

Renewing Our Spiritual Strength in The Lord

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[0 : 00] The prophecy of Isaiah, and we're going to read in chapter 40, that's on page 639, we'll read at verse 27, page 639.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God?

Have you not known, have you not heard, the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary?

His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might, he increases strength. Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

[1 : 19] They shall walk and not faint. We're looking at this passage in Isaiah 40, and we're thinking about renewing our spiritual strength in the Lord.

Renewing our spiritual strength in the Lord. Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. Now, if you think for a moment about it, in terms, first of all, of our physical bodies and our need of adequate supplies of the right kind of food.

If we're going to function well, then it makes sense that we keep up our strength, that we use the right food.

We don't overindulge, and we don't cut ourselves off. We don't eat inadequately. And it's important that we eat the right food.

And, of course, nowadays there's plenty of information on that. We're bombarded with it, both in the media, in the papers, and also in the television.

[2 : 35] And some people, of course, do neglect their health by neglecting to eat properly. And that affects us in so many ways.

It affects us if we work hard. It causes us to be weary all the quicker. It makes us anxious, maybe sleepless.

And all this militates against our spiritual health. It affects us in a spiritual way. If we're weak and weary, if we're overworked, if we're anxious, if we're sleepless, we can easily be affected in a spiritual way.

We become weak, not only in body, but in soul. And this passage has to do, of course, with a weakening of the Lord's people in a spiritual way.

And they were encouraged to see the answer to their weakened state as found in the Lord. He gives, verse 29, he gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might, he increases strength.

[3 : 47] And, of course, he's talking here about spiritual strength, about that ability to rise up and to go on in the life of faith. And here we are today, who would profess to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we need to know how to watch and to look after, to guard our hearts and minds. We need to do the right things and avoid the wrong things.

As Paul, the apostle said, in speaking about this subject, Make no provision for your sinful desires to fulfill them.

And, you see, in a weakened condition, we are vulnerable. We are vulnerable spiritually. We are vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy.

That is to say, of the arch enemy of our souls, that old serpent, the devil. He can use our weakness against us.

[4 : 52] He can seize his opportunity to catch us out and to bring us down. And the context that we find our text in is all about the Lord's people struggling with the conditions that prevailed in Isaiah's day.

The problems, both of the Assyrians and later on of the Babylonians, were problems that wearied the Lord's people. They were in difficulties.

They were discouraged. And, you see, the answer to their plight is given here. They were struggling with the difficulty of how can the Lord be with us when all this is happening to us.

It's all against us. Verse 27. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my just cause is passed over by my God?

This is their problem. This is where they had arrived in their experience. They were weakened. They were in a weakened and vulnerable condition.

[6 : 06] They lacked a sense of the Lord's presence and blessing. And so they became weak and weary in the faith. They lacked confidence in his power.

You see the way the Lord speaks here in answer to their questions. Have you not known? Verse 28. Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, he neither faints nor is weary.

He it is, verse 29, who gives power to the weak. And to those who have no strength, no might, he increases strength.

So you can see in a few verses the problem and the solution to the problem. And in our own situation, both nationally and locally, this is a useful time of year and a useful passage to help us to refocus on the Lord.

To look at our own thinking on him and on his work represented by us, represented in the wider church.

[7 : 26] If you think about it this way for a moment before we get into it. What had changed the Lord's people in Isaiah's day? What made them say, my way is hidden from the Lord?

What made them say, my just cause is passed over by my God? I'll put it this way. Had the Lord changed?

Or had they changed? And the simple answer is, he hadn't changed. They had. And that includes you and me.

This is relevance to ourselves today. Have we changed in our thinking about the Lord? Because, be sure of this, he hasn't changed at all.

And I submit to you that it's important to get in there, into the depth of our own hearts. And think about what has created in us this kind of mentality.

[8 : 34] For I think it is in us. This complaining attitude. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel?

My way is hidden from the Lord. I think in the NIV they translate it more accurately. Why do you complain? It is a complaint. And that's our first point.

The believers complain. My way is hidden from the Lord. He's not just speaking. He's complaining. Why do you say, my way is hidden from the Lord? My just cause is passed over by my God. We want to think about how this came about.

And how it comes about in ourselves. And the first thing we've got to say is that it always comes about by our muddled thinking on reality.

[9 : 38] And it comes about because we fail to recognize that we have weakened in the way.

They had weakened in the way. They had succumbed to pressure. They had succumbed to discouragement. And they were facing two ways.

And this is where it's difficult sometimes to see where we're at. We face two ways. What do I mean? I mean that we can acknowledge that the Lord is our God.

That Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, the God of Abraham, the God who sent his son into this world to die in the Roman set of sinners. That God, the living and true God, is our God.

You see, they were saying that. Why do you say, verse 27, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, from Yahweh? And my just claim is passed over.

[10 : 40] Notice this. By my God. It wasn't a lack of knowledge of him or of acknowledging him.

They acknowledged the truth about him. But they had drawn the wrong conclusions about his relation to them.

That he had withdrawn from them. That he wasn't treating them fairly. That they were saying, in effect, he doesn't really care for us.

He doesn't see what's happening to us. He has disregarded our cause. You see, my just cause is passed over.

The just claim there is cause. He's not really regarding us. He's disregarded our cause. Surely if he really knew our plight, he would act for us.

[11 : 42] Here we are trying to be faithful to him. I'm going back into Isaiah's day and I'm taking this forward to our day too.

Here we are trying to be faithful to him. To his worship, to his doctrine, to his word. Here we are seeking to make known, not simply to the nations through others, but we're seeking to make known to other people around us, the great news about Jesus, the sinner's savior.

And what do we have from him? We are weakened. We are weary. He gives power to the weak. That's addressing the situation that we're in. And to those who have no strength, that's them. He gives might. So they're saying in effect, we have a just cause.

We're doing our best. But he's not helping us. Now, if you're with me on this, you can identify with it. Honestly, identify with it. But you see, the fact of the matter is, we reason in a wrong way, in a meddled way.

[13 : 03] We complain. And the important thing here is to acknowledge the fact of the complaining spirit. This cast of mind that maybe all of us have gotten into, because when we get into it, it can be established firmly.

And it is incredibly difficult to remove from our hearts. It fixes in our thinking.

It affects our thinking. It permeates our thinking. And it is so fast in us that we can't easily remove it. I forget who said it, but one of the old expositors said, it's as when a post is hammered into the ground, clean out of sight. And there's that sense that it is deeply embedded, almost out of sight. So we need to recognize that mentality. And if it applies to us, even in a little way, to see something more about God.

[14 : 21] That's the second thing I want to look at. The believer's God. And, of course, the Lord says this, we've read it. Verse 28.

Have you not known, have you not heard, the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. Now, in Isaiah's day, they could say, we know that.

We know the doctrine. We believe the doctrine. And we can say it too. We believe the doctrine of the Bible about him.

That God is eternal. Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. We know he is not only infinite spirit, but within his glorious being, that is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We know he is unlimited in power. We know that he can do whatever he wills to do. We know he is all-knowing and all-seeing, as well as all-powerful.

[15 : 30] We acknowledge we can't plumb the depths of why he works the way he works among the children of men. Why he does to people and nations, and his own people too, the things he does.

We acknowledge he does these things. See what I'm saying? We know. We may even know the finer things. Romans 11, 33-36.

How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding it. Who has known the mind of the Lord or been his counselor? He chooses to bring multitudes into salvation through Christ and to pass by others.

And we know for sure he is not susceptible to weakness. We know all these things. That's the believer's God.

So what's the problem? It's at this very point we begin to see our need to apply the doctrine. It's not enough to believe it, to know it's there, to have an understanding of it.

[16 : 48] Some will have more, some will have less. But to understand it. We need to apply it. We need to take it and say, okay, how does this work out in my experience?

I have become weakened and discouraged. I can identify with the people of Isaiah's day.

I recognize on the one hand I acknowledge the truth about God and on the other hand it simply isn't making the difference. And the whole point here is that if we are to experience a spiritual refueling, then the truth has to affect us.

If we're to be strengthened in our soul inwardly, we need to be affected by the truth we know. The word has to dwell richly in us.

The Bible's teaching us to dwell richly in us. And for that we have to simply receive it humbly and prayerfully. It's said of the Israelites in the days of Moses, you find it in Hebrews 3 and 4, that they did not receive the word.

[18 : 18] They didn't embrace it. The word was preached to them, but it did not profit them not meeting with faith in those who heard it.

And it's important, therefore, to embrace it by faith every time we hear it and to act upon it. And I say reverently and truthfully, we're to react to it humbly.

We're to receive it meekly. And that, you see, is not a simple thing. It's not a one-off. We must do that again and again.

We need the varied portions of the word. I know there's a lot of talk in medical circles about the worth or otherwise of herbal medicines or homeopathy.

But we'll assume for the moment that there is much benefit in these treatments. And, you know, the thing that scientists can't accept is that the weaker the amount of this or that portion they put into the product, the more effective it is.

[19 : 40] And that's scientifically untenable and therefore it can't work. But it does work. As millions probably testify, it works.

Some doctors will acknowledge it works. The point I'm making here is we need the word like that. We need aspects of truth, this and that, mixed together, meeting with faith in our hearts.

The truth we know and in a sense we have received. We need to act upon it and let it act upon us again and again.

The believer's God. Thirdly, we want to consider the obvious, the believer's weakness or weariness as it is here.

It's implied in verse 28 at the end. He neither faints nor is weary. That was their problem. The reference is to spiritual weariness and weakness.

[20 : 52] Although, in verse 30, we're told the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall. In other words, there's an image here of these really fit athletes.

They're up for anything. But they become weary and weak too. And that, of course, is a good image for us to think about the spiritual life and how our fitness becomes weakened.

There are spiritual forces at work against spiritually minded people. It's a fact. It's a reality. Jesus warned his disciples, Watch and pray lest you fall into temptation.

He told them, The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. The enemy will find his way in and trick us and trap us and weaken us by our fallen nature, by our sinful appetites.

And spiritual forces have a vested interest in doing their worst against us. And we are foolish if we don't acknowledge that. I remember Lloyd-Jones in his sermon on the spiritual warfare saying that people who are not awakened spiritually who are still strangers to Christ, this means very little to them, virtually nothing to them.

[22 : 41] They don't know anything of this spiritual battle. And if you're like that, if there's only one here like that today, take that as a point from the Lord that would urge you to plead that you would come into knowing the reality of the spiritual warfare, of being alive to these things, of believing the gospel and resting on Christ so that you will know what it is to be threatened and tempted and tried by the enemy.

The Lord's people, you see, are a constant target for Satan. He uses all his hellish means to bring us down.

As it was in Isaiah's day, so it is still. He uses our weaknesses. He exploits them against us.

And, if that was not enough, sometimes he uses the Lord's own people against each other. We're living through times of just this thing.

When those who are friends of Jesus become our enemies, sometimes simply by doing nothing to help us.

[24 : 08] And this, too, the enemy uses and exploits and outsmarts the Lord's people. There is, according to Jesus, much tribulation, much hassle for the godly who will live in Christ Jesus.

These are real things that can weaken us and discourage us. There are so many things all around us in the nation today, the huge departure from the Bible's teaching, from the Christian way, the rise of false religion, the struggles as a result of all these things in families and communities.

we can easily be just like the folk in Isaiah's day, weakened and weary.

So we're to recognize the complaint and we're to recognize the believer's God and the weariness or the weakness of the believer.

The last thing we want to consider is the believer's duty. He tells us he gives power to the weak and to those who have no mighty increases strength.

[25 : 40] Verse 29 The fittest that the world can produce may go on in that strength for many a year until at last they weaken.

No reflection intended on some of our very fine athletes in the UK who go outside it. but you see guys and you see ladies too who were just the peak of physical almost perfection when they were winning medals and you see them 10 20 years later and you see they're not at all what they were.

There are a few exceptions. The point is the youths the fit ones will become weak and weary under fail but at a spiritual level and this is important the believer's duty is to wait upon the Lord.

Verse 31 Those who wait on the Lord or as another translation is who hope in him shall renew their strength they shall be revived.

[26 : 58] Actually it's an interesting word those who wait upon the Lord the Hebrew is kawah and it's a wonderful word that depicts rolling your burdens on him and being lifted up by him.

It's a most graphic word that's used. You find it in the Psalms end of Psalm 27 for example wait on the Lord and keep his way roll your burden on him and be lifted by him and this is our duty you see to wait upon him.

I like the thought here that this kind of waiting is no slouching it's not sitting in your arm chair with your feet up it's not inactivity it's not to be thought of as a cozy kind of relaxed state it's activity it is spiritual restlessness to do his will waiting upon him looking for him to act for us and obviously it's an earnest seeking of the power he promises not sort of lying back in the iron chair waiting for a zap from heaven but it's following the course of going to his word of seeking him in his word perhaps of fellowshiping with other believers and praying together for that kind of strengthening inwardly because he tells us he gives power to the weak and to those who have no might left he increases strength my dear friends this is a wonderful encouragement to us he supplies what we need he supplies the spiritual and moral power we need to get up and to get on with it he has an abundance to give us and our problem you see is that we don't take time to seek such strength in it if we're true about it we're terribly stubborn we think we can solve the problems for ourselves we rush hither and thither hoping that our activity will make this thing happen hoping maybe too that there's this magic that will come but that's not the kind of instant remedy that's promised or offered rather it is the strengthening and empowering given to those who diligently seek him we seek him in his word we seek him in the fellowship of his people in prayer time you see and this is encouraging because he doesn't give he doesn't give power to the the spiritual gladiators the supermen and superwomen but to the weak and helpless we were thinking just coming up towards

Christmas about the folk who were waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Messiah and they were part of a chain through the centuries who were waiting and waiting and looking and expecting the Lord to come and they did their bit in their day in the power he supplied the folk who were there when Jesus arrived were wonderfully privileged but we miss the point if we think it was only then we've said before 400 years passed from the last prophet Malachi to the coming of John the Baptist and the birth of Christ 400 years a long time to be waiting longer still if you go back to Isaiah the prophet and the promises he made about Jesus coming and see what I'm saying here is that what we're involved in here is part of a whole thing part of God's work in this world as it goes on and we are encouraged to wait upon him with this spirit knowing that he will renew our strength as the days go on and it is by this means that our faith is strengthened and our confidence is increased he increases strength their strength is renewed they shall mount up with wings as eagles what a wonderful illustration this is of the of the eagle soaring high above so far you can hardly recognize that's an eagle away up there how safe the eagle is at that altitude how safe in spiritual and moral strength are those who wait upon the

[32 : 46] Lord in this activity we've been describing in a life a spiritual life that is hidden with Christ in God and this you see is about us being so heavenly minded that we are of supreme earthly use we're involved in the work of the kingdom never never never think for a moment that the hour or two here and there you spend in your days in prayer for the kingdom of Christ is wasted time it's wasted time not to do it and it is our spiritual and moral strength to be engaged in a ministry of prayer if we can do little else because of our limits placed upon us we lift our souls to him who assures us that waiting upon him our strength shall be renewed like the evil and we are encouraged therefore to wait upon him knowing that those who do will renew their strength amen well our time is have