

Go Forward With God's Favor, Be Strong With God's Strength

Isaiah 40:21-31

GCF's 40th Anniversary Message
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When Isaiah wrote these prophecies of restoration (*Isaiah 40-66*), Judah still had over 100 years of difficulty ahead before Babylon conquered it, and then faced 70 years of captivity. Anticipating the future captivity and God's restoration, Isaiah encouraged God's people to live righteously in the present, despite forthcoming difficult circumstances. This is instructive for us who live today as God's covenant people, blessed with a good past, and anticipating God's greater blessings in the future.

As we celebrate a new generation, another 40 years (as the Lord wills), we look back with gratitude for those who've gone before us, with excitement at what lies ahead, and with hope despite any concerns we have today. This is because God is greater than all, and

with His favor and strength we will see Christ fulfill His promise: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (*Matthew 16:18*).

1. GOD IS GREATER THAN THE C_____ B_____ US (VV. 1-11)

- As the remnant in Babylon looked back, they saw failure and sin, and needed encouragement. They thought that nothing had changed in their situation; the enemy was still firmly in control, Jews were still totally impotent in all political and military matters, and Jerusalem was a pile of ruins.
- Someone defined circumstances as "those nasty things you see when you get your eyes off God." If you look at God through your circumstances, He will seem small

and very far away; but if by faith you look at your circumstances through God, He will draw near (*James 4:8*) and reveal His greatness to you.

2. GOD IS GREATER THAN THE C _____ B _____ US (VV. 12-26)

- The victories of Assyria and Babylon made it look like their false gods were stronger than God. But in controlling history, God establishes rulers and removes them (*Daniel 2:21*). This truth was comforting to Isaiah's readers living under the terror of the Assyrians, who heard that the Babylonians would take them into captivity. When you behold the greatness of God, you will see everything in life in its proper perspective.
- Someone said: "Look at others, and be distressed. Look at yourself, and be depressed. Look to God, and you'll be blessed!" When the outlook is bleak, we need the up-look. "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?... Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing" (v. 26).
- When, like Israel, you face a difficult task and an impossible tomorrow, remind yourself of the greatness of God.

3. GOD IS GREATER THAN THE C _____ B _____ US (VV. 27-31)

- The people are rebuked for a lack of trust, which is akin to idolatry (vv. 18-20). It is an idolatry of the mind that demands that God and his word make sense to them.

- The word "wait" does not mean we sit and do nothing. It means "to hope," to look to God for all that we need (*Isaiah 26:3; 30:15*). This involves trusting in His character and Word, praying, and actively living to glorify Him.
- In verse 31, "renew their strength" is literally "to exchange strength", as one might change into fresh clothes or exchange an old thing for a new. God's time is not our time (*John 7:6*). God's moment is not our moment. Those who can learn to wait on God's time and God's way will renew their strength, will run and not be weary, walk and not faint.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Those who persistently put their hope in God are blessed by God with strength. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong!"

The wrong conclusion about God's greatness is that He is too big to care; the right one is that He is too great to fail. Given these truths, let us "*Go forward with God's favor, be strong with God's strength.*"

HAPPY 40TH ANNIVERSARY, GCF!