Studies in Isaiah

Study 1

The Secret of Strength – Isaiah 40: 25-31

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A Summary

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Introduction

Have you ever been so weak that you wished you were dead? This can happen when you have a bad attack of gastro-enteritis that lasts several days and you become dehydrated.

Such a physical condition is an illustration of what can happen spiritually – the same kind of weakness in our spirit leading to collapse. This kind of moral feebleness and spiritual weakness afflicts huge numbers of Christians today. Yet, in His Word, God has shown us all **the secret of strength**.

Isaiah knew the secret:

"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."

This passage presupposes the danger of weakness.

1. The Peril of expended strength (v. 29-30)

Here Isaiah outlines to us a dangerous sequence. First there is weariness. This leads to weakness and weakness culminates in collapse! It is the danger of expended strength. In such a situation, the devil, who is both subtle and alert, pounces on us in our weakened state!

In Deut. 25:17-18 Moses warns the people of God about the peril of expended strength.

"Remember what Amalek did to you by the way … how he attacked you … all that were feeble behind you when you were faint and weary." [This refers to the situation in Exodus 17.]

Remember too how David found himself in deadly combat with one of the sons of the giants. He would have been killed if his faithful servant, Abishai, had not come to his help. (2 Sam. 2:15-17) Why was David so nearly killed? It was because he had "become weary".

It is **essential** to guard against expended strength. In Scripture we see two ways that our spiritual strength can be expended – the demands of service and the dissipations of sin.

- **The demands of service**

God has promised us abundant strength.

"He gives power to the faint and to him who lacks might, He increases strength."

This implies that daily we expend strength – we lose power in ministry.

The example of Jesus

Mark 5:30: a very sick woman pressed through the crowds and touched the hem of Jesus' garment. As she did so, she was healed. Then we read, ***"Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned and said, 'Who touched My clothes?' "***

The power of healing had been released in the life of the Lord Jesus. It was an expenditure of strength! This was true of the teaching and preaching ministry of the Lord Jesus as well as His healing ministry.

None of us can exert a spiritual impact on a godless world without the expenditure of strength and power. So the demands of service will take a toll on our spiritual resources.

- **The dissipations of sin**

Spiritual strength can also be expended through the dissipations of sin. Perhaps the most sobering example of this in Scripture is Samson. He was a man endued with immense physical strength, but a moment came in his life when he played with sin and in so doing, he lost his strength, lost his sight and lost his service for God. [See Judges 16]

This is a sober warning. One moment we can be in touch with the throne of heaven, living in glorious victory, and the next moment we can fall in complete defeat. Why does this happen? It is because we have failed to draw on the resources of heaven. Beware of the peril of expended strength.

2. The Principle of exchanged strength (v. 31)

"They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." The word "renew" can mean **"exchange"**. The commentaries say that the word is used of the process by which a moulting eagle exchanges its old feathers for new ones.

If you are familiar with the writings of Hudson Taylor, you will remember that he taught much about what he called "the exchanged life" – i.e. the principle of Christian living is exchanging all that we are (living in the flesh) for all that Christ is!

"I am crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Gal. 2:20)

The secret of the exchanged life is gathered up in the little word "wait". There are at least three conditions that bring us into the joy and fullness of the exchanged life.

- **The waiting of dedication**

Waiting is not an attitude of rebellion but of submission. If there is rebellion in our hearts – impatience, restlessness, frustration etc. – there can be no waiting! But where there is submission to the whole will of God, then there is delight and restfulness in the Lord.

Hudson Taylor was in deep trouble. His missionaries were dying. There was much trouble at home and dissonance in the mission. He wrote:

"When my agony of soul was at its height a sentence in a letter was used to remove the scales from my eyes and the Spirit of God revealed the truth of our oneness in Jesus as I had never known it before."

Someone wrote to him: "How to get faith strengthened? It is not by striving after faith, but by resting in the Faithful One." Taylor wrote: "As I read, I saw it all! *'If we believe not, He abides faithful.'* I looked to Jesus and saw and when I saw, oh how the joy flowed that He said, *'I will never leave you'*. Ah, there is rest I thought! I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more, for has He not promised to abide in me, never to leave me, never to fail me? And He never will!"

Paul also says he can rest, ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*** (Phil. 4:13)

Do you know this waiting of dedication? Can you say as David did, ***"I waited patiently for the Lord and He inclined to me and heard my cry?"*** (Ps. 40:1)

- **The waiting of supplication**

Implicit in the idea of waiting is the idea of supplication and pleading. This is where the exchange takes place. As we breathe our need to heaven, God answers with His help. As we confess our sins, He imparts His cleansing. As we admit our weakness, He empowers us with divine strength. Reflect on these words in Psalm 96:6: ***"Splendour and majesty are before Him. Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary."***

If we are to know the exchange of strength and the transformation of character so that we become like the Lord Jesus, then the secret is in the sanctuary. This is the place of prayer and supplication. If we neglect prayer and supplication, strength is gone – no sanctuary – no strength. The sanctuary represents private, quiet devotion. It must never be neglected.

- **The waiting of expectation**

Expectation pre-supposes hope. Why wait if there is no hope? We only receive what we expect.

"Ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord." (James 1:6-7)

To believe expectantly that God will meet our needs is to be rewarded with divine power and strength.

"In quietness and confidence shall be our strength." (Is. 30:15)

In the quietness of prayer and in the confidence of expectation the answer comes – spiritual strength. This is the principle of exchanged strength. We only become strong when we exchange our utter weakness for the divine strength of the Lord Jesus – power for any eventuality!

3. The Purpose of employed strength (v. 31)

There is some lovely imagery here of the exciting, exhilarating adventures we can have with God.

"The people who know their God shall be strong and do exploits." (Dan. 11:32)

God's power prepares us for three areas of Christian experience:

- **Special exaltations** – "rising up with wings as eagles" – eagles are characterised by:
  - ✓ rapid flight
  - ✓ keenness of vision
  - ✓ discernment of scent/smell

Mounting or rising up as eagles implies rising up rapidly over all difficulties, falling rapidly on any opportunity with a joyful and quick discernment of the will of God for us as well as having, by faith, a keen vision of God Himself.

Paul prays that God would strengthen the believers in Ephesus, ***"I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."*** (Eph. 3:16-17)

There is no greater exaltation in this world than to know and experience the adequacy and glory of the indwelling Christ – to know the Lord's indwelling in terms of the height, depth, length and breadth of His incredible love for us. Perhaps the reason we don't enjoy these exaltations more often is that we don't take time **to wait** upon the Lord for His inner strengthening – ***"So that ……."***

- **Crucial obligations**

"They shall run and not be weary."

I love the story of Philip. He was called out of a revival in Samaria and taken down to the desert where he met a Sudanese who was returning home. Philip noticed the man reading a scroll. The Holy Spirit said to him, ***"Go near and join the chariot and Philip <u>ran</u> to join him"***. (Acts 8:29-30)

The crucial obligation was **to witness and to buy up a fleeting opportunity** in a time of crisis. At such a time we need special strength so we can run and not grow weary – no more foot dragging – no more procrastination.

- **Normal situations**

"They shall walk and not faint."

This is our goal in the ordinary tasks of life – not just work, but hobbies and everything else. It is our daily walk with God – nothing very spectacular or critical here – just a steady walking with God.

This is the area where we are likely to faint! We like the exaltation – flying! We often handle crises and critical obligations well. But in the ordinariness of normal life, we tend to rely on our own strength and invariably we collapse!

The reality we must take on board is that whether we are flying, running or walking we need the strength of God. Failure to recognise this is the cause of spiritual bankruptcy and moral breakdown.

A Summary

- Learn the secret of strength!
- Remember the peril of expended strength.
- Lay hold of the principal of the exchanged life and strength.
- Then we can enter into the joy and purposes of **employed strength** used in all the circumstances in which we find ourselves.
- Rejoice in the exchange of human weakness for divine strength that comes to those who wait on the Lord.

Christian, wait upon the Lord
If you would not faint and fall.
Take and wield the Spirit's sword,
Lest you heed the tempter's call.

Christian, wait upon the Lord
If your strength you would renew
Claim and trust the promised Word
And God's power will flow through you.

Then you'll mount with eagles' wings,
Run for Christ your King of Kings;
Walk the path that always brings
Faith that rests and joy that sings.