

Isaiah 40:27- 31

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 November 2017

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Do you ever dream of flying? And I'm not talking about being squashed in the middle seat in economy class. It's a nightmare scenario, but I'm not talking about that kind of flying.

But I'm talking about soaring high and free, actually flying. There's something very alluring about that, and it seems to have been throughout history, men and women have been drawn to that prospect, the power, the capacity, the ability to fly. When I was a young boy, which wasn't yesterday, there was a drama on TV called Fame. Now, for the benefit of those, I guess, I don't know, under 40, it was a series about young aspiring artists at the New York High School for the Performing Arts.

And I particularly liked the theme tune or song, and the chorus went a little like this. And no, I'm not going to sing it in case you're concerned. But along these lines, Fame, I'm going to live forever. I'm going to learn how to fly. Hi, I'm going to make it to heaven. People will see me and cry, Fame. Live forever? Well, yes, I do anticipate living forever. Make it to heaven? Yes, not by my own efforts. But yes, I do, by God's grace, anticipate making it to heaven. People will see me and cry, Fame. There is no chance of that happening. I'm going to learn how to fly. Well, that's not going to happen either. But I guess two out of four isn't so bad. But there is something alluring about flight. And in our passage, we are told of how we can fly, how we can soar on wings as eagles.

And it is a beautiful picture. It's an exciting picture. It's a very evocative picture that is painted by the prophet. Just on a personal note, this was the verse that we had, Isaiah 40 verse 31, on our wedding invitations. I don't think I'll look back on 25 years of marriage and make an audit on how much was soaring and how much was plodding. But nonetheless, this is the verse that we chose there in the, I don't know, the naivety of youth or whatever it was to mark our wedding.

I want us to consider what Isaiah had to say about believers soaring on wings like eagles. We do need to just very briefly step back and identify the circumstances in which the prophet makes this promise or this declaration. The people of Israel are downcast. Now, we were thinking about that last week, the complaints that they were leveling against God. We can remind ourselves as to the nature of those complaints. In verse 27, why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel?

[3 : 3 3] My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God. Now, leaving aside the measure in which the people of Israel were justified in so complaining, it is clear that they find themselves in a place of discouragement. They are disheartened. They are despairing given the circumstances that they find themselves in. How does God respond to their complaint? How does God look to lift them up from the pit of discouragement and despair? Well, I think we can identify, even in these verses that conclude the chapter, we can identify two elements to God's response. He responds with truth, and He responds with hope. God's people needed to know their God, and they needed to see something of their future.

And in that regard, nothing has changed. This is the manner in which God responds to us today. If you are discouraged, if you are disheartened, then this is what you need to hear. You need to hear God's truth, and you need to hear and see this prospect of hope that is presented for you.

First of all, they needed to know their God. You see there in verse 28, immediately following the complaint of God's people, Isaiah responds in this way, 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, and His understanding no one can fathom. They needed to know their God. Of course, that's what we were thinking about last Sunday morning in particular, how we need to lift up our eyes and see our incomparable God. Throughout the chapter, God described us incomparable in power, incomparable in wisdom, incomparable in dignity, incomparable in sovereign authority. Well, these are matters that we gave thought to last Sunday morning. This is the remedy for our despair. This is the remedy for our discouragement, good theology, a sound theology of God. As I was thinking about this, and this morning we're going to be moving on from that and thinking about this hope that is set out for us. That's our concern this morning. But as I was thinking about this matter of the usefulness of sound theology, it reminded me of a classic Charlie Brown cartoon that I saw some time ago, and I wanted to remind myself just exactly what the cartoon looked like. So, I Googled it and managed to find it. Now, one day, but not today, I will make use of this screen for occasions like this. But today is not that day. So, you're just going to have to make do with me describing the cartoon. So, we'll see how effective my powers of description are. But basically, the cartoon has Charlie Brown and

Lucy, and they're looking out the window, and it's pouring down with rain. That shouldn't be too difficult to imagine for any of us looking out a window, pouring down with rain. And Charlie Brown, or rather Lucy says to Charlie Brown, boy, look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world? And Charlie Brown responds, it will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah, that would never happen again. And the sign of the promise is the rainbow. To which Lucy replies, you've taken a great load off my mind. And then you have the punchline. Charlie Brown responds to Lucy, sound theology has a way of doing that. Of course, it's true. Good theology is very encouraging.

Good theology helps us. It lifts us up. When we know who God is, then that is God's way of lifting us up from that pit of despair and discouragement. So, the people of Israel needed, and we need, good theology. But the second element, and where we're going to be focusing our attention, they needed to see the future. They needed to have a sense of hope in what lay before them.

[8 : 05] And that's what we find particularly in this final verse of the chapter. Or even if we pick it up from verse 30, even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But, and here the ray of hope appears on the panorama, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint.

This is where I want us to focus our attention this morning and pose four questions around this picture of believers soaring high and free. The four questions we're going to pose and try and answer are as follows. First of all, who is it that soars? Who soars? But then we're also going to think about the source of our strength. What is the source of our strength to be able to do that? But then also maybe just think a little bit more and dig a little bit deeper and ask the question, why? What is the benefit? What is to be gained by soaring in the manner described? And then finally and briefly just pose the question, is it all soaring? Is that the totality of our Christian experience? Are we always up in the heights soaring with the eagles? First of all then, who soars? Well, the passage tells us. It tells us in two ways.

It tells us in a negative sense by identifying those who do not soar and then by identifying those who do. First of all, it is not the youths or the choice young men. There in verse 30, even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall. And the language that is employed here translated as youths or young men is the idea of choice young men or women. It's the language of the elite, the fittest, the brightest. And God says, they stumble, they fall, they grow weary.

Their strengths do not last forever. Those who perhaps because of their influence, because of their health, because of their wealth, because of their connections, because of their influence, they put confidence in themselves. They trust in their IQ. They trust in their financial resources and the connections that they have and the influence that is theirs. But these young men, far from soaring, they will stumble and fall. Not immediately perhaps, but they will grow tired and their stamina will be sacked. So, they're not the ones who will soar on wings like eagles. Rather, the prophet assures us, it is those who hope in the Lord. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. Those who hope in the Lord. What does that involve? What does it mean to hope in the Lord? Well, hope in the Lord is not some forlorn hope that maybe, just maybe at some point, God may come good. Now, the hope that the

Bible speaks of is a sure and certain hope, a certain conviction concerning the goodness of God and the promises of God and the reliability and trustworthiness of God. The idea is of resting in the Lord, depending on Him. As we recognize our own weakness and consequently our need of Him, we rest in Him. We rest in Him for our salvation. We rest in Him for our strength. We rest in Him for the grace that we need to get through this life and all its obstacles and struggles and trials. It's the picture of trusting in the Lord. Not in the sense principally of a one-off dramatic decision, but a lifelong and deepening trust in the Lord and in His wisdom and in His power and in His grace. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. Who is this Lord in whom we are to hope and trust? Well, the word or name

[12 : 45] Lord there in our passage translates the Hebrew and name Yahweh or Jehovah, the personal or covenant name of the living and true God. This is the name and identity that is remarkably attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus is Lord. And so, the call this morning to us is that we would put our trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. And that involves a conscious and deliberate decision on your part. Even a soaring ego has to first lift off. Have you begun to trust in the Lord? Is your hope in Him who soars?

Well, let's move on to the second question that we pose, and that is, what is the source of strength that allows the likes of us to soar on wings like eagles? Well, what the passage tells us is that our strength is renewed. And with renewed strength, we are so able or enabled to soar in the manner described. If we were to try and apply a literal rendering of the Hebrew text here, it would be something along the lines of keep putting on new strength. And the language or the picture is of exchange, our flagging strength replaced by another external strength from outside of ourselves.

And where does this strength come from? Well, in the verse we are told. We're told that He gives strength. Notice in verse 29, He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. And of course, the He of verse 29 has already been identified in verse 28. The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary. So, the strength that we need, the strength that we require in order to soar on wings like eagles is granted to us. It is given to us by God Himself. He grants the strength to soar. You can't find it inside yourself. How often we hear that language. It's quite remarkable how often people speak in those terms. You know, you just need to look inside yourself for the strength to move on and to succeed and to realize your dreams. It's all inside yourself. And the message of the Bible goes in the opposite direction. It says if you look inside yourself, you'll only find weakness and failure and frustration. The strength you need isn't inside of you. It's outside and it is given to you by God. That is a strength that allows you to rise up and soar on wings like eagles. That is the source of our strength. I wonder if anybody here this morning doubts that you have the strength to soar.

That strength to soar is available to you. Does the very notion of soaring in life seem quite alien? Maybe you don't think of yourself as the soaring type. Or perhaps you believe your soaring days are over if ever they did exist in the first place. If you're harboring these doubts, who are you doubting?

You might imagine that you're doubting yourself. You say, well, I know how weak I am and I know how difficult I find life and, you know, I just know that that's not something I could do. You imagine that you're knocking yourself, but of course you're not because you're actually knocking the one who gives the strength. You see, if it was your strength, then yes, you would be knocking yourself, but we've already identified that it's God who gives the strength. So, if you say, well, that's not for me, I'll never soar, then the one you're doubting, the one you're questioning, the one you're pointing the accusing finger to is to God because He is the one who gives the strength. You're saying, well, I don't think you're able to give me that kind of strength. That's beyond your capacity.

[17 : 13] Perhaps there are some of us, maybe some of us who have heard the message of God's Word time and time again, and we hear a message like this, we say, well, I've heard this before. Of course, that was true of the Israelites. That's exactly why verse 28 begins with these words, do you not know? Have you not heard? The prophet is saying, this isn't news to you. You've heard this before, but they needed to hear it again and again and again, and so do we. Let's move on to the third question. The third question we want to pose is, why soar? What is to be gained by soaring in the manner described in this beautiful picture? They will soar on wings like eagles. Well, what does the image of an eagle suggest? In what ways can the Christian life or life of faith be compared to the flight of an eagle? Well, let me suggest three ways or three words that I think capture different elements of this. And the three words that I want to suggest and just briefly consider are as follows, freedom, strength, and vision.

First of all, freedom. The picture of a believer soaring on wings like eagles is a picture of one who has the freedom to be what God wants him to be. Freedom to be what God wants you to be. Free to obey and enjoy God. The Christian has been set free from sin. We're still sinners, but we are no longer under the dominion of sin. We're able to use the language of Hebrews. We're able to throw off that which entangles.

You know, that picture that is painted by the writer to the Hebrews of casting off the sin that so easily entangles it. You can imagine the picture of a bird in a strawberry patch and there's the, you know, the mesh that's protecting the strawberries and the bird is trapped there and it wants to fly, but but it can't. It's entangled in the mesh. And then finally it manages to free itself and it soars into the air. And it's a picture of what we can do in God's power as we cast off the sin that entangles and that holds us back from being the people that God would have us be. Freedom to be who God wants us to be.

And we take flight. You might say, well, yes, that sounds a wonderful picture. But what of trouble, what of temptation that is my daily reality. Do such things not bring us back down to earth with a crash?

Well, what does the eagle do when it encounters turbulence? Well, it flies higher. God wants the very best for you. If your hope is in the Lord, nothing immovable stands in the way of you being everything that God wants you to be. Plenty stands in the way, but nothing immovable stands in the way of being who God wants you to be. Freedom to be what God wants you to be. This is true freedom, to be what God intends for you, to live life as God would have you live it.

[20 : 44] Maybe you've bought into the lie that freedom is to live a life contrary to God and doing what you want to do. That's not freedom, that's slavery. True freedom is to live the life that God has created you to live to His glory and in His service. But also the picture of the eagle is a picture of strength, strength to do what God wants you to do. The eagle is a picture of majestic strength. I'm reliably informed that an eagle can fly for 4,000 miles without refueling as a citizen of God's kingdom.

Yours too is a majestic strength. And yet the eagle is not held aloft by his powerful wings, though they are powerful, but by the currents carrying the eagle. And so too, our strength will be in the measure that we are willing to be carried by the Lord, to be filled by God's Spirit, to be open and available to God, to stretch out our wings. And how do we do all this? Well, we do so as we study God's Word and listen to His voice, as we pray to Him, as we serve in God's world. So, we stretch out our wings and discover that God's currents would carry us and give us the strength to do what He would have us do.

What does God want you to do? Well, I don't need to go into details, but what I can say is this, that He wants you to obey Him and to serve Him. He wants you to share with others the good news concerning His Son Jesus. And time is passing. The days are running in. Another Christmas will come and go. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last.

Why soar? Enjoy the freedom to do what God, or to be what God wants you to be, the strength to do what God wants you to do. But then thirdly, the vision and direction to see what God wants you to see and go where God wants you to go. Again, I'm told that an eagle has a unique perspective that is denied to us.

270 degree peripheral vision and can see a rabbit from two miles away. To kind of bring this home, if you were sitting in the gallery here, if an eagle was sitting in the gallery here, he could read the text you're writing on your iPhone. Not that anybody's writing text on their iPhone right now, obviously. But if somebody was, that's what an eagle could see. It's a bit scary, actually.

[23 : 30] But that's the kind of vision that an eagle has. That's the capacity for sight of an eagle. In our lives, we need to have good vision. We need to be able to see the big picture. We need to grasp the overall perspective, to be able to see what's really important. You know, one indicator of what we deem to be really important is to consider what produces in us delight or dejection. It's maybe a useful exercise for us to just pause for a moment and think, well, what is it that really excites me?

What is it that really gets me down? You can be pretty sure that those are the things that you consider really important. Now, whether they are or not is another matter, but they're the things that, by the evidence of your delight or dejection, are the things that you consider to be most important. That might be the result of a football match. It might be the opinion of others. It might be academic success. It might be the state of your bank balance. And we're being encouraged to soar above these things, though they have their place and their good in their place. We need to soar above these things and see the big picture, see God's big plans and our place in them. But let me close by just posing one final question, and that is whether the Christian life is all about soaring. Well, the very passage makes it clear that that is not the case. This beautiful picture is painted, but it's one that continues. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. But then we read on, they will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. So, soaring is not a constant. It's not our permanent experience as believers nor is it intended to be. What is a constant is the Lord's strength and the Lord's provision. And note that the picture here that we're not going to develop because time doesn't allow us to do so, but the picture of running and walking, they're not to be considered some kind of second best. Well, it'd be better to soar and to fly, but well, if you can't fly, we'll at least run.

And well, if you can't run, we'll at least walk. So, it's kind of like a second or even third best. I don't think that's the idea at all. Indeed, the picture that's painted of running and walking is a remarkable one. It's supernatural. It's even godlike. Why do I say that? Well, it's not natural to run and not grow weary. That is not the natural course of things. And also notice, and I think this is significant. Notice also what is said in verse 28 about another who does not grow weary.

Verse 28, 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. And so, when it speaks of us as believers running and not growing weary and walking and not being faint, it's saying, you'll be like God in a measure. He doesn't grow weary and in His strength, you won't grow weary either.

So, it's certainly not some kind of second best, this picture of running or walking that accompanies this picture of soaring on wings like eagles.

[27 : 07] Is the promise here that you will never experience weariness or failing strength? Well, in time, yes, that will be our experience. But in this life, weariness will be our occasional experience. And it is when we must, with renewed urgency, turn to the Lord for strength. I think the apostle Paul captures that which can sometimes be the experience of the believer. As he writes to the Christians in Corinth in his second letter, in chapter 4 and verses 8 and 9, he speaks of his own experience. And he says this, hard pressed, on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed. I think that captures the balance between the reality of life and yet the reality of God's upholding, of God's strengthening, of God's grace accompanying us.

Do you know what it is to soar on wings like eagles, to run and not grow weary, to walk and not faint? Perhaps somebody here this morning is not a Christian. You haven't put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. You need to trust in Him before you can soar, before you can experience what is described here. The Bible is very clear. It is those who hope in the Lord who renew their strength. If you're not trusting in the Lord, then you will not renew your strength. And so that is what you must do.

But perhaps you are a Christian. But even as a Christian, perhaps especially as a Christian, you need to launch out in greater dependence on God. Step out of your comfort zone. Serve in ways that you have not done before. Give of yourself and what you have unreservedly to the Lord. And in the measure that you do, in the measure that you hope and trust, so in that measure you will soar. Well, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Word. We thank you for the promises of your Word. We thank you for who you are. We thank you that you are the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. You are the one who does not grow tired or weary. And your understanding no one can fathom.

And all of your riches so you share with us. And so you grant to us the strength that we need. We are weak. And we are incapable. We fall short in a multiplicity of ways. But we have a God who is generous and a God who is able. And a God who renews strength, who grants strength where there is none. And who enables us to soar on wings like eagles, to run and not grow weary, to walk and not faint. And for this we are grateful. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.