

Guest Speaker John Holland

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Trinity Grace Pastors College, a one-year theological training school for guys serving in churches throughout our, or hopefully will serve in churches for many years throughout our family of churches.

I've gotten to know John different times over the past couple of years. Wonderful man. Daniel sends all his regards to you guys. A wonderful man of God, talking about the way John carefully, lovingly leads his family.

My Anna comes alongside to wrangle these young kids and all that they're doing. And, you know, this is one of the things that we love to do. We love to have Pastors College students into our gathering.

We love to hear from them. You know, it's kind of an awkward thing to hear somebody you've never heard before, but one of the things I want you to be thinking about today is, you know, the gospel is passed down not through a blimp, but through calling, like a gospel blimp that drops down tracks.

[1 : 28] Sorry, I want to complete that metaphor for you. But the gospel is passed down through people being trained up, being sent to speak, being trained up in places, sent to speak in new places.

And so really, like today, it's an opportunity for us to participate in gospel transfer and the opportunity to be excited to think.

We get to receive today from John and from all his studies, but we also get, as he speaks, to anticipate, what's the Lord going to do with this man, you know, which is incredible to think about because that's the way the gospel goes forward.

I planted, Apollos watered, as the Apostle Paul said. God gave the gross. Many others jumped in and came in after him. So we're excited today to have John in the house, not just because he's Daniel's friend, but because God has called him to this work, and we get, in this little moment, an opportunity to be a part of it.

So thank you, John. Come on and serve us today. Can we welcome him? Thanks, man. Appreciate it. Thank you, Walt.

[2 : 41] Thanks. Good morning. Good morning. Bring you greetings from Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville, which is actually my sending church for the PC, so I only had to move down the street.

It's very easy for me. Easier than Daniel. That's easier than Daniel. That's right. Thank you so much for this opportunity to preach this morning. Thank you for being a church that supports the PC.

I'm so grateful for that. It has been an incredible year. Thank you for loaning us the McGraw family for 10 months. They are a wonderful family. We are sad we don't get to keep them, but I'm sure you guys are excited to get them back sooner rather than later.

Elijah McGraw specifically wanted me to make sure I passed along to you that he says hi. Hi. So could we say hi, Elijah, in 3, 2, 1?

3, 2, 1. Hi, Elijah. Awesome. He did tell me, he informed me he'd be listening to the recording to make sure that I did that. So I have fulfilled my word to you, buddy.

[3 : 44] There you go. You kept your word. That's right. Please open your copy of God's word to Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah chapter 40.

If you're interested in World War II history as I am, you may know the story of a Japanese lieutenant named Hito Anoda. He was sent during what would become the final months of World War II to Lubang, which is a small island in the Philippines.

His mission was to destroy an airfield there on the island as well as a pier on the water in order to disrupt Allied forces who were using the island as a stopping point.

After being driven into the jungle by Allied forces, he and his three comrades stayed hidden there to wait for backup or another opportunity to attack. When Japan surrendered in August of 1945, leaflets were dropped over the island meant to inform anyone left fighting that the war had ended. Anoda and his comrades dismissed the leaflets as fake. Over time, all the soldiers he was fighting with died, and he was there on the island fighting by himself.

[4 : 58] Anoda would go on to live on the island for 29 years, all the while thinking he was holding out for reinforcements and disrupting enemy supply chains. Anoda finally surrendered in 1974, when his old commanding officer traveled personally to the island to tell him to lay down arms.

He had dismissed the news of surrender as false and continued holding out. He stayed far too long in a place he didn't need to be anymore. And he had leaflets telling him the fighting was over.

The people of God that Isaiah is speaking to had divine revelation, scripture, to tell them good news. And yet, it is as though they have never heard this before.

They are having a difficult time believing God's purposes in their waiting and in their suffering. Spiritually speaking, they too, and we, have stayed far too long in a place we didn't need to be anymore.

They had the good news of God's hope to draw from, but they were in a state of despair. They could have been drawing on the Lord's help and strength, but instead, they seem to have forgotten God's desire to help them in their exile.

[6 : 16] The nation of Israel had been fragmented by war, and it was rebellious against God, even though prophets had warned them time and time again. They persisted. So, God's people were conquered by foreign nations.

Isaiah writes in this section of his book to the nation of Israel, which is in captivity under the Babylonian Empire. They're far from home, under pagan rule, and they feel the weight their mistakes have cost them.

They are waiting for God to do something, waiting for deliverance. And the message that Isaiah brings to the people is one of hope.

Despite what they're experiencing, they have a God who has not forgotten them and who plans to deliver them. Isaiah 40 represents a turning point in the book in which God brings a message of hope and comfort.

God will reveal himself. The people's sins will be forgiven. God will give them strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

[7 : 26] And God will do this very same thing for us. Follow along in Isaiah chapter 40, starting in verse 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. 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 gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength.

Even youth 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. This text tells us to wait for the Lord because the Lord strengthens those who wait.

[8 : 38] Wait for the Lord because the Lord strengthens those who wait. We will divide this text into three points. Point number one, a question for sufferers.

A question for sufferers. Verse 27. Isaiah is having a dialogue with the Israelites over the course of this book, and in this dialogue, as we reach chapter 40, light and hope begin to shine on the horizon for the people, even in what they are suffering.

And yet, they don't quite get it yet. In fact, in the midst of their misery, they are questioning God. In fact, they're making statements against God. This is what they're claiming.

My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God. Their claim is essentially twofold. God's power is not far-reaching enough for Him to know what we're going through, and God is disregarding what we deserve.

In other words, they're doubting God's sovereignty and God's character. And these are two fundamental temptations when we undergo suffering. If you notice, both of these pertain not just to God's actions, but to His very person.

[9 : 55] On the one hand, they're claiming that their current situation is hidden from God. They don't think He can see them. Now, why do they think that? Well, they don't think He can see them because if He could see them, surely He would put a stop to this, right?

He would not let them suffer on purpose, would He? Well, so it seems rather than thinking of God as seeing this suffering and letting it happen, some claim God clearly just can't see us.

Others, or maybe the same people at different times, claim that God has disregarded what they deserve. He's been unjust to them. They're thinking, surely there has been some change in how God thinks about us.

Maybe He doesn't favor us anymore. We thought we'd be His people till kingdom come, but now we sit under enemy captivity. Maybe God changed His mind.

Both of these accusations will fall flat, as we will see. God is certainly powerful enough to see what His people are going through, and God has not been unjust to them. As the people make these statements against God, Isaiah has a question for them.

[11 : 08] Isaiah essentially asks them this question, why do you claim that God has abandoned you? Why do you claim that God has abandoned you? That's the question of verse 27. Isaiah will respond to their claims of God's alleged abandonment of His people, and he will do so in just a moment, but for now, he considers their claim of God's abandonment to be subject to scrutiny.

He doesn't allow them to sit with these accusations against God. We find a fitting illustration of the same dynamic in Mark 4, as the disciples are out to sea with Jesus, and a storm is upon them. It's a very familiar story. What's Jesus doing? He is sleeping. He's sleeping in the stern of the boat on a cushion. He is clearly not concerned.

The disciples come to Him, and they wake Him up, and they say, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? They didn't think He knew what was going on. They didn't think He cared about what was going on.

In the Gospels, too, God's people doubted His sovereignty and character. And if the disciples can struggle with this same dynamic hundreds of years after the book of Isaiah, we certainly struggle with it, too.

[12 : 20] How quickly in our trials can we go to accusing God? When things get hard, we have to suffer, we have to wait on something. We can be tempted to distrust God or to accuse God.

When the car tire pops on the way to work, when the baby wakes up for the tenth time in one night, when a friend distances himself from us, when we lose a loved one, when we're waiting on exam results or medical test results, forgot to save someone we know and love, we can fall into this same trap of thinking false thoughts about God or questioning God.

Sometimes we, too, ask God, we ask Him, Do you not see? Have you abandoned me? Do you not care? My friends, these are real questions we sometimes ask when things get hard, when we are waiting for God to do something.

We sometimes make the mistake of looking at our circumstances and making judgments about God rather than looking at God to understand our circumstances. Sometimes we let our circumstances tell us more about God than our Bibles.

The fog of life, clouds, judgment, and we find ourselves confused, confused enough to start to question God. In the past, we've trusted God and believed His promise that suffering is for our good.

[13 : 59] Yes, we know that, right? Well, right now, it doesn't seem that way. Things are too dark for the Lord to be in this. He must not see us. Well, how does the Lord respond to waiting, struggling, suffering, accusing people?

How does He respond to those who struggle with these doubts? Well, by His grace, He gives us an anchor. Number two, an anchor for sufferers.

Verse 28, an anchor for sufferers. Isaiah continues in this passage in verse 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. The people of God often forget fundamental things about the God we worship.

We slip into thinking shallow thoughts of Him or having weak thoughts of Him. And in the midst of this forgetting, God has a way of reminding us. He reminds us sometimes through trials.

[15 : 07] It's a wake-up call. Sometimes in our quiet times, in His Word. Why does He remind us? God knows that we are a forgetting people. And that is why the Bible is full of wonderful instances of

God repeating Himself.

People of God, Isaiah is writing to, were in need of reminding. And even though God has told them about Himself countless times, even though they should have known better, God is full of grace and patience and love and He reminds them yet again who He is.

There is no wrathful reply here to the frailty of God's people. He doesn't thunder down at them for what they've said. No. His message is comforting.

He is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. An everlasting God is precisely who they needed and who we need in the midst of our suffering and waiting.

He is the God who's been there forever and He will continue to be forever. forever. He doesn't just last forever though, that would be a comfort in and of itself, but Isaiah has more to say here.

[16:29] He is the creator of the ends of the earth. God is both everlasting and the creator. If I were to sum up this verse, it would be God is God at all times and in all places.

He is God at all times and in all places. There is no corner of this earth that God did not create and that God does not see. God's knowledge and presence surpass our knowledge and presence.

Praise the Lord. Theologian in the 19th century put it this way, there is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine. We have a God who is God at all times and in all places. There is nothing outside of His knowledge and His reach. How does this comfort the people of God?

Well, the God who lasts forever and made everything, the Lord of all existence, the God who is God at all times and in all places, this is the God who calls them by name.

[17:41] He's on their side. He's reminded them that He's on their side by calling them Jacob and Israel in verse 27. These are covenant names. He's reminding them He has not forgotten that He is their God and they are His people.

And their God is comforting them first in the very power that He Himself holds. Isaiah continues on describing this great Lord. He does not faint or grow weary.

As the source of strength and creation and eternity, God never grows weary. How can we understand this?

The only real reference we have for strength and for weariness is our own experience. And we experience exhaustion frequently as created beings.

Often, all it takes is one sleepless night or one particularly trying week at work and we're done. We're tired. God never grows faint or weary.

[18:45] Not once in all of eternity. What a sweet truth. What an anchor in our suffering. God is not only everlasting. He is not only the Creator but He also has unsearchable understanding.

His knowledge of everything, His omniscience is critical for us. He knows the exact experiences of His people in our suffering.

He knows the weight that we feel when we are going through something difficult. He understands the stomach churning of waiting, of wanting things to be resolved.

He is there He is powerful and He understands. Maybe you've noticed but one of the Israelites objections and statements against God has been answered by God through the prophet Isaiah.

They believed God couldn't see them because He didn't have enough power. The anchor we find in verse 28 stabilizes us from this false belief. He has infinite power because He made the ends of the earth and He has been and He will be forever.

[19:58] He has no weariness, no exhaustion, and His understanding is unsearchable. It is so vast. The way of God's people is not hidden from God.

He sees our experiences and He does not only see our experiences in His providence, the use of His power and His goodness in the universe. He has ordained each and every one of our experiences hand-picked for us.

He sees. He's not surprised. And while this may still leave us with many questions in our suffering, we can know that the Lord who is behind our circumstances is perfect in character and in power.

What's the alternative to this God who is all-powerful at all times and in all places? On their minds, God could not see their way. Well, if this were true, God would be weak and ineffectual.

It may be a temporary relief for us to think, well, maybe God can't see me. But a God who can't see is a God who can't help. So as we recognize that our Bibles teach us that God can see us in our trials, the result of this doctrine is that we can trust God in our trials.

[21 : 18] We can trust the God who has unsearchable understanding. You could say that our understanding as people is searchable to say the least.

Nothing makes this more clear to me than a few questions from my wonderful, thoughtful, curious bride. I often begin to tell her about my day or something I'm reading for the PC or a conversation I had.

It usually takes about three follow-up questions for me to tell her, you have reached the end of my knowledge on this subject. That is all I've got. Our knowledge is very searchable.

Our understanding is very limited. What a great contrast to the God we worship. He knows all things and He brings everything to pass. God has pointed us to Himself as the source of all power and strength.

He's given us an anchor to hold fast to in the midst of our suffering, but He is not yet done. He has an offer to us in the midst of our suffering. Number three, an offer to sufferers.

[22 : 25] An offer to sufferers. Verses 29 to 31. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might He increases 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. Isaiah now moves from speaking about God and His wonderful promise and power and knowledge as creator and sustainer of the world to telling us what God chooses to do with that power.

There's so much here we can draw encouragement from. When we are waiting on the Lord to do something, it can feel like our souls are being pulled from two ends, our trials and our self.

Being pulled, being stretched by the circumstances of life. What we see here is that God intends to help us with this very thing.

[23 : 32] God intends to give us strength. That is what His desire is for us in our trials, in our waiting, in our suffering. It is strength we need in those times, but not strength from ourselves.

We see that this flows directly from who He is. He has strength to give because He is the source of all strength. He knows precisely how to give it and when to give it because He has unsearchable understanding.

Isaiah is answering their objections one by one. And Isaiah now sets up an incredible contrast in verses 30 to 31. We see here how surprising the reality of this strength can be.

We see the limits of the strength that comes from man. Man's strength is real, but it is limited. Even youths shall faint and be weary.

In my home, we have three little ones that are sitting right over there. One is asleep right now.

Praise the Lord. Ages 5, 3, and 1. And if you have been around little kids, you know that they are a powerhouse of activity.

[24 : 44] The older two will go around running from the backyard to the inside to doing a puppet show to hitting each other sometimes to climbing to tying things up on and on and on and on.

And the littlest one crawls around trying to catch up. And it would seem during the day that they never get tired. On an hour of sleep and a tortilla chip, they can race around everywhere somehow. My wife and I occasionally share a bewildered look with one another as the chaos of little ones ensues around us. How? How do they do this? But even little kids and all their energy fall fast asleep most nights.

Their play and their striving catches up to them. And the need for sleep overtakes them again each and every day. Verse 30 also says that young men shall fall exhausted.

I think of watching the Olympics when a great, strong man does a power lift or finishes a marathon. What does he do? He falls down exhausted. That's the peak of human strength.

[25 : 47] And he falls down exhausted. Human strength has its benefits but more than that, human strength has its great limitations. The strongest men and women who have ever lived need sleep.

They need food. They need shelter. They have limitations. Their strength only get them so far. But there is a kind of person who continues on even in the face of great trial and exhaustion.

There is a kind of person who persists. What kind of person is this? Well, it is the one who waits on the Lord. They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

You see the parallel here with verse 30. Human strength still ends in people growing weary and falling exhausted. But they who wait on the Lord shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and

not faint.

We're on the precipice here of a great offer from the Lord. It deserves our attention because we have great need of this strength in our suffering. The offer of supernatural strength is for those who wait for the Lord.

[27 : 02] It's only for one kind of person. And what does it mean to wait? What does waiting mean? It seems simple on its surface. How do we do that?

To put it simply, to wait on the Lord is to demonstrate expectant faith. To wait on the Lord is to demonstrate expectant faith. And whether we intend to or not, we demonstrate expectant faith all the time.

When we are in line at a restaurant, we expect to get food. When we work a job, we expect to get paid. When we plant seeds in a garden, we expect something to grow.

And when we make plans to meet a friend somewhere, we expect them to show up. We can be reasonably confident in most of these things happening. What's difficult in these moments is the waiting.

It is hard to wait, especially in an Amazon Prime culture. It is hard to wait, especially when we are not informed about the timeline. We want to know when, how many business days, what are we doing here?

[28 : 12] What is the difference between waiting and not waiting? We are waiting as long as we expect that we will get the thing we wait for. It is not until we pull out of the drive-thru because the line is taking too long that we are no longer waiting.

It is not until we throw our hands up and walk out of the coffee shop, that we are supposed to meet our friend, that we are no longer waiting. It is not until we lose confidence that the Lord has plans for us in our suffering that we are no longer waiting.

When we move on with our lives, when we stop expecting to see more of the Lord in our trials, we are no longer waiting. But a person who waits on the Lord says, I don't know how things will shake out, I don't know how long it will take, but I believe the Lord will work this situation out for my good and for His glory.

And while I wait, I will pursue Him with everything. The person who waits on the Lord recognizes their weakness, their frailty. They know that without the Lord they could do nothing.

So, they take their weakness, they take their frailty, and they put it at the Lord's feet, and they ask for help. This is the kind of person that the Lord gives strength to.

[29 : 33] He gives strength to tired, weary people who turn their eyes from their doubts to the Lord in all His glory. Waiting on the Lord is not simply sitting around.

We have many things the Lord has called us to do, even when our trials are not resolved. Isaiah describes the way the Lord sustains us as we wait. We can run and not be weary, and we can walk and not faint.

Basically, what that means is whether we are called to a busy season or a slow season, a time to sprint or a time to walk, we can do so in the strength that the Lord provides. We strive with hope toward Him, continuing on in what He has called us to while we wait for Him.

we don't strive to simply get out of the trial that God has placed us in. We don't strive to work our way out of this uncomfortable situation.

No, we strive in faith to everything else the Lord has called us to while we wait. And it is in this that God strengthens us.

[30 : 47] we wait for the Lord because the Lord strengthens those who wait. If you're like me when I first read this passage, I wondered, what does this strength actually look like?

That sounds wonderful. What is it? Like, show me. What does it mean? I think the passage is intentionally nonspecific because our trials are so diverse.

We're all going through different things. For some, the strength that God provides is strength to keep having hard conversations with that person we're disagreeing with, waiting for God's work in our hearts or God's work in their hearts or both.

For some, the strength that the God, that the Lord provides is strength to get out of bed when nothing in us wants to at all. For some, the strength that God provides is simply taking the next step of faith in daily life even though the world seems to be crumbling around you, taking the next step. But for everyone, divine strength looks like one day at a time of waiting expectantly for the Lord to help us even in the midst of suffering.

[32 : 06] We can wait on God not with naive hoping against hope or shallow glass half full optimism. God is much more concrete than that.

We can wait on Him because we trust His character and we trust His power. It's a good thing that in moments of weakness and discouragement when we look to ourselves we find precisely nothing to help us.

Nothing. That's a good thing. That's God's mercy. That is meant to make us look to Him, wait for Him and eagerly expect His strength to help us continue on.

I think it's important that we also notice what the Lord does not give us in this passage. Well, hold on. This is supposed to be encouraging. What do you mean what does He not give us in suffering? He doesn't give us everything.

He is, according to verse 28, all-powerful and all-knowing. And we see in this passage that God shares generously of His power to help us in daily life.

[33 : 16] But what God does not often share with us is knowledge of why we are going through a particular trial. He shares strength. He does not share knowledge.

The Lord does not intend to share with us the why. That's what we ask. The why. He doesn't intend to share that with us while we wait. But He has shared with us the God we wait on.

We often want specific knowledge as to why we're suffering. We want knowledge. We don't want strength. Tell me why. I'd rather have the why in my situation than be enabled to press on.

But that is not the way the Lord shepherds us. what He has shared with us is who He is and how He loves us and cares for us.

We trust Him not because or we trust Him rather because of His transcendent and majestic power and also because He has shown us that He loves us and upholds us with His power.

[34 : 16] Look back at verses 10 and 11 of our same chapter Isaiah 40. Verses 10 and 11 say this, Behold, the Lord God comes with might and His arm rules for Him.

Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. He will tend His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arms.

He will carry them in His bosom and gently lead those that are with young. He comes with might but He shepherds us tenderly.

God's great power does not snuff us out. He carries us along gently. And the way that He shepherds us, the way that He carries us is by giving us strength.

The power that He gives us is no ordinary power. This is the power that can only be compared to soaring on eagles' wings. Where does that imagery come from?

[35 : 17] As Americans, we love the eagle but what does that imagery come from in this culture? The Israelites would recognize this imagery immediately. They would recall perhaps the most important event in the history of Israel, the Exodus.

They would remember Exodus 19, 4. It says this, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

To God's people, the image of eagles' wings means divine delivering. Deliverance, deliverance from the air. The God who delivers us does so in a way that can only be credited to Him.

And sometimes this deliverance looks like the Exodus, sometimes it looks like the promise of Isaiah 40 of a renewed strength. This is what we are to be reminded of, the Exodus.

And while the Israelites could look to the Exodus as the sign of God's delivering power and grace, we have an even greater vision of God's plan of deliverance for His people.

[36 : 24] There is one, Jesus Christ, who walked a weary path to the cross in order to be crushed by the Father. It would seem like His way was hidden from the Lord.

It wasn't. It would seem like He was treated unjustly, and by men He was treated unjustly. But His way was not hidden from the Lord.

His way, the way of salvation for all who would trust in Him, was established before the world was created. For us, He laid His life down and was crushed by the Father for what He did not deserve, for our sin.

sin. He did this for our good, and that we who receive Him may experience everlasting life with Him, that we may renew our strength.

But our Lord did not stay in the grave. God raised Him from the dead. His strength was renewed.

We find testimony to this in Hebrews 12, 1 and 2, which says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that

