

When God Seems Distant – Is 40:27-31

Is 40:27-31; I trust your end to 2013 was a good one, and that you're off to a good start here in 2014

We got away for a few days as a family between Christmas and New Year's, but mostly cocooned at home, stoked the fire, and enjoyed some good down time
For which I was really thankful

I'm also thankful for Garth Glenn and Jeremy Hickman who preached on my behalf
We're blessed with faithful men of God who rightly divide the word of truth

And last but not least, I'm thankful for your generosity and faithfulness in giving the past few weeks

We ended up short of our projected need for the year, but we were also well under our budgeted expenses; Enabling us to end the year on a positive note
So thank you; And I trust you'll know the goodness of God in your life as a result

➤ That said, I'm eager to continue our study of Isaiah this year, and hope you are too
Especially so, as we're coming into some of the richest chapters in all the Bible; And this is no exception (**Intro**)

[27] *Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"?*

Jacob and Israel are two ways of referring to God's people at the time; Of whom we're a part by virtue of our faith in Jesus Christ

So it's as if Isaiah is speaking to *us*, when he says – Why do you say that God is *distant*? Or silent? And that he doesn't see your plight, or your difficulty?

Why do you think that way, Isaiah asks

[28] *Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. [29] He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. [30] Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

What a beautiful passage; And what a comfort; And if it's not marked in your Bible, you might consider doing so; B/c they don't get much better than this

➤ But notice the tone with which Isaiah starts; He's nearly incredulous
Given the fact that God's word is sure, and that he's more than capable of accomplishing his purposes, all of which Isaiah has just laid out . . .
He can hardly believe his ears; That we would somehow think God doesn't see us; Or care about us

But we do, don't we? Sometimes we feel like God is distant; Or silent; Or powerless; Or uninterested; "He doesn't care about me; I'm not on his radar screen"

"He doesn't even know me; I'm just a peon"

That's what we think sometimes; That our way is *hidden* from God, and our *right* as his children, ignored; "God doesn't care about that"

➤ And Isaiah responds in v28, still a bit incredulous, by saying . . .

[28] *Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

As in, are you not aware? Do you not *remember*?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

IOW he may *seem* distant to you; He may *seem* silent; He may *seem* disinterested or unable to keep track of your life; But it's not true

And we ought to remember that; That's the gist of what Isaiah's saying here in v28

That when God seems distant . . .

Remember who he is (v28)

It's the first of 4 reminders in fact; Not that this is some sterile list, but a passionate plea

Remember that he's everlasting – that there's never been a time when he wasn't; Or won't be; Ever

Which means there's never been a portion of your life he's *missed* – not a single second
From eternity past to eternity future, and everything in between – he's never missed a beat; Including your heartbeat; And never will

That's why King David could say in **Ps 139:1-5**

[1] *O LORD, you have searched me and known me! [2] You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. [3] You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. [4] Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. [5] You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.*

Ever-present that he is, he's never missed a beat; Remember that*****

➤ And remember, that having created everything under the sun, *Creator of the ends of the earth* that he is – you're never beyond his reach; Even if you wanted to be
He's ever-present and far-reaching; Like David goes on to say in **Ps 139:7-12**

[7] *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? [8] If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! [9] If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, [10] even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. [11] If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," [12] even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.*

When God seems absent, remember that; He not only created *you*, but everything around you; And there's no place he isn't*****

➤ And as if that's not enough, remember that he doesn't *faint or grow weary*
His power is off the charts as we saw a few weeks back, and *stays* there
There's never been a brown out, or a black out, or even a flicker from time to time
He never grows tired, and never wanes

➤ And remember that his ways of operating in this world, his ways of moving in our hearts and lives – are so much higher than ours, we couldn't fathom it if we wanted to
That's the idea of his understanding being *unsearchable* – it's beyond us
Not just his knowledge, but the way he applies it; And the *reasons* for doing so

Which means that the things he does or allows may not make sense
But that *doesn't* mean they're any less good; Or outside of his control

When God seems distant, remember that he's the ever-present, far-reaching, never-tired,
crazy-wise God – who loves you more than we can imagine
That's the first reminder here from Isaiah

Second, is to . . .

Trust what he does (v29)

When God seems distant in your life, trust what he does
Which in this case, is give *power to the faint*, v29; *He gives power to the faint* [the weak], *and to him who has no might he increases strength*.
That's what God does; Whether we're just weak, or completely powerless – he gives us strength and power

Strength and power in the ability to overcome obstacles and defeat opposition
Strength and power in the ability to *persevere* in the midst of difficulties
Strength and power to get up when you've been knocked down

When God seems distant, or absent, or silent – key to restoring your sense of nearness is to trust what he does in that respect; Trust, that he will indeed . . .
Supply every need of yours (Ph 4:19)
And that he cares enough in the first place to do it; Like **Lk 12:6-7** says

Jesus is speaking and says –*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?* IOW are they not so cheap as to be inconsequential? They are
And not one of them is forgotten before God. [7] Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered [even inconsequential hairs are noticed by God]. *Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows*.
Getting out of the doldrums of despair when God seems distant – requires trust that God knows, and God cares*****

➤ And that he'll do with you what he's done before; Like he did with *Jacob*
In fact, I wonder if that's not one of the reasons his name was used here in v27 – to connect *his* plight and deliverance as an exile fleeing Esau (Gen 28) . . .
With the exile and *promised* deliverance of God's people in Isaiah's day

IOW calling the Israelites *Jacob* in this context, could be a subtle way of saying – “Hey, it happened with him, it will happen with you; You just have to trust; Like he did”
And with the benefit of hindsight, knowing full well that God followed through with both, we have even more reason to trust

➤ How's that going these days? Are you choosing to trust? B/c that's what it is – trust is a choice; A decision
And it requires faith – a confident assurance of things unseen, or yet to happen
A confident assurance that God will act, just like he did before
Leave that out, fail to trust in *faith*, and your perception of God's distance will only increase

And then 3rd, is . . .

Acknowledge your need (v30)

When God seems distant, acknowledge your need
[30] Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted

Here's the deal – in addition to trusting what he does, crucial to a restoration of your sense of nearness with the Lord, is acknowledging that you need help
And the fact is, every single one of us is weak from time to time, and needs the strength that only God can give; Every one of us
Even the strongest among us, those with the most maturity – who Isaiah likens to young men in the prime of their life

We're all weak from time to time, and we all have *weaknesses*
And if you fail to acknowledge that, and fail to acknowledge your need for help – it's likely that once again your sense of God's distance will grow
And your list of questions and complaints right along with it

I think that's why Isaiah includes this statement here in v30 – that even *youths*, even *young men* will struggle
I think he says that to tell us that nobody's exempt – nobody's exempt from weakness and the need for God's help . . .
And nobody's exempt from *feeling* this way – feeling like God isn't there

➤ I'll never forget the exchange between 2 women that I overheard when I was in high school; It was in church . . .
And one woman was sharing that she felt like God was far away at that point in her life
Even absent; And that she was a bit panicked by it all

To which the other responded that she had *never* felt that way, and didn't think it was legitimate; B/c God never leaves us or forsakes us

And though I couldn't have proven it biblically at that point in my life, I knew that except for the never leaving us part, the 2nd woman was wrong; *It is* a legitimate feeling
It may not be right, but it is real
Not b/c God's *really* absent, or doesn't care, or doesn't know – but b/c we're weak, and faint at times, and don't always see so clearly; Or perceive things rightly
It happens; Look at Jonah; Look at Elijah

➤ And the solution isn't to live in denial and act like it's not happening; Rather, it's to *acknowledge* your need for help, and focus on truth; Maybe even w/ a nap thrown in
So that you can focus not on your emotions, or your thoughts, or the thoughts of others – but truth, biblical *truth*
Things that are written in black and white, and apply to you

Like **Joshua 1:9** – *Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*
And **Is 54:10** – *The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*
When God seems distant, acknowledge your need and weakness, and focus on things like that*****

And last . . .

Wait for his move (v31)

[30] Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Anybody here like to wait? I don't

And the more we're forced to do so, the more we hate it

Like waiting at stop lights; Do you know that over the course of a lifetime the average person waits 6 *months* at stoplights? Unbelievable

Or how about waiting for rollercoasters; Just pad the walls and lock me up

And then there's slow internet connections; And restaurant tables; And the list goes on and on; We wait constantly

Not to mention the more serious things of life

Like waiting for the salvation of a family member; Or for Mr. Right to come along

Or waiting to conceive; Or *have* the baby; Or waiting for a job; Or healing

Life is *full* of waiting; And though we see it as a nuisance or necessary evil, God sees it as the key to blessing

They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; That's a blessing

And God *acts* for those who *wait* for him – Is 64:4b

And the Psalmist says to God in Ps 25:3 – *Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame*

Implying that if you *don't* wait, if you try to take matters into your *own* hands – you *will* be put to shame; God *won't* act on your behalf

And you *will* remain weak – never soaring and always faltering

Waiting for God to move, is one of the keys to blessing; One of the keys to seeing him work, and being a part of it

➤ Now, does that mean sitting around and doing nothing? No

That would run contrary to example after example in Scripture of those who did what they could, while waiting for God to do what they couldn't

Waiting doesn't mean abdicating your responsibility, or sitting down on the job, or slacking – it means doing what's right, and doing what you should, and keeping on . .

While waiting for God to bless it, and do more should he so desire

➤ You see, just like *humility* is prerequisite to receive God's best, so is *waiting*

And the sooner we embrace it instead of just tolerating it, the more we'll benefit

The sooner we wait at the stoplights of life with *patience*, and hope, and faith, and anticipation, and a mindset of learning – the more we'll be a part of his move

And, the better off we'll be in the meantime

Like **Eugene Peterson** says, who wrote The Message – *Waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting.*

Our *faith* grows, our *patience* grows, our *hope* increases, and so does our *knowledge*

And the sooner we embrace it, the sooner we'll benefit; B/c it won't last forever*****

➤ Which is perhaps the best part of all; Waiting for God to move in your life, won't last forever

They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

It's a promise; Not that every single Israelite in Babylonian captivity was released to go back to Jerusalem

But they *were* strengthened to persevere while they waited

And that may very well be the extent of God's move in your life; He may not *heal* you this side of eternity; He may not *correct* your difficult situation

He may not *restore* your good fortune

But he *will* renew your strength to keep on – every single day

He *will* enable you to rise above the fray

And he *will* give you all that you need for life and godliness

Your wait may be longer than you'd like, but it won't last forever (**Summary**)

B/c he knows, and cares, and promised

Remember that; And trust what he does; And acknowledge your need in the meantime

Prayer – Lord, we know you never leave us or forsake us; And we rest in that truth; But sometimes, in our weakness, we don't feel it; Forgive us for that; And help us to

remember your goodness and greatness; Help us to trust what you do; And find us

waiting with hearts full of faith and anticipation, for all that you'll do

We give with that mindset; So use it I pray for your glory