

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.

Your God says to you, "Comfort, comfort My people." Your God says to you, "Your warfare is ended." That's comforting. Your God says to you, "Your iniquity is pardoned." That's comforting. Your God says to you, "You have received from the LORD's hand double for all your sins." That's not very comforting. In fact, that sounds downright scary and for oh-so-many reasons.

One reason it sound so scary is that you have oh-so-many sins. There are your sinful thoughts. Its what you think when your boss at work starts riding your back. Its what you think at the holiday table, when your know-it-all brother or sister-in-law starts telling everyone why they are the smartest people in the world.

And its not just your thoughts, but the words that fly from your mouth. Like when you walk in the house after a long day at work and your spouse tells you why you are a total failure as a husband or wife, or your child tells you why you are a complete loser as a parent, and its game on, and the words fly from your mouth, bitter, hurtful words you really don't mean, but can never be recalled. Or, in the break room, when the conversation turns to a co-worker, and the words that fly from your mouth do not defend, speak well of, or explain their actions in the kindest way.

And there are your sinful deeds. Its the holiday season. So, your fellow merry makers have a glass of wine and another and another, and

you -- you Child of God and heir of heaven -- match them glass for glass. Amid all that wine and cheer, someone begins making sexual innuendoes and you -- you who renounced the devil and all of his works and all of his ways in your confirmation vows -- laugh hysterically.

And then, there are there sins we are not even aware of. The sins we don't even know we do. We may may not know we do them, but they are known to God.

It is for all those sins of thoughts, words, and deeds, those known and unknown to us, that God says that from His hand you deserve double for all your sins.

That's frightening, not only because of all the sins we have, but also because of how God handles sin. Adam and Eve sin, they are thrown out of the Garden of Eden, and you and I are born sinful and unclean. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah cry out before God and so He showers down sulfur and fire to burn them to a crisp. For the sins of Israel, they are carried off into captivity by their conquerors. For the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, they are struck down, dead. And God says, You, for your sins, deserve double. That's downright scary, to think that you would be punished **double** for your sins.

Your God says to you, "Your warfare is ended and your iniquity is pardoned." This is not the warfare that's going on in Afghanistan. Rather, this is your warfare against God's commandments. The Lord your God says, "Do this, don't do this," and you resent it and hate it and don't want anything to do with what the Lord your God says; you want what you want. And the Commandments fight back, showing you how often you have failed; how much you have sinned.

And, there's your iniquity. Iniquity is the consequence of sin, both inside and on the outside. On the inside, we feel ashamed, the guilt is so great that even our bones hurt, and devil convinces you that God will never forgive you. On the outside, it's the consequences of sin that come like broken relationships and mistrust, even with those we love very much; and the consequences from God of damnation and hellfire for eternity.

But, God says that your warfare is ended and that your iniquity is pardoned. How then can the Lord your God say in the next breath that still, you're going to receive double for all your sins in the way of punishment? How can He say that when your warfare is ended and the iniquity of your sin pardoned? Is our God a God who says one thing and then does another? Or, is it that you and I missed something along the way? Given that the Bible says that God is the same yesterday and today and forever and that He does not change, it's most likely that we missed something along the way.

That something that missed is Jesus. Christmas: miss Jesus. We are caught up in .... Jesus is the reason for the season.

So when God says to you, when that you have received from the Lord's hands double for all your sins, He's not talking about punishment; He's talking about blessings. He's talking about the blessing of warfare ended and your iniquity pardoned. But the only way for that to happen is because you have received ??? for all your sins.

When Jesus was born as that little baby in Jerusalem, He came to be your double, your stand in, your substitute. He took on your flesh and bone, live in the world just as you do, everything about Him was the same as you except for one thing -- your sin. The Commandments said "Do this,

don't do this," to Him and never once did He sin against any of them. He kept all the Commandments perfectly, and He did it as your double, your substitute, so that when God looks at you, He doesn't see your warfare, your breaking of the 10 Commandments, He sees the perfection of Jesus and He credits it to you, so that your warfare is now ended.

And when it comes to your iniquity, the consequences of your sin, Jesus has you covered on that one as well. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, He was clothed with your sin, clothed with your iniquity. There, He took all the consequences of your iniquity, suffering the damnation and hell that you deserve. He died the death you deserve for all your sins. And after three days in the tomb, He rose to declare to you, "Comfort, comfort, you My people." Your warfare is ended. Your iniquity is pardoned. That's the double for all your sins that you receive -- ended warfare, pardoned iniquity, because Jesus paid double for your sins. What comfort there is in all that.

There is comfort even in this life. You and I both know that even though our warfare is ended and our iniquity is pardoned, we still have sinful thoughts, sinful words, and sinful deeds. We are all too aware of many of them and some we are not aware of at all. We still struggle with "do this and don't do that" of God's Commandments. And, the Commandments still fight back. Our sin is ever before us, and we cry, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

It is those times that Jesus says to you, "Comfort, comfort you My people." Even though you are a sinner, you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Even though you fail, even though you fight against my will, even though you have iniquities, even

though you have sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, you are baptized, your sins are washed away, you are mine.

Especially, when the struggle is fierce and the warfare long, Jesus says to you "Comfort, comfort. Take eat, take drink, this is My Bod, this is My Blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins."

Its those words of comfort that the Lord your God speaks tenderly to you, that allow you to believe and rejoice that you have received double the blessings from God inspite of your sinfulness all because Jesus is your double, your Savior who came to save you.