

God's Never Late, But...

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Isaiah 40:31

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Who the Son sets free, he is free indeed. You know that's not just a lyric to a song, that's straight out of Scripture, and yet today is the day that all across our land both in and outside of the church, we celebrate the sacrifice that untold millions have given on our behalf so that we can experience what we sing all the time, the land of the free. But you know, you can live in the land of the free and still be in bondage to sin and you can live in a place where in the earthly realm there is no freedom in absolute bondage and be completely free. You see, freedom may be pictured and it may be demonstrated by these earthly powers but it is only truly experienced through Jesus Christ and let us not be guilty of living in the land of the free but being in bondage to sin.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we continue our time of worship, Lord, as we have the privilege not just of declaring the truth of your word in song but opening your word, reading your word, studying your word, digesting your word, God, I pray that this would not be just an academic exercise, I pray this wouldn't just be a time where we check off a box and say, "Been there, done that," but that somehow through your Holy Spirit today you would transform us, you would change us from the inside out as your word becomes the lamp unto our feet and the light unto our path. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Isaiah 40. As you turn to Isaiah 40, today we're just going to look at one very simple verse as far as its quantity is concerned but a very complex passage as far as the depth of what God is trying to teach and show us this day. If you're a guest or visitor with us, we are as a family of faith, we are walking through the Scriptures about a chapter or if you're in Isaiah, two chapters a day over the course of about three years and as we gather on Sunday morning, we look back at the passages that we've read, we extrapolate some of the themes, the ideas and the motifs, but today one very simple verse. In fact, this is one of those what I call poster verses, this is one of those verses of Scripture that oftentimes you can be in a store or in somebody's home and you will see a plaque or you will see a poster that has Isaiah 40:31 on it, and today we're going to deal with the subject matter that none of us enjoy and none of us like, we're going to talk about the fact of waiting on

God. In fact, one of the old adages of life is this, that God is never late but rarely, if ever, is he early.

Today in Isaiah 40:31, it begins with "But." I'm going to stop there for just a moment. You say, "Why are you going to stop?" Well, number 1, that's my favorite word in the Bible, number 2, you're in the 31st and the last verse of this chapter and all of a sudden it says "But." In other words, we've been building to this point, we've been dealing with some subjects for 30 verses and all of a sudden in this last verse the Lord says, "But," and when you walk through chapter 40, one of the great chapters of Scripture, not as if there are any bad ones but just one of the great chapters of Scripture, it begins by declaring the prophetic word of whom we will one day know as John the Baptist, Elijah in spirit coming as the forerunner of Jesus Christ who would one day stand on the banks of Jordan and say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Then it begins to share with us who the Messiah will be, his characteristics, his aspects up until the point of which the day as we read at the end of the Bible, where he physically returns to earth, establishes his kingdom and reigns forevermore. It's one of those shouting hallelujah, amen, kind of chapters in the Bible and then you get to verse 31, "But they that wait upon the LORD." In other words, the Lord says, "In all that I've shared with you, it's going to be hundreds of years and in some cases thousands of years before it comes to fruition. Those that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." And what we discover in this verse are two constructs that I want to explore. The first one is this, the problems of waiting on God; and secondly, what are the promises that he gives us when we wait on him?

You may be wondering, "Why do you call it a problem?" Because none of us enjoy waiting on anything. In fact, waiting is a painful experience, whether you're waiting on somebody, something or the Lord himself. We live in a world today, in a culture today that we think that waiting might be the worst of all evils and I can prove it to you. How many of you have gotten frustrated when you send somebody a text and you're going, "Where are the dots?" In other words, you need to respond to me immediately. We've become a people that if we have to wait five minutes, much less 15 minutes, surely it is too long. One of the things that I've shared with my boys as we're raising them in the home is they're going through that adolescent teenage years where the dating and the courtship and such, I remember at least in my generation, we didn't have text messaging, we didn't have instant messaging, oh and yes, we had cassette tapes. I'll go ahead and share it with you. You had to wait on a phone call. That's a brutal experience. When someone says, "I'll call you tomorrow," there is no dot, dot, dot with that, there is no instant message, there is no I've got this one. Have you been guilty of this, I have as a parent, checked on your app for your child's phone to see exactly where they are? I've even got an app that tells me exactly how fast he's driving. I know where they are but the pain of waiting to the return.

You know, today as we celebrate what we know as Veteran's Day, our remember my grandfathers who both served in WWII and though I did not know one because he passed away early in my life, I remember hearing stories not only from my grandfather but from

their friends and from that generation where they talked about the difficulties of the war but the excitement of coming home. In those days, they didn't have text messaging, they didn't have the phone communication that we have today, they would send a telegram with something like this, "Coming home." In that time, sometimes it meant six months. Can you imagine waiting six months? Can you imagine in our culture? We can't wait six minutes.

I mean, we struggle but it says those who wait on the Lord. You know, just a couple of everyday items here, there are a lot of folks, particularly at various stages of life, that have decided that the Bible is true, that whoever is in debt is slave to the lender, and they've decided that they're going to live differently, they've decided they're not going to be in debt, shall we say, to the system, and one of the things, that's hard to do. When your friends are buying new cars and your friends are buying new houses and your friends are taking fancy vacations, it's hard to wait eating beans and rice, rice and beans, living on love. It's tough. It's hard waiting. It's hard waiting, living a certain way so that it can be different in the future.

How about relationships? I alluded to that a while ago. We live in a world that says, "Don't worry about waiting on finances, just charge it, do what you want to do. Don't wait about this. Don't wait about that." But I've got news for you and I know this is absolutely unbelievably culturally unpopular but the Bible says that if you find interest in a person of the opposite sex and you desire to marry them, you are to wait for some things until you get married. But we say, "No, no, no, we don't need to wait. It's economically beneficial just for us to be together." Now I know that's not popular but I've got news for you, I'm not taking a popularity vote today. The Bible says those who wait not on the culture, those who wait on the latest fads, those who wait on how many likes did I get online, no, those who wait on, what? The Lord.

This isn't just us, you know, the men of the Bible, even the ladies of the Bible, they struggled with this. There's a prophet by the name of Baalim and Baalim is known for the donkey that talked and he couldn't see the angel of the Lord, but immediately before that story in the book of Numbers, it says that there was this leader of the enemy of Israel who came to him and said, "You're a prophet of God, I want you to curse the Israelites. I want you to make their life miserable for me on behalf of your God." He said, "I can't do that." He said, "I'll tell you what, I'll offer you great prestige and prominence, I'll offer you silver and gold, you'll be second in the kingdom next to me." Do you know what he says? "Let me pray about it." That's a true story. That night he goes and he prays to the Lord, do you know what the Lord tells him? "Alright, Baalim, when you get up in the morning, if he calls for you, you may go." Do you know what he does? Just what we do, he gets up and takes off and the people of God fall into this pitfall of sin for generations because he could not wait just a couple of hours to have that conversation.

But he's not the only one, the king known as Saul, the one who the Bible says was head and shoulders above everybody else and powerful, he gets into this battle one day and there's all this spoil and he makes the decision to honor the God who delivered them and he's going to have this sacrifice, he's going to take all these animals and they're going to

offer a, in his words, a sweet aroma to the Lord. It would end up becoming what the prophets call a strange fire and there the prophet Samuel, or the priest Samuel, he comes and he makes this statement to Saul, he says, "Why do I hear the bleating in my ear?" In other words, "Why are there animals being sacrificed? That's not your job, that's my job." And you get the idea from that passage in 1 Samuel 15 that Saul says, "I didn't know when you were going to show. It had to be done."

It's not just our struggle, it's all of humanity's struggle waiting on the Lord and it hurts, it's painful but it's also, as we see in this verse, very personal, "But they that wait on the LORD." This is not addressed to humanity in general. It's not addressed to society as a whole. In fact, you go all the way back to the first chapter of Isaiah and it's made very clear that this message is to the children of the Lord who have rebelled against him. So in the context of Isaiah 40:31, this is the Lord as a parental figure to the Israelites, the child in this relationship. "But they," and so you get this idea of the parental guidance and wisdom.

You know, when we talk about parenting and I know there are a lot of experts and a lot of books and a lot of information and such, but I know that when I was growing up and in my adolescent days and years, there was a phrase that came to be very popular called helicopter parents. Now you may be familiar with this. I actually had somebody after the last service confess that they are one. It's okay. A helicopter parent is someone when their child is in need, their child is in trouble, whatever it may be, that they hover over them, pull them out of the situation because God forbid they experience any of the negative consequences of life. They're helicopters. Well, that still exists but there's a new parenting description I've heard as of late, it's called lawnmower parents. Now if you're not familiar with what a lawnmower parent is, that is one who said, "I don't want my children to have any difficulties in life. I don't want them to have any obstructions in life. I don't want them to have to wait for anything so I'll just pave the road for them. I'm going to mow the grass in advance." Here's the problem when you look at this passage in verse 31, when we look at ourselves just as earthly parents, there are things, there are situations that people need to go through so as to appreciate what they've got and the Lord says, "I need you to wait on me, that way you don't think you did it in your own strength, that way you don't think you did it in your own power." And when we hear about this and we say, "But if God loved me," you do realize that when the Lord has you wait, when the Lord says, "Not now, give it a few," he's not punishing you, he's protecting you.

Let me give you an illustration. How many of you when you go home today and give a power tool to a 4 year old? Now some of the dads are going, "Hey, hey, that could be fun." No, it's not, not unless you want to repair your entire house because a child needs to wait a few years before that's placed in their hands. I've got one, how about go home and give the keys to your brand new family SUV to your 7 year old and say, "Could you run to the store and get me some milk, please?" You say, "I would never do that. They need to, uh-oh, wait until they are qualified and capable." So when the Lord says, "Hey, there are some things in life you need to wait on," sometimes that's financial, sometimes that's

personal, whatever it may be, please understand when God says wait that's not a lightning rod of punishment, it is his protection so that the season of our life is ripe for what he has.

Now, notice the prophetic element here, those that wait on the Lord shall. Shall, not might, not could be, not well, it might happen. No, it says they shall and so when we deal with the struggle of waiting on the Lord, we're about to talk about his promises in just a moment, please hear this, that he desires and he wants to deliver and to save and to provide on his time, not ours.

Allow me to illustrate. You go through some of the great stories of the Old Testament that deal with men and women having to wait on the Lord. Let's just begin with Noah. The Lord comes to Noah in Genesis 6 and he says, "My spirit will not strive with man but for 120 years," then he lays out the plan for Noah to build this boat over 120 years. Now I'm not Noah and I don't have three sons by the same name, but I've got three boys in my house and I'll make you a wager today, I'll bet you that if you came to my house with plans to build something and said, "I'll tell you what, I'm going to give you seven days to do it," I bet we'd say, "We can do it in three. We can get this done. We can make this happen." And the idea that I get from Genesis 6 is the Lord saying, "Noah, you can build this thing in 50 years if you want but you're going to wait for 70 more," because the rain is not coming for 120 years. But he did prophesy, it's going to occur, it's just not on your time scale.

How about Moses? He's wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Read that story sometimes. Do you know how many times Moses cried out to God and said, "Can we get this over with? Can you just kill these people, please? They're driving me nuts!" It could've happened in four years but the Lord took 40, and Moses is an example of one who got impatient with God and said, "It's got to happen quicker," and he struck the rock the second time without permission and it was Joshua that led them to the Promised Land, not him.

How about the prophets of old? You read the Isaiahs and the Jeremiahs and such, you discover it was hundreds of years just as we read in Isaiah 40 before the Messiah would come. It would be hundreds of years before these promises would take place and yet when the appropriate time, as Romans said, there were a group of magi, there were a group of what we commonly call wise men who looked up at the stars, saw his star in the east and made their way to his place of residence. How many generations, how many men in the east, how many of these wise men sat down with the younger ones and said, "We've been looking but it hasn't happened yet"? How many times are we guilty of saying, "I know that's not the star it should be but I'm going to make it that way because I'm tired of waiting. I know this isn't what God really wants for me but I'm tired of waiting."

Moses fell into the trap, Baalim fell into the trap, even King David fell into the trap and so do we. Why? Because it's a problem. It's painful and even though it's personal and even though we know God has the best intentions for us, we don't want to wait for his

perfect timing because we want the dots on the text, "Can we do it now, please?" But he says those that wait on the Lord.

Now notice the promises: they shall renew their strength; they will mount up or shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Three promises that he gives the Israelites and he gives us today. The first one is this: that there will be an exchange. That your strength will be renewed. In other words, that which you are futile in doing and cannot accomplish on your own, he will do on your behalf and for you.

Some years ago, in fact it's been about 20 years ago, Tracy and I, my wife, we purchased our first home and soon after purchasing our first home, it was new to us but not new to the community, we discovered that there was a massive probably about 30 inch diameter Texas oak tree that was dead. It wasn't dying, I mean, it was dead. In a bad storm a tornado could come through and it could easily fall and unfortunately could fall on the house, so we made the decision that this tree needed to come down. Here was the problem: we didn't have a chainsaw and we didn't have the money to buy a chainsaw. So one day we got out there, yes, true story, with an 18 inch handsaw and we, I mean, I went to work on that tree. Now she was by my side all day long, in fact, when we got toward the end, she was actually pushing on the tree, leaning on the tree. It had been about six or eight hours, I don't know, it all just kind of gets cloudy at that point, when one of my new neighbors who I had never met before came over and said, "Hey, you want to borrow a chainsaw for that?" I'm like, "Where were you eight hours ago?" I'm worn out. I wonder why I have shoulder problems now, maybe because of that tree, among many other things.

He will renew your strength. What he will do is exchange what you cannot do on your own for what he can only do. You know, in the book of 2 Corinthians 5 it says, "He who knew no sin," Jesus Christ, "became sin for us." You know, just like that illustration with the tree, the harder you work, the more labor you put into it, the more exhausted you are, the more frustrating it gets. You know, we're guilty of the same thing. When we know we've sinned, when we know we've messed up, when we know we've done things we shouldn't have done, said things we shouldn't have said, we always try to cover it or gloss it with good deeds, don't we? "Well, if I'll just do more of this and a little bit of this and less of that." You know, it is exhausting being religious? It's exhausting. I mean, how many services and how many things and prayers, it's exhausting, but Jesus made this great statement when talking about the fact that he came to save us from our sins, he said, "My burden is easy, my yoke is light." In other words, "Let me do for you what you cannot do for yourself." And when we call on him, and when he places the Holy Spirit in us, he can do more in a moment than we can do in a lifetime.

He promises this incredible exchange, "I will renew your strength." Then he says, "I will mount you up with the wings of eagles." You know, when you use this phrase about being mounted up with wings of eagles, it's actually used three times in the Bible. It's found back in the book of Exodus 19 and the book of Revelation 12 and here in Isaiah 40, and what's interesting about all three of those passages is they all speak of deliverance.

The one in Exodus, the Israelites have been in captivity for 400 years, 10 generations of slaves, and what does he say when they find themselves on the other side of the Red Sea? "I brought you up on eagle's wings." When you get to Revelation 12, different situation, different group of people, same problem. They are in bondage to what the Bible calls the beast or the antichrist and it's not 400 years, it's 3 ½ years but nonetheless they're running for their lives, they're going to and fro. Jesus said in Matthew 24 it would be a horrible experience and it says that the Lord reached down and he delivered them up on the wings of an eagle. And what you see here is an incredible expectation that when we allow him to renew our strength and exchange his strength for ours, we can expect that he will deliver us. Here's the problem, sometimes it takes 400 years, sometimes it takes 3 ½ but the key is he does take us to the other side.

Think about it for just a moment. The Israelites, they did get there. You think about all those individuals in Scripture who struggled with believing and trusting, there was a time – now here's the issue – it may not happen "on this side" but I've got news for you, the Bible says when we get to the other side through the blood of Jesus Christ, there is no more sorrow, no more pain, no more heartache, no more misery, isn't that what we're all wanting to be delivered from today? Isn't that what we're desiring for our lives? And he says you can be brought up on the wings of an eagle, you can be delivered from, and even if you're shackled with physical bondage today, you can be free because he who the Son sets free is free indeed. So there's this incredible promise that we will be delivered.

Then the final one says they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not grow faint. I know I mention all the time kind of the status of our home, having three teenage boys in the home is an entertaining event particularly when it comes to feeding them, but that's a whole other message for a whole other day, but one of the things that I've teased and I've joked with them and this is something I say and I know my day is coming, I get it, I realize this is a temporary thing, but I always tell them, "No matter what you do, where you go, I'm always going to be stronger than you." So when we go to the gym and we work out as of today when we get on the bench press, it's okay, when we get on the squat rack it's okay, but I'm going to tell you something, about four years ago, they got faster than I am. I'm serious. I've talked to folks and they say, "Yeah, you've got that thing we call dad strength." You know, something about dads just maintaining strength, but we don't maintain speed. I mean, it's gone. Not that I was ever fast to begin with but one of the great things when they were little guys was we'd run a race and I could purposely lay back to make them feel good about themselves, now I don't even try. I may be strong but they're gone. And I tell them, I say, "Guys, you may be able to outrun me but you've got to come home eventually and I'll be waiting on you."

But what does it say? It says we will run, we will walk and we will not grow weary. You know, as I go through the aging process, there's a lot of things that I miss. I miss my good eyes. I'm going to be honest with you, I miss them. I miss my good eyes. I miss strong shoulders because they're shot. But do you know one of the things I miss the most? Endurance. Endurance. You say, "What do you mean endurance?" I used to be like I could stay up all night studying for a test, I could stay up all night working on a project, I

mean, I could go when the buzzer rang at work, I could keep on going. Now I fall asleep in the chair studying. I can't make it all night anymore. The endurance is waning with time.

Notice what it says here, you'll run and not be weary, you'll walk and you'll not be faint. One of the great passages in the New Testament, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." You realize one of his promises on the other side, the endurance, it will never fade away. It will never depart. It will always be. I joke with my boys when we all get to the other side, we're going to run one more race and I'm going to whip them when I get there because it says I will run and not grow weary, I will walk and not be faint. But it's more than just a physical challenge and endeavor, he promises us if he takes our sin in exchange, he will deliver us one day and then it will be everlasting, without end forever. You know, I know we struggle with waiting on God but aren't those promises worth it no matter how bad the pain is in the present?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, today we've talked about waiting and the difficulty of waiting, the struggle of waiting and the non-fun of waiting but as we come to this time in our service, did you know that there is one thing in Scripture that God says you never have to wait to do? In fact, the Bible says in the book of Hebrews 6 that today is the day of salvation and when it comes to asking Jesus Christ to be our Savior, when it comes to that point in our lives, he's never going to make you wait. In fact, maybe you're here this morning and maybe you're in this place today and you realize that's who you are and where you are and what you need to be and what you desire in life, you don't need to wait until tonight, you don't need to wait until tomorrow, next week, next month, in fact, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. If you're that person today, can I encourage you just to have a conversation with the Lord? You don't have to have a conversation that's out loud, you don't even have to say necessarily the same words that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this, "God, today I just want to admit to you what you already know about me, I'm the problem, I'm the one that's messed up, I'm the one that's gotten myself in this position but I believe today, I believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my problem. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sins on the cross and raise from the dead three days later so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of this world but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, maybe that's the conversation you had with the Lord. We'd love to have a conversation with you. We'd love to just celebrate what the Lord is doing. Or maybe the Lord has impressed something else upon your heart or whatever it may be, we just would love the privilege today of celebrating with you what the Lord is doing in your life this day.

Lord, as we come to this time, as we've declared truth in song, as we've heard truth from your word, Lord, we've come to one of those points where a decision must be rendered, what do we do with it? God, I pray that your Holy Spirit would burden us. Can I pray your Holy Spirit, Lord, if you'll allow me to say that it would bother us so that we'd bend our knee to your will and your way in our life; no longer, God, would we desire to do it our way, even if it takes longer than we'd wish. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.