

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Renewing Strength Pastor Steven Gaines May 15, 2016

This morning we are going to be looking at Isaiah 40:27-31. This is a very familiar passage of Scripture, especially Verse 31. I think I've seen quite a number of pictures and images over my life, where you have a beautiful picture of an eagle in flight. And you have Isaiah 40:31, there with that great and wonderful promise that we're given in the end, of mounting up with wings like eagles, of running and not being weary, and walking and not faint. That is a very popular passage for devotionals as well, in considering the strength that the Lord gives to us. That is a wonderful thing. Hopefully this familiarity will not breed contempt with this passage, and I would ask you to try to listen, and engage with it afresh and anew, to try to see what the Lord would have to say to all of us this morning.

One of the main focus points of this passage is this idea of waiting for the Lord, or in some translations it is translated as hoping. The reason there being that this word has both of those elements in it, that it is waiting, but it is expectant waiting, it is hopeful waiting upon the Lord. So I don't know how your week has been, but have you had to wait on anything this week? Have you had to wait on anybody? Maybe even this morning, as you were getting ready for church, maybe there were some people you had to wait on to get out the door. Maybe not. Maybe you've been in traffic, and you've had to wait at traffic lights. You know what that is like.

I want to give you a little bit of a comparison as an introduction this morning, from Scripture, about two different men, and how they waited upon the Lord, to help us out as we consider this subject. The first man is King Saul. He faced a point in his life where he had some trying circumstances. The enemies of Israel, the Philistines, were mustering up all their people, their 30,000 chariots, and their 6,000 horseman, and their troops like the sand on the seashore in a multitude. That sounds pretty intimidating, and apparently he had been given guidance by Samuel, who was functioning sort of as a judge, a prophet, a priest. He was given instruction by Samuel that he needed to wait seven days. That is what we are told in the Scripture. We don't know exactly why, or what it was, but he needed to wait for Samuel to come to make the sacrifice. Seven days went by and there was no Samuel, and so after the seven days went by, Saul made the conclusion, "Well, his time is up, so I'm just going to take the matters into my own hands, and now not only am I going to be a king, but I'm also going to be a priest as well." And so at that point, Saul takes over, and he makes the sacrifice, and then Samuel shows up

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on the scene and asks him what he's doing. So here we have the issue, that is, the need of deliverance, the time frame is seven days, and the circumstances are pretty trying. Let's compare Saul, and his waiting, to another man, and that is David.

David had been anointed to be king over Israel. The timing here was not seven days, but it was 15 years, 15 long years. Consider the difference there. The circumstances of his waiting was the active persecution of Saul, coming after him, seeking to take his life, having to live as an outcast with a band of outcasts, to be away from civilization, and yet in this case, the result was very different. For David waited upon the Lord, hoping and trusting in His promise.

Today, as we look at Isaiah 40, we know that you and I are not Davids, or Sauls, but we still face the issue of waiting in our lives on a recurring basis. Whether it is waiting for answers to prayer, the resolution of situations in our life, waiting for relief from our pain, for justice and righteousness to prevail in our situations, and even waiting to see the fulfillment of deferred hopes and dreams. Today, as we study this passage, I'd like to break it down into three points. The first point is *Apparent Abandonment*, looking at Verse 27. The second point is *Awesome Character*, looking at Verses 28-30. And the third point is *Amazing Strength*, looking at Verse 31.

1) Apparent Abandonment:

Well let's start with our first point, *Apparent Abandonment*. In Verse 27, we read this statement:

Isaiah 40:27 ~

***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"?***

Now this, of course, was many hundreds of years before the time of Christ, but perhaps this statement, or this thought that is expressed here, isn't so far away from any of us when we go through a situation where we feel like the Lord is not acting upon our behalf. The context, or the people in Isaiah 40, as his prophecy was given, would have been the nation of Israel in captivity in Babylon, being taken out of their land as a just chastisement for their sin. Being in a place where they are far

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from the temple that was existent in previous times, the worship of God at that place, far away from their land, the land that God had given them as a nation, as a promise. And here they are exiles in a strange place, with a strange people ruling over them, and yet God is giving them, in Isaiah 40, this chapter, a word of comfort, as you see at the beginning, if we were to look at it. “Comfort my people. Say to Jerusalem that our warfare is over, that she has received double for her sins.” But that is the context of these people, that they are in captivity, and in trouble. So I ask you today, as we look at this, and we see how they were interpreting their circumstances, for you to think how you interpret your circumstances, and how you achieve your understanding of reality, how you achieve your understanding of God’s ways, and His nature.

You know, it is easy for any of us to become an empiricist. That is, to look around us, to see what is going on, to gather data, to use our senses to see what is there, and then from that data that we gather, to then begin to construct an idea of what must be right and true from that. Now that is very easy for all of us to do, and of course, we do have to look around us, and we have to pay attention to what is going on, and we have to understand things, but what I’m talking about here is something very different. It is something where we don’t start with the revelation of God for who He is, and for what He does, but we rather start with ourselves, and our limited perspective, and we work our way from that back up to a way where we almost construct for ourselves, the God that we think we worship.

You see here in Verse 27 the statements that they are saying this, “My way is hidden from the Lord.” The claim here is, this idea is, “God doesn’t know what is going on in my life and my circumstances. Perhaps in this first phrase of your way being hidden from the Lord, the emphasis here is either on His inability to know what is taking place, or His apathy to know what is taking place. We’ve all experienced this before sometimes. We have a problem, and maybe we even tell somebody we have a problem that needs attention, and they forget about it, and we’re sitting over here, and we have this need. Maybe you’ve been somewhere before, to a certain agency or place, and you’ve gone up to the counter, and you stated your need, and they say, “Thank you, Sir. We’ll have somebody get with you as soon as they can.” And then you go, and you take your seat, and you wait, you look at your watch, you look around, maybe there are some magazines there. You look at the magazine, you look out the window, you look up at the counter, you look around, and you go through this cycle over and over. What is going on in the back of your mind is this, “It’s not just that I’m waiting for someone, they’ve forgotten about me. They really don’t care about me. It is just passed by.”

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We can make an erroneous conclusion, as the people did at that point, that God is not aware of our circumstances. That even though we have the Scriptures that tell us all these wonderful things about how He is almighty, that His presence is everywhere, He is omnipresent, that He is all-knowing, that He is the all-seeing God. But if we look at our circumstances, and we don't see Him acting in the way that we want, it is easy to reach this conclusion, to reach the conclusion that, "God does not care about me, and my circumstances, and my burden, and my grief, and my pain, and my difficulty, and my unfulfilled hope," it is easy to reach that. Well, the second point that they make in their statement about the Lord, goes a little bit further. It says:

Isaiah 40:27 ~

***"My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?***

That ups it just a little bit now. Now it is not just a matter of saying that God is either apathetic, or He is unable to see what is going on, but now it is the idea that, "God doesn't care about my cause. He doesn't care about the rightness that is going on." And in this case, and in this context, it would have been His people, in captivity, thinking that God had just abandoned His purposes with them because He had made them these great and wonderful promises, and it seemed now as if they were not being fulfilled.

We too, in our circumstances, can make erroneous conclusions. Perhaps today, if you are going through some manner of personal affliction and trial, if you begin with that personal affliction and trial, and you start there, and then you work your way up to deciding the character and nature of God, you will reach an erroneous conclusion. If you start with persecution, or the difficulty facing the Church, and the world, or even living in a nation where we see things happening at the national level that outrage us, and are so ridiculous for us. To hear this week of the idea of even proclamations being made, not about great and lofty things, or character and ideal, or the future of our nation, but the idea of taking away men's and women's bathrooms. It seems so ridiculous to us, but yet this is the reality, and the time and the place that God has called us to live in as believers in Jesus Christ. If you look at your pain, and illness, and physical suffering, if you wake up in the morning, and your indication of whether God loves you is determined by how you feel, then you will reach erroneous conclusions about Him. If the way that you think about God is

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determined by your unanswered prayers, or by your unfulfilled hopes, or your loneliness, or your grief, you will not come to the right conclusion.

Today, as we look at this, and we see how the people of Israel in captivity would have been thinking and speaking, the thoughts that would have come to pass, that God was not involved in their situation, we need to be very careful. If we are to honor the Lord, we need to remember that whatever we are going through, He calls us to trust Him first. He calls us not to build an understanding of Him, of our lives, of His work in our lives, by what we see and feel around us.

2) Amazing Character:

Now His answer to these things comes in our second point, and that is *Amazing Character*. In Verse 28, the response is given.

Isaiah 40:28-29 ~

***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.
29 He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.***

So the Lord responds to this accusation of *Apparent Abandonment*, and He responds by showing that the answer is, “Look at who I am, and My character, and My attributes.”

Well, let’s look at some of these, and in doing so we’re going to be looking at some of the other sections of Isaiah 40 that we read earlier, in this great and wonderful section beholding our God. The first one here is He says that He is everlasting. Consider Psalm 90:2.

Psalm 90:2 ~

***Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.***

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This idea of God's eternity. But if you think back a thousand years, God existed in perfection. If you think back a million years, He existed in perfection—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you go back a trillion years, and if you keep going back farther, and farther, and farther, it is this idea of a timeline where infinity is out here, and you keep increasing the math, and the numbers, but you don't reach the beginning because, as we read in both Genesis 1, and in John 1, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and in John 1, in the beginning was the Word. There it is, in the very beginning of time. You can't stretch back to find Him.

And for eternity in the future, the idea of someone who will never die, who will never pass away, a God who never changes. Psalm 93:2 says:

Psalm 93:2 ~

*Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.*

We see also, in the response, regarding His character, that He is the creator of the ends of the earth. If you look back in Isaiah 40, back to Verse 12, some verses we looked at on Wednesday night, we read this:

Isaiah 40:12 ~

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand...

Now think about that for a minute. Think about the waters, the oceans, the seas, the lakes, the rivers, everything on this earth, and think about the hollow of your hand right here, what that would be like. Just if you wanted to be a little bit literal here, and think about how big you would have to be to have a hand with a hollow big enough to hold all of those waters that are there. Secondly, it says in Verse 12:

Isaiah 40:12 ~

*...and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?*

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Now I shared this on Wednesday, if you were here, but consider this idea of marking off the heavens. The Milky Way galaxy, it is estimated, is 100,000 light years across, okay? Think about that. Now don't ask me to tell you right now how they know that. There is an explanation of that approximation, there is some science behind it, but just think about it for a minute. A hundred thousand light years, from one end to the other, of the galaxy, and yet the Milky Way galaxy is just one of numerous galaxies that exist in the heavens. But it says that He marked off the heavens with a span. Well, let's bring it down another notch lower. It says there that he enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure.

Now, I could probably ask many of the kids here, and they could tell me that the earth is about 8,000 miles in diameter. It is a fact we learn earlier in life, but it is talking about the dust of the earth. So consider this, they estimate that the weight of the earth is 6.6 sextillion tons. I think that is 6.6 times 10 to the 21st, or 10 to the 23rd tons. Now that is pretty heavy, that is a lot of dust to weigh in a measure. Now think about a measure that is something you could weigh, or hold something in, that was large enough to hold that, and strong enough.

Let's bring you down one more notch, from earlier in Chapter 40. It says here He:

Isaiah 40:12 ~

***...weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?***

A mountain that would have been known to the people of Israel was Mount Hermon, there in the north part of Israel, 9,200 feet in height. Imagine that, to put that on a balance, or a scale. We also see here, in God's *Amazing Character*, that He is one, as it says here in Verse 28 that:

Isaiah 40:12 ~

...his understanding is unsearchable.

We read earlier in Chapter 40:

Isaiah 40:13-14 ~

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***Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,
or what man shows him his counsel?
14 Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,
and taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?***

It is an amazing thing when you consider that God needs nobody's counsel. It is easy for us sometimes, when we achieve success, and we do well, to think that we don't need anybody's counsel, but it is foolhardy. We are warned in the Scripture that plans fail because of lack of counsel, that it is a good thing for us to humble ourselves, to listen to other people have input in our lives, to believe that God speaks through other people. But we know from Ephesians 1:11, that God is the one ***...who works all things according to the counsel of his will...*** That is, He takes counsel in Himself. For a person to do that is very arrogant, to say, "I don't need to listen to you, I just take counsel in my own counsel because there is none that is superior," but we see that this is a great blessing of having God to be our God and Savior.

He also has no need for a teacher or instructor. But even for those of us who have read, and have learned on our own, who have taught things to ourselves, that if you've learned by reading a book, you need to be thankful that you had somebody teach you how to learn to read, to teach you the letters, to teach you the basic things in life. But God has no need for a teacher or an instructor. We find as well, that there is a promise here in God's amazing character, that He is a God of power, that He is able to give power to the faint because He does not grow faint or weary Himself. And when you think of this idea of power, we see this displayed earlier in the chapter in describing His relationship to the nations of the earth.

Now for the people of Israel at this time, the nations of the earth were a big deal because it was the Babylonians that had come and taken them into captivity for the Southern Kingdom, and the Assyrians that had come earlier and taken the Northern Kingdom. So these major world players would have been a big threat, it would have been something that they would have feared, that they would have been concerned about. A little bit like during the Cold War, if you had grown up in America, the Soviet Union seemed to be such a big thing, this fearful nation, with all the nuclear weapons, with all this hatred and enmity toward our people. But here we see that the nations are as nothing before Him. They are counted by Him

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as less than nothing in emptiness. It is this picture here of the nations being as it says in Verse 15, like the dust upon the scales. Consider if you had some old fashioned scales, and you are weighing a substance on there, and as you weighed the substance, you took it off, and here were some residual particles that had been left upon that scale. That is a picture of God's power compared to the nations of the earth.

We can also rejoice that God is a God who does not grow faint or weary. That is one of the issues that we can't get away from. Some of you might be getting by on seven hours of sleep, or six hours of sleep, or five hours of sleep, maybe you get by on four hours of sleep, but there comes a point, at some point, where you are going to grow faint and weary. No matter whether you are full of energy, and vivacious, and you just kind of go, go, go, there is a point that you can't go anymore unless you stop. And sometimes, when you go too much, you get stopped because your body collapses, and it falls exhausted. What a great promise that we serve a God who does not grow faint or weary. That whether it is 2:00 in the morning, or it is 2:00 in the afternoon, that He is all-powerful, and He is not losing strength as we are.

Well the second point, God's *Amazing Character*, we see here the answer to the accusations of abandonment in the first part, and here is the argument and how it goes. The argument is that if there is a being who existed in eternity past and will exist to eternity future, and who is so great that He's the Creator of the ends of the earth, and so powerful, and He's all of these things, and He doesn't need a teacher, and He's all wise, and He's all knowing, then there is no possible way that your cause is being disregarded by your God, that there is no possible way that your way is hidden from the Lord. That's the argument that he's making here. How foolish it is to think that a being who could be all of these things could just simply not have the ability, or care, or concern about what you are going through.

We find this type of argumentation a little more clearly and explicitly made in the New Testament in Matthew 6, where He's talking to people about their struggle and their fear for lack of provision, and He gives this illustration, and He says:

Matthew 6:28 ~ Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 And yet if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and gone tomorrow, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

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It's the argument from the greater to the lesser. God says, "If I can do the great thing that's bigger and higher, well then how is it that you can question and wonder if I'm going to do the smaller thing?" Perhaps even greater and more closer to us in our salvation is that wonderful argument he makes in Romans 8, where he says this. He says:

Romans 8:32 ~ He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

The argument there is if God is going to do this marvelous work in Christ of sending His own Son to come to earth and become a Man, and to live a life we couldn't live, and to die as a sacrifice, a propitiation for our sins, if He's going to do all this and He's going to give Him up freely on our behalf, well then how is it that He is not going to continue that work in your life today? How, if your salvation rests upon this tremendous work and sacrifice, how is God not going to continue to bless you and love you, to supply all your needs, to uphold you spiritually in all things?

Today I would ask you, have you beheld God in all His greatness, in all His might? When you woke up this morning, did you think more about who He is, more about His power, more about His strength, more about His eternity, or did you think more about the things that are in front of you, more about your personal affliction and trials? More about the fact that it seems like God is working over here in this person's life, and they're talking about answered prayer, and they're talking about fulfilled hopes, and they're talking about external material blessings and encouragements, and you're looking over at your life and saying, "I'm waiting on prayer to be answered, and I'm waiting on blessing to come, and I'm waiting for hopes and dreams to be answered. And so it looks like You're working over here in this person, but You're not working here in me, and that You have forgotten me." I would argue today, don't look at your circumstance. Don't be an empirical person who builds your understanding upon what is around you, but look rather to the character of God, to the revelation He has made to Himself. Bring before you over and over again in those times of sadness, of difficulty, of pain, of affliction, or feeling abandoned, bring before you the character of God. Think of Psalm 145 which says:

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Psalm 145:

- 1 I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.***
- 2 Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.***
- 3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.***

To keep thoughts like that before your mind and your thinking, that you would think and meditate upon the Lord. Well, having looked at this idea of apparent abandonment and also looking at this strength of character, let's now look at point three, *Awesome Strength*.

3) Awesome Strength:

Isaiah 40:31~

***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.***

As I mentioned at the beginning, this word *wait* that is translated here in the ESV, is also translated as *hope*, and so the word connotes hope or waiting patiently. It can also connote the idea of resting in a trustful manner. And so this is the concept that is there, this idea of biblical hope. It's something that is waiting expectantly. It's not like the hopeless waiting that we can have sometimes if we're waiting in perhaps a long line of cars or people. But rather it is a truly expectant waiting where we are hoping for God to act upon our behalf and upon His promises. I mentioned before, the comparison of Saul and David. When we think about waiting upon the Lord, there are different things that we wait for. One of those things that we wait for are His promises. We know of course in the Old Testament in the life of Abraham and Sarah, this was a big theme, that they were to wait upon the Lord for this promised child. And that as the years rolled on and they were waiting for this child to come, this child did not come, and so they took a little detour thinking that God was not going to act in the way He said. And so here's

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Abraham, and here's Hagar, and here's Ishmael, but no real child of promise. But God fulfills His promises in their old age. He does what He says. In some cases, waiting upon the Lord involved deliverance, like David waiting upon deliverance from Saul. Many of the Psalms that we read account David's experience when he was waiting to be delivered from the threats of Saul coming at him. I want us to look for a few minutes at this concept of waiting, in some passages in the book of Psalms, because I think this is one place that this concept is developed well in Scripture. If you'll turn with me to Psalm 25, we're going to flip over and look through a few of these places together. Psalm 25 mentions this more than one time. Look from Verse 3 to Verse 6 there. In Psalm 25, the Psalmist says:

Psalm 25:

- 5** *Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.*
- 6** *Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.*

So in Verse 3, there's this promise that:

- 3** *Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

And in Verse 5, the commitment to wait for the Lord all the day long.

So we see here this promise that waiting on the Lord has a positive consequence that the moment you do it, it's very hard, because when you wait for the Lord hopefully and expectantly, at that moment if your circumstances are crying out against you to wait, then you have to actually trust that God is going to act even though at this moment He is not acting. Flip over to Psalm 27 and we'll look at the end, the statement there at the end.

Psalm 27:

- 13** *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living!*

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14 *Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!*

Here we have an exhortation that we are to wait for the Lord. Flip over with me beyond that to Psalm 40 and let's take a look at this one. Verse 1:

Psalm 40:

- 1** *I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my prayer.*
- 2** *He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.*
- 3** *He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.*

Here is a testimony of what came with the waiting upon the Lord, of the blessing that came with it. Now, some of us have a harder time waiting than others. Some of us are people who see themselves as people of action, that is, so concerned that we not sit around and do nothing, that there's got to be something in every situation that we can do, that we can take hold of, and that we can achieve our purposes if we just know the right things to do and we have the ability to do them. Well, I think God calls us to be very proactive. Scripture is full of those commands and exhortations. We're supposed to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We don't just passively sit back, close our eyes, and put our middle finger in our palms, and say, "Lord, make me holy." God gives us means and He works through those means to accomplish His will. There are many actions that He calls us to that we have to put ourselves forward to trust that His Spirit will use us in. But there are times when we've done all that we humanly can, all that we rightly humanly can, that is, and we have to stop at that point and say, "Lord, I've done everything that I can see biblically that I can do about this situation to please You, in pleasing You in this, and there's nothing else to do, and yet it's still not working. It's still not happening the thing I'm praying for and hoping for. The person in my life that

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I'm working on and praying for is not changing. My husband is not the husband that he needs to be. My wife is not the wife that she needs to be. My church is not the church that it needs to be, and yet, Lord, there's nothing else for me to do now except to sit and pray, and to leave it in Your hands."

Now, that's hard for any of us, but for some of us it's harder than for others, because if you're a person who is prone to action and take the bull by the horns, this is the point where God humbles us, and He says, "I'm the one actually who's got the bull by the horns. You need to try to get your hands off the bull, and you need to just leave it to Me, and to trust in Me for these things."

I want to break down this idea of waiting, a little bit more, because sometimes it can be a little too nebulous of what that means, I think, for us to be helped by this. As I mentioned before, Isaiah 40:31 is such a wonderful devotional verse, that sometimes it's easy to take these things and sentimentalize them a little bit. We can enjoy them, and we can be encouraged by them and warmed by them, but one of the elements of waiting for the Lord is obedience, a little bit like we saw in the situation with Saul and waiting on Samuel for the sacrifice. That was an issue where it was waiting for God's deliverance from his enemies, but it needed to be done in obedience to Him. Sometimes there's a temptation to say, "Well Lord, I know that You say that Christian believers need to marry other believers, but time is going on and I found this nice man. I found this nice woman. And I know they're not really a Christian, but they're not too opposed to it. Maybe this is the person for me, and I'm just going to go ahead and marry and go through with this." But you just need to wait for the Lord. You don't need to step outside of His revealed will, thinking that He's going to honor or bless that.

As I mentioned before, sometimes when we're in relationships with other people, sometimes we want to step out of the authority or the limits God has placed upon us to take control of things. A wife may say, "My husband is not the leader that he should be. I can't wait any longer. I'm going to take over." Perhaps you're in a situation where God has placed you under authority as an employee, or a child where you've been given limits, or you've been given restrictions, or you've been given things that you don't want to abide by, and they're too limiting, and things aren't happening the way you think they should happen. And so you decide, "I'm not going to abide by those things anymore. I've got to take matters into my own hands." God's not going to bless that either, because you've stepped outside of His revealed will. You need to wait upon Him, and trust and hope that He will act in the place that He has put you.

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Waiting on the Lord also means exercising faith. Now, this realm of exercising faith seems to get in this realm of subjective experience in the Christian life. But exercising faith is an active principle. It's not just a passive, hopeless, "I give up," but it's an everyday believing and trusting in the Lord consciously. I believe that waiting and hoping in the Lord also means practicing contentment in submission to the will of God. Following that great Psalm 131:

1 *O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.*

2 *But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.*

That wonderful picture of calming our souls in the midst of whatever it taking place around us, that if we are to hope and to wait on the Lord, we must do this. It also means persevering prayer. It's interesting in our development as we grow up, how we learn perseverance, it seems, just a part of the maturing process. When you're a child it seems like waiting another hour for dinner will almost kill you. You get a little bit older and you're waiting for a response from someone. Maybe you filled out an application or a job interview has gone on, and you don't get a call right away. You don't get it the next day, and you're just so tense and you're just wondering what's going on, and you can't wait. And you get older, and you live more, you experience more, and you begin to see that bigger picture, longer term thinking of what's there.

But you know, think about prayer. Prayer is, "I prayed for this every day this week, Lord, and it's time for You to answer." How about, "I prayed every day this month. I prayed every day this year. Lord, I've been praying for ten years for this to happen, and it's still not happening." Waiting upon the Lord increases our faith and grows us. One of the ways that it does this is by persevering in prayer, for us saying, "I'm not just going to pitch up a prayer and that's it, and then if He takes it, He takes it, and if He doesn't, He doesn't, and I'll just move on." But it's sometimes every day, every week, every month, continually coming back before Him, praying in hope and in faith that He is a God who has the power to answer.

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Well, what's the blessing in all of this? It is that God is a God who is strong and powerful, but it's also the blessing that He gives strength to the weary. I encourage you to read through this passage today or maybe this week, and to just pay attention to some of the language that's used here. When we talk about our weakness, you look through and you find the word *weary*. This is in ESV. It's used here in Verse 28, that He doesn't grow weary, and then when we look in Verse 30, we find that even youths shall grow faint and weary, and young men fall exhausted. And so this idea of weariness and faint is used a number of times. It's as if for us in our writing style, we might have wanted to use some more synonyms in here to make it a little more interesting in the language, but I think the repetition here is to just hammer home this point, to hammer home the point that, number one, God doesn't grow faint or weary, but you know we do. We are weary. We grow faint and we grow exhausted.

In fact, it even says that young men and *youths* grow weary. Now, that's an amazing thought. You know how it is when you have little kids around and it's just like the randomness of their movements if you get a group of them around, and you just sit there and you're trying to watch them, and it's not all coordinated. You're trying to predict where they're going next and what they're going to do, just this energetic thing that goes. And then they get older into that youth stage. I get the opportunity to watch a lot of soccer games because of my household interests. And it is an amazing thing in some of these older soccer games to watch two players running for a ball down the field, and the form that they have, and the art that is there as they are coming at the ball from different places, and you're just trying to predict what's going to happen when they finally arrive there. But it seems when they're running that it's something that is just tireless. They're just streaming along and they're doing this, but they can't do it forever. You can make a soccer game long enough that they'll have to stop. And in fact, if you notice the end of the second half, versus the beginning of the first half, you oftentimes see a difference even among players that are highly skilled and trained.

The great promise that we have here is that we who are weary, we get exhausted, and spiritually speaking, because this is the focus here, is that we get exhausted through the hardness of life. Living in a sin-stricken world with the situations we face beating down upon us, the world system around us, our own sinful flesh there as well, all of these things have this draining effect upon us that lead us to become spiritually exhausted. But the promise here and the hope here is that if you hope and wait in the Lord, that God will not necessarily make your body become like an 18-year-old with new strength and health. You can go off and look in medications

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and treatments elsewhere if you want to work on that. That's not His promise here. His promise here is that spiritually if you do the right thing and you live a life of obedience, and you wait for Him, and wait for His timing, do things His way, the promise then is that He is spiritually going to give you renewed strength for your exhaustion and your living in this sin-stricken world, and with the hardness of life.

And then we have this beautiful picture of the eagle, of mounting up with wings like an eagle. Isn't that a wonderful example or picture to think about in your spiritual life? That if you wait upon the Lord, that He will work in you the ability through all these trials and difficulties, to soar like an eagle soars. It's so different, I think, now as I think of what it's like to run at this stage of life, to put all my effort into it. It just doesn't feel like I'm soaring. It just doesn't feel like I'm just gliding along with ease. But the beautiful picture is what God will give to us if we will trust Him, that we will look to His character, not our circumstances, that He will make us soar.

In conclusion today, we've looked at these different points—The feelings of abandonment, the character of God, and the awesome strength that He promises. So on this day, on May 15, 2016, what is the area of life where you feel like God is absent, where you feel like your way is hidden from the Lord? Do you feel like there is something going on where He is ignoring your situation, where you're not hearing an answer to your prayers? I exhort you today not to look to these, but look to the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth who does not grow tired or weary, and to remember that our seeming weakness in this world, even though it humbles us and it brings us low, that it's the very place where God can work. Think about the apostle Paul and his thorn in the flesh, and the words that were spoken to him. *My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness.* That if you want God's power to be manifested in your life, then it is in weakness. It is not in your self-exalted strength or righteousness that it will happen. So I would call you today to look to God and His awesome character, and to wait and to hope in Him.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You that the word of God is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, penetrating even to dividing joint from marrow, soul from spirit, judging the thoughts and the attitudes of our hearts. We pray, Father, this morning that You would take these words and that You would apply them to us. I pray that You by Your Spirit would give us the

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grace and the patience to wait, and to leave matters to You, and to trust You for Your timing and for Your fulfillment. And I pray this in Christ's Name, Amen.

"Renewing Strength"

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