



## Waiting for God (Is 40:21- 41:4)

One of the great features of the British is the way in which they love to queue. It is only the British that would form an orderly queue for a cash machine. And there they stand patiently.

Have you ever been in a hurry, perhaps at a railway station and there is a huge queue at the ticket office. There you are standing there and you can see the minutes ticking away. How you'd live to push to the front. But you can't. It's a horrible feeling isn't it?

We sometimes feel that about God too don't we? We see our current position and even ask ourselves; why has God put me in this position? Why are things like this? And we can't see a way though.

Or we feel we have heard God's voice that He's doing a new thing in Britain or in Norfolk or in Swaffham. Yet things seem to move along so slowly and we wish that certain things were different - that God would just get on with it.

As many of you know, we have acquired a new dog; Judy. She's a Heinz - that is that she is made up of about 57 breeds. Like all dogs, she has that enthusiasm to escape and run. She can't wait to get out. But unlike our old dog Taffy, she is so patient and well mannered about meal time. She doesn't beg. She sits next to her bowl while I fill it and she doesn't dive in when it's put down and only eats when I tell her to. I don't know where she learned her manners! It certainly wasn't from the children! Taffy used to bark, jump up and couldn't get her face in the bowl fast enough.

The difference between the two dogs is that one dived in regardless of whatever and the other waited for the master's voice.

We know we have a God who is doing new things in Britain. We know He works in power in people's lives because we see evidence of how He has done it in other people's lives. So why isn't he doing it here? Why isn't He doing it now in my life? Sometimes it isn't a questioning we have. We're saying "Come on Lord, I'm ready! Here I am, wholly available and all that. Let's get sharing the good news. Let's reap the harvest. Let's see works of power!" And like Taffy we dive in. But God doesn't seem to be in a hurry to do it. And we become discouraged.

It's easy to be a little like the world and try to have events and do things that will produce the results we want. We do them in the hope that we will reap a harvest. And we are disappointed that revival doesn't come. In fact, we are so disappointed that we fail to see the lives of the individuals who have been touched through what we have done. God is working, just not in the way that we want. We wanted hundreds saved. We wanted to see power manifestations.

Who has the problem? We do. We want God in a certain way and our faith and hope is dashed when we don't see it. But God is there. We just needed to listen to the Master's voice.

Which brings us to Isaiah. Here were a people in exile. Here were a people saying *"My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"* Why isn't God thinking and caring about me? I'm ready to serve, I'm ready to follow. I believe He is a powerful God who changes people's lives. I've believed all that but now I'm discouraged.

A few weeks ago I produced a sermon that was entitled Thirst for God because it is my desire to lead a fellowship that thirsts for the presence of God. It kind of got to be a series as I followed it up with Delighting in God and Seeking God First. All these sermons were to focus on the fact that we have a God who is one to be desired and delighted in and therefore sought. Yet our experiences so often are that we feel like the Jews in exile *"My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"* Our head believes one thing about God but the reality of our hearts and our lives is something different.

Why does this happen? Very often it is because our desires do not match the mind and will of God. We have a view of God and therefore want to dictate to Him how He should act. We wouldn't say it to Him or others in those words, but our lives and actions speak clearly that expectation. We want God to work in a particular way - but God has His purposes and we forget that.

This was the Jewish problem in Babylon. They were placed into exile because of the sin of the nation and there is much about that in the early part of Isaiah. Yet with the casting into exile was a promise of restoration. Look in Isaiah 1

*24 Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. 25 I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. 26 I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." 27 Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness.*

So as they sat in Babylon, they would have remembered prophecies like this and would have also the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As in the words of Psalm 37, they say by the rivers of Babylon and wept and remembered Zion they expected to be restored. But restoration did not come. These words in Isaiah 40 were written for them. So you are disappointed. You were expecting restoration and all you got was an exile that drags on and on. They had a view and expected God to act and get them out of it. They became discouraged and suggested that God had forgotten them.

And this prophecy stood out before them and said "You're wrong to think that". Their perception of who God is was wrong. Their God was defined by who they thought He was and that was just inadequate

### Their God was too small

*21 Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in*

Don't you people know; don't you understand? Obviously not! If our expectations of God fall short, then it's because our perception of God is wrong. What we think of as a big deal to Him is at the scale of grasshoppers. God is the creator and sees the big picture. That's often what we fail to see. We see our situation and we do not see our purpose and function as a part of God's creation as a whole. We don't understand it when things happen in our lives or our church. We don't understand it when we hear of God's people persecuted. We don't understand it when we see suffering like in the

Darfur regions which is in the news at the moment. Why does that happen? Where's God in it all?

He's there. He has His purposes and right now we don't see what it's all about. But He is the Creator and has the big picture and knows how it all fits together. I like the picture of the tent. Steve and I spent some time trying to work out how the bedroom annexe or our caravan awning should be put together. Why? Because we didn't have the maker's instructions in front of us! It took a long time to work it out and all through the week I found the mistakes we made. We didn't have the full picture but the people that made it did. We just didn't have the instructions! Our Creator has the instructions - we don't. We need to trust Him and ask Him for the instructions! Too often we bumble about but never go to the One who has the bigger picture.

#### Their God was too weak

*23 who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. 24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.*

Their other problem is that they were prisoners in the land of the most powerful ruler of their day. They were trapped and enslaved by a power that they could not resist. They could keep their identity and worship together but they could not return to their land. How could they ever return? It seemed impossible. And they sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept, *"My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"*

Many people still say to me "Why are you so hopeful about what can be done in Swaffham? It's good to see new people in your church. It's good to hear that some of your young people are trusting Christ. it's good to hear that things are happening. But it isn't a revival because all you should expect of Norfolk is dry and stony ground." We sing "My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing He cannot do - except in Swaffham!" Look at this passage. What are the princes of this Earth to God - nothing. They are just shoots that die quickly and are blown away. What we think is a big deal in God's universe are insignificant. I remember how years ago we thought that Communism was the huge evil hat would wipe out the Church and destroy our civilisation. It survived as a force for 80 years but in all but in many places is now gone and in its place the church of God flourishes. Shoots blown away.

The Jewish exile was for a season. The decline of the church in Britain is for a season. The decline of churches in rural areas is for a season because we have a God who is in control.

#### Their God was too distant

*The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is un-searchable. 29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. 30 Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;*

One of the major problems with God's people is that they often have a perception of God that is unbalanced. God is a God who is transcendent. By that I mean *beyond and outside the ordinary range of human experience or understanding; very excellent; superior or supreme in excellence; surpassing others; surpassing others; pre-eminent or supreme; being above and independent of the material universe*

All pretty good descriptions of the Creator. That was the Jewish view too. He was a God who couldn't be known. *"My way is hidden from the LORD"*. But this passage

shows that even though He is the Creator he has a personal interest in those the world has no interest in because they are insignificant: *29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.* God is God who is interested in individuals: a God who gives power and strength. A God who gives them strength in their weakness.

How much more is that true of us who are of the New Covenant. Because we have a God who is more than close - He's in us. He's *immanent*. By that I mean *remaining within; inherent; indwelling; abiding; intrinsic*. He's a God who by His Spirit is within us and you can't get closer than that.

The problem is that many Christians treat God as distant and who feel far from Him. You can only feel far from God if you walk away or place that distance yourself. You've made the barrier and you can tear it down by asking His Spirit to reveal His presence in your life. And He does and you see the blessings.

We need to go forward in faith and recognise the blessings that shows that God is in us and with us as we move forward together as His people because it's easy to create that distance and then fall and feel weary.

Verse 30 also tells us that if we go forward in our own strength not recognising the closeness of God, we will just suffer from spiritual exhaustion. Some of us have worked hard this year and we need to beware our own strength and the exhaustion that it brings, just because we have not stayed close to God. One of the disciplines I shall be encouraging in the coming months is that of prayer because that keeps us close to the mind of God.

Which brings us to the actual subject of this morning's sermon:

 They had to wait for God's time

Look at verse 31 *but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

The Jews desperately wanted to see what God had promised and were flagging badly. And here we have this promise *but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength*.

Those that wait for the Lord. Translations of this vary. The AV says "Those that wait on". The NIV translates it "Those that hope for". But the best translation of this does appear to be those that wait for. The implication is that we wait for God's time. He is the Creator, He does control destinies, He does know our weaknesses - and in everything He does it in His own time! He is the God of the big picture and He knows His purposes.

Oh that we would understand this and see things in His perspective. Because in desiring to see revival or power manifestations, we fail to see a God who is working in people's lives - now. It's the one or two. But the one or two becomes the 4 and 8. Who would have really believed that two years on we are expecting to see the ceiling repaired. We looked in faith when the reality seemed different. We see now people in the church, we welcome new members. God is moving on in His time. We must learn to wait for Him.

Let me give you another dog analogy. Judy likes to run along by herself. When we first had her it was unpleasant to take a walk because she strained on the leash. It has taken a bit of training but she is now quite well behaved, except when she gets the notion that she wants to do something else and she is a problem again - mostly to herself as she chokes on her collar.

Are we straining on the leash? Are we wanting to walk before the Master? The we will soon become weak and fail. We need to wait for Him and walk with Him. It reminds me of what Paul says this in Gal 5:25 *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Waiting for God. We need to be people who wait for God's time. And it comes with a promise: *they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.* When we wait and do things at His speed then we are the ones that defy gravity and don't get tired.

Some of you will know that this has been an important verse in my life. It was given to me on my baptism and has cropped up throughout my life. It sits there as a constant reminder to keep up with God. To wait on Him. To wait for Him. To do things in His time - at His speed. That's where all personal strength lies as a believer. Let me give you another promise from Lamentations which I preached on one evening a few months ago:

*Lam 3: 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." 25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. 26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD .*

Here we see a God who responds to those who are waiting on Him and seeking Him. these are promises. So why run on? Let's take time to wait for Him. To seek Him and not be so zealous that we run on without Him.

I believe that God wants us to be a church who walks at His pace. But this implies something else. That we are not a people who have waited so long that we give up and become a people who drag behind and become stragglers because we say *"My way is hidden from the LORD , and my right is disregarded by my God"*

This sermon was intended for the likes of me - people who want to get on with ministry - that we wait for God. But the reverse is true. God is moving on and we must follow. Let's not be stragglers but see the opportunities He is placing before us - but that's another sermon!

And what happens as we claim the promise of Isaiah 40:31? We see a God who has the bigger picture worked out. This prophecy in Isaiah 40 was a promise and is explained in the first few verses of chapter 41. It was a message that said - wait because God is bringing a deliverer from the east - Cyrus king of Persia. When the people went into captivity, no-one thought the Babylonians would be overthrown, particularly by the Persians. Yet it happened.

Let's never get into the mentality of saying *"My way is hidden from the LORD , and my right is disregarded by my God"*. Let's stay out of the mentality of running in our own strength but claim the promises of God and see His purposes worked out as we rise up, as we run and not be weary, walk and not faint and bring glory to Him.

*Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*