

## Strength for the Weary

*Isaiah: Strength for the Weary*

By Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 40:27-31  
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**First Presbyterian Church**  
1324 Marion St  
Columbia, SC 29201

**Website:** [www.firstprescolumbia.org](http://www.firstprescolumbia.org)  
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*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Scriptures for they bring us such hope and comfort in time of need and we pray now for that ministry of your Spirit to bring the written word to life and energy in our hearts and souls for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Now, turn with me, if you would, to the prophecy of Isaiah 40. We begin a series, a short series that will last through the end of November, 8 or 9, I think, messages on some of the great texts in what we sometimes call the second half of Isaiah, what the Rabbis called the Book of Consolation. And our text this morning is in chapter 40 and in verse 27,

27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? 28 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. 29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they 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.

Playing hide-n-seek is a fun game, especially if you're playing it with children or your grandchildren but something sinister occurs when the game of hide-n-seek is between you and God and God is hiding himself from you, or so you think. Consider three Psalms. Psalm 10, "Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" Psalm 44, "Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?" Psalm 89, "How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?" And these exiles here in the 40<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah are saying the same thing, "How long will you hide yourself from me?"

Perhaps these exiles are beginning to think that God doesn't love them, his covenant people to whom he has made promises. John Knox wrote a catechism in the time of the Reformation in Scotland, the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Knox asked a question as to what it might

be that Satan was insinuating when he asked Eve about the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the answer was: that God didn't love them. He sowed a seed in the minds of Adam and Eve, a seed that bore fruit, that God didn't love them. If he prohibited this tree, this fruit, it could only mean one thing: that God didn't love them.

These exiles have perhaps been in exile here as Isaiah imagines them in the future for him, they have perhaps been in exile now for a couple of decades and life seems to have taken on a different hue for them. They have been taken from their homes and some of them from their families and loved ones and their past, they are in a different culture, they're a thousand miles away from where they were, speaking a different language, and there is no hope and all seems to be dark. It's not so much the good life now as the good life, if there was one, was in the past and it's not coming back and, "We're stuck here in this dark place and God seems to be hiding his face from me and he doesn't seem to be listening to my just cause." "My right," verse 27, "is disregarded by my God," and the tense of the verb suggests an ongoing disregarding on the part of God. It's as though they have been bringing their sense of justice before him again and again and God seems to be disregarding them and ignoring them.

As the prophet will later say in chapter 50, "they walk in darkness and have no light." Is that you, my friend? Is that you this morning because life has turned sour? Your dreams have not been fulfilled? This is not how you thought it would be? Things have now come into play that you can't control, you can't undo, and it seems as though God is hiding his face from you and you bring your pleas and your petitions and you ask him over and over, but he seems to be disregarding you? However did this come about? How did it come about for these people here in this text?

So we need to go back a little. We need to go back to the time of the prophet himself, Isaiah, and Isaiah ministered in the 740s BC through to the 680s BC, a period of just over 50 years, half a century spanning the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was the rise of, well in one word, Assyria. That's the issue. That's the problem that dominated the ministry of Isaiah. Assyria, the war machine that it was, that took over the world as it then was and conquered and pillaged and raped and took into captivity and killed and destroyed and made slaves. The rise of a man by the name of Tiglath-Pileser III, Pulu as he was sometimes known, in 745 BC and by 722 his successor, Shalmaneser, had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital in Samaria and Israel was gone forever, never to return, its cities forever destroyed. And then Assyria went south to where Isaiah was. Isaiah was in Jerusalem and his concern was the southern kingdom of Judah and the focus of the Assyrians turned southwards and threatened Jerusalem.

Isaiah warned about it. Just if you have your Bible, turn to chapter 8. We'll only do this once this morning. Chapter 8 and there at verse 7, picking it up in the middle of the sentence, verse 7, "behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many." Oh, those of you who are passed through this flood, you shiver at that metaphor, don't you? Likening Assyria to a floodwater, "the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and

go over all its banks, and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." That's the prophecy that Isaiah was giving about Assyria coming down south to Judah and Jerusalem.

But there was a divine intervention in the time of Hezekiah and the Assyrians were sent packing. Tens of thousands of them were killed by an angel of the Lord and they were sent packing. It was a miracle. God delivered Jerusalem and when that news came to Hezekiah and all that story is told in chapters 36 and 37 and 38 and so on, Isaiah picks up the whole story of the ministry of Hezekiah and the invasion of the Assyrians and the deliverance of Jerusalem, and Hezekiah was so thrilled by this deliverance that he entertained the King of Babylon in Jerusalem and showed the King of Babylon all of Jerusalem's treasures and defense systems, even though in chapter 39, and this is the context, "the days are coming," Isaiah said, "when all that is in your house," talking about Hezekiah, "all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon." This is a 100+ years in the future. "Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Do you hear what he's saying? This is a mixed audience so I can't go into detail here but do you understand what he's saying? That the line of Judean kings will end will Babylon because the sons will be taken off to Babylon and they will become eunuchs and there will be no more children. You want to talk about darkness? You want to talk about a prophecy of darkness? There it is. And when Hezekiah heard it, he said, "Well, at least there will be peace and security in my days." He has lost the faith. He has turned in upon himself, a religion of works and a religion of selfishness and me-ism has replaced the true faith in Jerusalem and Isaiah is warning here of a doom that is coming called Babylon.

And there is no gap. In the original text, you know, there's a wonderful thing that you could see, the Dead Sea scrolls, and you remember the boy, the bedouin throws a rock and it falls down into a hole and into a cave and he hears the sound of broken pottery and he goes down by a rope and discovers these scrolls that had been there for 2,000 years and more, the Dead Sea scrolls, and among those scrolls is an almost complete copy of the prophecy of Isaiah. And you can see that, and when you look at it and you see, you look at chapter 39 and then you look at chapter 40 and there is no break. So you go from this prophecy of doom and darkness and then all of a sudden, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and say unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." You remember that from Handel's Messiah.

And what need of comfort there was in the face of such a prophecy of doom. Whatever would become of Isaiah's prophecies about a future king? You remember back in chapter 9, a passage that we think about at Christmas-time, you remember when the prophet is speaking in chapter 9 and he talks about the coming "child who is to be born and the government shall be upon his shoulders and his name will be Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." Well, how is that going to happen if the sons

of Hezekiah in the future are going to be made eunuchs and there are going to be no more kings? And all of Isaiah's words seemed to be so much hot air and empty promises. So little wonder as Isaiah peers down the corridors of time 100-120 years into his future and he sees these people, God's people, in exile in Babylon and they are singing this song, they're singing the blues, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded of my God."

Has God forgotten me when my spouse walks out of the marriage for someone else, a younger model? Has God forgotten me when my children rebel? Has God forgotten me when cancer strikes and all of its debilitating, humiliating weakness and seeming unending course? Has God forgotten me when my home is under water, brown, filthy water that soils everything I own and possess? Has God forgotten me when my dreams and hopes and aspirations for the future are crushed by a visit to the office and I'm told I'm being laid off? Has God forgotten me when I turn in upon myself and religion just becomes an empty form and shell and I go through the motions of it day after day or week after week but the life and energy and vitality have long since gone and I say to myself quietly in the secret hours of the night, "Have you forgotten me, Lord, because I bring you my pleas and you seem to be disregarding me over and over and over?"

And you notice what the prophet does in verse 28, "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" He's challenging this unbelief, that's what this sermon is about this morning, challenging the cancer that is unbelief. Martin Luther, you don't want to meet Martin Luther on a Monday morning. Martin Luther on a Monday morning in 1530 wrote to his friend, Philip Melancthon, chiding him because of his doubts. "I too am sometimes downcast but not all the time. It is your philosophy that is tormenting you, not your theology. What good do you expect to accomplish by these vain worries of yours? What can the devil do more than slay us? Yes, what, I beg you? You who are so pugnacious in everything else, fight against yourself, your own worst enemy, until you furnish Satan with too many weapons against yourself. Christ died for our sins, he will not die again for truth and justice but will live and reign. If this be true and if he reigns, why should you be afraid for the truth? Perhaps you're afraid that it will be destroyed by God's wrath. Even if we ourselves should be destroyed, let it not be by our own hands. He who is our Father will also be the Father of our children." Chiding unbelief.

You notice the prophet here speaks of giving power to the faint, verse 29, of increasing strength, "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they 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." Fainting souls soaring like eagles. Can you imagine it? High above the clouds, catching the updraft of air, the current, and soaring above the trials and the difficulties and the problems below and you're up there where there's peace and quiet and a perfect view and the sun is always shining above those clouds.

How does that come about? Well, look at what he says in verse 28, and in many ways it's a summary of what he's been saying throughout the whole chapter. "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." He challenges unbelief by saying to these exiles in the future who are singing the blues, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Look to God. Remind yourself of who he is, his character, his nature, his being."

Look at verse 26, "Lift up your eyes on high and see." That's what you need to do. Lift up your eyes. You remember in the second half of "Pilgrim's Progress", the man and he's looking down and he's got a muckrake and he's looking down at the muck but above him there's a crown and he doesn't see it. You need to look up and behold something of the majesty and glory and greatness of God.

Four things. Wait on the Lord, wait with, "Well, wait a minute." There's all kinds of waiting. There's the waiting for your spouse and you're in the car and then you start the engine and then you lose your mind and you rev the engine just a little, a little hint. You'll hear about it when they arrive. There is the waiting of a dog by the front door and the master is gone and there is no sound nor sight of the master, and the body language is saying, "He's gone." And he's waiting but, "He's gone." And the waiting here is a different kind of waiting, it's a waiting with hope. Like a lover looking into the eyes of their loved one and waiting for the next word or gesture, as though they would almost put the words and the gesture into their faces and into their mouths, waiting with hope and waiting with anticipation. Indeed, this word in the ESV is sometimes translated "expectation," and sometimes translated "hope." Waiting on the Lord. What kind of Lord is he?

Four things. First of all, he is everlasting. He is everlasting. He is outside of space and time. He has existence within himself. You know the problem, look at verse 19, the problem with idols. He talks about idols in verse 19, "A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains," and so on. The problem is it's man-made, however good it is. Even if it's made by a craftsman, it's man-made. It has origin. It has beginning. God is everlasting. He's above the vicissitudes of space and time, things that change. You know, things change. Our lives change. Time marches on and things have changed and we can barely remember now the past and we have conversations with people and we ask, "Now, do you remember, what order did it happen in? Who said what?" Because the memory is beginning to fade of things that happened in the past. But God is outside of all of that.

Then, secondly, he is omnipresent. You notice the expression, "Creator of the ends of the earth." The ends of the earth. From one end of the universe to the other, he made it all and he is there in all of it. He occupies the entirety of the universe. There are no dropped calls, no dead zone. "Can you hear me now?" Because he's everywhere.

And he's, thirdly, omnipotent. He's the Creator and he doesn't grow weary or faint. I planted some winter pansies yesterday. It was pitiful, took all afternoon. A beautiful day. Had to take a little tablet sometime in the evening, my back was hurting me. I grew faint and weary. God never faints. He never grows weary. He is the Creator. He spoke the

universe into being, "Let there be light," and there was light. "Let there be," and there was so that he can say in verse 17, "All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness." All the pretenders from Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Greece and Rome, all of these pretenders, there is nothing before God. He is the Creator.

And he's all-wise. "His understanding is unsearchable."

Do you see what the prophet is doing? He's challenging unbelief but what is he doing? He is telling you to think about the character and the attributes of God: that he is everlasting; that he is omnipresent; that he is omnipotent; and that he is omniscient. J. B. Phillips wrote a book once, it was called, "Your God is Too Small." That's our problem. When unbelief threatens, when darkness descends, when these gloomy pronouncements that God has forgotten you, God has forgotten his covenant people, God never forgets.

You see, there are two kinds of worlds in which we can live in. C. S. Lewis in "The Last Battle" describes this two world phenomena. In one world there is Tirian and Peter and Lucy and Jill and they are friends of Aslan and there is summer and blue skies, and in another world there is a company of Dwarves and all they see is a dark and dirty stable. Instantly a glorious feast appeared on the Dwarves' knees: pies and pigeons and trifles and ices and each Dwarf had a goblet of good wine in his right hand, But it wasn't much use, they began eating and drinking greedily enough but it was clear that they couldn't taste it properly. They thought they were eating and drinking only the sort of things you might find in a stable. One said he was trying to eat hay, and another said he had a bit of an old turnip, and the third said he had found a raw cabbage leaf. And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said, "Oh, fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey's been at. Never thought we'd come to this." They couldn't see it, you see. They couldn't see it.

Is that you, my friend? Is that you this morning? You have turned in upon yourself. You are beginning to doubt the promises of God. You're saying, "This is all I can expect now and there is nothing better for me." And Isaiah the prophet from 2 ½ thousand years ago and more is saying to you across those ages, "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." And when you see that and believe that and trust that, you will soar like the eagle. May God so grant it.

*Father, we thank you. We thank you for your word. Thank you for its comfort. Thank you for its challenge. Thank you for the medicine that it is. So this morning we cast ourselves upon this word, this word of promise. We cast ourselves upon you, Lord our God, the only God there is, and we find our total satisfaction in you. We thank you for your Son. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the Gospel. Thank you for all the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. We look full into his wonderful face so that the things of this world might grow dim in the light of his glory and grace. Banish this darkness from us, O Lord, we pray, and may the light of the Gospel and the covenant promises of God be our vision today. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*