

**Finishing Strong**  
**December 30, 2007**  
**Isaiah 40:25-31**

Intro:

We come to the end of the year, and I don't know about you...but I kind of look over the past year and start to take stock in everything that has happen...good and bad:

For me:

- My dad passed away
- Soul searching about where God was leading us as a family and in ministry
- My wife and I became pregnant with our third child
- Different than the other 2...Lia really struggled with her health this pregnancy, resulted in several hospitals stays
- Lost about 50 lbs, gain about 40 lbs (you do the math)
- Had a baby, Reid - a little scary at first, but God is GREAT
- Two words: Hospital bills
- My daughter started 5<sup>th</sup> grade, public school, really good Christian woman for her teacher.
- Son started K
- I turned 36

There were difficult moments, sad moments, overwhelming moments, happy, joyous and glad moments. I'm sure if I did an accounting over the years...many of them would be somewhat the same. Trials, struggles...or what I like to call: LIFE. Life in a world that is fallen.

What about YOU? How many of you in the past year have spoken these words aloud, under your breath, or simply in a prayer:

- Why me?
- I don't think I can handle any more!
- What are we going to do?
- Is Taco Bell still open?
- Thanks God, thank you Jesus
- No one would miss me.
- You just don't understand.
- I'm not strong enough.
- God, are you there?
- Enough.
- It hurts so much.
- I can't stand this any more.
- Help.
- Enough, God, enough.

- Our faith in Jesus and wanting to be more like him hasn't changed perhaps, but maybe your heart is a little weak from this year. Maybe your spirit is heading in a bad direction, into sorrow, sadness or depression. Your patience has run out. Your motivation is gone. You aren't just on cruise control, you've run out of gas and 1 or more tires are losing air!

**Big Idea: God gives us the strength so that we can fly high, run fast or walk steadily through this life**

**Isaiah 40:25-31**

Intro to the scripture passage:

- The kingdom is divided into 2 parts, Israel and Judah
- Israel has already been defeated by the Assyrians
- Judah is still at war with the Assyrians
- Everything that the prophet Isaiah shares with them in chapter 40 will take place after their captivity.
- But they are going to go another 100 years of trouble, strife and pain felt during times of war, then they will be taken in captivity for 70 years by the Babylonians.
- These people have every right to be discouraged. Much of their trials are a result of turning against God, but their King, Hezekiah is one of the more faithful kings in the history of Judah, but as a nation, they have sinned and turned their backs once again to God.
- But in Chapter 40, Isaiah gives words to comfort them. He will tell them that God is going to deliver them, that God stands forever, that God is bigger!

... Bigger than Idols and false gods  
 ... Bigger than Nature and its forces  
 ... Bigger than Humanity

Our God is BIG!

We will pick up in verse 25:

**25) "To whom will you compare me?  
 Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One.**

- This begins the summary of Chapter 40
- After sharing with them God's greatness...His "bigness", the question is simple who is equal to God.
- Now understand, God's people in this day had all kinds of issues of putting things before Him. They trusted more in idols, they paid more attention to their things than they did God. They trusted the advice of friends and neighbors over the advice of His Word.
- They fretted and worried and feared and doubted in their lives and instead of handing those things over to God...they looked for their own answers.

- Does that sound like 2007 to you?

**26) Look up into the heavens.**

***Who created all the stars?***

***He brings them out like an army, one after another,  
calling each by its name.***

***Because of his great power and incomparable strength,  
not a single one is missing.***

- The Israelites will learn the names of the constellations from the Babylonians. The Babylonians had names for groups of stars. This hasn't happened yet. They haven't gone into captivity. God knows the name of each star, it is His power that keeps them going.

- God didn't forget the name of a star...don't think for a minute that He has forgotten about you.

- God knows you...that seems so elementary, but I think adults need to be reminded of it just as often...God knows you. You can come into this building, you can walk out those doors, you can go home, go to work, go to school, go see family, go get in trouble...God knows you...He knows where you are at every moment.

- If you would just look up...lift your eyes in the evening, on a clear night and see that God is powerful, good, holy, incredible...and He knows YOU.

**27) O Jacob, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles?**

***O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights?***

**28) Have you never heard?**

***Have you never understood?***

***The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of all the earth.***

***He never grows weak or weary.***

***No one can measure the depths of his understanding.***

- In moments when the Israelites are struggling or hard-pressed against something, they often make statements that say, "God doesn't care" or "God has left me" or "God doesn't understand"

- So often we attribute to God what is really true in ourselves.

- because we ignore the troubles of others
- because we don't always seek to understand others
- because we don't listen
- because we don't understand

- Whatever is defective in each of us, has nothing, nothing to do with God

- The hardest part of this is simple - I, you, me, us, we don't get it... "No one can measure the depths..." Some translations say, "There is no searching His wisdom"

- Here is the dividing line, you will just have to trust God

- Paul suffered from something that we are never given description of and he asked God to take it away:

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

**8) Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. 9) Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 10) That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

- We may never be given the answers in this life, why we have to deal with things that are so hard...but I know that God can use our trials for the good of His Kingdom.

**29) He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.**

**30) Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion.**

- You may never understand God's wisdom, His ways, but you can understand His greatness, His power and strength:

Ephesians 1:19-20

**19) I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power 20) that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.**

- Youths will become weak, tired and will fall! I think this has more to do with immaturity than age. It's the person who thinks that they can handle anything that comes their way. The person who says yes to anyone and anything. The person is self-reliant.

- How many times have you tried to barrel your way through something, only to hit a brick wall. And then you are reminded...pray.

- The other aspect is that young Christians, so if you are 12 and you just accepted Christ or you are 75 and you just accepted Christ, you are young or *immature* in the faith. It's not a slam, but it is something you should be careful. It is in these early days of your faith in Jesus that you will be tempted most to fall away.

**31) But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles.**

**They will run and not grow weary.**

**They will walk and not faint.**

- The original language, as well as many translations says, "those who wait on the Lord"

- So instead of trying to make something happen without God in the mix.

- Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah, God says, you're going to have kids, so they barely wait at all before Sarah says, "go sleep with my servant." and Abraham's like, "Okay!"

- In the end, God made it right, but our best intentions are not always best. Sometimes we simply have to wait.

- Do not mistake this for laziness...if you are 30 years old, living in your mom's basement, spending what few waking moments you have on the couch in front of a huge TV, your mom says, "when are you gonna get a job?", don't you dare say, "I'm just waitin' on the Lord."

- When you are face with circumstance beyond your control, don't be tempted to always take matters into your own hands...wait.

- God gives them a divine promise. If you look in scriptures you will find men and women who have waited. Who were patient and trusted God and he was able to do incredible things in their lives.

- Put this in the context of the people of Judah, in captivity, remember, that is what Isaiah is talking about...he says, "wait, you will find strength"

- Then 3 powerful images:

- soar high on wings like eagles
- run and not grow weary
- walk and not faint

I want us to consider three things as we enter the new year, as we seek to finish strong, and it comes from these three images given to us by Isaiah.

### **Big Idea: God gives us the strength so that we can fly high, run fast or walk steadily through this life**

#### **#1 - Soar high on wings like eagles: Perspective**

- When I get on a plane...for me...
- Think about Judah in captivity.
- You can go down in the dumps or rise above and see your problems and struggles through the eyes of a God who knows you, cares about you and understands you.
- Step back and pray about the things that come you way. Are there positives, list them. Try to see were God can use this situation.  
\*\*\*Caution: You may not understand.

#### **#2 - Run and not grow weary: Progress**

- Remember Forrest Gump, that's stupid
- 1 Cor. 9:24, Paul says to "run in such a way as to win the race to get the prize."
- Make an effort to grow and strive this year, not just survive
- Progress in your faith and walk with Christ (The Janitor)

#### **#3 - Walk and not faint: Perseverance**

- Notice the progression, throughout my year, there have been moments when I've soared like an eagle, where I have run like a cheetah (post-antelope), but more often, I do find myself walking, only to navigate the hills in life, to avoid obstacles and overcome others.
- The walk is more difficult than "the run"

- Remember our strength comes from God, we must wait on Him, placing our trust in him, that he will bring us through.

Closing:

Isaiah 40, not only is there to comfort the people of Judah, but it is prophetic. It tells of someone (John the Baptist) shouting, "Make way for the Lord."

The "highway" or "path" or "way" is the same way that the prophets have declared throughout the history of the bible, it's the same "way" that the Angels spoke of to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, the same that John the Baptist was teaching to all who would listen, and finally the same that Jesus would declare himself in John 14:6, when he says, "I am the WAY."

Then in Matthew 11, Jesus says something that a Jewish person in that day would truly understand:

***28) Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29) Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."***

In that time if you followed a certain Rabbi or teacher, you took upon yourself their teaching, or doctrine, or yoke. So many of the Rabbi's in that day had difficult standards to live up to, rules that came from scripture as well as others that made life difficult. But Jesus says, "take my yoke...let me teach you."

This year, you want to finish strong, follow Jesus, let him teach you, become more like him each and every day. Sometimes you may fly high, run fast or just walk steadily through this life...because in Jesus, you have the strength to finish strong.

**Prayer**

**Invitation**