

Hope in the Lord Renews our Strength Isaiah 40:25-31

I come from Mosgiel which is a town in close proximity to the Taieri aerodrome where small planes and gliders use to operate out of. Just like Drury with the Auckland glider club in Appleby Road where the skies are busy on a fine weekend. I got to fly in a fly a Cessna but never had a trip in glider and always wondered what it would be like to soar up there in the sky. It was not until my 40th Birthday that my brother-in-law as a present and thinking that i could do with a new refreshing experience at this stage of my life took me for my first and only ever flight in a glider in Tauranga. After the tow plane got us off the ground we were soon on our own up there soaring on wings like eagles. Huge long wings designed not only to keep the glider in the air but two people as well. It was hot having the sun overhead but it was a wonderful experience soaring glider wings flexing, almost in silence climbing higher above the ground of the Western Bay of Plenty. It was another moment in my life that I know that I was alive, soaring through the skies with great ease.

It is no wonder that the eagle was used by God as written by the prophet Isaiah to illustrate to the Israelite people who were exiled and captive in Babylon for 70 years because of their sinful apostasy when they continually turned away from God to worship other God's, to rely on their own strength and through greed seek to put themselves ahead at the expense of the poor, weak, underprivileged and needy who grave injustices were committed against. The chapters of Isaiah 40-55 are a section after the judgements of the first 39 chapters, this next section of Isaiah was written to bring the Babylonian exiles comfort and hope over that 70 year period. The eagle represented to captive Israel the point of what it is like to hope and renew your strength and the heights that you can once again soar to as a result. A great encouragement if you've been in exile 10, 20, 30 40, 50, 60, nearly 70 years which was their God imposed period of captivity.

Do you know that when eagles were created by God he designed them to be able to fly long distances at high altitudes by catching thermal's, an updraft of air, just as a glider does to gain height soaring higher and higher on thermals until you've reached a great altitude, from which the eagle then can glide long distances or spend much time soaring in the skies with the greatest of ease using very little energy. So an eagle will always choose to soar and glide when it can. But to get airborne initially they require great strength and a surge of energy while they flap their wings.

Now, an eagles long and wide wings were created not just to bear their own weight but that of which they prey on as well such as a rodent, a snake animal or a fish, even a large one. Eagles expend a lot of energy and require strength, when they have to flap their wings after having swooped down on and caught their prey, to carry the extra weight back to the place where they will feast on it or feed their young.

From birth to death the eagle has the longest life-span of its species. It can live up to 70 years, but to reach this age it has to make a tough decision. When an eagle enters its 40's, just like the human body, mortality kicks in. Those once long strong flexible talons, that it uses to swoop down with and grab and latch on to its prey and then to fly away with, become weak and lose their strength which makes the eagle powerless to snatch, grab and carry away its food. To make matters worse at the same age the eagle's long sharp beak has become bent, no longer functioning properly to help it tear up and eat its prey. And as happens so often in middle age, to top things off, the eagle puts on weight, but not in the way humans do. They don't have a problem with over-eating the wrong type of food, flabbiness and lack of exercise. What happens is that over its life the eagle's wing feathers continue to grow and thicken making it much heavier and therefore not as easy to fly, especially with the extra weight of its prey. Also the eagle's chest feathers have thickened and become matted so that they stick to its heavier chest making the eagle much less aerodynamic in flight.

So, in its 40's the eagle now begins to become tired and weary losing its strength and power to be able to fly, hunt, carry and eat its prey, its food. In this predicament, what hope does the eagle have to live and survive? If it can no longer soar the skies, let alone being able to swoop down on and snatch and carry away its prey which it can no longer eat. What hope is there when as a top predator of the skies you are all of a sudden, even at the thought of having to flap your wings to fly in order to find food, you are exhausted, you are fatigued and feeling faint? Death in this most hopeless situation seems inevitable, almost certain. But wait!

From within the eagle resides the sense that I could actually do something about this life threatening problem today! It's a risk but I sense that if I can just push through and make one last flight with my remaining energy to my mountain top nest, a single focused flight of hope, then I might survive.

Inherently within an eagle God created and planted the ability for the eagle to both know and decide to make a decision that will take a weak, blunted, powerless, overweight, non-aero dynamic and middle-aged eagle and completely change and renew it, giving this bird a new lease on life. It would be like giving an old car that had not been maintained well or serviced in a very long time, not only new oil, spark plugs and tyres but a whole new engine, paint job and a refurbished interior and seating as well.

Such is the transformation. If it was your car you would be spending thousands and thousands of dollars today for the change. With the eagle there too is a great cost to pay because to live the eagle has to go through a painful process of transformation lasting 150 days. So it has to make the choice: die or fly. If the eagle chooses 'fly' then it rises to its mountain top nest and begins its hope filled quest of renewal by first of all perching on a rock and knocking its beak continually against that rock until its beak is dislodged from its face. Now that's what I call radical surgery. The eagle then sits and waits until a new sharp straighter beak grows back which it then uses to operate on its self once more, this time plucking out one by one its old and useless talons- no anaesthetic used here! And then post-op, once again the eagle sits and waits for the talons to grow back, because it's not over yet.

The eagle then has the ability to perch and hold on with its new talons while it goes about the task of plucking out all of those thick and matted chest feathers along with all the heavy old wing feathers too. And then after this third self-surgical procedure the eagle... can you guess? It waits... for a third time... in this long and painful drawn out process which reminds me of last week's scripture Proverbs 13:12 "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." Which we could call not only a longing of hope fulfilled but 'rebirth', just like the complete overhaul and refurbishment of a motor vehicle that I described earlier, with all the eagle's new lightweight aerodynamic feathers to grow in, to the stage where once again it can fly, soaring high, looking for its prey to swoop down on and grab, then with great strength and power exerted in the flapping its wings it lifts off flying away to tear and eat its food- its strength renewed!

After this 5 month process, the choice that the eagle made on day one, the hope that was employed as it acted in faith responding to what it inherently knew to be true, has resulted in its rebirth and given it a new lease on life for another 30 years.

What a choice. What a long and painful period of waiting. What a great illustration of the renewal of hope to the Israelites held captive in Babylon for 70 years. What a wonderful example to us today to use and apply to build on last week's theme, Hope deferred, or long drawn out, makes the heart sick, but a longing, a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

So how are you doing today? Are you tired and weary? It could be age or health related. Are you working long hours, staying up late, the busyness tied together with the worries and anxiety from the stress of life not allowing you to stop and rest properly or get a good night's sleep?

Are you tired and weary- Physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually? Of work, life, commuting, old-age, family, relationships, including tiredness with your computer and other electronic and mechanical devices that are supposedly designed and produced to help us and save us time and cost us so much money. Come on tell truth - even youths grow tired and weary!

Today I have good news from the Holy One himself for each one of us: The God who created the heavens and the earth and sustains it all by his power and strength and does not ever grow tired or weary himself... The God who names and holds the stars of heaven in one hand and then his people in the other hand preparing them for leaving captivity in Babylon, this is the Lord, the everlasting God. This same one and only God today:

1. Gives strength to the weary and
2. Increases the power of the weak.

God today dispenses that very same power involved in Creating and sustaining the universe. As weary as you are spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. Whether you're exhausted, fatigued to the point of feeling faint, God can strengthen you today in all ways from the inside out by increasing the power of his might, his presence within us.

In order to receive the promise of God's strength and empowerment, what should our response be as the tired, weak and weary? The answer is in V.31 We are to 'hope' in the Lord if we truly desire the renewal of our strength. Qavah/hope here carries with it the sense of 'lingering with intent'. And the intent is that while you '**wait**' you never stop looking in eager expectation for this hope to be fulfilled- which is to have your strength renewed. This renewal *chalaph* is the gaining of or sprouting something new in such a way that you change and alter for the better.

Just like the eagle does after its gruelling 5 month period of waiting growing ever more hungry, tired and weary, who then flaps its wings and launches itself the in a flight of rebirth, the first flight of many for the next 30 years. So who wants to renew their strength and soar on wings like eagles? If that is you then you need to put your hope in the Lord. I would like you to consider the following, as challenging a process as it may seem to us:

First of all, with regards to the eagle's bent beak, what is it, if anything that has served in your life to bend you out of shape? To even stop you from enjoying worship, God's presence in prayer and reading the bible, feasting on and being fed by the truth of God's Word? Could it be any of these things: resentment; bitterness; unforgiveness? You have to knock these things off, pluck them out of our lives by knocking your beaks on our Rock of Salvation, on God our Rock of deliverance if we want to be free of these.

Secondly, why are we not so long sharp and able with our talons in being able to snatch and grab hold of the truth as opposed to what is untrue, wrong, false and incorrect as far as God is concerned in our daily lives and dealings in the world? Why do we often lack in Godly wisdom and spiritual discernment when it comes to latching on to the truth of what God thinks about what's happening in our lives and flying away with it? It's time to use a new sharp straight beak of the truth of God's living Word to address the talons of worldly attitudes and wrong belief, the spirit of unbelief and lack of faith. Let's pull out these weak ineffective decrepit talons that fail to grasp and hold onto and fly away with God's truth and wisdom in our clutches.

Jesus said, "If it causes you, or anyone else for that matter, to sin- pluck it out." There are many hollow and deceptive philosophies and beliefs both secular and religious in this world, do not be caught up in believing in them. Pluck out the old and let the renewed talons of God's truth, loving wisdom and discernment, faith and belief grow in their place so that you can believe and hold on dearly and learn to live by them. The truth will set you free!

Thirdly, as far as our feathers go, let's start with the chest. What has served to mat them together so much so that they stick to your chest making you less aero dynamic and able to fly? Could it be pride? When we believe that "I Am" – not, "You Are" God, my will be done, not yours. Then there's self-sufficiency. I live by the strength of my own human and material resources, I make my own way in life, therefore I am the one who is in control of my life and destiny. Or is it your own sense of self-righteousness, by my own

set of self determined standards, morals and ethics that I live by, they are all right enough for me as long as I try to stick to what I believe to be true. When the truth is that all these very things are what serve to inhibit us from being liberated and joyfully flying freely through our daily lives with God's blessing.

Finally, as a part of the process of renewal and transformation we come to our wings that are growing in thick fast and heavy to weigh us down. We haven't been able to stop this process no matter what we've humanly done by giving or being good or by the occasional act of kindness. Because the weight that burdens and brings us down is what separates us from God while at the same time preventing us from soaring upwards to meet with God. Unconfessed sin that you have not repented from- thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, actions and attitudes that fall short of God's glory prevent us from meeting with and being renewed by God's strength and loving power today.

So again I say who wants to renew their strength and soar on wings like eagles? If that is you then put your hope in God today. To do it... Let's spread our wings and allow God the Holy Spirit to blow through us, to convict us with regards to right and wrong, truth and error, the sin that burdens us with a great weight, deceiving us, holding us down as fallen individuals unable to ascend and meet with God.

It was Helen Keller who once said, "One can never consent to creep when he feels an impulse to soar." We as God's people need to cultivate and exercise that impulse with our hope in the Lord. If we do, God will give us strength and power to be free of, and overcome, that which we cannot on our own strength. Hope in the Lord for this and you and I will renew our strength and soar like eagles. Let's open up the wings of our hearts to pray and meet with God, to receive the blessing of inner renewal and strength by God's own power... "Heavenly Father as we would each individually put our trust in Jesus Christ through whom we have forgiveness and pardon for the sins that we now confess and repent of, as the risen and living Lord and Saviour of our lives, we believe that by your grace and mercy you are with us now to give us your strength and power to help us no matter what stage of life we are at or circumstance we find ourselves in that serves to tire, weaken and make us weary. We choose on this day to hope in you and by your power have our faith and strength renewed so that we might live for Christ and soar freely as on wings like eagles to meet with you." Amen.