

## **On Eagle's Wings**

*by Rev. Robert Griffith*

We gather today as the people of God under the banner of *Lismore Regional Mission*, we are here to give thanks for God's faithfulness to us and the many who have gone before us in our journey and to look forward to the next chapter which is about to unfold. We will give thanks for those who have served in various leadership roles in the past and affirm those who will do so from this time forward.

As I was praying about today and trying to discern what God might want to say to us all on the day of our Annual Meeting, I was drawn to a couple of verses of Scripture written many thousands of years ago. The Holy Spirit inspired these words long ago, preserved them until now and the same Spirit will interpret their importance to us today, if we let Him. They are found in Isaiah 40:30-31.

*"Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength: They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."*

I must confess that I was tired when I read these words earlier in the week. I was weary in body and feeling a little exhausted mentally. It has been a very busy month. In fact, it has been a very busy year! Now I'm sure you all know how this feels. Sometimes we just get weary of it all. We get tired in body and in spirit. Our strength is exhausted, our determination diminishes and we just become overrun with life itself. Unfortunately, one of the plights of humans, even Christians, is that our strength is exhaustible. We are not superhuman creatures. Our strength can fade and we then face the common problem of weariness.

However, this is not God's plan for us. This is not God's best for us. We are reminded in the Bible of a deeper reality where we can actually tap in to the inexhaustible strength of God. This text in Isaiah reveals a source of strength for those who trust in, hope in and wait upon the Lord.

So let me check first that I'm preaching to the right people: would you like to have an inexhaustible source of strength for your life? Would it be good if you were able to draw upon an unlimited reserve of power to get you through the difficult times? Would you like to be able to work until you are tired, but then plug into a supernatural charging station and be restored, renewed and empowered for another day? If you are not saying 'yes' at this point, please check you still have a pulse!

Well, in these short verses in Isaiah 40, we are pointed to two realities. One is really obvious: in the kingdom of this world, we all grow weary. The other reality reminds us that we live in another Kingdom also – the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God. So as we act as people of faith, trusting in and expectantly waiting upon the Lord, we will find a strength that is inexhaustible. The real question is: which reality are we willing to settle for? Let's look at the two alternatives.

*"Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly. . ." (v. 30)*

Isaiah is stating the obvious here - at least it's obvious to some of us. It's the truth that we are all destined to grow weary. We are frail, imperfect human flesh. We wear down and weariness comes to us all at some point. Perhaps the only category of individuals for which this truth is not really obvious is young people, which is probably why this verse addresses them specifically.

Young people do not generally realise that their strong energy levels will also diminish. They tend to think that they will always feel as good as they do now – and always look as good as they do now! However, those of us who have experienced the passing of years, understand that the vitality of our youth does not last forever. These bodies that were once full of energy have begun to run down. We tend to hurt in various places more often than before. Even the wide-eyed buoyancy and expectancy of youth is usually replaced with more sober anticipations, tempered by burdens of responsibility and obligation. These are some realities of growing older.

However, there is a real danger in growing weary. When we are weary, we become vulnerable and can become defenceless against the attacks of the enemy of God and the pressures of the world around us. We are like a weary sheep to a wolf. The wolf will always wait for the weary straggler to fall behind the flock and then he pounces upon the easy prey. The Scripture is filled with examples which prove this point. In Deuteronomy 25:17-18 we read:

*"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God."*

When we become weary, we are weak and defenceless against the enemy and the many pressures which come from living in a fallen world. That's why we are exhorted in Hebrews 12:3 to consider Jesus *"Who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart."*

It is when we grow weary and lose heart that we are in the most dangerous position. We become easy prey for doubt and discouragement. Our defences are down and often we aren't even aware of it. When we are weary, we also lose our proper perspective. In Genesis 25:29-34, we have the story of Esau selling his birth right. Notice how this happened.

*"And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, 'Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.' Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, 'First sell me your birth right.' And Esau said, 'Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birth right to me?' And Jacob said, 'first swear to me;' so he swore to him, and sold his birth right to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birth right."*

It was because Esau was weary and hungry, that he sold his birth right. Weariness makes you more attentive to your physical and emotional needs than your spiritual needs. Because of his exhaustion, Esau lost his proper perspective. He forgot what was really important and missed out on the blessing of God.

The same can and will happen to us. When we are weary we look only through physical eyes. But what we need is spiritual vision. The weary man or woman is much like Elisha's servant, when the king of Aram surrounded the city where Elisha was. The servant only saw the troops of the opposing army. He was worried and anxious. He did not know what to do. But Elisha prayed. The prayer is recorded in 2 Kings 6:17:

*"...O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."*

We, like Elisha's servant, need to have our eyes opened to see what is real. When we grow weary, we tend to lose our proper perspective. But God is still on the throne. We need to see that. When we grow weary, we are also susceptible to despair and depression. While the Scripture is full of examples of this, we also know it is true from our own experience.

It is very easy for a weary person to want to throw their hands up in the air and quit. It's so easy to be sceptical, negative and critical when you're weary. It's so easy to feel like everyone is against you. And it's so easy to feel sorry for yourself when you're weary. You become like the man who had both an identity crisis and energy crisis. He didn't know who he was, but was too tired to find out!

All of us grow weary. There's nothing new about that. But what can we do about it? Quite simply, there is only one thing we can do – we need to find an inexhaustible source of strength. We have just seen the obvious reality that we all grow weary. Now let's turn our attention to the deeper reality in the next verse of our text. It is the secret of inexhaustible strength.

*"Yet those who wait for (or hope in) the Lord will gain new strength: They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary." (v. 31)*

The fantastic promise of God is that *"Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength."* Who are 'those' people being referred to here? We find here the true church – disciples of Christ. Their hope is only in God. They live by listening for, waiting for and hearing God's voice.

The contrast here is between the weakness of a weary soul and the vitality of a waiting, listening disciple. Those who gain strength are those who trust in the Lord, put their hope in the Lord and wait upon the Lord. They are true believers. They are those who walk by faith and not by sight. They make decisions based on what they believe and know to be true about themselves, others and God – not by what they see with their flawed human eyes or comprehend with their fallen, imperfect minds. Such are those who wait for the Lord.

What does it mean to 'wait for the Lord?' Well, the original word in the Hebrew here is fascinating. It means 'to bind' or 'to braid.' The idea is that we bind ourselves or braid ourselves together with the Lord. In fact, to wait upon the Lord may be the Old Testament equivalent of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Waiting on the Lord means that we exercise faith in Him. To wait on the Lord means that we seek His face earnestly; that we wait patiently and expectantly.

David said, in Psalm 27:14,

*"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord."*

David understood that when you wait patiently and expectantly, with your faith placed in God alone, good things will happen. Jeremiah, in Lamentations 3:25 says:

*"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him."*

To wait upon the Lord is to seek Him, to turn your eyes from your situation towards Jesus, to listen for His voice, to draw close to Him, to come into His presence, and to recognise Him as your source and resource. The promise to those who wait upon the Lord is that they shall *"gain new strength."* Some translations say they shall, *"renew their strength."* Literally, it means that those who wait upon the Lord shall *change* or *exchange* their strength. That is, as we draw near to God, waiting upon Him expectantly in faith, trusting in Him as our resource, He will impart His strength to us.

The truth is our strength runs out, which is why we need new strength. That's precisely the promise God gives us here. We will *"gain new strength."* As we wait upon Him, we bind ourselves together with Him, we braid ourselves into Him, and receive His strength. So when it says that we shall gain new strength, it means that we will exchange our strength for His – and what an exchange that is!

But look at the impact this exchange has on our lives. It says, *"They will mount up with wings like eagles."* As we exchange our limited strength for His inexhaustible strength, we shall sprout spiritual wings and gain the ability to soar far above our problems. How would you like to fly high, over the circumstances which plague you? As we live in Christ, through Christ and for Christ, that's exactly what happens! By trusting in Him, waiting expectantly upon Him, you will gain the ability to rise on eagles wings, high above discouragement, disappointment, despair, depression and even death! Paul expresses this in 2 Corinthians 4:16 where he says:

*"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer (self) is decaying, yet our inner (self) is being renewed day by day."*

In Jesus Christ, our inner self can be renewed day by day as we exercise faith in Christ. The choice is ours: Do we want to soar with the eagles, or walk with the turkeys? In Christ, we will always soar!

But the promise is not yet finished. It says, *"They will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."* As we tap into the inexhaustible strength of our Lord Jesus, we receive grace to accommodate the pace set by the Commander of the army. There are times when He calls upon us to run. And in those times, we *"will run and not get tired."* But there are other times when we must simply walk at His pace. In those times, we *"will walk and not become weary."* What a promise! And the secret is in our waiting upon the Lord – placing our hope in the Lord.

What all of this says to us today is simple: our lives and, by extension, the life and ministry of Lismore Regional Mission, can be as great, as fruitful, and effective as we could ever imagine – if we choose to give top priority to our daily relationship with God in Christ. There are so many things which press in on us from every side as individuals and as a Church but we must not let those things rob us of our time with the Lord.

It is in these daily times of drawing upon the eternal storehouse of God's resources that we are given the strength to live in Christ, through Christ and for Christ. If we want to face all our circumstances victoriously, if we want to live for Jesus the way God always intended, if we want to find the strength to keep us going in the difficult times, we must wait upon the Lord. We can become so engrossed in the work of the Lord that we have forgotten the Lord of the work. It is our daily, personal connection to, interaction with and ministry in Jesus Christ which empowers us and the Church.

The visible Church is weak and Christians are weak and ineffective today because God is not in the centre of everything we do. Over sixty years ago, A.W. Tozer cried out in despair from his pulpit and proclaimed a truth nobody wanted to accept then or now. He said, *"It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God."*

It is a strange thing when a Christian ministry comes to the point of operating separate from the One Whose name it bears. It is a tragic reality that the visible institution of the Church is able to operate without the discernible presence of the risen Christ in its midst. It is incomprehensible that for generations we can spend so much time and energy pursuing activities and ministries in the name of a God we have not really met personally or did so long ago we have forgotten what it's like to seek the Lord, wait on the Lord, place our hope in the Lord – a Lord Who is present and active in our midst. Until that changes, we will continue to grow weary.

Until we learn or re-learn how to engage with God Who is alive and present and powerful and effective and ready to change our world ... the Church will only ever be a hollow shell or a facsimile of the real Church which Jesus promised to build.

Unless we discover, or re-discover that deep, passionate longing for and pursuit of God Himself which we see in the heart of David as he wrote Psalm 63, we will always grow weary – or worse still, we will become complacent, indifferent and have no expectation of God at all.

So come, Holy Spirit of God, and release in our hearts the desire in David's heart when he sang this song to you so long ago:

*"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

*On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me."* (Psalm 63:1-8)