

THE SECRET OF UNFAILING STRENGTH

"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." Isaiah 40:31.

It was to a despondent group of Jewish exiles that this classic passage was addressed originally. From time immemorial they had considered themselves God's chosen people, set apart from all others as the recipients of the Divine favor. But war had driven them from their homes and made them slaves in a foreign land. They had been deprived of their ancient and cherished liberties. Their magnificent Temple had been destroyed. Jerusalem, which they had thought would never fall, was a heap of ruins. Desolation prevailed throughout their native land, while they ground out weary days in subjection to their powerful conquerors. Their courage and hope had dwindled almost to the vanishing point. Never had it seemed less possible for this captive people, broken in faith and courage, to slip from under the iron bonds of Babylon. Everything suggested the utter futility of revolt.

For many years they had borne the yoke of oppression and sweltered in slavery on the Babylonian plains. These years of exile had broken their spirits. Men can endure much and accomplish many things as long as their spirits remain unbroken, but when their spirits are broken they are crippled seriously. Concerning their sorrow one remarked, "This is sorrow's crown of sorrows — remembering happier days." Of itself sorrow had no power to strengthen or beautify. Rather it tends to sap one's strength, both physical and spiritual, and to rob life of its glory. Yet there are those into whose lives something bigger and nobler has come as they have passed through the vale of sorrow.

During the years of their exile, no hand had been extended to deliver them. Nothing had been done to relieve their situation; consequently, it was only natural for them to become morose. In every direction they saw evidences of the might of Babylon. From all appearances the proud and imposing empire was as secure as ever. Seeing no prospect of escape, they ceased to expect their restoration. As they thought of the circumstances, any hope of deliverance seemed to be only an idle dream. They thought that God had forgotten to be gracious to them and that He was no longer mindful of them. They concluded that if He was able to help them He was unwilling to do so. They were tempted to feel that He had forsaken them. Broken in faith and courage, they had no desire to struggle on.

Naturally, they questioned, "Is this the end of God's purpose for Israel? Has our cause gone down into the dust never to rise again? Is there hope for our people?" In that dark hour, when they were resigning themselves to despair, God sent His prophet to them with a message of deliverance, which seemed too good to be true. They had the thrilling experience of a great hope breaking through the thick darkness, and of a great joy moving their hearts from despair to heroic endeavor. When the liberating message reached their ears their hearts leaped within them. Immediately they began eager preparations for the journey as if they might be back in the land of their fathers within a few days, but there followed the stern realities of a long journey as day after day they trudged across the country. At first there was the sheer joy and excitement of being free, the feeling of "walking on air." But soon their feelings changed. The long road quickly took the resiliency out of their steps, and some of the joy out of their hearts. Then the need for strength became more pronounced. How applicable this is to our daily lives. Life has a way of starting briskly, then calming down, and finally making its supreme demand for patient endurance and steady strength.

To aid them in their perilous journey and the arduous task of rebuilding their ruined land, the prophet dwelt upon the majesty and power of God until the might of Babylon faded into insignificance. He emphasized the tenderness of God, as well as the fact that He had not forgotten to be gracious. He taught them that God's strength was sufficient to equip them for every experience which they might have. He bade them lift their eyes and behold their Creator, who "fainteth not, neither is weary." He expressed his sincere conviction that God could help them, and would help them, but that He would do so in His own time and manner. Then he added, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

The experience of the exiles is somewhat similar to the history of all great enterprises. There is first the buoyant hour of inception, when glorious possibilities give wings and the spirit of man mounts like an eagle. Then follow the first attempts at realization, when friends are many, and encouragement great, and progress rapid. Finally there comes the stern and testing days, when vision has to be fact, and dream has to be translated into reality. Then it is that patience is needed and faith is tested. While it is the drudgery of the long afternoon that tests strength, it is the walking that singles out the heroes. Many for the moment can mount, and some for a time can run, but it is the brave who walk and win.

The spirit of our age has carried us beyond the thing this text calls upon us to do. The pressure is so great and the days seem to move so rapidly that we do not have the time to "wait upon the Lord." The stress and strain of these high-pressure days has depleted our spiritual strength. One of the features of our time is spiritual weariness. In his analysis of the decay of civilization Dr. Schweitzer says it is due to a fatigue of the spirit. Voices from behind "the iron curtain" echo the same note when they say that the people of the West have lost vitality and are suffering from exhausted ideals. Signs of this fact can be found in many quarters. They appear in the cynicism, the feeling of frustration, and "the couldn't care less" attitude of many people. Yet things are not so hopeless as might appear. There is more than a hint that many are tired of meaningless living and are looking for something to fill the vacuum. They are groping for a faith to live by.

This vision of God is what all people need. In these days of commotion, confusion and uncertainty it is indeed splendid to have one's soul filled with such a vision of God as is presented here. Regardless of the trend of events and the conditions on earth, God is unwearied and strong, and His power is available for those who wait upon Him. He has the strength to match our days. Our text touches the need of the hour and taps the source of strength for the most demanding journey.

In exposing human inadequacy and inability God says, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young shall utterly fall." In other words, human strength at its best will fail. But what nature cannot produce God stands ready to provide. However, we must remember that something more than exhortations, pep talks, slogans and human enthusiasm are necessary to carry us through. We need the strength that comes from God alone.

God tells us that the weary may be revived, that the fainting may be restored, and that the weak may become strong. There is no doubt about it. There is divine rehabilitation for the spiritually anemic and run-down. We can rise from weakness to power and achievement. God is an expert at stiffening wabbling knees and putting courage into wavering hearts. Those who seek spiritual strength in their circumstances or in the world about them are headed for disappointment. When contact with the electric current which drives

a machine is broken, the operator does not try to work the machine by his own strength. He restores the contact and waits for the power to set the wheels moving. It is the same with the human machine. We are only channels; God is the reservoir. We must make contact with Him and wait for His renewing Spirit.

Waiting upon God does not mean sitting still and looking into blank space. It does not mean to possess an idle mind. The scriptures do not justify empty headedness. Waiting on God may take different forms. It may take the form of contemplation, reading the Bible with the ear that listens for God's personal word. It must take the form in which the whole being is laid open to His grace and guidance, whatever barriers from our side to be broken down. It must bring to us that deep dependence on God in which self is laid aside and the tide of His renewing life fills the channels of the heart. It reveals the true attitude of prayer. True prayer is not only speaking but listening; it is not merely asking but receiving. It means trusting in God for help.

Blessings Promised Those Who Wait On God: --

1. Strength shall be renewed.

Man's great need is renewal of strength. We are constantly using up our energies and finding ourselves utterly exhausted. Our real problem is how to get rid of the energy of the flesh and exchange it for the strength that comes from God. Waiting upon God is the answer. Listen to this helpful promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." It is here implied that strength is needed; it is here promised that strength will be given; and it is here affirmed that strength thus given will be graduated according to our need.

2. Exaltation shall be secured.

"They shall mount up with wings as eagles." The Christian's life is not a sighing and dying life; its scriptural image is that of the soaring eagle. All of us can live on a higher plane than we have been doing.

3. Support in extraordinary trials.

"They shall run and not be weary." Just to think of running without getting weary! It seems incredible, but it is the manifestation of the supernatural. Those who trust God shall move forward with vigorous strength, elevated spirit, and unwearied body. Extraordinary trials are sure to come to all men. In the allotments of life cloud and storm must come as truly as sunshine and calm.

4. Victory in daily duty.

"They shall walk, and not faint." God's power is inexhaustible and His wisdom is unfailing. There is grace and guidance for every emergency that may arise.

Waiting upon God is the secret of unfailing strength and the path that leads to power. The wise person is the one who waits on God.