

# “WAITING TO SOAR”

**READING:**        *Isaiah chapter 40 verses 21 – 31*

Many will have seen the film, “Chariots of Fire”, or at least be familiar with the Vangelis theme tune. It tells the story of a Christian Scotsman, Eric Liddell, who refuses to run in the 100 metres race in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, because the selection heats were being run on a Sunday, something which Liddell’s Christian upbringing and personal belief felt was a breach of the commandment – “Remember the Sabbath. Day to keep it holy...” He was a firm favourite for the title and the Prince of Wales even tried to talk him into running the race. Under pressure from the Press and Royalty, instead, Liddell went to the Scottish Presbyterian church that Sunday and read the lesson from *Isaiah chapter 40*, with **verse 31**, capturing the situation. He was given the chance to race for Britain in the 400 metres, a distance he had never tried before. But God honoured his stand. He ran the first 100 metres at the same speed as he would have the 100 metre race. The experts thought that he would soon run out of steam and soon tire. But Liddell kept up the speed and won, setting a new world record into the bargain.

God wants us to rely on him, whatever we are doing on life, and as we look to him, he will give us the strength to continue when tempted to give in. There are times when life will be such that we are tempted to “thrown in the towel” and to give up, but it is in those times when the Lord wants us to look to him and to trust his promise that when we do, he will renew our strength.

*Isaiah chapter 40* sees a new episode being written for God’s people. **Chapter 39** ends with the threat given to King Hezekiah that his apparent well wishers from Babylon, were actually eyeing out the palace and its contents, and that soon, all would be carried off into Babylon, including the people. But whilst **chapter 39** ends with little hope, by the time **chapter 40** is written, the captivity has taken place and now we read the prophet trying to console the people that God has not forgotten them. For those who love Handel’s Messiah, the words of **chapter 40 verse 1** are probably echoing in your head – “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says the Lord...” This remnant of God’s people, these faithful who were left needed encouragement and in this chapter, the prophet speaks words of pardon – forgiveness for their past wrong doings; words of providence – that although the way back to their homes and ways of life would not be easy, God would be with them and guide them; words of promise – the captors Assyria and Babylon had gone and that all God had promised in his deliverance of his people would come to pass, that whilst the glories of the world would fade, God’s word would stand forever; and the voice of peace – the victory over the conquering Assyria and Babylon would be accomplished and that the people would live in peace again, that God would win the battle.

All these words were great to the people, but the situation they had come from and what they were heading towards was very daunting. Through the prophet God reminded his people of just who He was, who was fighting their corner. They might feel a weakened people, decimated through recent events, but they had a mighty God in their corner. In **chapter 40 verses 9 – 26** these broken heated, demoralised people are reminded of the greatness of their God. They had heard of his mighty works in the past, now they had to trust that God who had proved his might back then, is the same God who will prove his might for them. The same God who created and named the stars, is the same God who would heal their land, the same God who would heal their broken hearts. Someone has defined “circumstances” as “those nasty things you see when you take your eyes off God.” If you look at God through your circumstances, God will seem very distant, but if you look at your circumstances through God, he will draw near and show his greatness.

After all this, we come to crux of our thoughts for today. These people, instead of praising God, were complaining and moaning. Anyone who read of God’s dealings with His people through the showing any concern about them or the problems they faced. Instead of seeing that open door of

opportunity and freedom which God had opened for them, all they seemed to be concerned about, was the long journey home, their weakness and lack of strength to face the journey ahead, that God was asking them to do the impossible. His word to them was that ***“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.....but those who hope (wait) on the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*** (chapter 40 verses 29, 31).

### **SO WHAT?**

Rev Dr John Weaver, the principal at South Wales Baptist College in my first year of studying there, always impressed upon us that each sermon should have a “so what?” moment. That point of saying, so what does this all mean? So what is the relevance to my life? So what do I do now?

Sometimes reading things from ancient Biblical history can seem so far removed from our day to day living. Even as I am desperately trying to finish this off, I am struggling. I am struggling because I know what today has been like. I am struggling because I know how I have felt since this morning – helpless. I feel like the baby eaglet who is dropped from his or her mother’s wings at a great height, in order to learn how to fly. The fear of seeing the earth coming hurtling towards them, flapping wings to know avail, but then mother swooping in to catch before disaster, and taking up to try all over again, until that eaglet has mastered the skies and the air currents and can soar – all after waiting the right time, when mother knows best. The impatient chick, climbing out of that cliff top nest by themselves can only expect disaster. But mother, at the right time, with appropriate patience will enable her eaglet to soar the skies.

God is greater than our circumstances – past or present and future. The American Gospel Singer, Carmen (a man), stated in one of his recordings that when Satan tries to remind you of your past, then turn to scripture and remind him of his future. Sometimes when we look back over our lives, we see only our faults and failings, hearing voices that will condemn us. But, like the people of Isaiah’s day, we need to hear those same 4 voices he highlighted – the voice of pardon – when we confess our sins, then he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness; the voice of providence – the road ahead may be long and hard, but the Lord goes before us preparing the way; the voice of promise – the Word of God is sure – the chorus reminds us “I believe in the Word of God, I believe in the Word of God; every promise is true, I believe it, do you? I believe in the word of God.”; the voice of peace – words of peace amidst the clamour of today’s harsh voices – Jesus told his disciples that in this world they would have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

The circumstances which face us in the here and now. Remember earlier, that we said that “circumstances are those nasty things we see when we take our eyes off God. That if we look at God through our circumstances, he will seem distant and far away; but if we look at our circumstances through God, he will draw very near and reveal his greatness. I love the worship song which states – “Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above; with wisdom, power and love, our God is an awesome God.” The God who has worked his power in the past of our lives, is the same God who will work in the present. When Simon Peter wanted to join Jesus on the waters of Galilee, so long as he kept his eyes focussed on Jesus, could walk. The moment he took his eyes off Jesus and feared the waters, he began to sink. So let us keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

God knows how we really feel, what we really fear. He knows how weak we feel in the circumstances we face day by day. The Apostle Paul had to come to the point where he acknowledge “Your grace is sufficient...your strength is made perfect in my weakness.” It has often been said and immortalised on posters “Let go and let God”, Sometimes we think very gung ho, but actually feel less so. We can not live the lives God would have us to live, in our own strength. We can not face the things which come against us day by day, in our own strength. We need to learn to “wait” to “hope” in the Lord, to rely on his strength to help us day by day to face

the circumstances which come our way. In these uncertain times, many are finding that circumstances are keeping them down and crawling around, whilst others are soaring high. I suppose each of us are really a combination of the 2 – some days one, some days the other – one day a chicken scratching the ground, other days the eagle soaring high above. The main thing is to be walking faithfully day by day in life. Warren Weirsbe wrote “It is much harder to walk in the ordinary pleasures of life than to fly like an eagle in a time of crisis.” Even William Carey, great missionary to Calcutta and noted as being the father of missions said “I can plod. That is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this, I owe everything.”

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. The greatest heroes of our Christian faith are not those who are continually soaring high, but those who faithfully and patiently plodding along. As we learn to wait on the Lord, not only will he help us to soar higher, to run faster, but also to walk longer – as our strength is renewed, day by day. Blessed are the plodders, for they will eventually arrive at their destination.

## **ISAIAH chapter 40 verses 21 - 31**

**21** Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

**22** He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

**23** He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

**24** No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

**25** ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One.

**26** Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

**27** Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’?

**28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

**29** He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak

**30** Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

**31** but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

## PSALM 8

<sup>1</sup> LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

<sup>5</sup> You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour.

<sup>6</sup> You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:

<sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,

<sup>8</sup> the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup> LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!