

God's Great and Gracious Renewal – Isaiah 40:27-31

Introduction – There are many great and precious promises in God's Word for believers. The promises that God will deliver (40:1-11), matched with the truth that God can deliver (vv12-26) are clear. But timing is everything and when reality hits and stays, the nagging questions return: "Does God really care about me? How could God be good and able and leave me in this? How long, O Lord?" He is very concerned about the placement of the galaxies, about the rising and falling of nations, but have you ever felt like God hadn't noticed what you were going through? In Isaiah's day, the message of an impending disaster gave cause for him to address the despondency which would inevitably creep in.

Our Despair (v27) – First we should note the parallel reference to "Jacob...Israel." This was one individual before the names referred to a nation. And Jacob's story was certainly one where many times it appeared that God was not watching out for him. Jacob's name was changed after he "wrestled with God" where he was given a new name and new strength. "My just claim is passed over" indicates the idea that the case has been brought before the Lord time and again and disregarded. "Will you forget me forever?" (Psalm 13:1). "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1). "Has His mercy ceased forever?" (Psalm 77:7-9). John Knox says of Satan's first work in the Garden, "he poured into their hearts that poison that God did not love them." And when we listen to that lie, despair and/or desperation set in.

The Theology of Renewal (vv28-29) – In times of despair, the problem is not that God has forgotten, but that we have. "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" Theology is for our souls; Bible study is for growing closer to God. Isaiah lists the topics, the Table of Contents of the attributes of this God you are doubting. First, He is everlasting. This means He is never late, never surprised, never bewildered with our circumstances. Second, He has created everything which means He is Lord over everything in His creation; nothing is outside of His sovereign control. Third, He is untiring, comforting words describing His omnipotence. Fourth, His wisdom is unfathomable and so we must never expect to understand all His ways. But then, fifth (v29), He loves to give power to the weak, "and to those who have no might He increases strength." This is not speaking to something God occasionally does as though it is outside of His normal attributes. This is part of Who He is. Our God is a renewing God; He strengthens His people. He lifts up the downcast. He cares.

Great and Gracious Renewal (vv30-31) – God's renewing work is not natural to us though. This is not the renewal of a nap or a vacation. It is also not the kind of renewal we often think we would like. We are often looking for straight deliverance. God is often renewing and strengthening us to grow by His grace in the battle, in the trial, in the difficulty. If your battle could be likened to a physical battle, the strength God gives is contrasted to the weakness of the strongest young warrior who would fall if he had to face the battle you face (v30 - think of Samson as an example). His renewal is great. But it is also gracious. It comes by grace through faith.

Waiting on the Lord (v31) – This does not mean waiting in the sense that nothing is going on right now, or that it is going to take a long time for God to answer. This word has the idea of resting with great expectation, trusting with real hope. This is something that faith is and does; "Now faith is the substance of the things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). Waiting on the Lord implies a complete dependence on God and a confident willingness to allow Him to decide the terms. This is a waiting that declares that we have no other help in ourselves or elsewhere and that we are glad that is the way it is. This waiting is not merely killing time, but a life of confident expectation. Frantic efforts, exasperating worry, desperation and despair, these fall away, exchanged for new strength and faith in future grace with eternal purposes.

Why Does This Come Up All the Time? – It seems we must preach (in the pulpit and to ourselves) over and over again about the issues of God's sovereignty in the midst of suffering. The so-called problem of evil never goes away whenever our eyes fall away from the God of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. The New Testament writers seem to constantly meditate on the teaching of this chapter and this passage. And throughout Old and New we find God cares for nations like ours, and individuals like you.

Paul knew what it was to despair even of life (2 Cor 1:8-10).

He knew what it was to receive grace he did not expect yet was a better answer than what he had been asking for (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Jesus often asked similar rhetorical questions like Isaiah (John 14:9, Luke 24:25).

He gently rebuked those who thought He was not at work or in control (John 5:17, Matt 8:26).

Paul knew that God would complete what He had begun (Phil 1:6).

And that there was nothing He could not endure (Phil 4:13).

He prayed for the church to experience the same strength (Col 1:11).

We are told to look to the stories of those who have persevered and join them (Heb 12:1).

And the church at Ephesus was praised for doing just that (Rev 2:3).

Our faithful persevering work will bear good fruit (Gal 6:9).

And finally, in that great chapter of the assuring work of God in our lives, Romans 8, Paul writes, "But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance." (v25). There is a great and gracious renewal for you here and now through Jesus Christ."