

# Second Sunday in Advent

## ADVENT'S CRY

### Isaiah 40:1-11

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### Analysis by Paul Jaster

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

*2Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.*

*3A voice cries out:*

*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

*4Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.*

*5Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

*6A voice says, "Cry out!"*

*And I said, "What shall I cry?"*

*All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.*

*7The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.*

*8The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.*

*9Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"*

*10See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.  
11He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: A Cry of Misery**

**Step 1: Initial diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Miserable in Exile*

Many complain about a 30% loss in their investments, a global recession, bankruptcy, restructuring, foreclosure. But what kind of complaint did Israel have in exile around 540 b.c.? Forty to fifty years earlier they had lost 100%! They had lost homes, land, jobs and occupations, king, priestly leadership, and temple. Here they were, God's chosen ones. Yet, they were far past recession and depression. They were deported to Babylon and their misery index went through the roof with a loud lament into the open sky. A dismal rocky desert stood between them and home: the abandonment of God. We feel the same when God is distant.

## **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *The Wrong (that is, Crooked) Way*

But who abandoned whom? Isaiah's diagnosis is that human beings are like flowers and grass whose "constancy" withers and fades. Which is just a punchy, prophetic way of saying that people always put their faith in the wrong place. In the days before exile, their faith was in a royal ideology that asserted, "God is with us, no matter what." "God's promises to Zion will save us." "God will not abandon his king and temple." But, rarely did they ever ask if their way was God's way. Instead, it was power politics as usual. From God's perspective this is the wrong (that is, crooked) way.

## **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *God Switches Sides*

God is not on our side, no matter what. Not always. There is a word from God that is conditional. That's the law. If we do not trust and follow God's way, then God will "switch sides" and use a foreign and alien power to oppose us as God did through the armies of the Babylonians. If power politics is what we want, then power politics is what we get. Leave it this way long enough and it leads to a people's dispersion and demise. Ultimately, all cries of misery are silenced...by death.

## **PROGNOSIS: A Cry of Comfort**

## **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *God Uses a "Foreign" King, His Anointed*

But if God can use a "foreign" king to oppose his wayward people, then God can also use a foreign king to "save. " That is Isaiah's insight. Initially the saving "foreign" king is Cyrus, whom Isaiah calls God's christ, God's messiah, God's "anointed" (Isa. 45:1), although Cyrus himself probably never knew he held that title. Ultimately, however, that "foreign" king is a baby born in Bethlehem. Certainly Jesus is a "native," a true son a David and a direct lineal heir to the royal ideology that got

Israel into trouble in the first place. But he is “foreign” in the sense that he is a different kind of king: A good-shepherd kind of king, who pays the price himself for his people’s sins. And since he is also truly God in human skin, this price is good for us. As hosts of angelic messengers will say, the coming of the Lord is revealed in a baby lying in manger, but also in the bloody body of a man dying on the cross, and in an empty tomb. In him, the penalty is paid.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *The Right (that is, Straight) Way*

God breathes on his people his gospel word, the message of this saving king; and they receive double for all their sins. What they get is not only a word that makes them whole and they are miserable no longer, back to base one. But rather this word also sends them out as joyful gospel messengers, too. As God says later to his people towards the end of Isaiah’s exalted poem, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant...to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). Through Jesus, God is not out only to end our misery and bring us home. That is “too easy.” Rather, God is intent on sending us on in a global mission, so that the light of God’s salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. This is very different from power politics. It is the “power” of the gospel of the cross, which is the dynamite of God. This is the right (that is, straight) way.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Comforted by the Promise (of Homecoming)*

We are not home yet. And we won’t be until that final “advent” when Christ comes again. But no longer are we completely miserable. Rather we are comforted by the promise of our homecoming with him, knowing that this word from the Lord is the ultimate word and will stand forever. In the meantime, Jesus,

the good shepherd, “smoothes” the way of his advent with the oil of baptism and the good news of his forgiveness. And he “feeds” his flock with his own body and blood. He carries our burdens in his bosom and leads us on the path that we must follow. And so, the cry of the Christian is not “Boy, am I miserable,” but rather “Maranatha!” Come, Lord Jesus. Come.