

# Wait on the Lord for Renewal

Isaiah 40:11-21, Mark 1:29-39, Romans 8:27-28

February 5, 2012

*Pastor James York*

Where do you find courageous encouragement when you are discouraged; healing when you are hurting; energy when you are exhausted; hope when you are hopeless; love when you are lonely; joy when you are sad; peace when you are tormented, forgiveness when you are guilty; abundant life when you are depressed? These are the questions the prophet Isaiah and the gospel of Mark answer in today's scripture.

The first people to hear Isaiah proclaim God's power and desire to renew us were the Israelites. They were suffering in a wake of tragedy. Wave after wave of pain, suffering and fatigue battered them. Their despair shook their faith to the core and led them to question God's power, love and faithfulness.

The prophet Isaiah through a series of rhetorical questions and descriptions of God reassures us that God has not forsaken us. God is almighty, all-powerful and all-wise. Isaiah proclaims the incomparable greatness, goodness and love of God. God not only has the power, God also has desire to renew us.

Isaiah proclaimed. **Isaiah 40:11-31** "God tends God's flock like a shepherd: God gathers the lambs in God's arms and carries them close to God's heart; God gently leads those that have young. Who else has held the oceans in their hand? Who has measured off the heavens with their fingers? Who else knows the weight of the earth or has weighed the mountains and hills on a scale? Who is able to advise the Spirit of the Lord? Who knows enough to give God advice or teach God? Has the Lord ever needed anyone's advice? Does God need instruction about what is good? Did someone teach God what is right or show God the path of justice? No, for all the nations of the world are but a drop in the bucket. They are nothing more than dust on the scales. God picks up the whole earth as though it were a grain of sand. All the wood in Lebanon's forests and all Lebanon's animals would not be enough to make a burnt offering worthy of our God. All the nations add up to simply nothing before God—less than nothing is more like it. A minus. To whom can you compare God? What image can you find to resemble God? Can God be compared to an idol formed in a mold, overlaid with gold, and decorated with silver chains? Or if people are too poor for that, they might at least choose wood that

won't decay and a skilled craftsman to carve an image that won't fall down. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Are you deaf to the words of God—the words God gave before the world began? Are you so ignorant? God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below seem like ants to God! God spreads out the heavens like a curtain and makes God's tent from them. God judges the great people of the world and brings them all to nothing. They hardly get started, barely taking root, when God blows on them and they wither. The wind carries them off like chaff. "To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? God brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by its name. Because of God's great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing. O Jacob, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles? O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. God never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of God's understanding. God gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and youth will fall in exhaustion. But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint."

Isaiah identifies two keys to being renewed by God: First, to trust that God has the power and desire to renew you and second, to wait upon God.

God is the all-knowing creator of the cosmos, so there is no lament, pain, request or longing that is unknown to God. God lovingly cares for you. God carries your thoughts and feelings near His heart.

There is no power, no idol, no government, no institution, nothing, that is even close to the power of God. Money, popularity, safety, technology, Wall Street, science, reason, none of these come close to the power of God. Although you may love these idols, no idol will love you, no idol can fully renew you. No disease, power or force, no matter how good or bad, will ever come remotely close to the power of God. God has the power and the desire to renew you.

Twice Isaiah asks **Isaiah 40:21 & 28** "Do you not know? Have you not heard?" Isaiah taught that to know God is to sense God's presence. Knowing God is Holy Spirit filled intuition. Knowing God is a sense of Godly peace surrounding a particular choice. Knowing God is Spirit teeming awe from beauty. Knowing God is Spirit filled wonder in shared love. Knowing God is holy joy flowing from service. Knowing God is Spirit

placed thoughts, dreams and coincidences. Knowing God is an unexplainable marvelous experience of God.

Isaiah also taught that to know God is to listen to God and to be told about God. Knowing God is reading, discussing and exploring scripture. Knowing God is listening to God sightings and observing God working in others. Knowing God is perceiving God in movies, nature, books, music, science, art and all around you.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Have you not been paying attention? God's power, love, care and restoration is all around you and in you. Your renewal, your soaring, begins when you trust that God has the power and desire to renew you.

Isaiah next instructs us in **Isaiah 40:31** to **“Wait on the Lord”**. What does “wait upon the Lord” mean? There are an abundance of answers. There are several translations of the word “wait” such as “expecting”, “hope” and “trust”. These translations connect with Isaiah's concept of knowing God as sovereign, loving and eager to renew you. It is a confident expectancy that God will heal, purify, perfect and restore you.

Pastors and Bible scholars have interpreted “wait on the Lord” in a variety of ways. Some suggest it is to look intently, to seek God, to persevere, to study scripture, to pray, to be open, to be present, to be patient, to believe, to discover your purpose, to see your life from God's perspective, to worship, to act justly, to repent, be merciful, be humble, to have complete dependence on God and on and on.

Some suggest you must do something to obtain God's renewal. Some suggest you must learn something to be rejuvenated. It seems that they are suggesting that to have sustained strength, you need to be like a Superbowl football player. You must spiritually train, exercise, lift, practice, condition until you are super fit, until you react with instant instinct. You must follow the way, the game plan, for it will lead you to the Superbowl trophy. Where is grace in that? Where is renewed strength for everyone in that, for the loser, for those who are unable to do or be all these things? All of these expectations to do and be left me feeling exhausted rather than renewed. So I looked deeper.

Some suggest that to “wait on the Lord” is to find a key that will unlock the strength of God in your life. One person suggested it was juggling the various aspects of life with a sustaining, steady pace. Another suggests that God knows the meaning of your life even if you do not, therefore you have reason to continue the journey. Another said, “no matter what happens, your life is in God's hands and they are hands bearing great love. This conviction makes you an unwearied runner.” Another said, “waiting on the Lord' means carrying on with the tasks at hand in a state of trust. When we do that, the continuing on itself can become the medium through which God strengthens us.”

I want to be renewed. I want to soar like an eagle. Maybe it is clear to you but I was still missing the connection between doing all these different things or finding a key, to Isaiah's instruction to "wait on the Lord". Doing, searching, juggling, is not what comes to my mind when I am told to wait.

The poet Annie Johnson Flint expresses ways in which God renews us.

God giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,  
God sendeth more strength as our labors increase,  
To added afflictions God addeth God's mercy,  
To multiplied trials God multiplies peace.  
When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.  
God's love has no limits, God's grace has no measure,  
God's power no boundary known unto humanity;  
For out of God's infinite riches in Jesus  
God giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

How do you "wait upon the Lord"? One pastor suggests it is like being employed at a restaurant to wait upon tables. A good waiter knows the menu and the services available. They excel at explaining the menu and services and then serve the requested items. Therefore we "wait upon the Lord" by knowing God and God's desire to renew us; by explaining God and God's rejuvenating love to others; and by sharing God's blessings, by serving others. In other words we are renewed with ceaseless energy by receiving God's blessings and blessing others.

This seems to resonate with the gospel of Mark. **Mark 1:29-39** "After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. So Jesus went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she served a meal for them. That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. The whole town gathered at the door to watch. So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak. Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others

went out to find Jesus. When they found Jesus, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.” But Jesus replied, “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came.” So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.”

Simon’s mother-in-law received healing from Jesus then she served them a meal. The word translated as serve is the same word used when the angels waited on Jesus in the wilderness. In these cases the person being waited upon did not need to do anything. God does almost all the work, all the renewing. Simon’s mother-in-law’s renewal flowed from God through her weaving them into community.

Also notice the rhythm of Jesus being renewed by God in a quiet place through prayer and renewal by serving others. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us to be renewed by the unforced rhythms of grace. The isolated place is a place of contact with God. God filled Jesus with power, energy, compassion, joy and love. God gave Jesus renewal and clarity to say yes to certain tasks and no to other tasks. If Jesus who was fully God and fully human could not do it all then why do some people think that they can do it all. It seems that to “wait on the Lord” involves rest, Sabbath, receiving from God, so one has clarity regarding who to serve, how to serve, be and live.

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word translated “wait” is “to weave together like a cord” It is taking strands and weaving them together to form a strong and lasting rope. Perhaps “waiting on the Lord” is resting in God, yielding to God, so God can weave you an ever stronger and more resilient life. Perhaps “waiting on the Lord” is trusting God to carry you close to God’s heart. Maybe you soar when you let go and let God forgive you, heal you and take your burdens. Maybe you soar when you let go of expectations and let God convince you that you are God’s beautiful, cherished, loved masterpiece. Maybe you become strong beyond fatigue when you let God empower your strengths, gifts and talents, let God weave them together with God’s blessings. Maybe you are renewed by letting God take the strands of your life, all your experiences, your thoughts, your feelings and weave them into abundant life. Perhaps this is what the Apostle Paul means when he declares **Romans 8:27-28** “**Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. The Holy Spirit knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good**” Some details, some strands

are strong, beautiful as is. Some strands need healing. Other strands forgiveness. Other strands nurture. Each strand, every instant of you, and your life, will be made beautiful by our caring, all-powerful God. God will weave every strand together into an unbreakable rope, a lifeline, an eternal rejuvenating connection with God, a nourishing relationship with Jesus. "Waiting on the Lord" is letting God weave you into God's eternal loving family.

Do you not know God's power, love, joy, and peace? Have you not heard that God cares for you, desires to renew, restore, rejuvenate and resurrect you?

**Isaiah 40:31 "Those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." *Amen***