



Grace and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our King and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is coming soon.

When you find the perfect gift, do you wait until the proper the day to give it?

Or are you the kind of person who can't wait, and has to give it right away.

As it turns out, God does both.

Right after the fall into sin, God immediately TOLD Adam and Eve about the Savior he would provide for them.

But then God WAITED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS before he actually sent that Savior into the human race!

In the first two verses of our sermon reading, God describes the gift of forgiveness that he is sending to the world.

Isaiah 40:1-2 (EHV)

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

²Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her.

Her warfare really is over.

Her guilt is fully paid for.

Yes, she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

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Double for all her sins.

There was a couple that was driving through a city in Montana, when they heard the "whoop" of a police siren, and saw the lights flashing in their rearview mirror.

"Oh no!" they thought. What did we do wrong?

When the officer got to the window, he told them he had pulled them over for a broken tail-light. Then he did all the normal stuff that a cop does, and returned to his squad-car.

But then things go strange. Out of the trunk of his squad-car he produced a 20-pound frozen turkey.

A frozen turkey? Yes. A generous donor had purchased a bunch of frozen turkeys and had asked the police department if they could give them out to anyone they pulled over around Thanksgiving.

What a surprise! On minute you think you're getting a ticket, and the next you're being handed a bird for the table!

[PAUSE]

Isaiah says that's what God's forgiveness is like.

We deserved nothing but punishment for our sins. **But the God of love gives us a DOUBLE REWARD instead.**

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And that DOUBLE part is significant.

Our debt isn't just PAID, it's paid DOUBLE. In other words, there's no chance of a mistake here. We're not going to get to the gates of heaven and find out, *"Oh, wait—shoot, sorry. There's still some debt here that never got paid. I guess you can't come in."*

No, we owed a trillion, and God paid TWO TRILLION.

[PAUSE]

At Christmas time many kinds of gifts are given. THIS is the kind God gives. Not "just enough", but a LANDSLIDE of grace.

[PAUSE]

But sinners could still miss out on this gift. So, God commissions a construction project to prepare the way for the Savior.

Isaiah 40:3-5 (EHV)

³A voice is calling out:

In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord.

In the wasteland make a level highway for our God.

⁴Every valley will be raised up,
and every mountain and hill will be made low.

The rugged ground will become level,
and the rough places will become a plain.

⁵Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all flesh together will see it.

Yes, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

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Jesus once said...

"Most assuredly ... he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (**John 6:47** EHV).

That' not a complicated message. Christ died FOR YOU. And by his suffering in your place, heaven has become your new home.

It doesn't matter if you've been the worlds lowest thief, or an arrogant, lying politician. But the weeping prostitute, and the self-righteous pharisee are covered by the price Jesus paid.

But without faith, the gift of forgiveness is abandoned. Left on the side of the road.

There were many in Jesus' day that had been told they were beyond help. Un-touchable. And these hurt and despairing souls needed to be lifted up by the love of God.

And when Jesus spent time with sinners, they WERE lifted up.

Think of the leper, who was probably told that his disease was his fault. That it was a curse from God because of some sin he had neglected to fix. Obviously, God would heal you if he was happy with you—was the opinion of many.

And then along came Jesus, and he doesn't say any of that TRASH. He just puts his hands on the man and says, "I am willing. BE CLEAN."

And a valley of despair was filled in.

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But there was another way to miss out on the gift.

If you didn't think you needed it.
Then you would see no need of it.
Naw, I'm good.

For the Pharisees God's religion wasn't about shining the light of the promised Savior into their hearts to chase away the infection.

No, for the Pharisees religion was about shining the light on themselves for all to see them.

The Pharisees needed to be toppled.
To be humbled.

And not for some spiteful, hateful reason.
No, they needed to be humbled so that they could be lifted up.

You remember Jesus' parable, don't you? The one about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector? One man was full of himself and expected God to reward him for how religious he was. The other man wouldn't even look up to the sky because he knew he was a lowly sinner. That man beat his chest in repentance, and prayed for God's mercy.

And Jesus said,

“¹⁴I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14 EHV).

**Some valleys need raising.
Some hills need leveling.**

[PAUSE]

And we have them both, don't we? In our hearts.

Low spots where we doubt God's grace.
Those places need to be lifted by the Gospel.

But we can have lofty spots too. Place where our opinions are elevated above God's Word. Those places need to be leveled by the Law.

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We read about one of those places in Catechism Class recently.

Jesus once told his disciples that they would all abandon him in the Garden of Gethsemane. But they wouldn't believe it. And Peter in particular, said that he loved Jesus more than any of the other disciples. That even if they all abandoned him, Peter would not. He would DIE with Jesus.

But that very night he SWORE that he didn't know Jesus to a crowd of strangers—THREE TIMES.

And after the cross, and after Jesus was raised from the dead, he found Peter on the beach of Tiberias and had a hard talk with him.

He asked him if he really loved him that much—THREE TIMES.

That was a humbling experience for Peter. But a needed one. His pride needed to be leveled.

If men like Peter needed leveling—men who had spent YEARS traveling with Jesus and hearing his words and seeing his miracles—you think we might need some leveling in our hearts too?

Yeah, I think so too.

[PAUSE]

God doesn't want us to miss out on eternity with him. That's why he lifts with the Gospel, and levels with the Law.

And with the final words of our text, God reminds us that we only have so much time IN THIS WORLD.

We read the final words of our sermon text...

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Isaiah 40:6-8 (EHV)

⁶A voice was saying, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry out?"
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside.

⁷Grass withers, flowers fade,
when the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Yes, the people are grass.

⁸Grass withers, flowers fade,
but the Word of our God endures forever.

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Years ago, I found a picture of an old woman online. She's covering half of her face with a photograph held up in her hand. But it's actually a photo of her own face when she was 20 years old.

It's a startling contrast. White hair and deep wrinkles on one side. Black hair and smooth white skin on the other.

And in the background it says...

“Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom” (**Psalm 90:12** NLT).

It wasn't long ago that the fields around here were full of sunflowers.

Now all the grasses are brown.
Winter dead.

And we are headed for the same future. No matter how much our culture tries to hide it with make-up and skin creams, Botox and fillers. We even try to hide it when we bury our dead. Take the body away quick! Dress it up with chemicals and make-up. Frame it up nice in a beautiful coffin. Add flowers.

Oh, but the flowers remind us.
All flesh is grass.
Grass withers, flowers fade...

...but the Word of our God endures forever.

In Revelation 21, John writes...

³And from the throne I heard a loud voice that said, “Look! God’s dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because THE FORMER THINGS have passed away” (**Revelation 21:3-4** EHV).

That is the gift.

It's maker was foretold in the Garden
Born in the manger
Nailed to the cross
missing from the tomb

And he is coming again soon.

[PAUSE]

There he goes again, telling us about the gift AHEAD of time!

I guess it's never too early for a gift.

Rejoice in the double forgiveness he's given you.
Fill in the holes, and smooth out the rough spots.
And remember that your time here is short.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.