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Notes of a Sermon preached by Mr. J.H. Gosden at "Ebenezer", Richmond
on 24th. August, 1961

Text: Isaiah 40.31

"They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

These words are part of an encouraging word spoken to those who are anxious and fearful that the Lord has forgotten them. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" We should not say it with words I suppose but perhaps we may be saying it, or asking the question whether the Lord has forgotten us, in our minds, in our souls, because of the peculiarity of our way; the difficulties, the unrevealed things, the perplexities, the defeats that we suffer. This is an unbelieving saying that the Lord has forgotten us, or that He does not see us, that our way is hid from Him. Mercifully it is not true and yet how apt we are to think God does not see or takes no notice of us. We find some saying, "How does God know?" That is an infidel question but the question is the anxious question of a doubting believer, a man who wants God to see him, wants God to help him. It is a kind of expostulation as though the Lord would say, dost thou think I should be unfaithful in forgetting thee, dost thou think I disregard thee in thy difficulties. We are very apt to think so because God is so great and we so insignificant. If we read this chapter with enlightened eyes, though no human language will set forth the greatness of God, it may give us some inkling of Who He is. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." His majesty is great. All things were made by Him. He is above all things and humbles Himself to behold the things which are in the heavens, humbles Himself to behold the things which are upon the earth and to behold sinners with a beholding of mercy and compassion - not mercy towards their sins, but towards their persons in their trouble. It takes a great deal to bring us to believe that God can have any regard to us as we are in ourselves, poor despicable creatures, sinful worms. It was a question with David in one Psalm, "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" Yet it is the very thing that we want, for the Lord to be mindful of us. "To remember us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever." And to fear that this is not so with us is

a terrible fear; to think we are outside God's care, that He takes no notice of us, that He does not care for us. O what a word that is in Peter if it belongs to us, "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you".

Then he goes on to speak of the youths and young men, "even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall." - As depending on their strength, their youthful vigour, they shall all fail, like grass which withereth and fadeth away. "All flesh is grass." We must all die, all become infirm. Natural strength must give way. What a solemn thing if our religion is the result of natural strength, the result of reasoning power, nothing more! It comes to be a very close point, I believe, in those whose consciences are made tender in respect of eternity. Do I know the Lord or not? Am I His? Do I know the truth savingly? Am I united to Christ, or is my religion only a result of my own acquisition? If it is the latter it must fail when natural powers fail. That seems to be the inference in this text. "The young men shall utterly fall." This will make us afraid of being strong in ourselves. This is a dangerous place to get into. If we become strong in ourselves we shall become independent and if we think we are independent we shall become prayerless, if we have the life of God deep in our souls, we shall find it to be a very solemn matter. Prayerless people are dead people if they are always prayerless. If we become strong so as not to pray for help - if we become sufficient so as not to seek sufficiency from the Lord, that will be our downfall. We may more fear our own strength than our own weakness, rightly considered - painful and crucifying to pride as it is to be weak. The Lord knows how to weaken people, to bring them down. "He weakened my strength in the way" said David (Ps.102) There is one man spoken of in the Scriptures, a very solemn case and a mysterious one, King Uzziah, who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord and had wonderful prosperity as a King, successes here and there, and it is said that he sought the Lord all the days of Zechariah and as long as he sought the Lord God made him to prosper (2 Chron.26.5) It is said he was helped until he became strong and his heart was lifted up with pride and he ceased to seek the Lord. He presumed to take on him the priest's office and the Lord smote him with leprosy and disqualified him for any usefulness, and took him to heaven. May the Lord make it instructive to us.

This text which I have read is a blessed alternative if the Lord will give us grace to walk accordingly. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." This waiting upon the Lord is from a sense of need, from a sense of insufficiency, weakness, ignorance, sinnership. O what needs we have! How weary we become, how difficult we find it to cope with circumstances, with our own deceitful hearts, with a hostile world. You may sometimes feel thus weary and ready to faint - but you will not faint if you remember the Lord and wait upon

Him. The faint-hearted believer who is brought down before the Lord to trust in Him, will prove what the text says, that his strength is renewed. Waiting upon the Lord is a great privilege, but it does mean dependence, I have no stones to throw at the proudest creature on earth. Independence seems engrained in my fallen nature, and to have to be dependent even naturally is very obnoxious. It means injured pride, that is all, not humility. Humility is a very precious grace, but injured pride is a dreadful evil. To be made willing to depend is no small mercy and to wait upon the Lord though it mauls our pride, is a very great privilege. God has appointed that some poor sinners, needy mortals, with many needs in their circumstances and more needs in their souls, shall be permitted to wait upon Him for what He has to bestow.

This waiting upon Him is an individual soul-exercise before God, first of all in secret prayer. Nothing can really be a substitute for secret prayer. If our religion is chiefly external and public our religion is wrong. If not absolutely so, it is certainly out of perspective. The chief part of real religion is that secret part, that secret exercise before God. And what a privilege to be a humble, needy soul who knows that he deserves to be cast away by God! It is a privilege to be allowed to wait upon Him. I know to my nature this is irksome. To unbelief and reason it seems like a lot of wasted time; but secret prayer is not wasted time. You may not have a great deal of time but you may find time for things not nearly as important as secret prayer. It is not imperative that we should always be in the attitude of prayer, on our knees, to pray secretly. I believe it is good to have stated times for secret prayer as well as for public prayer, but you may pray when you are walking over London Bridge, you may pray when you are busy behind your counter or in the office. The Lord is available to His people - O the mercy of it! You will find it so sometimes a great relief to look unto Him in your mind and in your heart and ask His merciful help and guidance in what you are about to do, in the way that you take. There will be a waiting upon Him in solemn, humble, earnest, secret prayer, that He will guide, that He will bless and especially that He will grant a proof of your interest in His grace. That is one of the chief things in waiting upon the Lord in secret, to get from Him a testimony of His special favour, as distinct from answers to prayer in temporal things though they will come into this. The great thing is an evidence of the mercy of God in your heart, to have an assurance that you are interested in His grace, that you have union with the Lord Jesus, that He does remember you in your low estate because His mercy endureth for ever, and that He bears towards you that favour that He bears unto His own chosen people. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart". This will be at times the pressing thing. Other things will press. Circumstances may press you and drive you here and there and bring anxieties before your mind,

but underneath all this is the chief consideration and there will be a watchfulness unto prayer, to see what the Lord will do for you, and to you, in answer to secret prayer.

Is it a privilege to you? Do you find, my dear friends, a little relief at times, in turning away from all the things of this life, as you have opportunity, and giving yourself unto prayer? "I give myself", said David, "unto prayer". It is not improper to ask friends their counsel and opinion and to give advice here and there; but that must come to an end, there is a limitation in that but no limitation with the Lord: He knows everything and can do everything. You may feel yourself to be a weak thing, unable to do anything for yourself, and you may be brought to this point where there is not a creature can help you in your particular trial. It is very solemn to come to that - not a whole universe can help a soul sometimes in this case, especially his soul's case. But there is one who can, the Lord Jesus. To wait upon Him is a privilege and a profitable exercise for such shall renew their strength. The margin is "They shall change their strength." You may be faint with famine, you may be faint with fear, with anxiety, with doubt, especially concerning eternity; but if the Lord gives you a token, a testimony, or even a look, - you know what a look is; it is a great thing to get a look - it will strengthen your heart more than the approving look of all your friends. It brings more gladness into the heart than anything else possibly could. When waiting upon the Lord in secret with regard to circumstances, you may find open answers to secret prayers. I know only too well the power of unbelief in extremity with Satan's temptations to doubt and to despair. It is a terrible feeling, a painful feeling. Alas! Through unbelief and temptation you may fear you will be driven away from the Lord and make shipwreck of faith but even that temptation and trial can be sanctified and is sometimes, when the Lord helps our infirmities and gives us a spirit of grace and supplication. When you find that bubbling up in your heart, it relieves your mind from that sad condition of felt despair. You will say: 'I will not despair, for the Lord can do everything and He knoweth the way that I take. He will answer my prayer and give me a true token'. You may have an evidence that your prayer has been heard and have a proof of it in some blessing. If not outwardly, in your soul, a testimony of your interest in the Saviour's precious blood and righteousness, and union to Him in love. That is a precious blessing that comes from the sanctification of trial and weakness as you are enabled to wait upon the Lord.

Then there will be a waiting upon Him in His Word. This comes very close, especially in these degenerate days. Never was there more leisure and never less study of the Scriptures prayerfully. People are always in a hurry today. The influence of this rushing about is evil. Even in the church of God there is a restlessness that is not good. There is a restlessness that is good, a

restlessness for God, and when you feel that restlessness and that need of the Lord, it will separate you from the restlessness about you, and you will find a retreat in the Scriptures. Wait upon the Lord in the Scriptures. Have you a purpose in your Bible-readings? Some people read the Bible so as to be enabled to store up a good deal of historical information. I would not say a wrong word with regard to that, but I would say, good though it is in its place, it is deficient with respect to salvation and you will not be satisfied with that as you are taught of the Lord. Wait upon Him in His Word for Him to manifest Himself and speak to you through His word, shine upon you through the sacred page. It is a great mystery but a great reality if the Lord speaks by His Spirit through the written Word to His peoples hearts, manifests Himself in His graciousness, in His goodness, in His love, in His faithfulness, through His Word and sometimes, as I have said, you may have a little shining of His countenance through the Word in your heart. There is a sacred, mysterious, living light shining through the Scripture in your heart. You see, so to speak, the well-pleased face of God in a promise, in a declaration, in a statement of the Lord in commendation or even sometimes in a gracious reproof. There is life in it. You know what I mean, some of you, I doubt not. It is a sacred, vital influence upon the heart. You cannot demonstrate it but you can say what it does. Some things cannot be described in themselves, in the nature of them but you can say what it does for you. You may say I was very low and the Lord helped me with that Word; I was very dark and fearful and I felt He smiled upon me in that darkness. I was very cold and I felt a little warmth in my soul in reading that sacred doctrine of Christ. You will go alongside those two who went to Emmaus in sorrow and perplexity. The stranger opened their understanding and made their hearts burn within them. You may find that burning, that love of the Lord Jesus and you will be strengthened when you know Him, that He spoke to you, that He lives and that you have union to Him, for there is union in living faith. Dead faith is cold. No life, no union in it, it is just a notion. Living faith is the life, the truth and substance and communion felt in the heart which makes Christ real, it makes Him precious, it humbles the soul, produces sweet repentance and gracious dependence upon the Lord. It causes a person to surrender himself, to commit all his concerns into His hand, he is strengthened, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength". Why my friends, sometimes you may really eat the Scripture, it is not only an appropriate word to your case, but you receive it, you assimilate it, it becomes strength in your soul as truly as if you took nourishing food to strengthen your weary body. Do you know what that is? Sometimes, it may not be often, you may be raised from your weariness and fearfulness like a giant refreshed. How? By a testimony in your heart of the love of God in Christ Jesus. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love;

therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". O the tenderness, the fidelity of the Word of God. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life". They that wait upon the Lord shall thus renew their strength, and sometimes you may even know a little joy in waiting upon the Lord thus. I do not like to speak much about joy because I do not believe there is much real joy in the church of God today, not because the Lord is deficient, but because we are so low and far off; but there is such a thing as real joy in waiting upon the Lord, when the Lord blesses you and gives you a sweet sense of His pardoning mercy; then you know something of what Nehemiah said to the people who were mourning and grieving because they had heard the law and were so wrong in many things. He said, "Eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." You may know that once or twice in your life, that deep down, sacred, holy joy that is felt in the soul that knows the salvation of Christ. If the Lord declares in your heart that He is yours, your Saviour, if He visits you with His salvation, brings it in - and He always brings salvation when He comes - you will have sweet joy in your heart. And He strengthens you - strengthens you for all the trials of life, fortifies the mind in respect of all the anxieties and burdens that lie upon you. This is in waiting upon the Lord, not for waiting upon Him as if that were putting the Lord into your debt for it is His mercy, if it is a debt at all it is a debt of grace.

Then waiting upon the Lord too in the means of grace. It is to feel we are in that number, not only because for the most part congregations are diminishing, but because of the evident lack of real waiting upon the Lord in those who do attend. You can tell it by the conversation after a service, very often very solemn is the conduct of many after a service in the Lord's house; you would not think they had been waiting upon the Lord by their attitude. If you wait upon the Lord you will preface your coming to the services with prayer; you look for His counsel in the services, we want to see Jesus, we want to hear His voice, Will He come and bless me tonight, will He visit my soul, give me a token, relieve me of my burdens, purge me of the guilt of my conscience? There is an anxiety in one and if you get what you want in measure it will make you sober and humble with gladness and praise; if you do not get what you want you will go to your homes with anxiety and prayer. If there is no such influence through the means of grace it cannot be said that we wait upon the Lord in the means of grace. To come to hear certain things said that are not untrue and to be satisfied with such formality will bring no spiritual good. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" in the means of grace. You may be sometimes so strengthened in your faith as almost to lay hold of the Lord.

You may be so strengthened in your hope as to anticipate some blessing and you may be so inflamed in your love as to be enabled to feel your heart going out to the Lord Jesus in admiration and true worship; and if a hymn meets your case you may find yourself enabled with your heart and understanding to sing the hymn of praise. And is not that a blessing? It is a wonderful blessing when the heart and voice are tuned together because the Lord has strengthened you and softened you with His presence.

Then I take it that this waiting upon the Lord would include also waiting upon Him to do His will. If I wait upon a person I seek to know what their desire is and to do it, I ask for their commands, their wishes, and try to meet their wishes and please them. That is not legal, it is rather an act of love. "What wilt thou have me to do?" is said by some people in a legal way as if doing something would contribute to salvation but those who have some little sense in their hearts of the Lord's mercy and His goodness, especially His goodness in salvation, in redemption, and have some very little comprehension of what that redemption cost the dear Redeemer in suffering on the cross, will say, "What wilt Thou have me to do"? You do not lose your own will but it is swallowed up in the Lord's. Self-will and pride come down and there is a surrender to the Lord and you wait upon Him in His ways. What is the service of the Lord? Submitting to Him, obeying Him. The appeal of the Lord Jesus in the Scriptures and the appeal of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a favoured believer, a burdened sinner, is an appeal to love - "If ye love me keep my commandments". It is not a driving of an unwilling slave to do the will of God because if it is not done there will be the lash. It is not the dread of punishment but it is rather an act of love, a wanting to do the will of God; indeed it is esteemed a privilege. It is a great honour for a poor sinful worm to serve the Lord Jesus, and there is one word my dear friends in the Colossians that comes very close, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." That is waiting on the Lord in daily life in the common task, the daily round. You can serve Him in the most menial position if you do what you have to do as in His sight, in His tender fear. You are not your own and would not be. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's". I realise dear friends as I try to say these things how exceedingly short I come but this is the standard. May the Lord bring it to us and bring us to it by His grace and love.

"They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength". What does James say? "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed". That blessing in the deed is to be strengthened, to be refreshed.

You will find sometimes in your soul spiritual labour rather refreshing than exhausting, it may exhaust your physical frame but it will refresh your spirit. In the Acts we read of being refreshed from the presence of the Lord, and that He is with His people in His ways, in His ordinances. There is a solemn, sacred refreshment because of the Lord's presence, not because those who are gathered are better than others, not because they can stand by themselves - "We are holier than thou" - but because the Lord gathers them in and gives them the privilege of walking in His ways, observing His ordinances. "If ye love Me keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" - a promise attaching to obedience, a wonderful promise. The Lord does not owe us anything but He will pay what He has pledged and I do believe, though I would speak with caution and tenderness and reverence, the way to an increase of grace and knowledge and experience is the way of obedience. "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him" said the prophet to Asa. While you are with Him He is with you; if we walk contrary to Him then He will walk contrary to us. Whenever He favours a poor sinner that sinner always feels that he is not worthy of that favour but he does enjoy it; the favour of the Lord is better than life.

"They shall mount up with wings as eagles", not in flights of fancy and speculation, the Lord give us a wholesome dread of speculative religion and notion, but this is the flight of faith, being borne up upon the wings of faith by the power of the Holy Ghost. Amen

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