

INTRODUCTION:

I recently read the results of a study that was commissioned by the US Senate in 1965.

- In that study, they certainly predicted an incredibly bright future for our nation.
- The study concluded that due to the advent of the computer, by 1985 Americans would work 22 hours per week and retire at the age of 38.
- I think that all of us here this evening have figured out that that did not happen!
- In fact, subsequent surveys have found that leisure time in our country has actually declined by 37% since 1965.
- Not only that, but the work week has actually increased from 41 to 47 hours per week.

We look around us, then, and we see that the tremendous power of the computer has not solved all of our problems.

- Certainly computers have been helpful in many ways, however we can still look at problems today and we can wonder, **“Why hasn’t technology been able to solve this situation?”**

Last week we began taking a look at **Isaiah 40** and I would like us to conclude our three part study this evening.

- Isaiah was a faithful man of God who spoke to the nation of Israel during a very difficult time.
- It almost looks like he was writing to an audience more than 100 years in the future, to those who were prisoners of war in Babylon—more than 600 miles across the desert.
- They had endured God’s punishment, and Isaiah was telling them to hang in there.
- He was telling them not to give up, but to come back to God, repenting of their sins, and maintaining their faith in God’s power.

In the first eleven verses, we looked at God’s comfort and in the second portion of the chapter we looked at God’s power.

- God has measured all of the waters of the earth in the palm of His hand.
- When compared to God’s power, all of the nations of the earth combined are like the dust on a pair of scales.
- Not only that, but when it comes to all of the stars in the Universe, Isaiah says that God has pitched them like a tent in the heavens.
- The Lord leads those stars through the sky and calls them all by name.

And so just as we sometimes look to technology and ask, **“Why can’t a computer fix this problem,”** the people of Israel had that same question for God.

- That is, **“If God is so incredibly powerful, then why are we suffering as prisoners of war here in Babylon? If God has all of this power, then why doesn’t He use it! If God is so powerful, then why has He not noticed me in my situation?”**

As we close **Isaiah 40**, we find that Isaiah gives the answer to that basic question. **Isaiah 40:27-31.**

- 27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God”?*
- 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.*
- 29 He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power.*

- 30 Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly,
31 Yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.*

As we look back over these five verses, we find that God has a message, and we find that this message applies not only to the Jewish people in Babylon, but it also applies to those of us as Christians living in a harsh world nearly 2700 years after the message was first written.

- I. First of all, we find a very clear statement that **GOD UNDERSTANDS**. In all of His tremendous power, God not only sees, but **HE ALSO CARES VERY DEEPLY ABOUT OUR SITUATION**.

We notice in **verse 27** that Isaiah poses a question from the people.

- The people were apparently upset... thinking that God did not care about their particular situation.
- Perhaps they were starting to see the big picture...with God being big and powerful and all that...but when it came down to actually believing in God's power on a personal level, they had a hard time with that.
- Someone once said that, **“People tend to make rules for others...and exceptions for themselves.”**
- That is so true, isn't it? And yet I think that we can say the same thing when it comes to the power of God.
- We know He's big, we know He's powerful, we know He calls the stars by name, we know He runs the Universe...but does He really care about ME?
- Can God really have an effect on my life? Does God really know how I feel?

But Isaiah gives the answer—**“Do you not know? Have you not heard?”**

- In other words, there is almost a little bit of shock here.
- Isaiah is surprised, he is amazed, that after everything that God has done, the people still do not understand that God cares for them on a personal level.

He refers to God as the **“Everlasting God, the LORD (that is, YAHWEH/JEHOVAH), the Creator of the ends of the earth...,”** and the fact that He, **“...does not become weary or tired.”**

- In fact, when it comes to our personal care, Isaiah says that **“His understanding is inscrutable.”**
- I will admit that when I read this verse, I don't think I had ever before heard the word **“inscrutable”** actually used.
- I looked it up on the computer, and I found that it is used only one time in the entire Bible—right here in **Isaiah 40:28**.
- It is pretty easy to figure out just from the context, but the word refers to the fact that God's understanding cannot be fathomed—it cannot be measured—it cannot be properly examined—because God's understanding is far deeper than our ability to understand it.

The basic point is that God is not like an earthly judge or jury in that He sometimes misses a few details in a case.

- He never gets the facts messed up. He is never distracted.
- But His understanding of our situation is **“inscrutable.”**
- And so, when God tells us not to commit adultery, when He tells us to live by the Golden Rule, when He tells us to love our neighbors, He truly knows what is best and understands what we are going through.

Even though He leads the stars through the Universe, He also knows the number of every hair on my head!

- As Paul said in **Romans 11:33**, *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”*
- And so, if we are ever tempted to think that God does not know, if we are ever tempted to think that God does not care, we need to go back and think very carefully about the *inscrutable* understanding of God.
- Even though God is strong, and powerful, and mighty...He is also very close.
- As Paul said in Athens in **Acts 17**, God *“...is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist....”*

If you want to call me, there are times when you will not be able to get through.

- I may be out of the office. I may be on another line. I may be out of town. But God is always there!

If Isaiah were here with us this evening, he would tell us that God is big. He is awesome.

- In many ways, God’s power is almost too strong to even understand.
- But Isaiah would tell us to remember that God’s love is very personal as well.

II. There is another very brief truth that Isaiah presents here, and it comes through the reminder that WE AS HUMANS ARE INCREDIBLY FEEBLE AND FRAIL.

All of us know that there will never be a day when we turn on the news and there is no bad news.

- There will never be a day when we live under a perfect government.
- There will never be a day when we elect a perfect president.
- There will never be a time when we are part of a church full of perfect people.
- All of us will make mistakes, and all of us will stumble and fall from time to time.

And so in **verse 29**, Isaiah refers to those who are *“weary”* and those who *“lack might.”*

- In **verse 30**, he refers to youths who *“grow weary and tired.”*
- He refers to young men who *“stumble badly.”*
- In other words, Isaiah is giving some common examples that all of us can understand.
- All of us here this evening know what it means to be weary and tired.
- All of us here this evening know what it means to lack might and stumble badly.

I should point out, though, that Israel’s situation (Israel’s stumbling) was not the result of God’s weakness!

- Israel stumbled and fell (they were experiencing God’s punishment) because they decided to ignore the word of God.
- And yet the point for all of us here this evening is still the same.
- First of all, God understands, and secondly, we as human beings are incredibly feeble and frail.

III. There is a third aspect of this paragraph that applies to us today, as Isaiah tells us (in **verse 31) to WAIT FOR THE LORD.**

I recently learned that there are 19 different words that are sometimes translated from Hebrew into English as *“wait.”*

- But this particular word in **verse 31** means, **“to hope strongly, to trust, to wait for—implying a firmness and constancy.”**
- Probably the best definition is, **“to expect.”**
- It carries the idea of expectancy—putting my hope and trust in God, fully expecting that God will respond to my situation.

I think most of us have probably ordered something through the mail.

- These days it is normally done on-line.
- But we will place an online order, and then we will wait.
- We usually do not wait in desperation, but we wait—knowing *with confidence* that the order is on its way and that it will arrive sometime very soon.
- We are not waiting with an empty hope, but we are waiting—knowing from our past experience that the package will arrive.
- And yet at the same time, when I order something online, I am not disappointed when it does not arrive the same day, because I am waiting with confidence—knowing that the package will arrive at the appropriate time.

And I believe in the same way, we should be waiting for God with that same confidence.

- We are not upset when something does not happen right away, because God is powerful and God is good, and we strongly hope that He will help us in an appropriate way.
- This hope is not something that we simply “**wish for**,” but it is the *calm confidence* that God will ultimately handle things in an appropriate way.

But sometimes it is so hard to wait.

- There is an African proverb that says, “**Lord Jesus, make my heart sit down.**”
- I think most of us can appreciate that prayer.
- Sometimes our hearts are pacing the floor.
- Sometimes our hearts are jumping up and down.
- Sometimes our hearts are a little too excited, or maybe nervous.
- But we need to ask God to allow our hearts to “**sit down.**”

As David said in **Psalm 62:1-2**, “*My soul waits in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.*”

- As we wait for the Lord, we need to remember that our sense of time is not always the same as the Lord’s.
- We normally want an answer right away, but God is truly patient. God doesn’t get tired like we do.
- He doesn’t give up like we do.
- But God moves toward His plans through decades, and centuries, and even through millennia.

Even in Bible times, though, we find some examples of people who got into a lot of trouble by being impatient with the Lord.

- We think of Abraham who had a hard time *waiting* for the promise of God.
- And we know the trouble that came when Abraham decided to speed up God’s plan by having a child through Hagar.
- We know what happened with Moses when Moses tried to speed up God’s justice by killing an Egyptian and hiding his body in the sand.
- Moses ended up thinking about that decision as he tended sheep for 40 years in the wilderness.
- And even today, the quick fixes for our pain in this life can also cause some serious trouble—when we put our trust in money, or pleasure, or drugs, or alcohol, or immorality—ultimately, these things do not help, but they cause more trouble instead.

And so, even today, we are still waiting.

- As Paul said in **Titus 2:13**, we are “*...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.*”

IV. As we close our thoughts on **Isaiah 40**, we come to a statement that is the favorite of many, as we find that **GOD PROVIDES STRENGTH WHEN WE WAIT**.

In **verse 31**, Isaiah says that ***“...those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength.”***

- When he speaks of gaining new strength, he is literally saying that our strength is **“exchanged.”**
- We bring our weakness to the Lord, and we trade it in for the Lord’s strength.
- We trade in our weakness and gain strength just like we would put on fresh clothes or trade in something old for something new.

I can’t help but thinking of **Matthew 11:28-30**, where Jesus said, ***“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”***

- In other words, Jesus has offered to let us share a yoke, but although we are taking on a new yoke, it is well-designed, and it allows the Lord to share our trouble.
- And so in that way, we as Christians have also **“exchanged”** our weakness for the Lord’s power—we have gained ***“new strength.”***

Isaiah goes on and gives several examples (or pictures) of what this exchange of power is like—***“They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”***

- And I will admit that it seems that Isaiah is going a little bit backwards here.
- He starts with flying, then goes to running, and ends up walking.
- We might think that it should be the other way around—first we walk, then we run, and eventually we fly.

I don’t have any idea why Isaiah was inspired to put these actions in this order, however when we think about it we recognize that all three of these things are impossible anyway.

- The order does not really matter, because no matter how hard I may try, I will never be able to fly.
- I will never be able to run without getting tired.
- And I will never be able to walk without becoming weary.
- Here on this earth, in a purely physical sense, all three things cannot be done.

As we carry this over into the spiritual realm, we realize that we face many other situations that seem impossible from a human point of view—truly loving our neighbor, having patience with our children, submitting to a spouse, forgiving an enemy—there are many things we are supposed to do as Christians that are so hard that they almost seem impossible.

- But we realize that we have exchanged our weakness for God’s power.

I was thinking about what it’s like to be away from the office and working on a laptop.

- Once that plug comes out of the wall, and once you switch over to battery power, the clock is ticking.
- But when we come to God, our weakness has been exchanged for His power—we are plugged in to the source, and His power never ends.

Isaiah starts by saying that we will ***“mount up with wings like eagles.”***

- This is a verse that we see on all kinds of motivational posters and plaques at religious bookstores.
- Eagles themselves have always been seen as symbols of power.
- The standard of the Roman legions was topped with an eagle.
- The eagle has been used as a symbol in many of the great kingdoms of the world.
- Our own national seal bears an eagle. The US quarter has an eagle on the back of it.

- But again, the eagle is not necessarily the most important part of this verse, because IS moves right along to running and then to walking.

In some ways, couldn't we say that it's harder to walk than it is to fly?

- Most of life consists of walking—the everyday routines of life, and so there are several times in the New Testament where the Christian life is pictured as a walk.
- Isaiah, then, is saying that God provides strength for our daily lives, as he exchanges our weakness for his power.

SUMMARY:

As we look back over the last few verses of **Isaiah 40**, we find...

- First of all, that the Lord understands.
- He knows that we are weak and frail.
- But if we wait for the Lord...
- ...God will exchange our weakness for His strength—allowing us to fly, and run, and walk.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

I am so thankful that we have had opportunity to look at these three lessons from **Isaiah 40**.

- During those 70 years of Babylonian captivity, we have seen the Lord's promise of comfort to those who would repent.
- We have been reminded of God's incredible power, and now this evening we have learned that even though God is so powerful, even though He calls the stars by name, He still cares about all of us on a very personal level.
- Whatever problems we may face, we have been encouraged to keep our eyes focused on our Father in Heaven.

The Bible teaches that God loved us so much that He sent His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

- We accept that sacrifice by changing our lives—no matter how difficult that may be—and then we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.
- If you are ready to obey the gospel, you can let us know about your decision as we sing the next song.
- Let's stand and sing...