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February 7, 2021

***Waiting on God***  
***Isaiah 40:28-31***

<sup>28</sup> *Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.*

<sup>29</sup> *He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.*

<sup>30</sup> *Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;*

<sup>31</sup> *but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.*

Most of us have heard these words before....

the last verses can be found on many motivational posters and signs.

In fact, Isaiah 40 contains some of the ***most beautiful poetry in all the Bible***.

But not everyone knows the ***CONTEXT*** of these words,  
when they were written, and how the original audience heard it.  
Which makes it all the more special, all the more beautiful.

Isaiah 40 was written ***to Jews in exile***.

They had been forcibly removed from their kingdom of Judah  
and their Temple in Jerusalem,  
after Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in the year 586 B.C.

The ***Judaeans were captured and taken to Babylon***, (modern day Iraq).  
They were ***in exile until Cyrus the Great*** of Persia conquered Babylon  
in 538 B.C., and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland.  
Scholars believe there may have been several deportations of Jews,  
possibly even before Nebuchadnezzar,

and likely different waves of Jews who returned to Judah, those who rebuilt the temple, and some who stayed in Babylon. The prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel wrote to the exiles, giving them hope of God's provision and love and the promise of returning to their homeland.  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Babylonian-Captivity>

The prophet Isaiah wrote to ***Jews in Judah in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.***, and he prophesied about ***God's judgment*** of the people. The first 39 chapters are known as 'First Isaiah', because of this theme running throughout the prophecies.

But the book of Isaiah has 66 chapters, and today's verses come from writings in the spirit of Isaiah, using his name. It's known as '***Second Isaiah***', ***found in chapters 40-55.***

Second Isaiah is most known to us through famous verses like today's, and from the beauty of Handel's ***Messiah***. It is a ***BOOK OF HOPE to the exiles in Babylon***, from the time of their exile to the time they were able to return home. These chapters were written before, and during the time that Cyrus conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return.

In this book of hope, Isaiah chapter 40 is one of ***the most famous*** chapters, beginning with the words,  
*Comfort, O Comfort my People...*

Which is a word they needed to hear, so desperately.  
***The exiles in Babylon suffered.***

They suffered because they were ***separated*** from their Temple—in fact, they'd seen it destroyed by an enemy! That was the place where they experienced God's presence. They suffered because of the ***cultural pressures*** of living in a different land, with different languages, customs, and religions.

Their ***faith had to take a different form*** without the temple,  
And all of this adjusting came at a cost.

***Many people lost hope, and faith.***

They believed God had abandoned them.

The exile lasted between 40 and 70 years,  
so many of the people originally exiled passed away in Babylon,  
and their children grew up in a foreign land.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Babylonian-Captivity>

***Why does all this CONTEXT MATTER today?***

It matters because ***it could be us.***

***We ARE exiles.***

The life we knew before COVID is gone.

We are in a new life, a new reality.

When COVID hit, we thought it might be over in a matter of weeks,  
months at the latest....

and here we are a year later, and we still don't know when it will end!

***Vaccines are coming, but so are new mutations and variants*** of COVID,  
some more transmissible, some more deadly.

We are still wearing our masks, staying six feet apart, sanitizing everything,  
and praying this will end sometime in 2021!

***If that's not exile***, I don't know what is!

***We are in a time of isolation, and weariness.***

Of ***grief and sorrow***—as we watch friends and family get sick.

As we see loved ones die, and we cannot mourn as we wish.

It's a time of ***doubt and confusion***,

as we try to figure out what we know about this virus and what the future holds.

And there is a LOT—***that has shaken our faith.***

***Mental health for almost everyone*** is suffering.

People are depressed and anxious.

Worried and afraid.

Mental health professionals are busier than ever,

and everyone from local pastors and counselors,

to the CDC are recommending that people take care of themselves.

Like ***taking a break from the news***, and social media,  
and making more time to talk to friends and family.  
We're encouraged to ***take care of our bodies*** with  
exercise, good food, sleep, and support from those we love.  
***The stress of COVID can be overwhelming, for the*** body and the soul.

The exiles certainly knew about stress, and needed these words of hope,  
***So, can't these same words encourage us today?***

Listen again-- *Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

Isaiah reminds us that we can ***trust in God***—

because God is the ***Creator*** of the universe!

God made the sun, moon, and stars—so God can surely take care of us!

*He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.*

We may be weary and worn out.

But ***God never gets tired***. God never grows weary.

And we can and should ***lean on God's understanding***, not just our own.

*Isaiah says: He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.*

In other words, our God is so powerful, that ***God gives power to us***,

Especially when we need it the most!

*Isaiah says: Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;*

God knows that this time of 'exile'—

Is a time when ***even the young*** are worn out and worn down.

Boy, you're not kidding!

***But there is hope—hope for those who WAIT on God.***

<sup>31</sup> *but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.*

Wow.

So what does it mean for us to **WAIT--wait on God?**

That word can also mean 'trust',

so this is ***not just a passive time*** to do nothing.

It is ***active—like placing our hand*** in the hand of God,  
and holding on tight.

Waiting on God is a time of ***surrender***.

Letting God be in charge, not us.

Unfortunately, when it comes to ***waiting***, most of us are like  
the little girl who got her first savings account.

When she was old enough to understand what saving money was all about,

Her dad sat down with her and explained the value of money—

how you save, and when the piggybank was full,

you take the money out and deposit it in a bank so it can make interest.

She seemed to understand and couldn't wait to open a savings account in our  
local bank by herself.

At the bank, she handed over her savings,

and he gave her a receipt and thanked her for her business.

But she wouldn't leave.

She just stood there like she was waiting on something else.

"Is there anything else that I can help you with?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "I want my ***interest***."

***Waiting on God sure isn't easy.***

But it's part of our faith.

And waiting on God is more than just learning to deal with whatever life brings.  
It is drawing closer to God—by **seeking and trusting**  
By **letting go and letting God** work,  
instead of trying so hard to make something happen on our own.

How many times have you found yourself needing to wait on God,  
But trying really hard to make it work out, **all by yourself?**

Or, how many times have you been waiting on God,  
And thinking it was just **wasted time?**

In the devotional, *Streams in the Desert*,  
John Ruskin talks about waiting on God, just as you do during a **musical rest**.  
*He writes, "there is no music during a musical rest, but the rest is part of making  
the music. In the melody of our life, the music is separated here and there by rests.  
During those rests, we believe we have come to the end of the song.  
God sends us rests,...God does not write the music of our lives without a plan.*

*Our part is to learn the tune and not be discouraged during the rests.  
They are not be slurred over or omitted, nor used to destroy the melody or to  
change the key. If we will only look up, God will count the time for us. With our  
eyes on Him, our next note will be full and clear...the rest is part of making the  
music."* January 22<sup>nd</sup>, *Streams in the Desert*, L.B.Cowman.

If we will only look up.  
**Can we look up, my friends?**  
Can we believe that waiting is **just as important**  
as our busy-ness?

After all, isn't waiting on God **preparation** for what comes next in life?  
like Moses' time as a shepherd,  
and Abraham and Sarah getting ready for a child,  
or the Israelites wandering in the wilderness on their way to the promised land.

**There's a lot of power in that preparation, isn't there?**  
It was in the wilderness time that the Israelites learned to **trust God**.  
It was there they **became God's people**.

Truth is---when we wait on God, **WE BECOME** God's people!

Ever heard of how the **Chinese bamboo tree grows?**

They plant the seed; they water and fertilize it, but the **first** year nothing happens.

The **second** year they water and fertilize it, and nothing happens.

The **third and fourth** year they water and fertilize it, and nothing happens.

Then the **fifth** year they water and fertilize it, and in a period of approximately six weeks, the Chinese bamboo trees grow roughly ninety feet.

...if they gave up and planted something else in the first 5 years,

there would have been no Chinese bamboo tree! *From a sermon by Rev. Thomas Brown*

The hardest part is that **God's timing** is not our own.

So we have to **trust**.

To **surrender**.

But when we **wait**—and **trust**—and **surrender**

Even in the middle of COVID-19,

Even in the midst of all our grief, and sorrow,

all our anxiety and fear...

listen to this:

**those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,**

**they shall mount up with wings like eagles,**

**they shall run and not be weary,**

**they shall walk and not faint.**

We will not just be ok—we will receive **God's strength,**

The strength to **fly like an eagle,**

The strength **to run and not be weary,**

**To walk and not faint!**

The exiles hearing this would **see new possibilities**.

They would **think differently** about their uncertain future,

And even returning to their devastated **homeland**, to rebuild and restore.

The weary exiles would hear that God would be their strength.

God would be their power!

***So, what about us?***

Can we hear the hope and possibility?

Can we trust in ***God's power and strength*** for our future?

***We don't know what life will look like after COVID—***

some things will have changed forever.

Even if we could 'go back home' to life before the pandemic,

We have no idea what that looks like now!

But that's ok.

This is a time to ***wait***.

And ***trust***.

And ***surrender***.

Knowing that ***we will receive new power and renewed strength!***

That is our ***Good News of the Gospel*** today!

And for this promise, all God's people say, Amen!