

### **Promise of a Savior**

**You recall that last week I observed that one of the most difficult things for most humans to do is to ask for help. It's only when tragedy and misfortune strike that many recognize they need help. Have you noticed that tragedies and injustices do not take holidays? When personal tragedy or global calamities strike, too often people look to humans and their promises to fix things. A few wiser folks turn to God.**

**This is the message we proclaim: that in the midst of all tragedies, misfortunes, and disasters of life, God keeps His promises and has sent a Savior. A Savior for people who are incapable of saving themselves from: self-inflicted disaster or simply the vicissitudes of life.**

**Long ago God promised to bring us a remedy for our situations: *In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God,* Isaiah 40:3. Though we tire of the bad news all around us, and even despair of our own sin, God provides strength, for *...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength...* Isaiah 40:31.**

**Since history is truly His story, let's keep our eyes focused on this Savior and rejoice that God is clearly the Lord of history ... rejoice that the power behind the universe is One who is willing to suffer on our behalf.**

### **Your Story**

**Everyone has a story to tell, even the people who smile all the time and say, "Fine, fine," when asked how they're doing. Some people look so well adjusted and happy that you'd think they don't have a care in the world. But they do. If you work with people long enough, you discover how much they are acquainted with sorrow and heartache. What's your story?**

**You may hear pieces of their stories: a tale of sadness or of failure; a story of a broken marriage, of a child with an incurable disease, of alcohol abuse, of crushing financial disaster, of loved ones far from God, of dreams dashed on the jagged rocks of reality. How long can they cope? The breaking point can come suddenly: a phone call that says, "I've got bad news." A failed exam. The test came back positive. The child died. She said no. "We're getting a divorce." The company doesn't need you anymore. "I'm being sued." A friendship suddenly ends. Suicide. You discover there is another woman or another man. Time stops. Life will never be the same again. You've reached a breaking point. How will you find the strength to go on?**

**I recall the very cold and dispassionate nurse at the hospital where I did my semester of chaplaincy training. I commented on her demeanor to my supervisor. He replied, "You just don't know. She may go home to WW III every day."**

**Some have given up on God because they feel He hasn't protected them from their wounds. Others grimly hold on to faith because they have nowhere else to turn. To all those people, God says, "I am still here and I care about you."**

## **Your Story and His Story**

**When the prophet Isaiah wrote to his own people, they were a nation in exile in Babylon. Everyone had a story to tell of how war and exile had brought them to the breaking point. Despair gripped the hearts of people wondering if God had forgotten them completely. In that company of hopelessness, God gave Isaiah a vision for their future: *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God... A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord...'* Isaiah 40:1.**

**Memories were awakened to earlier promises from God and a vision of hope for all people *...in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles... The people walking in darkness have seen a great light... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders... He will reign on David's throne... The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this,* Isaiah 9:1-7.**

**It was the promise of a divine Savior who would come for all people who are at the point of despair *... A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him ... In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious,* Isaiah 11:1-10.**

**The prophet's vision brought words of refreshment for dry souls; hope that kindled new motivations and strength. The prophet's vision of long ago can do the same today for people whose faith has diminished into apathy or been broken by tragedy and disappointment. Even more, hope is brighter today for the promised Savior has walked among humans and we can know Him. He has brought God's promises to life. Let's look at Isaiah's words for hope for us.**

## **The Promise**

**A. God will supply strength in our weakness. *He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength,* Isaiah 40:29. Power and strength together give endurance in hard times. Renewal comes when God exchanges your weakness for His strength. He's got more strength than you've got weakness and more strength than you've got problems.**

**B. God will do it because we all need it. Even the strongest of the strong can lose. No one can take the strain of life forever. *Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted,* Isaiah 40:30. That's why we need God's strength in our moments of weakness. Our greatest need is to look up to the sufficiency of God. As long as you look at your problems, you are not looking at God. It is not the magnitude of my problems that matter. It is the magnitude of my God that makes a difference.**

**C. Those who trust Him find new life. When we pray: Lord, will you be there when I need you? ... He answers "I was there before you were here." *... they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength...* Isaiah 40:31. (Some translations say "hope in the LORD.")**

**Waiting is perhaps the hardest discipline of the Christian life. Most of us hate to wait... for anything ... Stop lights, check-out lines, school to be over, that medical test result, the next check-up, computer processes.**

## **Waiting on Him**

**But we are not waiting for the latest medical breakthrough, or a message from our loved ones, or for the offer of a better job, or even a check for a million dollars.**

**We are not waiting for something. We are waiting for someone. We are waiting for the Lord – trusting that He will arrive. Waiting for the Lord is a profound expression of faith. “I know God is going to resolve this situation. I don’t know how and I don’t know when, but I know He’s going to do it. I’m not giving up because I’m with Him.”**

**Waiting for the Lord isn’t passive, it means, “I am convinced that God is at work in this awful situation even though I cannot see it at the moment.” Trusting Him is our bulwark against being overwhelmed – and being overwhelmed never solved a problem anyway. By God’s grace we just do the next thing that needs to be done, trusting that God is at work behind the scenes. The next step is the step of faith.**

***They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint,* Isaiah 40:31. Everyone likes to soar and to run and that’ll happen. But to “walk and not faint” may be the most important gift from God and highest attainment of faith. This is the ability to get up day after day, and do what needs to be done, facing the irritations of life, the burdens and challenges, without flinching and with reasonably good humor. Walking is more remarkable than running or soaring precisely because walking is the real “stuff” of life. It means steady progress in one direction by means of deliberate choices over a long period of time. Walking isn’t exciting but it gets you to the destination.**

**When you don’t know what to do there is always a next thing that needs to be done. It may be menial and mundane, but there it is: washing, cleaning, writing a note or making a phone call, paying bills. cleaning shelves and closets, filling an order, putting gas in the car or picking up the kids, weeding the flower bed, walking or feeding the dog. These are things that can be done while praying. So do the next thing, trusting God to be in those moments, and the next thing after that will be revealed to you; and eventually (though it may take a while) you will begin to see the way forward.**

**In the Gospel it says of the Savior: *...he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,* Mark 1:8. His gift enables us to *walk in the Spirit* (Gal. 5:16) which simply means allowing the Holy Spirit to work through your life on a daily basis. Walking in the Spirit is really God’s design for normal Christian living.**

## **Everlasting Promise**

**God has always had a vision for our future and that’s why the promise of a Savior goes way back. He will come to us if we will turn to Him. Through Him the unlimited power of God flows into our failing humanity. But if God knew he was sending a Savior why go through the ages and stages of humanity with all the strife and death and troubles? Why not just save humans long ago? It’s because God wants two things:**

**1. God knows our need for a savior. He wants us know our need for a savior. Noah and the Ark, Abraham and the covenant with God, Moses and the Law, the kings and prophets of Israel, all point to Jesus Christ, because they point to the need for a Savior. The Ark, the Covenant, the Law demonstrate that humans are not capable of living up to God’s standard. The words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, when he**

**told Adam and Eve that they could be as God, is shown for what they are: a monumental and fatal lie. Only a savior of divine origin can bring us to God's level.**

**2. God wants all of us to come to him of our own free will. The Lord is not slow to keep his promise... *He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9.* God wants all to have the chance to see their need of divine help and come to Him.**

**The greatest promise in this life is a Savior who is Christ the Lord. In Him, through Him, with Him we find all the strength and power and grace and comfort of God. They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength. This is the promise of our Savior.**

***Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable, Isaiah 40:28.***