



**“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins”** Isaiah 40:1-2. The Book of Isaiah is sometimes referred to as the Old Testament Gospel because of God's comfort offered on its pages. The prophet Isaiah

lived during a time when people were deaf and blind and refused to listen to the warnings of God through this prophet. Isaiah, is the son of Amoz, and is quoted by New Testament authors more than any other Old Testament prophet. The name Isaiah means “the Lord saves.” Isaiah spoke extensively about the promised Messiah and His work through His saving kingdom of grace.

At God's direction, Isaiah spoke God's Law against idolatry and the apathy of a people who did not appreciate God's mercy. At the same time, he also offered the comfort of the saving Gospel which places great importance on the Grace of God and His forgiveness. While speaking of God's judgment against sin of what the future of those who reject God would be, Isaiah also speaks pointing forward to the Messiah, that is, the Gospel message.

In chapter 7:14, Isaiah points directly to the Virgin birth of the Savior and His identity as Emmanuel in chapter 9. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Isaiah foretells the “ingathering of Gentiles.” “And all nations shall flow to it” (Isaiah 2:2b), which means the Gospel shall be offered to all people. He also speaks of the blind seeing, the deaf who will receive hearing, which is a foretaste of the miracles of Jesus in chapter 35. Isaiah 40 points to the work of John the Baptist who is the voice that cries: **“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”** This prophecy is fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist as we see in **St. Matthew 3:1-3.**

Chapter 40 begins with speaking tenderly to Jerusalem noting that **“her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned”** which points to the end of the Babylonian Captivity, release from their oppression. We learn as Christians that these words are correlated to forgiveness of sins for all God's people. God's mercy is revealed through the prophet Isaiah, showing that people receive an unmerited grace from God as these verses speak of a warfare ended, iniquity forgiven, and receiving from the Lord's hand **“double for all her sins.”**

This poses a question: if Israel could not merit God's favor nor pay for their sins, as we cannot pay for sin, nor earn God's favor through anything we do, how does God forgive sin? Isaiah is spoken of as the Old Testament Gospel which is made evident in the passages and chapters referred to earlier and especially Isaiah 53 which answers the question as to how God forgives sin.

Isaiah 53 is among the “Suffering Servant Songs” of Isaiah, in which the prophet clearly depicts how this is done. **“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”** Isaiah 53:6. All the sin of Judah and of all the world is laid on Christ through His vicarious suffering and death: the Suffering Servant of the Lord: the Christ (**St. John 3:16**). This is the **“double portion from the hand of the Lord”** which speaks of God's grace given in Christ, instead of the punishment sinners deserve. The Grace of God reveals He is the God of all mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. Grace originates from God and is offered by Him through the Christ. The double portion is the description of His mercy and grace given in such an abundance that it is beyond our greatest expectations. The “Old Testament Gospel” is evident throughout Isaiah as he is guided by God in warning by the Law but pointing also and especially to the precious Gospel of Christ Jesus, our Savior.

In the church year, on July 6, we commemorate and remember with thankfulness and praise the Prophet Isaiah. We commemorate Isaiah and the other saints gone before, not because they were people without sin but that they were sinners exactly like us, yet, blessed by God. We remember their lives and their work, given by grace and gifts given to use to God's Glory for the good of His people that they and we would know the way of salvation in Christ.

We should note: the Lutheran Reformers did not give up the “commemoration” (remembrance) of the saints; only the veneration (worship) of the saints, for they were humans flawed by sin, just as we have original sin also. To look at the saints is not to see perfect people in their lives on earth but God's work through them to strengthen our faith seeing them as examples of God's care and provision in Christ.

***“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”*** Hebrews 12:1.

To God be all the glory!  
In Christ, Pastor Ahrendt