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"Comfort My People"

Isaiah 40:27–31

Intro: Have you ever tried to help someone who just didn't want to be helped?

- A. It's frustrating because you really want to help and really think that you could be of help
- B. It's not that they don't want any help at all its just that they have a certain idea of the kind of help they want and only that will do!
- C. Story of the hiker that fell off a cliff and caught a branch sticking out
 - 1. "Help... Anybody up there?" (repeat)
 - 2. A deep voice answers, "I am here..."
 - 3. "Who are you?" - "I am God."
 - 4. "Great! I bet you could help me!" - "Yes, let go of the branch"
 - 5. "Is there anybody else up there?"
- D. Too often we refuse God's help because we won't let Him help us His way
- E. The Jews of Isaiah's day were very similar. The Assyrians were ransacking everything but Jerusalem as a result of God's judgment because the people had sinned against the Lord for so long.
- F. They were looking for God's help but they wanted it to be their way - they wanted immediate justice from their perspective. After all, were they or were they not God's chosen people?!
- G. In our passage for today, Isaiah wants us to see that during the difficulties of life, God is willing and able to deliver us and give us strength if we but truly seek Him.
- I. Complaining - Its natural but not necessary
 - A. In vs 27 Isaiah is questioning the people about their attitude
 - B. It was a continual complaint
 - 1. The people had been saying this, they were still saying this and they would probably be saying this again

2. Example: The Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised land can be characterized by one complaint after another

a. "We're going to get killed by the Egyptians!" (Ex. 14:11)

b. "We're going to die of thirst... of hunger!" (Ex. 15:24, 16:2-3)

C. Two complaints:

1. The first complaint:

a. "way" - the course of our lives; the things that befall us from day to day; our circumstances

b. "hidden" - implies unknown, neglected or forgotten

c. Therefore, "The Lord does not see (or does not seem to care about) what is happening to me."

2. The second complaint:

a. "justice due me" - refers to my rights; the treatment that I think I deserve

b. "escapes the notice" - implies disregard or neglect

c. Therefore, "Life is not fair - God has neglected my rights."

D. The complaints accuse God of forsaking them and reveal doubt in His omniscience and goodness

E. This seems to be a universal complaint against God by all people in times of difficulty or adversity

F. Are you experiencing a time of difficulty or adversity? Most of us probably are in one way or another.

1. Some are worse than others:

a. Trouble or pressure at work?

b. Problems at home? with a spouse? with your kids?

c. Financial problems? (As a student I relate to this one!)

- d. Personal illness?
 - e. Death of a friend or family member?
2. Chances are that most of us can relate to one or more of the above
 3. We need to ask ourselves how we respond to God in our times of adversity or difficulty:
 - a. Do we doubt that God is aware of our circumstances?
 - b. Are we doubting God's goodness to us?
 - c. Might this be a pattern for us as well as the Israelites?
 4. Maybe, if we were honest, we would admit that we have been asking these questions all of our lives and are doing so even today!

G. (vs 28a) By way of two **rebuking** questions, Isaiah informs us that these attitudes are wrong. "Do you not know? Have you not heard?"

1. He is dumfounded that they would complain in light of what they should know
2. We can understand how he must have felt if we imagine a resident of Los Angeles who didn't know that the Lakers won the NBA World Championship!
 - a. "Do you not know? Have you not heard?"
 - b. We would be so stunned that our questions would be taken as a rebuke
 - c. We would expect them to know.
 - d. We might even add "Where have you been?! Don't you know **anything?!"**

What is it that Isaiah thinks is so crucial? What are we lacking in our thinking that could influence our attitude? The answer that Isaiah gives us that we need to have right thinking about God.

II. (vs 28b-29) God's greatness and strength is affirmed. We need to take a close look at the titles of God that Isaiah specifically picks to focus in on here.

A. These are the attributes of God that Isaiah chose to remind people going through difficulty of. Let's see how they relate to people and their trials.

B. God is eternal/He is everlasting - He has always existed and He will always continue to exist

1. Your problems did not surprise God when you were confronted with them. In fact, you are probably not the first person in all of history to face whatever it is you are facing!
2. Your problem will **not** outlive God! **He** is eternal; your problem is not.
3. With God available you don't have to rely on your limited wisdom and perspective.

C. God is the Creator - He has the power to bring everything that IS into being out of nothing.

1. Look, around you and see if you can find something that would exist apart from God. Anything?!
2. Everything owes its ultimate existence to God; from birds to babies and computers to space shuttles.
3. Oh we can manipulate our environment and invent fantastic contraptions; some say that they can even create life from chemicals in a test tube.
4. But the common denominator is that **we** have to start with some initial ingredients our raw materials; even when we convert matter into energy!
5. Now think of the awesome power of God! He created everything from what? From **nothing!** Just by "speaking" it into existence! Gen 1:1ff - "And God said... and it was so."
6. God still has that same power. Imagine what He could do with that kind of power in your situation!

D. God does not become weary or tired - He never "runs out of energy", He never needs to sleep (Psalms 121:3-4)

1. Did you every wonder (perhaps as a child) how God could hear the prays of everyone who might pray at the same time? (let alone answer everyone!)
2. Maybe you wondered how God could continue to listen to people pray day after day after day without getting tired.
3. Well its time to put away such thoughts once and for all: **We** would grow weary of trying to make God weary before He would become weary! And we often do grow weary of bringing our burdens to the Lord, don't we?!

E. No one can fathom God's understanding

1. He does not lack understanding (He is wise)
2. We cannot investigate His understanding - sometimes our questions go unanswered, especially the "Why?"
 - a. He is not required to explain everything to us
 - b. God does not exist for us, rather, we exist for God
3. Not that God and His ways cannot be known at all
 - a. God is infinite - we are finite - We cannot **totally** comprehend Him
 - b. But we can apprehend the things that He has revealed to us about Himself
 - c. Yet, some things remain that we cannot understand; but not because they are contrary to reason but because they are beyond reason. Ex. Trinity.
4. Even if we may not understand how God is working in a particular situation we can be assured that **He** knows and He is worthy of all our trust.

F. God is the giver of strength (vs 29)

1. He not only has strength but He gives it:
2. Notice that He doesn't give His strength to the rested or the strong. But:
 - a. to the weary, and
 - b. to those who lack power (He increases their power)
3. In the midst of our weaknesses we need to tap into His strength.
4. There are two extremes at this point:
 - a. First, we could sit back and wait for God to rescue us all of our problems.
 - b. And second, we could take matters into our own hands apart from the any help from God. (Which is the one most of us probably fall into... I know I do.)
5. We need to find a middle ground and admit our weariness and weakness to ourselves and to God.

- a. But pride often gets in the way of this. We even try to rationalize our own efforts apart from God.
 - b. We say that God has given us gifts and He expects us to use them.
 - c. But we forget that the human aspect was never meant to work without or apart from the divine aspect. We were not meant to attempt to live our lives apart from God and without His help.
 - d. We need to humble ourselves from our rugged individualism and accept that its OK (more than OK - its necessary!) to admit weariness and weakness and to look to God for His strength!
- G. These five attributes were true about God in Isaiah's day and they are also true about God today. Yet, Isaiah needed to remind his people of these things and we need to be reminded also (as is evident from our frequent complaining)
1. How can one doubt God when you truly realize who He is? You can't! It is overwhelming!
 2. There are a couple of ways that you could be reminded:
 - a. We can wait for someone to remind us
 - Through a sermon in church
 - Through a small group Bible Study
 - Through a program on a Christian radio station
 - b. or, We can remind ourselves! How? By meditating or dwelling on passages like this one and letting it really "sink in".
 3. These things are just facts about God for us that we file away in the recesses of our minds unless we allow them to take a hold of our lives and let them affect how we live.
 - a. In the midst of difficulty it is important to think long and hard about who God is. Not who we would like Him to be or who someone else thinks He is but who He has revealed Himself to be in His word.
 - b. For one thing the process of taking your eyes off yourself and focusing on God will give you patience and a willingness to put your trust in the One who has the strength and the wisdom to bring about what is best for you.

III. Our lives are affected when our attitudes are corrected - when we are ready to trust God because He is worthy of our trust. With this reminder of who God is Isaiah goes on to show how God is able to deliver His people.

A. Because of who God is He acts on His promises.

B. This is what Isaiah was leading up to - this is where it gets very practical.

1. Isaiah is not content with just a discourse on who God is

- Its not our changed attitude that is the final result
- But this change leads us into faith in God and what He has promised
- We do not just rely on positive thinking but we look to God and expect Him to intervene

2. We must be careful, however, because His intervention may not be in the way we expect (as we shall see in a moment)

A. Isaiah makes a comparison between the best of human strength and virility and God's strength.

1. "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall" (vs 30). Contrast with vs 28.

2. Even the best of us, those that we could hold up as exceptional, grow tired and fall. Football players grow tired, marathon runners grow tired, people in iron men competitions get tired.

3. But Isaiah tells us we need not despair - there is another option.

B. We can "hope in the Lord" (vs 31). Contrasted with our normal approach as seen in vs 27.

1. NASB has "wait on the Lord"

2. NEB has "look to the Lord"

3. The idea here includes waiting with patience and implies having faith.

a. Old English meaning - "to wait upon" - a servant who awaits his master's orders.

b. There is a sense of expectancy

c. The person who "hopes in the Lord" must show confidence in God's ability to fulfill His promises by patiently waiting

- d. This is active faith not passive waiting. (Wheel barrow ill.)
 - 4. This is where our faith gets exercised - its hard to wait (Our culture doesn't make it any easier... We as consumers are told we have the right to instant everything - even "instant cash"!) (ill. about moving to Chicago)
- C. Promises made to those who "hope in the Lord" (vs 31).
- 1. They will "renew their strength"
 - a. Exchange their strength for a new strength
 - b. Strength from God - the strength to preserve amidst our difficulties and adversities
 - 2. NASB - "they will mount up with wings like eagles"
 - a. May just be a reference to the effortless and swiftness that eagles have in flight or,
 - b. Possibly, Isaiah is alluding to Ex. 19:3-4

"Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself... ' ' "

- c. This occurred 3 months after the people had left Egypt under Moses. They were at the foot of Mt. Sinai.
 - d. The imagery of the whole exodus with the dramatic parting of the Red Sea may have been intended to show that God is the one who delivers His people from the depths of their difficulties and despair.
 - e. Ex 3:7-9 (The call of Moses at the burning bush)
 - f. God revealed through that that He did see their affliction, He was aware of their suffering. "I have seen their oppression" and He was moved to do something about it.
 - g. As Isaiah reminded his people that God could still see their affliction so He still sees ours and He will either give us the strength that we need to endure it or deliver us from it.
- 3. "They will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary"

- a. Here we see the possibility of the miraculous - a picture of strength and endurance that comes from God alone
 - b. The promise is that with God's strength we can go from one situation in life to another and not become tired because we would not be relying on human strength (Phil. 4:13)
4. This is what was meant earlier when I said that God might intervene in our life the way we want or expect Him to. But strength is only needed by those who must endure.

Conclusion - How are you responding to your circumstances?

- A. Are you cultivating a proper attitude?
- B. Are you meditating (reflecting) on who God is in order to think rightly about Him?
- C. Are you responding to who He is in faith by "waiting patiently on the Lord" in times of difficulty?
- D. Are you trusting fully in God expecting Him to either give you the strength to endure or to deliver you?

No matter what your circumstances are right now, you can begin to apply the first two today. By doing that you can prepare for the adversity that will (if you're human!) no doubt be in your future.