

Isaiah 40:31

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Date: 24 May 2009

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[0 : 00] Are you a high flyer? I can't imagine anybody rushing to raise their arm or hand, even if you think you are.

Who are the high flyers is that term? These words are used commonly amongst us. Young professionals climbing the corporate ladder and enjoying, perhaps even flaunting, the material rewards of their success.

In some cases, maybe they're very hard work as well. High flyers, well, a few have unceremoniously crash-landed in recent months, but no doubt others will gladly take their place, given half a chance.

In the chapter we have read, the prophet Isaiah tells us who the real high flyers are. And you might be surprised by his answer.

In verse 31, the final verse of chapter 40 of Isaiah, we read, But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.

[1 : 19] They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. Those who hope in the Lord will soar on wings like eagles. They will fly high.

Last week, we considered the words of challenge brought by Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon. Seek the shalom, the peace, the prosperity of the city.

And this evening, we return to the exiles in Babylon, but to consider these words of comfort and challenge brought by Isaiah. The whole of the chapter is a glorious chapter, looked at from almost any perspective, be it a literary perspective, a poetic perspective, a spiritual perspective.

It is a chapter that soars. It speaks of soaring, but the chapter itself soars. Even as we read it, we are thrilled by what we read. And there is so much that could be said clearly of such a chapter, but we will be concentrating on the words of challenge and comfort that we find at the very end of the chapter.

A message of hope for the exiles. The vision of being lifted up from their prostration and soaring. And perhaps in the mind, in the mind's eye of the exiles, of soaring back to Jerusalem as an eagle.

[2 : 43] I wonder how many thought of that possibility. Here they were so far from home, and the picture of being an eagle. And free from the shackles of those who were oppressing them.

And being able to soar and to fly back home. Perhaps that was a picture that would have thrilled them as they considered it. Well, as we consider these words, on this occasion, we will not be so concerned to consider the original audience to whom these words were directed.

But rather, take these words and see what lessons they have for us. What encouragement there is for us. What instruction there is for us. Particularly in these final words of the chapter in verse 31.

And we'll be making reference to one or two of the verses prior to that as well. The first question I want to pose to the passage, and then consider what answer we can give to it, is, Who soars?

The passage speaks of those who will soar on wings like eagles. And the image is, I think, for any of us, a thrilling one. Who would not like to be of those who soar on wings like eagles?

[4 : 09] Well, who is it? Who are they that can soar in the fashion described by the prophet? Well, we are given two answers to that in our passage.

We are told, first of all, those who do not soar. Before them being introduced to those who do. So, let's think first of those who do not experience this kind of life, of soaring on wings like eagles.

Well, in verse 30 we are told, Those who do not live in this way. Youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.

This picture of youths, or of choice young men. And the language here is not of all youth indiscriminately, but rather it's the language of the elite, of the fittest and brightest, perhaps of those who in our society we would describe as the high flyers.

Those successful young men and women who will go places, who will go far in the estimation of their peers and of society. And the prophet says, They will not soar.

[5 : 21] They rather will grow tired and weary. They rather will stumble and fall. Those who put their confidence in themselves. This, I think, is what lies behind the language of the prophet.

Those who appear so strong. Those who appear so gifted. Those who appear so full of potential and of talent. And yet, and perhaps for that reason, they trust in themselves.

And they think, In my intelligence I will soar. In my abilities I will soar. In my influence I will go far. Resting on my financial resources I will do great things.

But the prophet says, Rather the opposite will be the case. Far from soaring. Such who trust in themselves. Will, sooner or later, Will stumble and fall.

Perhaps not immediately. Perhaps to begin with, They all will appear at least to be well. But they will grow tired. As their stamina is sapped.

[6 : 35] So it is not the elite. It is not the brightest and fittest. That will soar. Certainly not such who trust in themselves.

But rather, we are told, Those who hope in the Lord. In verse 31, But, Those who hope in the Lord, They will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles. In order to soar then, We are told that we must be of those who hope in the Lord. And when the prophet here speaks of hoping in the Lord, It's not to be understood as a forlorn hope.

We use the word hope sometimes in that, What shall we say? Diluted sense. Oh, I hope things go well. I hope everything works out. And really, We use the word to speak of some aspiration that may or may not happen.

But here, When the prophet speaks of those who hope in the Lord, He's speaking of those whose hope in God is a sure and a certain one. Indeed, To hope in the Lord could be understood by introducing, Maybe two other connected verbs that would bring across the meaning here before us.

[7 : 52] Those who hope in the Lord. The idea of those who rest in the Lord. The idea of those who depend on Him. The idea of those who recognize rather their great need.

Recognize rather that they are not able to do all that they would do without God. Who recognize that in themselves they are weak and needy.

And so they rest in the Lord. They turn to the Lord. They seek His help. Their hope is in Him. Not in themselves, But in God. Such will not grow weary.

Such will soar with wings like eagles. The idea then of resting of the Lord. And the idea also, And these words have a great deal of overlap.

But together maybe they give us a fuller picture. The idea of trusting in the Lord. Of trusting in the Lord. And when we speak of trusting in the Lord, We're not talking simply of a one-off decision that we take in our lives to put our trust in Jesus.

[8 : 53] That is important. And many of us are able to look back in our personal history and be able, Are able to say, Well, yes, At that time in my life I was brought to the point where I put my trust in the Lord.

And that is a great thing to be able to do. Perhaps others have had the privilege of being brought up in a Christian home Where it's not that simple to be able to identify that moment. And yet we are able to recognize and give testimony to how we were brought to the point And brought to a greater understanding and experience of trusting in the Lord.

It is such who will not grow weary. Those who trust in the Lord. Those whose lifelong attitude towards God is one of trust.

Who day by day and week by week and month by month, In the good times and in the bad times, Their trust is in the Lord. When the going gets tough, They're trusting in the Lord. When all seems to be well, They're trusting in the Lord.

When all seems to be darkness and all seems to be difficulty and trial. They trust in the Lord. They're confident in Him. Their hope is in Him.

[10 : 02] They know that He will not let them down. They know that He is there for them. Those who hope in the Lord. And if we do, Just for a moment, In our mind's eye, Return to the exiles by the rivers of Babylon.

Weeping. Among even those, There were those who were trusting in the Lord. And Isaiah encourages them And motivates them to carry on trusting Because it is such Who will not grow

weary, Even in difficult circumstances.

But rather, They will renew their strength And soar on wings like eagles. Those who hope in the Lord. And who is this Lord In whom you should hope and trust.

Well, in the light of the fuller revelation, In the light of the New Testament, We can say, And we do with great enthusiasm And with great conviction, That Jesus is the Lord.

He is the one in whom we put our trust. He is the one in whom you must put your trust. As your Savior. As your Lord. As the one who orders in your life.

[11 : 13] As the one who has that place of government And authority in your own life and family. He is the one in whom you must trust. He is the one in whom you must place your hope.

And that involves a decision on your part. For some, perhaps, To decide for the first time To put their trust in Jesus. And for many of us, The decision, Because it is a decision, To continue trusting in Him.

Consciously and deliberately Every day of our lives. But we must begin. Even a soaring eagle Has to first lift off.

Even a soaring eagle knows What it was one day in his life history To have been a chick in the nest. Even that soaring eagle One day had to jump out of that nest.

Trusting That in the case of the chick, The mother eagle would be there To help him To learn To fly. Who soars?

[12 : 15] Well, the prophet assures us Those who hope in the Lord They are the ones who soar. But also, We want to consider The source of the strength That we require.

We're told that In verse 31 That those who hope in the Lord Will renew their strength. They will renew their strength. Well, where does this strength come from? The language used here The language or the verb particularly That is translated In our Bibles, renew.

The language there Is of exchange. The implication, The meaning Is of exchange. So, the ideas of Our inadequate strength Being replaced With a greater strength.

Now, what is this strength? That comes to our aid. Whose strength is it That we are talking of? Or that the prophet Is talking of?

Well, there in verse 29 We read, He gives strength to the weary. He gives strength to the weary. And who is he? Well, it seems Such an obvious And a simple question.

[13 : 27] Yet, it's worth just reading Who it is. Who is it That grants strength To the weary Grants strength To those whose hope Is in the Lord? Well, verse 28 Describes the one Who gives us this strength.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord Is the everlasting God The creator Of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired Or weary In his understanding No one can fathom.

Who is it then That grants us strength? Whose strength is it That will renew us And will empower us. It is the strength Of God himself.

The Lord Is the everlasting God. The creator Of the ends of the earth. It is his strength That is at our disposal. It is his strength That renews us. It is his strength That lifts us up And gives us the strength That we need To carry on And to soar indeed On wings Like eagles.

And as we Use this language Soaring on wings Like eagles I wonder if For some of us There is an element Of doubt And we say Well That's not really me.

[14 : 42] Oh yes I know people like that As Christians They seem to soar They seem to Have such a great trust In the Lord And they seem to be So used in his service But that's not me.

I'm not the Soaring type. Maybe the whole notion Of soaring Seems quite alien to you. And if that is the way You think And if you have come To the conclusion Well that's not for me Yes I'm a Christian And I'll plod on To the end But this soaring Well that's not for me.

Is that A sign of great humility? Maybe very laudable And commendable humility? Who is it that you are Knocking If you doubt Your ability to soar?

If you question That soaring As a Christian Is for you? Are you knocking yourself? Are you questioning yourself? Are you criticizing yourself? Even that would probably Not be a very sensible thing To do Though it could have The appearance of humility.

No. Rather you are questioning The God who grants Strength to soar. You see it is his strength. So if you say Well I can't soar. Soaring isn't for me. You're actually Questioning God.

[15 : 57] You're saying He can't give That kind of strength To me. He can give it to others. He can use others. He can bless others. He can prosper others In the Christian life But not me. And really

The accusing finger Is being pointed At God himself.

And so let us Be very careful. And let us be Very cautious In this appearance Of humility That would Question Our usefulness In the kingdom That would question Whether we are able To serve God In the manner In which we are Invited to do.

And we say No that is for others. Other Christians But not For me. The source Of our strength That our strength Would be renewed And that we would Soar on wings Like eagles It is The strength Of God himself.

The Lord The everlasting God The creator Of the ends Of the earth And even that description Can give us The confidence That the supply Of strength Is a supply More than sufficient To grant to us The strength That we need.

But as we continue I just want to ask Another question. Not only Who soars Those who hope In the Lord Not only To have identified The strength That we need Where did it come from? God himself But also Ask the question Why soar?

[17 : 23] Why would we want To do so? Indeed What does that involve? What does the image Of an eagle suggest? In what way Can the life Of the Christian Be compared To the flight Of an eagle?

As the prophet Does here. What does that Teach us? What aspects Of our Christian life Could be compared To an eagle Soaring High above us?

Well I think The picture Of an eagle Paints for us A very stirring Picture Of the Christian life A life That is characterized In three ways And perhaps There are more But three That we will Focus on As we use The picture The image Of an eagle A life First of all Of freedom And freedom To be What God Wants you to be This is not An unrestricted Freedom To do What you want To do But freedom To be What God Wants you to be Free to obey God Free to enjoy God Just to Before we Go down that road A little more I hope I hope that you Have in your Mind's eye That image Of an eagle Soaring high above And the great Freedom that That pictures For us Well that is the Freedom to which We are called As Christians The Christian Has been set Free from the Shackles of Selfishness And of sin He has been set

Free that he Might be able To throw off As the writer To the Hebrew Reminds us To throw off The sin That entangles us We can imagine With the picture Of being entangled Perhaps we've seen A robin Or some other Small bird Entangled In the nets Where strawberries Maybe are being Grown I don't know Have you ever Seen that And the little Bird has come in Looking for a Feast And then is Entangled And can't fly And is trapped There And so sin Entangles us And we can't Fly We can't run We can't even Walk Because we're Entangled by sin Well the picture Of the eagle Reminds us That that is not To which we have Been called We have been Called to Freedom To be what God wants us To be To throw off The sin Which entangles And would stand In our way And would Obstruct us In our service For God And then we say

Well that sounds All very great But what of Trouble and temptation That seems to be A constant in my life And seems to hold me back And doesn't let me Take off Never mind Sword Does not Trouble and temptation And trial Do these things Not rather bring us Back down to earth With a crash And all our Great intentions Are left Just that Great intentions Well let's just Think for a moment What an eagle does When it encounters Turbulence You know what an eagle Does when it Encounters turbulence Does it crash land What does an eagle do An eagle flies higher That is what an eagle does When it encounters Turbulence As it's flying And it encounters Turbulence What it does is To fly higher Above the turbulence What a Glorious picture for us As we face Trial and trouble And temptation The challenge to us And the invitation to us

[20 : 51] Is that we would Fly higher In the Lord's strength God wants The very best For you And if your hope Is in the Lord Nothing immovable Stands in the way Of you being everything That God wants you to be Nothing immovable Plenty things Stand in the way But nothing immovable Nothing that cannot be Removed In God's strength This is true freedom To be what God Wants you to be And to live As God Would have you live So the picture Of the eagle It paints this picture Of the freedom That is ours As Christians But the picture Of the eagle Also is a picture Of strength And the picture Of the eagle Speaks of the strength To do what God Wants you to do Freedom to be What God wants you to be But also strength To do What God wants you to do The eagle of course Is a picture Of majestic strength

Those who know Of these things Assure us that An eagle Or certainly A certain kind of eagle I can't imagine This would be true Of all There are different Varieties But some eagles Can fly for 4,000 miles Without refueling As it were Now If you could invent An airplane That could do that You'd be a

millionaire Overnight 4,000 miles Great strength And even as we Look at an eagle And see it soar The impression is Of this majestic Strong Creature And as citizens Of God's kingdom Ours too Is a majestic strength And yet That eagle That seems so strong And is so strong Is not Born aloft By his powerful wings It's not the strength In his wings That keeps him High above

This world of ours But rather He is held aloft By the currents Carrying him The strength indeed Is not in the eagle Himself But in the currents That the eagle Is able to take Advantage of And so Soar Effortlessly Carried by the currents And maybe that truth Also reminds us Of such an important truth That your strength My strength As a Christian Will be in the measure That we are willing To be carried By the Lord Now that is not A passive thing But it is a recognition That he is the one Who will carry us He is the one Who will take us Where he would Have us go Our strength Will be in the measure That we are filled By God's Spirit Our strength Will be in the measure That we are open And available to God Our strength Will be in the measure That we do Stretch out our wings The eagle Who fails To stretch out His wings Well is not able

To be carried By any currents What the eagle Must do Is stretch out His wings To their Widest extension And then The currents Will carry him Miles and miles And miles To his destination So we have to Stretch out our wings That the Spirit of God Would carry us Where he would Have us go How are we to Stretch out our wings What does that involve Well it involves Praying to God It involves Meditating upon his word It involves Being involved In the service of God In the church Where he has placed us And that way We stretch out our wings And as we stretch them out So the Spirit of God Carries us And strengthens us And equips us For all that we Would do Strength to do What God wants you to do And what does God Want you to do Well God wants you To obey him God wants you To serve him God wants you To tell others The good news Concerning Jesus And that is something You must do now Life Passes So quickly And if we Fritter it away On things That are at the Periphery Of what is important And are Careless Concerning The main things Then soon we will find That so many opportunities Have gone And so much time Has been lost Strength then To do what God Wants you to do The picture of the eagle Paint that picture For us But a third Picture that is Presented to us By this picture Of an eagle And the Christian As an eagle Who soars On wings Like eagles And it is this Vision and direction Vision and direction To see What God Wants you to see And As you so see Go where God Wants you to go Again Those who Know About this subject Inform us That an eagle Has Remarkable Peripheral Vision 270

[25 : 52] Degrees Peripheral Vision Can see all Around So much more Than we are able To do I'm also told I don't know If this has been Confirmed by the eagles Themselves But Those who have Observed Also tell us That an eagle Can see a rabbit From two miles Away And No doubt Observation Would suggest That that is Indeed So Another interesting Anecdote Not an anecdote But curious Fact Concerning the eagles Is that Eagles can see Even with their eyes Shut How does that work Well apparently They have two sets Of eyelids And one set Of eyelids Is Transparent And it allows Them to fly When there are Maybe Dust Or In the air That would Affect them And they can Even closing One set of eyelids To protect their eyes They are still able To see Well all in all They have Remarkable vision Remarkable vision And this idea Of vision

Is something That speaks To us In our own Christian lives In our own Lives as Christians We need That perspective And maybe When we think Of the vision Of an eagle The most Obvious element Is how the eagle Is able to see From on high You know we see Just round about us Our immediate Circumstances But the eagle Is way up above And can see The whole panorama And how important That is for us In our own lives To be able To see The big picture To see Things from that Heavenly perspective If you wish To be able to see What's really important You see So often For us The things That we think Are so important In the grand Scheme of things In the light Of eternity Really aren't That important Those things That cause us Great despair Are indeed Great delight That may be Legitimate in themselves But in the grand Scheme of things Really aren't That important Ponder on this For yourself What produces In you Delight Or dejection Would it be true Of some of you That Even some football Results Yesterday or today Would be the Greatest cause Of delight Or dejection How many Dejected Faces do I see In the congregation This evening And how many Delighted ones Do I see Now there's Nothing wrong With being delighted When your team wins Or being disappointed When they lose But in the grand Scheme of things It's not that important In the light Of eternity What causes you Delight or dejection Is it the opinion Of others Is it exam results Academic success Material rewards Are these the things That cause you Great delight Or great dejection But we need to Soar above These things And see the big Picture See

God's Kingdom purposes And where we Fit in within them See God's Big plans For our lives And ensure That we are Where God Would have us be Doing what God Would have us do And all of these Other things Legitimate as They may well be Will find their Place But their Appropriate place So the eagle Paints this picture It speaks of the Freedom that we Have in Christ To be what God Would have us be Of the strength That we are given To do what God Wants us to do The vision Granted To see What God Would have us See But finally As we consider This picture Painted by the Prophet We ask the question Is the Christian Life all Soaring Is it all Soaring Is it all As exciting As soaring On wings As eagles Well it is not Because the Verse continues Those who hope In the Lord Will renew Their strength They will soar On wings Like eagles But it does not End there

They will run And not grow Weedy They will walk And not be Faded Soaring is not A constant It's not our Permanent Experience And yet Before we Go on To highlight That And to Give that The place It deserves That truth It would be Amiss If we never Soar As we focus in On the truth That in our Christian lives There will be times When we can maybe Run And other times When we can only Barely walk That is true But though that is true Let us not Allow that truth To take us away From what is Expected by the Prophet That there would be In our lives As Christian times When we do Soar On wings Like eagles However that is not A constant It is not our Permanent Experience What is a constant

[30 : 55] And this is of course The main thing What is a constant Is the Lord's strength Whether we be Flying Whether we be Soaring Or if we be Running The Lord gives Strength If we are only Able to walk It is the Lord Who keeps us From fainting Are we Completely exempt From Weediness then If we enjoy The Lord's strength If our hope Is in Him No We are not Exempt From tiredness And weediness But rather The experience Of the believer Can be as Described by Paul In his second Letter to the Corinthians Where he Recognizes That there are Times of Weediness And of Difficulty And yet he is Able to say That we are Hard pressed On every side But not crushed Perplexed But not in despair Persecuted But not abandoned Struck down

But not destroyed Yes there is Weediness Yes there is Tiredness Yes there is Discouragement Yes these things Are part of our Experience And yet not Destroyed By them As we Hope in the Lord and as Our strength Comes from Him Well as we Close I pose the Question for you I pose it To myself Also Do you know What it is To soar All of our Lives will not Be lived At that In that Dimension if You wish But do you Know what it Is to soar Maybe this Evening You are not A Christian Maybe you Have not As yet Put your Trust in Jesus Maybe as Yet your Hope is not In the Lord Well you Need to Jump out Of your Nest Before you Can hope To soar You need To jump Out of That nest Trusting In Jesus Putting your Trust in Him Recognizing That he Is the One And the Only one Who can Help you Recognizing

That he Is willing To grant You the Strength that You need To live As a Christian Many Sometimes Hold back And say Well I Don't want To take That decision Because I Don't know If I'd Be able To live As a Christian I fear That I Would let The Lord Down I fear That when Temptation Comes I would Fail The Lord And maybe It's best Just to Hold back This is Precisely What trusting The Lord Involves Saying well Yes I Won't be Able to In my Own strength But I Trust in You Lord And so I Give my Life over To you That you Would be The one Who would Carry me You would Be the One who Would help Me Live the Life that You would Have me Live But Christian Friend This evening You too Need to Launch out In greater Trust and Dependence on God To leave Behind perhaps Those things that Are comfortable In your Experience To serve in Ways that You have Not done Before To give

Of yourself And of What you Have Unreservedly To the Lord And as You do So As you Do so And as You demonstrate By so Doing your Trust in Him As you Demonstrate By so Doing that You are Indeed trusting In Him And in Him alone As you Do so So You can Be sure That you Will experience What the Prophet speaks Of here But those Who hope In the Lord Will renew Their strength They will Soar On wings Like eagles They will Run and not Grow weedy They will Walk and Not be faint Let us Pray