

QUESTIONS GOD ASKED

6. “WHY DO YOU COMPLAIN, JACOB?”

READINGS: Isaiah chapter 40 verses 27 – 31

Introduction

Human beings generally are, by nature, very impatient. None of us really likes waiting too long for something. It gets even worse when we think that someone we have contacted seems to be ignoring us. Recently I received a package delivery and on checking its contents found that there was something there which should not have been, and something I was expecting, not included. I immediately wrote off to the suppliers pointing out the error and omission and waited. After a week of no response, I sent off another and waited. After a few more days, I was feeling a bit peeved at not having had any sort of acknowledgement and was about to rattle off another message, when the phone rang. On the other end was a lady apologising profusely for the error in the order and that she would rectify it immediately. Feeling somewhat guilty about what I had been thinking, I offered to pay for the item sent in error, to which she replied “No need. It was our mistake. I will send on the item we omitted to send in the first place.” I was relieved that the matter had been resolved, but also felt guilty about my impatience and the thoughts I had had about this particular company. In the end, I came off better than I had expected to.

Without sounding like Billy Connolly’s description of the “wee men” who present the epilogue, the God spot on TV or radio. It is a bit like our dealings with God. We pray, and when that prayer or those prayers seem to be taking a long time for a response, we rattle off our prayer-mails of complaint, wondering sometimes, if God actually listens to our requests.

The book of Isaiah was written during the time when Israel had divided into 2 kingdoms; Israel in the north and Judah in the south. It was a time when God’s people were being punished by foreign nations because they had turned their backs on God, going their own ways and had replaced worshipping the God for their own gods. As Isaiah wrote at the beginning of the 7th century BC, a large part of Judah’s population and all of the northern kingdom of Israel were in exile in various parts of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian leader, Sennacherib, had marched in and stripped Judah bare. He captured all of the fortified cities of the land, and had almost captured Jerusalem itself in 701 BC, when Hezekiah was king. But in the middle of the night an angel of the Lord thwarted the Assyrian plans. Isaiah was in dark and difficult times, looking to the future for comfort whilst experiencing the hardships of the present. On the distant horizon he could see a great deliverance from exile, which was a foretaste of the coming deliverance through God’s chosen one, the Messiah.

The second half of Isaiah is written to people who had already been and were living through some difficult times and if that were not bad enough, there was more trouble ahead with the onslaught of the Babylonians and the coming destruction of their nation. It was to these people that God through Isaiah gave the words of our text. Some of these words are very familiar to us but today they are just as relevant, as they were in Isaiah’s day.

In ***Isaiah 40 verse 27***, we are introduced to the mood of the people. There is no specific information given as to the circumstances for this complaint. It might be relating to their current circumstances, but for those who are familiar with God’s dealing’s with his people, it was a cry often heard when difficulty and adversity arose in the past, something they were reiterating in their present, but also words which they would say again and again. Whenever God’s people go through difficult times, the natural complaint is to wonder where God is and to Him ask why He is not doing anything about their situation, the same complaint God’s people raised to God and to his prophets time and time again, and the answer which Isaiah gives here was probably not really what the people wanted to hear. Likewise, it may not be what we want to hear either in the midst of our difficulties: “wait on the lord...”

1. Why do we have to wait on the Lord?

As already stated, we don't like to wait. We want things to happen, and to happen now. We want contentment and happiness in life, and we want it now. In our current circumstances, with shielding and lockdown, with chapels forbidden to hold worship services as before, whilst pubs, gyms, swimming pools and a host of other things are allowed to function, we wonder why we have to wait. When we experience difficulties in everyday life – shaky relationships, uncertainty over jobs or unhappiness in a job, financial uncertainty, health concerns, and generally life not as we would like it - the answer we don't want to hear from the Lord or his modern day prophets, is wait.

God's people in Isaiah's day were going through some tough times. The Assyrians had come in, killing and pillaging. Now the Babylonians were knocking at their door wanting to do even worse. What they needed was help. What they needed was relief. What they needed was to get out of this desperate situation and they needed to get out now. But Isaiah doesn't tell them what they want to hear. He doesn't tell them that God is coming right away or even soon and that He will remove all of their hardships. No Isaiah tells them to wait - to wait on the Lord. Over and over again, we read the same message in scripture. I will list separately, some of these at the end of this. This world will always be imperfect, no matter how good things may seem to get – there will always be something that is wrong and until that day when we see Him face to face, sadly, the reality is that this world is broken and needs the healing touch of its Creator to make it what He originally created it for, to bring glory and honour to Him. One day, that will happen.

2. Why should we wait on the Lord?

Sounds like we just have to grin and bear it, but not really. In **verses 28 and 29** Isaiah gives his readers reasons why they should wait on the Lord. He is the everlasting God; He has no beginning and no end, always been here and always will be. He has seen it all, and He sees it all. Who better to wait on than an everlasting God. He is the Creator; he made all things, therefore He is greater than all things, He controls all things. God knows how everything works and as Creator He knows what is best for His creation. That sounds like someone worth waiting on. He is all powerful; the source of all strength. God does not get tired or weary. That's why we should wait on him. That's what the Psalmist had in mind when he wrote **Psalms 121**. He gives strength to the weak; not only does God not get weary, not only does He have strength, but He gives this strength to the weak - to those who admit they need it. Not waiting on God leads to trouble, The Bible is full of instances of people thinking they knew best, of not waiting on the Lord and the trouble it brought them. Life can present some quick fixes, but not lasting joy.

3. How do we wait in the Lord?

In faith, is the bottom line. The Hebrew word that is translated "wait" also means trust, hope, and faith. We wait on the Lord in faith. We know that He can be trusted to deliver what He has promised. At the start of this time of lockdown, we looked at the prophet Habakkuk and the questions he asked of God – "How long...?" In **Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 3 and 4**, in response to Habakkuk's questioning of the injustices of his time, we read God's response: **"At the time I have decided, my words will come true. You can trust what I say about the future. It may take a long time, but keep on waiting - it will happen! I the Lord refuse to accept anyone who is proud. Only those who live by faith are acceptable to me."** How do we wait? We wait in faith. We don't demand that God does what we want and when we want it – now! Faith is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not yet see..." We wait in expectation.

4. What will happen when we wait on the Lord?

Our text says; **"...those who wait 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..."**

With apparently no effort the eagle mounts high into the sky; in like manner the people of God will mount up from the depths of their grief and difficulties. They will not stumble falling to the ground, because they have no strength, but rather with the ease of an eagle they will soar on high above the thunder and the clouds of life. They will run and not be weary, walk and not grow faint. Again the prophet Habakkuk writes: **Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 16 - 19**

"When I heard this message, I felt weak from fear, and my lips quivered. My bones seemed to melt, and I stumbled around. But I will patiently wait. Someday those vicious enemies will be struck by disaster. Fig trees may no longer bloom, or vineyards produce grapes; the olive tree may be fruitless, and harvest time a failure, sheep pens may be empty, and cattle stalls vacant - but I will still celebrate because the Lord saves me. The Lord gives me strength. He makes my feet as sure as those of a deer, and He helps me stand on the mountains.."

Conclusion

Sadly, it seems there will never be a day when we turn on the news and newscaster will say that there is no bad news today. It's highly unlikely. As much as we would love it to be different, problems will still come and go, difficulties will arise and subside. Jesus spoke of this to His disciples before He left them – "In this world, you will have troubles and tribulations..." – not really great news for the bewildered disciples. But then He went on, "***but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.***" He never said it was going to be easy down here. But, put your focus, your faith, your trust, your hope in me – He did say.

For a people whom God loved dearly, yet constantly complained about Him not hearing their prayers, not answering their calls, not seeing to their needs and never being there – we are not very far removed. The words He gave to His people then are just as appropriate to us today: ***"Those who wait upon the Lord, will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary, they will walk and not be faint.."***

ADDITIONAL VERSES (referred to in the message)

- "In the morning, o Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation..." ***Psalm 5 verse 3***
- "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord..." ***Psalm 27 verse 14***
- "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes..." ***Psalm 37 verse 7***
- "Wait for the Lord and keep His way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it." ***Psalm 37 verse 34***
- "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him." ***Isaiah 64 verse 4***
- "At the time I have decided, my words will come true. You can trust what I say about the future. It may take a long time, but keep on waiting - it will happen!" ***Habakkuk 2 verse 3***
- "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoptions as sons, the redemption of our bodies..." ***Romans 8 verse 23***
- "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." ***Jude 1 verse 21***

ISAIAH chapter 40 verses 27 - 31

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.

“DON'T YOU KNOW THE EVERLASTING GOD..”

Isaiah 40 verses 28-31; Psalm 55 verse 22; Romans 8 verses 28

Don't you know the everlasting God
Never grows tired or weary.
Those who trust in Him for help
They will find their strength is renewed.

*They will rise, they will rise
They will rise on eagle's wings.
They will run, they will run
They will run and never tire.*

Cast your burden on the Lord,
He's our help in time of trouble.
Those who come to Him in need,
He will never turn away.

All things work together for good
For all who love the Lord and saviour.
Those who trust in Him for help
They will find their strength is renewed.

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