

GOD'S REFRESHING PRESENCE

Isaiah 40:21-31

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/gods-refreshing-presence/>

Science wasn't my best subject in high school, but I got by. I do remember Newton's Laws of Motion. The first is the law of inertia. An object at rest tends to stay at rest unless acted on by an outside force. And...it takes more energy to start something moving than to keep it moving. Renewal takes energy! But what if you're out of energy?

The Isaiah passage invites us to look at a weary people, ending Babylonian exile and anticipating return to their homeland. But they are so tired, full of bitterness, doubt and self-pity. Isaiah begins with a simple statement: Your God is too small. No wonder you're tired! His is a breathtaking sweep of God's vast presence. He begins with four rhetorical questions (v. 21). The answer is a set of five verbs, all present tense, continuous action, still going on: God sits, stretches, spreads, brings, makes.

He pictures the stars all lining up for roll call. God's in charge (v. 26). When Isaiah references the stars it's helpful to remember that Babylon was the ancient home of astrology and star worship. He is saying to Babylon, "You may worship the moon and stars; we worship the One who made them!"

I was once visiting a museum and during the tour, the guide pointed out that only 10% of the artifacts were on display at any one time; 90% remained in storage, for later use. Isn't that a picture of God's overflowing grace? There is always more.

Besides acknowledging that our God is too small, another way we can experience God's refreshing presence is to trust God enough to trade our tiredness for God's strength. We feel faint (the word is used three times in our text) and we grow weary (two times). Here is the good news. God has power (v. 28) and gives power (v. 29). And when we trust Him, wait on Him, He renews our strength. We trade our tiredness for His strength.

We will mount up wings like eagles. Eagles are smart. They soar on thermals, allowing them to reach great heights, then they glide and don't get tired. Imagine. They actually use the wind of the storm to climb above the storm. They don't escape it; they simply go higher! Please remember that the eagle is able to glide without having to expend energy by wildly flapping.

Thomas Merton once wrote, "Despair can take us to the edge of the cliff. At that point, hope is just about to turn to despair, but it never does. Because at that moment of supreme crisis, God's power is made perfect in our weakness" [*No Man Is An Island*].

Do you know why this spiritual truth is so crucial? Because *if you are not yet a believer*, one reason may be that you are afraid you can't live up to it and you don't want to be a hypocrite, one who starts and can't finish. Then vv. 28-31 are for you! Likewise, *if you're a new believer* and the new has worn off. You can't go on emotions anymore. Obstacles are discouraging you.

Then vv. 28-31 are for you! Also, *if you are a veteran Christian*, you've grown cold, tired and apathetic. This is what Brennan Manning calls "the second journey" and "the second call" [*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 165]. Then vv. 28-31 are for you!