

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

When you feel weary

Presented by Steve Cooper

Good morning! Simon and Garfunkel commenced their famous song 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters' with the words: 'When you're weary, feeling small'. Maybe that's one reason for the song's popularity. We all go through seasons when we feel weary and discouraged. The song lyrics continue: 'When times get rough, and friends just can't be found ... When darkness comes, and pain is all around'.

Today let's talk about this feeling of weariness. Recently I was feeling particularly tired and weary. I'd been given lots of responsibilities and not many people were around to assist me. I found help in a wonderful passage of Scripture, Isaiah 40. It's so helpful to ponder these words of God through his prophet Isaiah, words to God's weary people. I want to share with you some insights from this passage that God used to sustain and encourage me in my time of weariness.

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Feelings can be very powerful. Today we're thinking about times when we feel weary. By 'weariness' we're not thinking of just being tired due to one night's lack of sleep. We're considering those difficult seasons when, over weeks or even months, we feel discouraged, burdened, overwhelmed with the pressures of life. We feel weary. Weariness may cause us to struggle with trusting God. We may feel that God has let us down, that God has not looked after us.

The people of God in Isaiah's time felt exactly like that. They were worried about the future. Other nations seemed to be dominating and oppressing God's people in Israel: nations like the Assyrians and Babylonians. God's people asked questions like: Is God still in control? Can God still be trusted? Do God's people still have a place in his plan? Does God want to restore them, and if so does he have the power to restore them?

God spoke to his discouraged and despairing people through the prophet Isaiah. They needed reminding of God's awesome power. As the mighty Creator he *does* rule over all, and he has a good plan for his people. Isaiah asks a probing question: 'Who else has held the oceans in his hand? Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers? Who else knows the weight of the earth or has weighed the mountains and hills on a scale?' (*Isaiah 40:12*). Isaiah is saying that when you feel weary, remember that God is incomparable as the mighty King over all the creation. He holds the whole world in his hand (remember that song?). God created the universe as effortlessly as a skilled craftsman constructing a model on his workbench.

A few years ago I flew to Europe, and it took 20 hours of flying time. It struck me afresh how huge our planet is. Yet God holds the vastness of the oceans, mountains and countries in the hollow of his hand. God is so much greater than the created world's awe-inspiring oceans, earth, mountains and hills.

This God we can trust is enthroned, ruling supreme, way above the world. As Isaiah puts it: 'God sits above the circle of the earth, the people below seem like grasshoppers to him!' (*Isaiah 40:22*). All the feverish activity of the six thousand bustling billions of our planet does no more to affect the mighty God than the chirping and jumping of cicadas and insects in the summer sun does to affect us.

What a helpful perspective for us when we're weary. The Lord is still in control, he's ruling over all with his mighty power. We can look to him and trust him.

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Today we're thinking about those seasons when we feel weary and discouraged. The prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 40, had great things to say to give us perspective during those times.

Isaiah invited God's despondent people to contemplate the stars. He said: 'Look up to 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' (*Isaiah 40:26*). The most awesome experience we can know is to stand alone on a clear night and look at the stars. Nothing gives a greater sense of remoteness and distance, and nothing makes us feel more strongly our own littleness and insignificance.

In ancient Israel they could count about 5,000 stars visible at night. Astronomers today estimate there are more than 400 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy, and 125 billion galaxies in the universe. The stars are billions of light-years in distance. Our minds and imaginations can't grasp the unfathomable depths of outer space. Yet it's God who brought out the stars; it was God who first set them in space; he is their Maker and Master; they are all in his hands, and subject to his will. Such are his mighty power and majesty. He calls them all by name and ensures 'not one is missing'. Such a God will surely never forget even one of his people.

Having pointed to God as the mighty Creator and Sustainer, Isaiah challenges God's disillusioned people with the implications. How could we doubt God's power and might? Isaiah puts it like this: 'How can you say the Lord does not see your troubles? ...How can you say God ignores your rights? 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' (*Isaiah 40:27-28*).

Isaiah is correct. God never abandons his people. It might seem that way to us, but he never abandons anyone on whom he has set his love. Nor does the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd, ever lose track of his sheep. Jesus said: 'I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep....My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me.' (*John 10:14, 27-28*).

You see: God could never forget the needs of his own people, or overlook us, or lose interest in us. We shouldn't give in to our doubts that God has left us high and dry. The danger is never that God will prove inadequate to our need, but rather we forget what he's like. How could we ever imagine that he, the Creator, has grown old and tired? He is sovereign, all-seeing, almighty.

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What do we do when we feel tired and weary? God's word came to the prophet Isaiah, giving great encouragement to God's people when they are discouraged and despairing. God is the mighty Creator, the great King who sustains his creation and is in control over all. We can trust him.

Not only is this God strong and powerful, says Isaiah, but he gives strength to his weary people. Listen to these stirring words from Isaiah 40: 'He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. 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.' (*Isaiah 40:29-31*).

You may recall that wonderful scene in the movie ‘Chariots of Fire’, where Eric Liddell is in a church in Paris and reading these verses. It was Sunday in 1924, when he could have run for England in the 100 meter race at the Paris Olympics. But Eric Liddell instead was worshipping the Lord with God’s people on the Lord’s Day. As he reads this passage, in the movie we see scenes of other English runners competing in their own human strength, disappointed as they stumble with exhaustion. But Eric Liddell, who trusts and obeys the Lord (despite criticism for his Christian convictions), is given strength and encouragement.

What does it mean, as Isaiah asks us, to ‘trust in the Lord’ (v.31)? It means to meditate on the God described in this chapter of Isaiah: the God of awesome majesty, the Creator who is powerful, great, good and wise. When we meditate on those truths, and rely on his promises by faith until the time of fulfilment, we find our strength renewed.

Have you been feeling weary and tired? You can do sensible things like have adequate sleep, healthy food and exercise, re-assess your lifestyle, take time for leisure and friendships that energize you. Perhaps see a doctor. In addition, Isaiah gives us profoundly wise advice. Isaiah himself knew that feeling of weariness only too well. He himself had been troubled by these feelings many times in his own long pilgrimage of faith. The prophet directs us to contemplate the mighty Creator God. This powerful God has not forgotten us. No one and nothing is too small to be important to him or worthy of his attention and care. If we can grow in the knowledge of this mighty God, says Isaiah, we can trust him and rely on his mighty power to sustain us.

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Most of us do go through seasons when we feel very weary and discouraged. The prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 40, urges us during those times to look at this huge planet and the stars in the heavens, and remember **who** created and **who** sustains it all. God is mighty, and we can trust him. He cares for each of us personally, and when we rely on him he gives us new strength for the tasks he wants us to do.

‘Father God, we thank you that you are always strong, wise, good and loving. When we feel weary and tired, remind us of how great and mighty you are. Help us trust you and rely on your strength. Renew us and give us the fresh energy we need. We thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus, who powerfully cares for his sheep. We pray in the mighty name of Jesus, depending on the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.’