

**“THE GOSPEL RENEWS OUR STRENGTH”**

These verses form the third and final section of this great chapter, a chapter in which the Lord announces gospel comfort to a people whose sin had brought them into an estate of considerable misery. In the first part of the chapter, verses 1-11, God instructed his prophetic messengers to publicly proclaim his announcement of good news. In the second part, verses 12-26, the Lord emphasized his greatness in order to refute the statements made in verse 27: “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God.” And in the verses that we are studying today, the Lord helps us to see why those statements are not true. In this passage, we are assured that *those who trust the Lord to be faithful to his gospel promises will be given strength to endure to the end of their days.*

**Feeling Abandoned by God**

Our passage begins with Isaiah confronting God’s people for thinking that the Lord had abandoned them. When we remember the circumstances that formed the backdrop for this prophecy, we can understand why the people of Judah would have felt abandoned. These words of prophecy were addressed to Israel in exile, an extremely low point in the history of the covenant people. It is

not very hard to see why they came to the conclusion that the Lord had either forgotten or rejected them.

There are times when we may find ourselves wrestling with the same kind of thoughts. This is especially the case when we are going through times of trial. At such times, it can be very easy for us to begin to suspect that God doesn't care about us. We might think of all of the ways that we have sinned against God and conclude that we are not worthy of his attention. Or we might reason that God's transcendence makes him too big to care about the details of our lives, as if our problems were too trivial to be a matter of concern to such a great God. These are the kind of thoughts that are being expressed by the person who says "My way is hidden from the LORD."

The other half of verse 27 expresses the same thing from a slightly different angle. It says "my right is disregarded by my God." The Hebrew term translated as "right" here refers to a legal case or a judgment. The speaker is essentially saying, 'God will not hear my case,' or 'God does not care about my cause.' This is a person who has brought his problem to the Lord, someone who has pleaded for God's help, but who has reached the conclusion that God has ignored his plea.

Once again, there can be times when we find ourselves wrestling with similar thoughts. This is especially the case at those times when our prayers seem to go unanswered. We plead and plead with God about a matter that is of great concern to us, but nothing seems to happen as a result of our prayers. When we have experiences like that, we can begin to wonder if God is paying attention to us. We might even think, 'Is my case being heard?' This is the line of thinking that Isaiah is describing in verse 27.

As I said, it is not very hard for us to see why the people of Israel began to think that God had abandoned them. Their circumstances certainly made it look that way. But notice that Isaiah does not excuse them for giving in to such thoughts. He does not say, 'Yes, I can see what you are saying. You really have had it rough. I would feel the same way if I were in your position.' Instead, he confronts them for their sin of unbelief. God calls his people to cry out to him in faith, with no doubting. As we are told in the book of James: "for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (James 1:6-8) One of the prerequisites for prevailing prayer is that we ask with confidence, trusting that God will hear us.

The person speaking in verse 27 lacks such confidence. These kinds of words can only be spoken by someone who has lost all hope that the Lord will answer him. Yet notice how the Lord responds to the statements that are made in this verse. God does not reject his people for doubting him. He certainly confronts them, he challenges them, but he does not turn his back on them. Instead, he gives them reasons why they should not lose hope. Even as he confronts our unbelief, God provides us with arguments that strengthen our faith. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it well when he observes that “This is one of the great glories of the Christian message and of the Bible. God not only gives us his message, but he also helps us to believe it. He deals with our doubts and our difficulties and our perplexities.” [*The All-Sufficient God*, 79]

### **The All-Sufficient God**

The first thing that Isaiah does as he confronts unbelief is call our attention to the nature and character of God. He did the same thing in verses 12-26 of this chapter, as we saw in last week’s sermon. Here in verse 28, Isaiah says four things about God. We will look at each of these things in just a moment. First, though, I want to call your attention to the two rhetorical questions that Isaiah asks at the beginning of this verse: “Have you not known? Have you not

heard?" These questions indicate that the things that Isaiah is about to tell the people of Israel are things that they have already been taught, things that they already know. He is not telling them anything new. These are things that are taught all throughout the Bible. Isaiah confronted unbelief by pointing God's people back to what they already knew. We need to do the same thing when we find ourselves wrestling with doubt. If you ever begin to wonder if God is truly with you, if you fear that God may not be listening to your cries for help, the best thing you can do is refocus on what you already know as a Christian. You need to go back to the basics.

The first thing that Isaiah says about God in this verse is that he is "the everlasting God." God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. As he says in the book of Revelation, he is "the Alpha and the Omega...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:8) God is Lord of the present, the past, and the future. There is immense comfort for us in this doctrine. Because God stands outside of time, we can be confident that he rules over everything that takes place within time, including everything that takes place in our lives.

The second thing that Isaiah says about God is that he is "the Creator of the ends of the earth." The Lord made everything that exists. And not only that, he also continues to uphold the things that he has made. The Bible's doctrine of

creation is not one in which God makes the world and then leaves it to fend for itself. It is one in which everything in the created order is in constant dependence upon the Lord. Listen to how this is expressed in Psalm 104: "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth... The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God... These all look to you, to give them their food in due season." (Ps. 104:14, 21, 27) Every morsel of food, every drop of water, every ray of the sun, every breath of air -- they all come from God. He is not a distant God, a God who merely sets the world in motion and then leaves it on its own. As it says in the book of Hebrews, "he upholds the universe by the word of his power." (Heb. 1:3) If this is true, then how could we ever think that our way is hidden from the Lord?

The third thing that Isaiah says about God in verse 28 is that "He does not faint or grow weary." Now here is something that obviously cannot be said of us. We do grow weary. Our tasks and our trials tire us. We not only experience physical fatigue, but emotional and spiritual fatigue as well. But it is not so with the Lord. He never gets worn out. This is a point that is underscored in one of the most humorous verses in the entire Bible. It is found in the book of 1 Kings, and the context is Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel.

When Baal did not answer the prayers of those priests, Elijah ridiculed them by saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." (1 Kgs. 18:27) Do you see Elijah's point? He doesn't really believe that Baal is a god. If he did, he wouldn't be so irreverent. He is being sarcastic. He is saying that a god who is limited in the ways in which man is limited is not worthy of being thought of as a god. The true and living God never tires. He never sleeps. He never gets overwhelmed at life and finds himself in need of a break. On the contrary, the Lord is always perfectly sufficient.

The last thing that Isaiah says about God in this verse is that "his understanding is unsearchable." This is another way in which God is so very different than us. Our understanding is finite, but his is infinite. His perspective is not limited in the way that ours is. We can never see every variable in a given situation. We do not know what the future holds. We do not understand how the things that are taking place in the here and now are interwoven with everything else that takes place in this world. But God sees it all. Because he stands outside of time, he always has the whole picture in view. This is why we can trust him even when we do not understand what he is doing in our lives. Our perspective is far too limited. His perspective is perfect.

## **Strength for the Weak**

In the last part of our passage, verses 29-31, Isaiah reminds us of our dependence upon God. He tells us that the Lord gives power to the one who is weak. Of course, everyone is weak, but not everyone is willing to acknowledge their weakness. We have to admit our neediness if we want to lay hold of the promise that is held forth to us in these verses. We have to own up to our frailty, our weakness, our complete dependence upon the Lord. God does not give strength to the one who thinks he is strong. He does not promise to help the person who thinks that he can manage life on his own. The promise that he gives in these verses is a promise for the faint. It is for the person who realizes that he has no strength of his own.

Isaiah impresses our weak condition upon us by pointing out that even youths grow weary. Even the strongest eventually grow weak. Even the most robust can be overwhelmed by their circumstances. This underscores the fact that man can never succeed in saving himself, not even at his best. In fact, we are at our weakest when we think we are strong. And conversely, the Lord's strength is made perfect in our weakness. This is why the apostle Paul declares, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10)

In verse 31, we come to one of the most inspiring statements in all of Scripture: “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.” Notice that the strength that is spoken of here is promised to the person who *waits* upon the Lord. To wait upon the Lord is to hope in him, to look to him in faith. The strength to persevere through the many trials and temptations that we face in this life is something that has to come from outside of ourselves. It is an unnatural strength. It is not something that we possess within ourselves. It is a strength that can only be laid hold of by faith.

This promise of power to run the race of life reminds us that the gospel is more than the promise of having your sins forgiven. That is certainly an essential part of the gospel, but it is more than that. It is also the promise of renewal, the promise of regeneration, the promise of a new life. The gospel is not just a *description* of good news. It actually has the *power to bring about* the good news that it announces. Through faith in God’s promise, our hearts are genuinely changed. In Christ, the weak really are made strong. Through the gospel, we are given strength to live the life of faith. If you are a Christian, it is God’s will for you to live a holy life (see 1 Thess. 4:3). He predestined you “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) Yet the Christian life is not something that you

can live by your own strength. It can only be lived by the strength that God gives to those who abide in Christ by faith.

As we are told in the opening chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, the gospel is "the *power* of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Rom. 1:16) The gospel is powerful, and its power is sufficient for every task and trial that you will face in this life, at every stage in your life. When you need strength to to soar above life's difficulties, when you need endurance to keep running your race, when you need guidance to keep walking on the right path, God's power grants to you "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called [you]." (2 Pet. 1:3) God's Word is true: you really can do all things through Christ, who strengthens you. (see Phil. 4:13) You are weak, but he is mighty. He will hold you with his powerful hand. Reflect upon this the next time you see an eagle or a hawk soaring effortlessly through the sky. That is a picture of how God will empower you to overcome your trials and temptations, if you will keep your hope fixed upon him.

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These verses teach us the biblical way of renewal. They also help us to see that we stand in constant need of such renewal. Even the strongest Christians

grow weary as they walk the pilgrim way. The way to renew your strength is to focus anew upon the greatness and goodness of God and to remember that you are completely dependent upon God for everything. Don't look inside yourself for the strength that you need. Look to Christ, the One in whom all of God's promises find their 'Yes' and 'Amen.' (see 2 Cor. 1:20) As the writer of Hebrews exhorts, "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." (Heb. 12:1-2) If you do that, if you wait upon the Lord, you can be sure that you will soar above every challenge, every frustration, every sorrow that you ever face in this life.