

Westerham Hill Pastoral Letter No.7

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. (Isaiah 40v1)

For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. (Isaiah 49v13b)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Corinthians 1v3)

Over the Easter weekend, without any services to take, I had the time to listen to Handel's Messiah which starts off with the words in the KJV from Isaiah 40v1. The context of these wonderful words is that Isaiah is looking forward to the day when Judah would return from Babylon to their own land, having spent 70 years in captivity under the judgment of God. But now Isaiah is telling the people that their sin has been paid for, and that their God will look with favour on them again and restore their fortunes. The long night of sorrow and sadness was coming to an end, so turn aside from idols and worldly ways, and trust in the God of their fathers who is sovereign over all the nations.

At this time of crisis it is important not to give false hope and assurance, but of all people it is surely bible-believing Christians who possess, and in turn can show to others, the assurance and comfort that our Saviour gives: a hope that is for this world and the next, a hope that is based on the promises of God who cannot lie, a hope that rests on the finished work of Christ on the cross, and a hope that abounds because of his glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven's throne.

When thinking of Christian hope and comfort, I am often drawn to the Heidelberg Catechism written in 1563 by two young men in their twenties- Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. Often called the catechism of comfort, the first two questions and answers go like this:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact all things work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Q. What must we know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three things: First, how great my sin and misery are;

Second, How I am set free from all my sin and misery;

Third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

It is when we truly appreciate the wonder of our salvation in Christ, and our hearts are singing in praise and thanksgiving, that we will be full to overflowing with such joy and comfort.

We bless thee for thy peace, O God,

Deep as the unfathomable sea,

Which falls like sunshine on the road

Of those who trust in thee.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Amen.