

SERMON: SOARING, SPRINTING, AND STRUTTING

Isaiah 40:28-31

(28) Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. (29) He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. (30) Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: (31) But they that wait upon 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.

Introduction

Their prayers had been answered. After seventy years of exile in Babylon, the Jews could now return to their homeland. They had been deported to Babylon under the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. After several rebellions, Nebuchadnezzar thought it a great strategic move to deport the members of the Jewish royal family to Babylonia. There they could not lead revolts. Once the Babylonians discovered that the free labor of the Jews helped the economy and there were still other attempts of rebellion, several other groups of Jews were forcefully captured and deported to Babylonia.

The exiles remained in Babylonia until the Persian army, under the leadership of King Cyrus, conquered the Babylonians. After conquering the Babylonians, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jewish exiles to return to their home land and rebuild their temple. The temple was destroyed under the earlier invasion of Nebuchadnezzar.

The decree was met with mixed emotions. There was jubilation, but also trepidation. There were many questions. The most pressing question was whether or not they had the physical and spiritual strength to make the long journey back to their homeland. In our text, Isaiah uses several metaphors to assure them that God would give them the strength to complete the journey. He uses the metaphor of eagles that have grown new feathers after molting. He uses the image of royal messengers and of strutting courtesans. All of the images were positive and reassuring.

In this familiar text, sometimes we get so hung up on the soaring of the eagle that we forget about those who run and we almost always forget about those who walk. Depending upon the stage of life or the circumstances, we experience each of them in various combinations of succession.

God gives everyone in every stage of life and in every situation, strength to start and to complete the journey. Life is a series of small journeys, which combine to make one big journey. This big journey extends from our mother's womb to our own mortal tomb. Along the way we do good things and bad things; we make good decisions and foolish

decisions. We have successes and failures. Through it all, the eyes of God are watching and the invisible hand of God is active.

Isaiah assured the exiles that God had not forgotten them. He declared their time in exile, which was punishment for disobedience, had ended. He began in verse twenty-eight by reminding them how great our God, the Creator is. He does this by asking two rhetorical questions that begin with the phrase, "Hast thou not known?"

Let's extract a few of the many great practical principles from this familiar text.

Exposition

1. Life Can Critically Overwhelm Us.

(Good Things As Well As Bad Things Can Overwhelm Us.)
(We Feel Inadequate For The Task.)

2. Patience Is A Much Needed Virtue.

(Eagles Get Their Strength From Their Patience.)
(A Molting Eagle Waits Until The New Feathers Are Flight-Worthy.)
(Patience Is Not Procrastination.)

3. Sometimes We Soar Like An Eagle With New Plumage.

(Sometimes We Soar With Excitement And Enthusiasm.)
(Sometimes We Soar Above A Crisis.)

4. Sometimes We Sprint Like A Royal Messenger.

(There Are Running Days Where The Urgent Is Upon Us.)
(We Wonder If We Can Get It All Done.)
(Sometimes The Great Opportunities Come All At Once.)

5. Sometimes We Stroll- Sometimes We Strut.

(Sometimes We Strut Like A Royal Courtesan In A Royal Processional or Parade.)
(Sometimes We Leisurely Stroll Down Memory Lane.)
(Sometimes We Walk Happily In The Day-To-Day Activities Of Life.)

Closing Thoughts

God knows our feelings and our fears. He is adequate to meet our every need. We can never be successful in our own strength, but we can always trust Him to provide the strength we need. If we trust only in ourselves, we will fall and faint. If we wait on the Lord by faith, we will receive strength for the journey. God has brought each of us too far, to leave us now. Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

End notes

1. Verse twenty-eight of our text delves into what systematic theologians call “post-creation simplicism.” (If you have been around Antioch-Lithonia for any length of time, you have probably heard me talk about it.) If you assert that God created everything out of nothing, then anything else He did or will do is elementary in comparison to *creatio ex nihilo*. Remember, we cannot perceive “absolute nothing.” Absolute nothing means no darkness, no light, no matter, not even space. That’s right, no space. God created space and then created stuff, and then dropped the stuff into the space He created. If you believe God created everything out of absolute nothing, then miracles would be “child’s play” for Him. So to doubt the power of the Creator after creation is ludicrous. To doubt God’s power is like doubting that a classically trained pianist can play *Chopsticks*, or that a trained opera singer can sing *Lift Every Voice And Sing*. It would be an insult to question whether or not our Sanctuary Singers and musicians could perform *Amazing Grace*. Isaiah reminded them first of the mighty power of our God.

2. Isaiah’s writings are rich with allusions. Verse thirty may refer to the royal messengers who would run carrying messages back and forth for the king to his dignitaries, statesmen, and military generals. Sometimes when there was much communication about pressing issues and time was of the essence, they would literally collapse from physical exhaustion.

3. In verse thirty-one his reference to the eagle may refer to the molting of eagles. Some birds shed feathers constantly and it is not noticeable. Others, like eagles, shed them all at once. When all of the old feathers fall off, the eagle looks like a plucked chicken. Driven by instinct, the eagle eats a lot of food before the molting, because it cannot fly and hunt until the new feathers are flight worthy. The eagle flies into a cave in the mountain and waits patiently as the old feathers fall off and the new feathers emerge. With the new feathers the eagle can fly higher and faster than before. Just as the eagle waits patiently for the new plumage to emerge, we must wait patiently on the Lord and our strength will be renewed.

4. The Hebrew word for walk in verse thirty-one, in some of the manuscripts, is not the ordinary word for walk. The word used here means to strut, to stroll, or to skip. When kings would come to town people would go before and after him to bask in his royalty. They would walk in a royal strut. This is what happened on Palm Sunday. Perhaps Isaiah is alluding to this practice. If that is the case, then the King would be present with them on their journey back to their homeland. They would strut joyfully around the King as they made the journey. The children would skip in a playful manner.

5. This is the last end note, but this Scripture is so rich. The Hebrew word for renew is also the word for “exchange.” When God renews us, He exchanges our weakness for His strength. He exchanges our weariness for His unlimited power. It’s ok to shout after reading this end note.

**Copyright © 2022 by James C. Ward
All Rights Reserved**