

WAIT FOR THE LORD

Isaiah 40: 25 - 31

You don't have to be an exile to feel like one. You can feel like a stranger, a displaced person even in a familiar place, even in your own house. You can feel that you are a captive, caught, trapped, in a situation you cannot escape; and somehow do not deserve. You can feel just plain neglected, misunderstood, mistreated. You can thereupon collect these grievances against life and fling them in the face of God and shout, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God".

Whereupon you understand exactly the feeling of the captive Israelites in their exile, and why they had wanted to shake their fists in God's face, for their faith had obviously not gotten them what they thought they deserved.

The prophet, Isaiah, understood their feeling too. After all he was one of them. If you ever feel this way, I understand you. And Christ understands us all, caught as he was in the exile feeling as in Gethsemane ("Let this cup pass from me!"), or in the ever-recurring Golgotha of those who would be good and godly, only to feel tricked by life and made a fool of. ("My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As the creed says even, "He descended into hell".) No greater exile than that. This is the forsaken hell of the eternal exile: It is to feel forgotten--forsaken, betrayed, neglected, misunderstood and mistreated, then to throw it all up to God, shouting, "Why"? If Isaiah knew the exile feeling, He also knew what the exile feeling could do to you; how corrosive it is, how contemporary sounds his choice of words: in this mood, he says one is "weary", one suddenly has "no might", with this attitude toward life he says "Even the youths shall faint....(when they feel this way) even young men shall utterly fall."

So, this exile syndrome is no respecter of age. I have seen students, feeling very sorry for themselves, detached from life about them, disappointed that their situation is more than slightly less than ideal, and so down on poor old God who must suffer the brunt of everybody's defeats; and they fit Isaiah's description to a tee: They are just too "weary" to work, you see, they have "no might" to concentrate, stare at one page all day, they may even "faint" and "utterly fall" into the infirmary or worse, into the dean's office, feeling even more exiled there than usual.

Or, if you want to find a sure enough “weary” woman or man of whatever age, one who feels less and less able to care to “walk” (Isaiah puts it--much less) “run” or “fly” (to employ Isaiah words again), then you go find you someone who feels forgotten, misunderstood, neglected, mistreated, reviled in his own living room, bedroom, or office. In other words, go home and look in the mirror--when you begin to feel like one of “them that have no might.” It may be that you are only physically ill. Go see your physician. It may be; however, that you are much worse off--that you are not sick but sad--ultimately, fundamentally, terminally sad. Fortunately, says Isaiah, there’s a remedy for this plight.

Corrusive

Thirdly, Isaiah’s remedy for the (...) exile syndrome is to “wait upon the Lord”, who is, he thinks, worth waiting on. For while space and time trap us, God is trapped by neither. For, says Isaiah, He is Lord of both, being “creator” and “everlasting”. This means, for all our smartness, we little godlets, the almighty still has a few plans we cannot fathom, a providence, for all our chaffing at the bit, racing the engine in impatience, we may just have to wait on.

As I have often said, we are so inclined to judge all our lives by one small hour or day or year; whereas an hour, a day, or a year is scarcely a tick in God’s watch. We despair so soon we spoil our chance of ever walking, running, flying high again. It might be better to wait a while, says Isaiah, before we allow ourselves too much weeping and fainting and falling out with life and falling out on the job.

G. K. Chesterton used to say it did not do much good to say to a crocodile who was swallowing down his second missionary for breakfast “Come on, now be a crocodile!” but that it might help some to say to a man who was low on life, swallowing down his second or seventh pill or cocktail, “Come on, be a man!” Don’t knock yourself down and out yet, there’s still a chance, if you give yourself that chance, that you’ll be a man yet, a real man, a man of God. Wait up a minute before you “utterly fall”.

But, you say, I’ve been waiting on God for years, and he’s too slow for me!” That’s missing the point. You don’t wait on God the way you wait on your spouse while he or she finishes dressing and you’re already late for the game. When God says “Wait on me” -- he doesn’t mean what a woman means when she says, “Wait on me while I run in and look at (...) *these* hats!” That sort of waiting just adds to your frustration. “Waiting on the Lord” doesn’t

mean standing around doing nothing while you wait on Him to do something.

Waiting on the Lord is better understood like this: when a clerk in a store says, “May I wait on you?”, he doesn’t mean “May I stand here like a do-do, a dumb ox, and do nothing while I wait for you to do something nice for me?” No, that’s not it. What the clerk means is, “May I be of service to you? Render you some assistance? Be of a little help?”, or should mean that!

Or as in the days of Royalty, what were “ladies in waiting?” Ladies who sat around silly and stupid and sluggish or sad, waiting for the queen to do something to cheer them up?, some favor for them? Goodness! Naturally not! They were expecting to be of service to her, obedient to her Royal Majesty’s commands.

This is precisely the meaning of “wait upon” in the Hebrew. It means to be ready to go—all prepared to hop to and do the will of God, to be “in expectation”, “to be obedient to”, “obedient expectation”, ready and willing to hop to, “aye-aye!, Sir,” “you bet, Sir”

The inference is clear. I will soon be weary in and of this world if all I wait on is me, or if all I’m expecting is my own little happiness and everyone to cater to it. If what I’m obedient to is limited to my personal ambitions, I’ll soon have these stepped on, I’ll feel like an exile nobody loves. I’ll faint and fall out. No more walking, running or flying high for me.

But, says wise old Isaiah, if we “wait upon the Lord,” put ourselves at his disposal, his service, jolly well expect to do his will (“not my will, but Thine be done”) commit ourselves into his hands, then we forget how weary we are, or we might even be saying with John Wesley at 82, “I do not know what weariness means”, no more depression of the exile, no more feeling forgotten, unappreciated, (...), and all that, so busy we are fulfilling our life’s purpose and plan, walking when we can, and when we’re not running, or flying, kept going, literally buoyed up by a healthy, happy faith in a God who himself “does not faint or grow weary”, and who for us has a plan.

You know something? One thing I’ve always noticed about those who stay busy, very, very

busy waiting upon the Lord: “they do indeed renew their strength”; they “mount up with wings as eagles”; and do “not faint”. It’s quite amazing!