

David W. Long, Pastor
Reformed Presbyterian Church
Lord's Day Morning
May 17, 2009
'Things God Loves' Series
#6

"God Loves to Give You Strength" Isaiah 40:25-41:20

Introduction

For all of Hollywood's faults, it usually gets one thing right. It knows that a good story means that when things get most desperate; when all hope is gone; when life looks most impossible, good is suppose to triumph. Most people don't like stories with sad or tragic endings. What Hollywood doesn't understand is what ultimate good really looks like. So sometimes in the end, the thing that triumphs feels like it's good, but it might not be good.

But in the Bible we have assurances that in the end true good, genuine justice and absolute righteousness will triumph – all to the glory of God. As we discovered last week, God loves justice. But what should we expect in the interim? As Christians how are we to make it through the trials and troubles that beat us down? What promises and help can we expect? From whence shall come our aid?

Sometimes, when you are most discouraged and most stretched, you will also be most tempted to forget the strength and presence of God. This morning I hope you will see that no matter how weak and tired you may be, your life is not hopeless because God loves to give you strength.

[Isaiah 40:25-41:20]

You should care about the strength and power of God because of your own weaknesses. The Bible is filled with the reality of our weakness. The consequence of the fall is that we are weak. In the New Testament scripture reading from Romans this morning we saw that there are all kinds of things that seek to separate us from the love of God – tribulation, distress, financial trials that threaten to leave us naked and hungry, conflict . . . the list and the implications that accompany the list are enormous. Each pressure and trouble you face opens the possibility or temptation or thought that God just might not love you. But Paul's point is that while we are weak, God is strong and nothing will be able to separate you from the love of Christ if you are in Christ.

Here in Isaiah 40:29-30 we find three kinds of weakness that we all face at various times.

1. *Weariness – He gives strength to the weary.*

Being tired is not sinful. Jesus experienced weariness. Fatigue is the by-product of working hard in a fallen world. It is what happens to you when you just flat out work hard. When Gideon led his army against the Midianites, the Bible says they were weary yet pursuing. In other words, they were so tired they could hardly go on. Physical exhaustion nearly overcame them.

Elijah was weary after his battle against the prophets of Baal. His was a spiritual weariness. The battle was high intensity. So much was at stake. Afterwards he slept and slept and slept.

Paul expressed a weariness in his heart as he felt the burden from laboring in the church. II Cor. 11:29-30, he said *there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak*

without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

Weariness can lead to discouragement, withdrawal, and sometimes a struggle with our faith.

What makes you weary? Struggles and pressures at work? Illness, sickness and pain? Battles at home with your family? Brokenness in relationships? All of these point to our weakness. So our weakness is manifested in our weariness.

2. *Lack of power. – To him who lacks might He increases power.*

The truth is you can't always fix your problems. Humanism says that you can, but reality proves otherwise. You can take a nap when you're sleepy and fix a tire that's gone flat. But you can't overcome the ways the fall has ravish the world.

When God defeated the Midianites through Gideon, he first reduced is army to 300 men just so that everyone would know that the power came from God and not man.

Elijah was really up against it on Mt Carmel. But God demonstrated His power by sending fire from heaven while the prophets of Baal made fools of themselves.

Sometimes you face things that you have no power in yourself to change or fix. A death of a loved one; an impossible physical trial; someone who has hurt you deeply and doesn't seem to care; the sudden loss of your job; an emotional, physical, or mental handicap in your child . . . These things don't get fixed by mere effort. And when we face them we realize we have very little power and great deal of weakness.

3. *We stumble badly. – Though vigorous young men stumble badly.*

Of course you don't have to be a young man to stumble badly, but the point is, even the strongest among us are subject to sin and failure. We are weak in the flesh. Paul said that his weakness was evident because he didn't always do the things he ought to have done and he at times did things he knew he shouldn't do. He knew that his offense was against a holy God.

Not everyone wants to admit that they sin – or at least that their sin is a big enough deal to put their soul in peril – or to separate them from God. But that is the truth of what the Bible says.

But if you know you have sinned, if you know that you are guilty before God and that He demands justice, then what? It's at that point that we have to admit that we are weak. We have no power to set right the wrongs we've committed. We can't undo our sin. Here is the ultimate weakness.

(Story of listening to *Car Talk*. They fix things. Premise: figure it out and do something. Great for a many things in life – God has given us minds and abilities and a mandate to conquer problems.) But some things we can't conquer because we aren't able. Sometimes our fatigue is beyond fixing with a good night's sleep. Sometimes things are so broken you can't mend them. And never can we fix our sin by simply doing better next time. Guilt doesn't vanish. So the reality of our weakness is a real problem.

But there is good news! God is not weak. He is strong, powerful and able. Nothing is too difficult for Him. Redemption, salvation, justification, glorification – these are all terms that indicate the power of God to fix things.

You can see the power of God by looking at what He does.

1. Look at creation.

Isaiah – God created the stars and named them and leads them. Psalm 33 says *Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.* Romans 1:20 tells us that we can, even today, learn something of His power by looking at creation. *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.* Don't think for a minute that God doesn't control the wind and the rain and the sun. Not only did God speak and bring into being all that is, it is His power that governs these things.

2. Look at His Providence

God's providence is His upholding, directing and governing all creatures, actions and things. It takes power to control every detail of every moment. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that *he upholds all things by the word of His power.* We need to understand that God normally does this by using ordinary means, not by miracles. For instance, I have no doubt that it was by the plan of God that I ended up living next to several Christians my freshman year at college. It was, in many ways, the turning point in my life. Only a powerful God could have orchestrated such a thing. But it was by no means a miracle. He used the ordinary means of application and the business office at IU to accomplish His perfect will. You can also probably tell important stories from your life that you know were not accidents, but God's working. As God causes His perfect will to unfold He is certainly free to work 'without, above, and against' ordinary means'. But He usually doesn't. What we

erroneously often call luck or coincident is in fact the power of God's providence at work.

3. Look at how He Changes People.

If we have learned anything in our studies of man it is that he has a naturally hardened heart that is at enmity with God. That's how we come into life. Even after salvation the heart can be more deceitful than anything else. So one of the places the power of God is seen is in the changing of people. The Bible is filled with stories of people's lives being changed by God so that they come to believe in Christ. Some of the stories are dramatic. Some are remarkably ordinary. But they all help us see that God is behind the change of a person's heart. We are described as being dead in our sin. Conversion to Christ is a genuine miraculous work of the Spirit of God to wake us up – to do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

So, with that background – with that contrast between the power of God and the weakness of men, we can come back into Isaiah 40 & 41 and make sense of the promises God gives us here.

First of all look again at how He promises to help you. (Read 40:28-31)

- Strengthen you when you are weary
- Power to live when you can't go on
- New life when you stumble badly – like and eagle mounting up with wings.

Then look at 41:10 (read).

- Presence with you.
- A personal connection to Him – *I am your God*. That's why you don't need to be anxious. (See vs 9 – because He chose you)
- Strength, help and upholding – but notice how – with His righteous right hand. In

other words, sins will be justly dealt with and paid for; wrongs will be made right.

This is pointing to Christ. Why you need Christ. . . You can't be in a good relationship with a righteous God without your sin being dealt with. – Christ on the cross.

Finally, look at 41:17-20 (read).

- Refreshment
- Whatever you need.

And we are charged to do two things:

1. Wait for the Lord (40:31). We live in a fallen, sinful world. And God has not promised to guard you from all trouble. He is causing all things to work together for good if you love Him. But part of being a Christian is waiting on God. His timing and ways are perfect, but they are not always what you would like.
2. Trust the Lord while you wait (41:10). Do not fear. Do not be anxious. When the Bible tells us to not fear or be anxious, it's not telling us that emotionally we are to be disconnected from our troubles. It doesn't mean you won't be burdened, concerned, and heavy hearted about things. What it means is that you will not allow your emotions to dictate your actions. You will not turn away from God and seek your own solutions. It means you will be courageous and you will walk forward with God into your troubles.

How can you do that, you might ask? That's the beauty of the Book of Isaiah and the whole of Scripture. You see, God loves to give strength to you when your faith and eyes are fixed upon Jesus Christ. His power comes through His Son.

Isaiah points as clearly as any Old Testament book to Jesus Christ. There are the well known prophecies in Isaiah 7, 9 and 11. But in this section

right here in chapters 41-53 we have what are called the *servant songs of Isaiah*. They are all about Christ. They point to Him as the One who has the strength to take away your sins; to help you in your distress and trouble. Dr. Wayne Spear will be preaching these for you in the evening services this June. I know they will bless you.

Trouble is part of life. This morning I want to encourage you to bring your troubles to Christ. Whether they are self-made troubles because of your sin, or troubles brought upon you by someone else, only Christ has the power to deliver and strengthen you. And not only can He do it, He wants to do it. Will you wait on Him? Will you put your faith in Him? Will you humble yourself and admit that you need His strength?

This is what Paul was writing about in that famous passage about knowing Christ in Philippians chapter 3. *More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*