts of the world what we have is economic refugees and I want to tell you that it is tough, the hardship is untold and my heart goes to those in this situation and they need the comforting words of God.

I am not saying that they have committed sin but I think it is a ripple effect of what some people have done in those nations; financial mismanagement, corruption, greed and selfishness.

If we sin, there is punishment for our sins because God has said that and we will face it squarely. But for the Christian, his sins have been paid for by the death and blood of Jesus. Christ has been tried and sentenced for him/her and it is impossible for God to the law of double-jeopardy when you are tried twice

for the same offence.

That is why Evangelist John said in 1 John 2:1-2 'My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.'

(2) **The voice of providence (3-5):** Israel had a rough road ahead of them as they returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, but the Lord would go before them to open the way.

The picture here is of an ambassador repairing the roads and removing obstacles, preparing the way for the coming of a king. The image of the highway is frequent in Isaiah's prophecy (see 11:16). Of course, the ultimate fulfilment here is in the ministry of John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 3:16).

I can relate very well to this as I remember not too long ago back home, when any important political dignitary is coming to our town, the council will find money to grade our impassable road for this august visitor to have a smooth ride to our town that is cut off from the rest of the state and you can guarantee that it will not last and will never be attended to anymore until another politician or military officer is coming depending on who is in government. We had lived hardship lives and it is tough to have crooked, rocky and gouges in a stretch of road.

Spiritually speaking, Israel was in the wilderness when Jesus came, but when He came, God's glory came (John 1:14). The way back may not be easy, but if we are trusting God, the way forward will be easier.

Today, I believe that the small and big mountains before us are the arrogance and pride of our own merit of humanity which will never allow the Spirit of Christ to reign and rule our lives and for the comfort and peace, prosperity of Christ.

Our hearts must be levelled for the good news of Christ to comfort us and give us hope instead of the depression, dejection and despondencies of our past failures and calamities.

Our political correctness, human rights that have gone too far, getting offence at almost anything as showing a disable person with one hand on the TV are the crooked ways that must be smoothed before we can enjoy the true liberation of Christ and see his glory revealed.

(3) **The voice of promise (vv. 6-8):** "All flesh is grass!" Assyria was gone, and now Babylon was gone. Like the grass, nations and their leaders fulfil their purposes and then fade away, but the Word of God stand forever Psalm 37:1-2; 90:1-6; 103:15-18; 1 Peter 1:24.5). As they began their long journey home,

Israel could depend on God's promises. Perhaps they were especially claiming 2 Chronicles 6:36-39.

I listened to the commentary on President Obama's plan to withdraw from Iraq, that it is a complex situation and that the true withdrawal is much more than physical absence but building up the ruined homes and infrastructure, building the Iraqi oil plants that they may enjoy the prosperity of their land. Building a governmental structure that is based on equality and fairness. The commentary said that it was well received by the Iraqis.

But God offers much more for those who will make room for Him in their hearts, His promise is not what we can see alone that is temporary but what we cannot see that is permanent and eternal.

As we are worried about the lasting effect of the economic crunch, the lasting effects of severed relationship and divorce, the immediate and lasting effects of unemployment in our lives, there is a promise from God that the way ahead is sure and secure with Him.

Instead of meditating on the devastations these conditions caused, instead of lamenting and spending energy to find out why and who caused it, we must look ahead to the promise of God that is sure and cannot change.

Last Friday on the question time, someone commented that it is far better to commit and spend the same amount of energy that we sue to find out why we went to war in Iraq on rebuilding that society and our nation of the mess we have caused.

My understanding of this is that let us move on, the past is gone and the future will be better.

(4) **The voice of peace (vv. 9-11):** Out of Israel peace and good news are to be proclaimed, but she must first receive the good News before she can proclaim it to the other people. It is what you have that you can give it is what you know that you can proclaim, hence Israel must be redeemed from her sins before it can proclaim same to others.

The good News must be proclaimed in a loud voice 'shout' not on the plain or the valley because it cannot travel far but on top of the mountains from where it can reach far and near. And the Good News is Victory over Satan and death which Jesus brings.

Now the caution itself comes out of the valley and limps the mountaintop to declare God's victory over the enemy. To "bring good tidings" means "to preach the Good News." The good news in that day was the defeat of Babylon and the release of the captive Jews (52:7-9). 'The Good News today is the defeat of sin and Satan by Jesus Christ and the salvation of all who will trust in Him (61:1-3;

Luke 4:18-19). God's arm is a mighty arm for winning the battle.

Someone has said that true peace is not an absence of war and I agree with that because the true peace referred to is the peace of God and it is not dependent on our circumstances. It is deep inside and you can feel and experience it when you are intimate with God, when you allow his Spirit to rule your heart and His Word to dwell in you. This is the peace all believers in Christ experience.

Withdrawing military personnel and artillery cannot bring peace but absence of war. The true peace is brought about by the changing power of the good news of Jesus Christ.

When we allow this to happen, then God will feed us like a Shepherd feed his flock with care and love. He will also bring us together in His arm and lead us and those with even young ones that need much and gentle attention.

The promise of peace can only be experienced when we have forsaken our past and put our trust in God who holds the future and our lives.

**To Close:** God is greater than our past circumstances, we have made the mess of it and we suffer the consequences. But God is merciful and gracious, he caused His Son to be punished and die for our messes and all that is required of you and me is to put our trust in Him.

If we focus on the circumstances behind us, we are heading for calamity just as a driver who focus on the rear mirrors will head for a disaster. But God has given us cause to rejoice and look forward for a better and secure future through Jesus. Would you put your absolute trust in Him today and you will not regret it. And if you have put your trust in Him but have been tricked by the devil to be looking at your past, the transforming power of Jesus blood is available for you to tap into and will surely deliver you.

Let us pray.