

Title: When (even) the Young Men Fall  
Text: Isaiah 40.27-31  
Theme: Sustaining Grace  
Series: Isaiah #34  
Prop Stmtnt: God exchanges our weakness for his strength, when we admit it.

Last Sunday night in our hymn sing, Nathan told us about the life of John Newton and mentioned that during his time as a pastor in Olney, England, Newton was a faithful friend and pastor to a man named William Cowper. Cowper's mom died when he was six and his father sent him off to a boarding school, where, this young, rather melancholy type child was the object of torment and abuse at the hands of a bully. These events combined to produce a young man who, though gifted intellectually, was prone to great fears and depression. Later in life he dated a young lady for seven years and was days away from marriage when her father called off the wedding. He, nor she, would ever marry. Circumstantially, it seemed to be the blow from which he would struggle to recover from for the rest of his life. There are so many things that we want, many of them good that elude our grasp, sometimes at the last second. Can you trust God, even if what you love is snatched from you by the providences of the very God who says he loves you?

Years ago I was told that if you preach to the hurting, you will always have an audience. It is right and fitting to preach to the discouraged, when the text before us is designed by God to be for those who are feeling lost and undone. As I read this text over and over I was captured by the reality that God exudes great care for the hurting. Tenderness, truth and triumph are found in these verses. It should not surprise us, since he is the Shepherd who gathers his lambs in his arms (11), the Creator who sits above the circle of the earth (22), and the Sovereign whose reign cannot be stopped (3-5). Here, the totality of God is brought together for the good of his people who are hurting and broken. He asks good, personal, probing questions. He tells the truth. He sets forth a challenge and He gives real hope. Look for those four things as we read the text.

Read Text:

Why was Isaiah written? To show God's glory to a people who have been ravaged by the consequences of their choices. Isaiah wrote with two audiences in view: 1) His contemporaries, that is his own people who lived in the southern kingdom of Judah were a people who just couldn't seem to stay away from idolatry. Although the God of the universe had chosen them to be his own people, they wanted to be like the nations around them. They wanted to worship idols like the nations around them, which proved disastrous. Isaiah's heart breaks as he warns and pleads with his own people to trust God. There are moments of reprieve and revival, but sadly, idolatry was in their blood and it would be their downfall. Therefore, Isaiah wrote with a second audience in view. These would be the people of Judah who one day would lose their land and be taken into captivity in Babylon. In that day when the people would be tempted to think that they had no hope, no future, and that the promises of God were not to be believed, Isaiah wanted them to be able to see that God could be trusted, because God had gone on record a

hundred years earlier and predicted these very events. Of course, God ordained that Isaiah write these things down for a third audience – us! The main message of the book for all three audiences is the same: You can continue in your sin and experience God’s awesome and eternal judgment or you can repent and trust God and experience God’s awesome and infinite grace. Either way God is going to be magnified. The issue is: will your life show off God’s righteous glory by using your life as an expression of his justice, or will your life show off God’s redeeming grace by using your life as an expression of his salvation?

Imagine this: You build a solid rock wall in order to protect your city and you explain to a young man that if he bangs his head against the wall that it will hurt his head, and if he persists, he will inflict serious damage to himself, but not to the wall. The young man doesn’t believe you. He thinks that you are lying to him. You are denying him the pleasure that he deserves from hitting his head against the wall and watching it crumble. And so, he, predictably goes over and bangs his head against the wall, and just as you said, just almost knocks himself silly. But, now, he’s angry. He does not want to admit that you are right and he’s not about to admit that he’s wrong, so he tries it again and again and again. Now, his head is gashed open and he lays crumpled at the foot of the wall. His head is no match for the wall.

God’s laws are like that wall. They are given for our protection. God did not wait for us to run into the wall before he said anything, he went on record from the first day that he created mankind to say, “Here is the wall. The wall will not move. If you try to break the wall, it will break you, but if you live within the wall, it will protect you. At this point in her history, Judah was characterized by a people who were hitting their collective head against the wall. They were gashing themselves open and would soon be lying in a crumpled pile on the ground. Even the few who themselves did not rebel against God, would be swept up in the consequences by the majority who did. How does God deal with those who are broken? How does God respond to those who feel abandoned by God? Some of them brought it upon themselves. Others, like some of you, experience brokenness simply because we all live in a sin-cursed world.

The people to whom Isaiah preached and wrote were either discouraged or were going to be discouraged. So, it is very helpful for us to see how God uses Isaiah to address this. And while I believe that there is some good help in these verses that we can profit from in our attempts to help those who are discouraged, I think that we first need to see how we are the ones in need. Look at how God deals with us, because we are all prone to wonder if God really knows or if God really cares.

### **I. God asks good questions. (27-28)**

The very fact that God anticipates the questions we are tempted to ask and puts them right here in the text is evidence that God cares about the person who feels abandoned. God goes to great pains to reveal to us what we need to know and God has provided all that we need to know in order to know that God cares for AND provides for the person who is tempted to feel that she has been orphaned by God.

Let's look at these accusations that we are prone to level against God. God has forgotten all about me. God has dismissed me. I do not matter to God. Notice the questions. First of all, Isaiah asks, why do you keep on saying this? (imperfect tense) That is a good question to ask yourself. Why do you keep on accusing God of having forgotten all about you? Isaiah is probing, isn't he? God is using him to ask the question behind the question. What is it that you wanted that you did not get? What were you entitled to that God did not cooperate with? Why do you keep on saying this? What is it about your life that has so wounded you, disappointed you, grieved you that gives you an "excuse" to accuse God of abandoning his own? When did God ever promise you that life would be smooth?

Fill in the blank. "God, I would be convinced that you really care about me if \_\_\_\_\_." Now, how does what you say compare with what he has already done through Christ?

## **II. God tells the truth. (28-30)**

The questions continue, don't they? But, the questions that are asked in verse 28 are not primarily for instruction but for reminding. Notice how God communicates with those who are hurting.

### **A. He tells us the truth in a tender way.**

"Do you not know this?" "Have you heard this before?" Again, notice how Isaiah is prodding and pushing. It's like he is saying – you already know this, but you need to put the pieces together. You need to think through the implications of it. But, there is something else that I want you to see. I think that one of the ways that God shows his tenderness is in the use of poetry. So much of the book of Isaiah is written in poetic form. Perhaps this was set to music, perhaps it was spoken in a cadence or rhythm designed to help the people remember it. But poetry, by nature is a medium that does more than just present information. It communicates truth in a way that is designed to get you to feel it. So, here is God, directing his prophet to write poetry about God that is designed to cultivate our hearts in a time when they are tempted to be hard and tough to open.

### **B. He tells us the truth about himself.**

- 1) He reminds us that He is everlasting.

This is in contrast to us. God is from eternity past; we are not. God is infinite; we are finite. God is the self-sufficient Creator; we are the dependent creation. I was talking with a couple of busy moms the other day, one of whom stayed up all night serving in the MCREST ministry last week. She was saying how much she was able to get done. I have pulled some all-nighters in order to complete some projects and the thought has crossed my mind as well. I could get so much more done if I did not have to sleep. But, the truth is, we have to sleep. Why? Couldn't God have made us in such a way that we did not have to sleep? What if God created us with the ability to have a midnight meal that would fuel us all night long? What if we had two suns, so that there was no night? Well, the

bottom line is this. God does not need us to do more things. God is the only who one who does not need rest. He made us with the need for rest because rest is a reminder that we do not have an endless supply of energy. We have to stop in order to be able to go. We wear out. We get tired. We become exhausted. Physical tasks, mental strain and emotional stress wear us out. We need to recover because we are not God.

2) He reminds us that He knows all about us.

(29) "He gives power to the faint." Who are the faint? That is us. Remember Psalm 103.14? "*For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*" Who gets all of the attention in this world? It is not the faint, the weary, and the worn-out. We celebrate those who appear to go and go and go and when they wear out, we toss them to the curb and find someone else to push to death with expectations. That happens in business and in sports. I was talking with a guy in our church one day whose boss told him his management plan. He said I push and push and push until you break. Then I back off, just a bit, and then start pushing again and I will keep on pushing until you break again. Then I will back off and do it again. I want to really see how much you are willing and able to do. He did not care if you slept three hours a night, if you ever saw your family, nor if you ever did anything else. If you quit, he would simply hire someone else. But, that is how we cheer athletes, isn't it?

But that is not how God functions. He knows those who are faint. The weak are not the losers in his book. The weak and the weary are the ones who can reflect his strength, because they have no strength of their own. Is this not amazing? The eternal Sovereign of the universe gives particular attention and ministry to the weak and faint. Here is another example of where God presents himself in a way that would normally appear to us to be contradictory. Throughout this chapter God has repeatedly given us evidence of the fact that he is sovereign and that he rules over all. We call that the transcendence of God. On the other hand, God also makes it clear that he knows all about those who are weak, frail, broken and needy. God is not only over all (transcendent) he is close at hand. We call that immanence. He is near. He knows. In our way of thinking someone who is mighty, powerful and in charge is someone who is far away running all of the big events from high above. And (21) he does sit above the circle of the earth. But, he also knows us. He comes near us. How do you reconcile this?

Ok, let me ask you this? How do you reconcile the fact that God has from eternity past elected and predestined every single person who will trust in him for salvation and at the same time holds every person responsible for whether or not he/she trusts in Christ? The scriptures clearly affirm both. How do you reconcile the fact that God has ordained the events of history, that he told Isaiah that he raised up Assyria as a tool of his judgment upon Israel, and when he is done using Assyria, he is going to judge Assyria for her arrogance? By the way, God says the same thing about Babylon and how she treats Judah. Now, I know that when we come across these passages that speak to some of this, that it freaks a few of you out. And I don't mind that at all. How do you reconcile this? There are two things that have settled it for me. 1) The recognition that God is infinite and that I am finite. 2) The recognition that Jesus is God and man.

### **C. He tells us the truth about ourselves.**

We faint. We grow weary. We are prone to fall exhausted. We wear out. In one of my favorite scenes from the original Toy Story movie, an exasperated Woody says to Buzz Lightyear, “You are a TOY!” What is God saying here? You are a HUMAN! You wear down and you wear out. You get tired. In fact, (30) even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.” The truth is that, even the best of us break down. Even the young can collapse. Even the good ones can succumb to disease. And if the young ones break down, what hope is there for us? Nobody can just keep on going, except God. So, here is the challenge.

### **III. God gives a challenge. (31)**

The challenge is to wait on God. Verse 31 begins with a contrast. On this hand you have young men who are fainting and falling over in exhaustion. But over here, you have others who are being fueled by renewable energy. The strong young men wear out, but those who wait for the LORD are renewed. This challenge to wait seems strange, doesn't it? It goes against everything that we naturally think. We want to do. We want to perform. We want to accomplish. If we were Judah, we would be tempted to think that if we had a strong army of young men that we would be safe from our enemies. But that is not our hope. Our hope is not found in what we can do in an effort to protect ourselves. Our true identity is not determined by what we do for God.

We are tempted to think that God loves us more if we do more for him. We are tempted to serve with the expectation that God now owes me some cooperation and convenience. “Look at all that I was doing at the church and what did I get from all of that?!” That performance based attitude reeks of self-centeredness because it reeks of self-righteousness. The foundational assumption upon which that stands is this: “I do, therefore I am.” That is the mantra of the self-made person. Do you see how this connects with so much of life? The more I do (successfully) the more I am validated as a person, and I am desperately looking for validation. So, I do more. The more I do, the more I have, the more I have, the more evidence I can present to others as proof that I am validated as a person. Envision a sophisticated car, with an experienced yet still youthful man behind the wheel. His tan face and steely eyes are set behind smart looking sunglasses offset by a whisk of gray hair around his temples. As he corners the car through the obligatory leaves on the road at a high rate of speed, the voice in the commercial says, “You've made it in life. Don't you think that you ought to command a car that has done the same?” What's the message? What is the assumption? “You are because you have” is spoken, but the assumption under that is: You are because you do.

Here is why the gospel is so offensive to our world. You are NOT because of what you do. You are, because of what Christ has done. That is the good news. It is good news because you can never DO enough. It is good news because we cannot rescue ourselves. But, here is the danger and it is a clear and present danger. We can take the good news of

the gospel and think that it only applies to how we become a believer (justification) and ignore the good news for how we mature (sanctification) as a believer.

My standing in Christ, that is, my identity in Christ, is rooted in and determined by what Christ has accomplished for me, not in what I accomplish for Christ. Instead of a car, envision with me a smartly dressed pastor, standing underneath a sign that is secured to a mammoth building that is identified as “Hills Church.” The headline under the picture says, “The amazing story of Brandon’s vision and leadership making Hills Church the state’s largest congregation.” We would be tempted to think – wow, this guy is an amazing servant of God. But, what is that assumption built on? It comes from the idea that if I accomplish “great things” then I am great! “I do, therefore, I am.” NO, NO, NO! Here is the gospel...God has done. Christ has accomplished, therefore I am! (period).

This challenge to wait is part of the Bible’s story line that points to the good news that we hope in the One who acts. Our waiting is our admission that unless God acts, we have no hope, because we have no help apart from him. But our waiting, is not a wringing of hands type of waiting, (like we do every time the Tiger’s closer takes the mound). No, we give up our trusting in ourselves, and what we can do (which, our best is seen as failing) and surrendering this to God. Notice the exchange that takes place. God takes our worn-out, fainting, weary, exhausted strength and replaces that with his renewable energy. He takes that which does not work, and replaces it with that which cannot fail. Jesus captured this same idea when he said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.”

#### **IV. God gives real hope. (31b)**

##### **A. God’s promises for the future bring strength in the present.**

The hope that God gives is that his energy will sustain you for your flight, and empower you for your run and equip you for your walk. The imagery of the eagle is perfect. The eagle does not fly in a frantic panic, but soars aloft, being carried by the updrafts of wind that are so characteristic of the mountains. The eagle can ride these for miles and miles with very little effort. His promises of continual updrafts of grace enable you to rest today.

##### **B. God gives strength to wait but only to the weak.**

But, this promise comes only for those who are humble enough to admit that they are weak.

William Cowper struggled with depression for most of his life. And yet, in this weak condition, he was still by God’s grace able to hope in God, though Cowper certainly did not hope perfectly. God enabled him to write poetry and write songs that not only spoke to him during the deep nights of the soul, but for 230 years have encouraged many believers. If Cowper trusted in what he could do he would have no hope at all. The testimony in song that he has left us is evidence that is hope is Christ, and that is all.